

Documentation
Least Tern

Least terns have been reported before in Ohio. Lou Campbell in Birds of the Toledo area (1968) reports six different sightings of one bird each from 1934 to 1964. Milton B. Trautman in The Birds of Buckeye Lake, Ohio (1968) reports one sighting in 1924 of five birds over Buckeye Lake. However, three different sightings in one Fall from areas as divergent as Huron, Columbus and Cincinnati is certainly a high point for this species in Ohio. Here's the way it happened:

David Styer

On August 6, 1980 at 6:30 P.M. I, Myra H. M. Styer (my wife) and Abdallah Lyzzaik saw an immature least tern at the oxbow region of the Ohio River. This area is geographically within the state of Indiana and is about one mile from the corner of the intersecting boundary lines of Ohio and Kentucky. The bird



Two views of least tern at Huron, Ohio August 20, 1980. Photos taken by Tom LePage and reproduced by Gary Herbst.

was observed until 7:30 P.M. and then again at 8:30 P.M. It loosely associated with two black terns, standing next to them for a while (or on occasion) in nearly belly deep water. Most of the time it flew over the water at five to ten feet above the water with occasional vertical dives into the water. This "water" was a borrow pit cut out of cornfields to construct I 275. The bird was distinctly smaller than the black terns and distinctly larger than barn swallows also in the area. The bill was black, the feet appeared dark but we couldn't see

them well and the back and wings were pearly gray. There was a dark line or area through the eyes which continued around the back of the head. There was a second dark area on the edge of the bend of the wings. The trailing edge of the wing was white. The underside of the bird was white but not strikingly different in color from the pale back. The tail was forked but not extremely so. The voice was a short high-pitched note like a least sandpiper. We were within 100 to 200 yards of the bird but sometimes much closer. The sun was out and at our backs the first one-half hour of observation. We used 7 and 9 x 35 Nikon binoculars and a Questar with 40 and 60 power eyepieces.

Tom LePage

On August 20, 1980 at 8:20 A.M. I saw and photographed an immature least tern at Huron, Ohio. This area is a dredge landfill extending into Lake Erie adjacent to the Huron pier. It was a typical hazy day in August. I saw a small bird fly around looking to land. I thought it was a shore bird at first but could not place it. Then it landed on a mud flat about 60 feet away. It was a tern. The bird was between semi-palmated plover and killdeer size and closer to the plover. The bill was dark. The top of the head was buffy. There was a black eyestripe extending back around the head. The color of the stripe was not as solid in the back as at the eye. The back of the neck was brownish and this color extended down the back. The tail was white. The short wings had dark primaries with a dark shoulder patch. The secondaries were pale, the underparts white and the legs flesh colored. There was a small amount of white between the buffy top of the head and the black eyestripe. The bird moved three times and during one time was standing between a black tern and a common tern so that the size difference was obvious.

Bruce Peterjohn

On September 23, 1980 at 5:50 P.M. I observed an adult least tern for 20 minutes at Alum Creek Reservoir, Delaware County, Ohio. Most of the time the bird sat on a large muddy island near the reservoir dam with five caspian terns. On several occasions it made several short flights over the reservoir but did not feed. I estimated the bird to be about 400 to 500 feet away. I observed it with a 20 power telescope. During direct comparison in flight, the bird was slightly larger than a killdeer but was dwarfed by caspian terns. The bird had a white patch on its forehead immediately above the bill. Remainder of the cap and nape were black while a narrow black line extended from the bill through the eye. The cheeks, throat and entire underparts were white. The back and wing coverts were a medium gray with a dark brown patch on the shoulder. In flight, the upper surface of the wings were mostly medium gray except for the brown patch on the coverts and the outer three primaries which were blackish. The underwings were mostly white, shading towards grayish under the primaries. The upper tail coverts were white. The tail was slightly forked and white with grayish outer tail feathers. The bill was very slim and small. It was mostly black except for a yellowish base. The legs and feet were yellowish or yellowish orange.

Editor

The closest known nesting locations of the least tern (*Sterna albifrons athalassos*) in the interior United States as of June, 1975 according to Robert L. Downing, Survey of Interior Least Tern Nesting Populations, American Birds Volume 34, No. 2 (1979) is that portion of the Mississippi River in the 150 miles below Cairo, Illinois. Here 300 least terns in 11 colonies were counted. The Ohio River (Styer's observation point) according to Mr. Downing has not had

a nesting least tern since 1961 although he saw several potential sandbars available.

Plumage descriptions in Bent, Life Histories of North American Gulls and Terns (Dover, 1963) indicate that these three sightings were of three different birds. The bird seen by David Styer could well be a mature least tern in winter plumage since no buffy crown or head or brownish back all characteristic of the juvenile was reported. The first postnuptial molt occurs in July or August of the second year.

Notes

Please add the following observation to the Spring 1980 issues (Vol. 3, No. 1):

White Pelican (D)

5/24 Oregon (Lucas Co.) (Mark Shields).

Please delete the following observation from the Spring 1980 issue (Vol. 3, No. 1):

Baird's Sandpiper (D: Spring only)

5/24 Ottawa NWR (4) (VF). Vic Fazio writes:

"I have just read that there is one confirmed spring sighting of this species east of the Mississippi (Amenia, Dutchess Co., N.Y., May 31, 1979). Therefore, although I was ignorant of the rareness of occurrence, my sighting should have been documented. Since it was not it should not have been published. I still believe what I saw were Baird's Sandpipers but nevertheless I should have documented the sighting." Ed. Note: The article mentioned above did say one confirmed sighting east of the Mississippi but probably meant by photograph or specimen and probably was restricted to the east coast (See American Birds Vol. 32, No. 5 (985) and Vol. 33, No. 5 (756). As, for example, there is a documented sighting reported from Waukegan, Ill. June 9, 1979 (See American Birds Vol. 32, No. 5 (1014). We agree that all spring records should be documented.

Please add the following observation to the Summer 1980 issue (Vol. 3, No.1):

Yellow-billed Sapsucker

6/21 Morgan Swamp (Ashtabula Co.) (nesting) (Jim Bissell, Cleveland Mus. Nat. Hist.).