GENERAL NOTES

A FIRST FALL ONSHORE RECORD OF THE ARCTIC TERN FOR GEORGIA — The Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*) is a primarily pelagic species rarely recorded in Georgia, with only 9 accepted sightings previous to the observation we describe here. The species is primarily found far offshore in the spring, with most records between 21 April and 28 May, several of which involve multiple birds (Beaton et al. 2003). There is only one fall record in the state, also offshore, on 13 September 1983 (Haney et al. 1986). The species has been encountered on the immediate coast on only 3 occasions before our sighting, all in May. At least one of these sightings occurred in the context of an offshore storm that produced strong easterly winds (NAB 63:410-411). One inland record involved a specimen that was collected on 22 May 1921 in Ware County with the note, "Caught in wire fence? (*sic*) Near a house" (Greene and Parks 1951). The circumstances of that record invite speculation about storm-related origins; however, no major cyclonic system affected the southern Atlantic coast at the time (P. C. Day 1921, W. P. Day 1921). The following account describes the first known fall record of an Arctic Tern on the coast of Georgia.

On 6 September 2009, the authors and several other birders were observing shorebirds, gulls, and terns at Gould's Inlet on St. Simons Island, Glynn County, Georgia. At approximately 1830 EDT, Blankenship noticed a few groups of terns coming in to rest on a sand bar that was south of the observers' vantage point. He identified several Royal Terns (*Thalasseus maximus*) and 3 Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*), and then noticed a tern that was "different." The latter bird was smaller or "daintier" than the surrounding Common Terns less than 1 m away, but it also (and more obviously) had a much lower posture due to the bird's extremely short legs. To make sure the bird was not resting on its belly, as a few Common Terns were doing nearby, he focused on the bird until he observed its short, stubby, bright red legs. Its bill was noticeably shorter and much deeper red than the bills of any of the Common Terns. The bird gave an overall impression of very little contrast – it was plain gray on the back, belly, and breast. He could not discern any contrast in the primaries at all. Having observed as many as 3 individuals recently (in May 2009 in Florida), Blankenship decided the bird was likely an Arctic Tern. He observed the bird for approximately 30 sec.

Blankenship asked Joel McNeal, who had experience with observing the species on its shared breeding grounds with Common Terns in Maine and

Canada, and had seen the species 4 months earlier in Florida, if he would examine the tern. Blankenship gave no suggestion to McNeal that he should expect to look for an Arctic Tern. As soon as McNeal looked at the bird in his 60X field scope he noticed a daintier, shorter-standing, more uniform gray tern with a shorter, redder bill than the neighboring 23 Common Terns. McNeal noted that the only visible contrast in plumage other than the cap (unlike any of the Common Terns on the beach) was the whiter cheek area directly under the cap. The tail length relative to the wing length, relative roundness of the head, and extent of the cap relative to the gape were not apparent from the distance at which the bird was viewed. (Note: The wings and tail were held in the same plane, and the wind was strong enough to inhibit distinguishing tail tip from wing tip.) Two additional observers watched the tern for about 1.5 min longer before all terns on the sandbar took flight.

The Arctic Tern migrates from breeding grounds primarily in the Arctic, and sporadically as far south as Massachusetts, to wintering areas in the southern Atlantic off the Antarctic coast. Egevang et al. (2010) used miniature geotracking devices to show that Arctic Terns from Greenland and Iceland traveled east to staging grounds in the middle of the north Atlantic, before continuing clockwise southeastward off the coast of Spain. Once off the western coast of Africa, some crossed the Atlantic and migrated southward to their wintering grounds by following the coast of South America, while the remainder continued south off the African coast. Northward migration of their tagged birds was much more uniform, and followed the western coast of Africa northward before crossing the Atlantic and then heading northward along the North American continental shelf; breeding birds from Greenland and Iceland often completed a roundtrip of 128,747 km. These dynamic patterns of movement demonstrate that Arctic Terns do not follow the most direct route during migration, but rather the most energetically efficient ones.

Breeding individuals in continental North America likely follow similar migration routes as those studied by Egevang et al. (2010) and, not surprisingly, there are very few fall records of Arctic Terns in the United States south of New England. An analysis of existing southeastern U.S. records through 1980 showed that approximately 75% came from spring and 25% from fall (Clapp et al. 1983), while a later re-examination of records by Lee and Cardiff (1991) produced a more conservative estimate of only 12% of southeastern records being from fall and 88% from spring. It follows that the few Arctic Tern records from Georgia occur almost exclusively in spring (Beaton et al. 2003), with only one prior fall record from offshore waters (Haney et al. 1986). It is likely that

additional efforts to detect the species far offshore in late April and May would produce more records.

On the day of the 6 September 2009 sighting, a low pressure system was located directly off the coast of Florida and Georgia, while a high pressure system was located over the Mid-Atlantic United States. This combination produced an intense pressure gradient, accompanied by east-northeast winds of 15-25 km/hr that began mid-day and intensified throughout the afternoon and evening. This weather pattern produced 2.4-m swells at sea. At the time of the observation, east-northeast winds were gusting up to 24 km/hr or more, and it is likely that the onshore presence of the Arctic Tern and a large number of Common Terns was related to this weather pattern. The prevailing east-northeast winds in the days leading up to the sighting extended all the way to the North Atlantic Arctic Tern staging grounds illustrated in Egevang et al. (2010), and terns departing during this weather pattern may have found the most energy-efficient flight path to be southwesterly rather than southeasterly during this time.

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Ken Blankenship, *2400 Barrett Creek Blvd #827, Marietta, GA 30066*
Email: kenhblankenship@comcast.net

Joel McNeal, *165 Yorkshire Road, Bogart, GA*
Email: j.mcneal@yahoo.com

LONG-BILLED CURLEW DOCUMENTED EATING A GHOST SHRIMP ON ST. CATHERINES ISLAND — On 8 January 2010, at approximately 1600 hrs, a group of shorebird biologists (Brad Winn, GA DNR; Stephen Brown, Manomet, MA; Ellen Jedrey, MA Audubon; Shiloh Schulte, Manomet, MA) observed a Long-billed Curlew (*Numenius americanus*) eat 3 ghost shrimp on St. Catherines Island, Georgia. Each ghost shrimp was about 10 cm long and, based on size, were identified as *Callichirus major* (Bishop, G. A., and E. C. Bishop. 1992. Distribution of ghost shrimp, North Beach, St. Catherines Island, Georgia. American Museum of Natural History, Novitiates 3042:1-17). To our combined knowledge, this is the first record of prey selection for the Long-billed Curlew in winter in Georgia. The foraging Long-billed Curlew was observed at North Beach (31.690008° N, 81.129884° W), the northern end of the island. We filmed and photographed images of the bird eating the shrimp (Fig. 1 and 2). The individual appeared to be an adult, foraging independently of other shorebirds.

Figure 1. Long-billed Curlew eating ghost shrimp, 8 January 2010, at North Beach, the northern end of St. Catherines Island, Georgia.