
News, Notes, Comments

Hook, Line and Sinker: A Common Tern Recovers from a Bizarre Band Injury

On 16 Jun 1996, while studying terns at Bird Island, Marion, MA (414-0704), we found an adult female Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) that was unable to fly up as we approached it. When we picked it up, we found that it was tethered to the tide-wrack by a fish hook that had become threaded through the band on its right leg. The hook was attached to a monofilament line and a 4-oz (116 g) lead sinker, which were rolled up and embedded in the wrack. The bird's leg was broken, so we took it to our banding station in the disused lighthouse, where we pried open the band and removed the hook. The leg was broken badly, with the foot hanging loose, so we fashioned a makeshift splint by cutting a section of the stem from a "Q-Tip" and binding it tightly to the leg with duct tape. We selected this method of attachment with the hope that the tape would remain tightly attached until the bone had set, but with the expectation that it would detach within a few days or weeks in salt water. We rebanded the bird (892-92800) on the other leg, weighed and measured it, and then released it. It appeared to be otherwise in good condition, weighing 113 g (about 90% of the local mean for breeding birds: Nisbet 2002), and flew off strongly. Because we did not know where it was nesting, we were unable to locate it later in the breeding season to observe whether the leg had set successfully.

This bird had been banded (892-88456) as a chick in 1988 and was thus eight years old in 1996. It had been found previously breeding at Bird Island in 1991 (when it was three years old and mated to a five-year-old male) and in 1995 (at seven years old, with an unbanded mate). We did not find it nesting at Bird Island in 1996 or 1997, despite trapping about 70% of the breeders in those years (Nisbet and Cam 2002). However, we trapped it again on a nest at Bird Island on 30 May 1999, at age 11, again with a previously unbanded mate. Although we did not recognize it at the time, it has been our standard practice since 1989, when we first found foot injuries caused by Darvic color bands (Nisbet 1991), to examine both legs of all trapped birds for

signs of healed injuries as well as for bands. Also, we included this bird in the detailed studies of parental feeding that we conducted in 1999 (Tims et al. 2004), so we would have recorded if it was limping or otherwise impaired. Accordingly, we are confident that it showed no visible sign of injury when we examined it in 1999, i.e., that it had fully recovered from its 1996 injury. The dates on which 892-92800 laid its first eggs advanced from 31 May in 1991 (10-30 days earlier than usual for three-year-olds: Nisbet et al. 1984) to 18 May in 1995 (six days earlier than the median date in that year) and 8 May in 1999, amongst the earliest (99th percentile) pairs on the island in that year (Nisbet et al. 2002, Tims et al. 2004). It laid three eggs in 1999, and with its mate hatched two chicks and raised one to fledging; the third egg was fostered into another nest and the chick hatched from it was also raised to fledging. Thus, this bird had fully recovered from its injury and had survived to be among the more productive birds in the colony. Although it has not been encountered since 1999, it survived to at least 11 years of age, older than the median breeding age of 9-10 years for this colony (Nisbet 2002).

The purpose of sinkers is to sink. We found no float attached to the line, so it is somewhat puzzling how the hook, line and sinker came to be embedded in the highest line of tide-wrack on the island, well above the elevation of summer high tides. One possibility is that they were washed ashore attached to a dead fish that subsequently disintegrated, but we found no fish bones or other remains associated with the hook or line. Another possibility is that the sinker was colonized by the green alga *Codium fragile*. This alien seaweed is abundant in the area, growing in bundles anchored to rocks, shells or other solid objects on the sea bottom. It traps oxygen bubbles generated during photosynthesis and becomes buoyant, so that as it grows during the summer, the bundles can lift shellfish (Martinez and Harlow 1994) or even rocks weighing up to 600 g or more (personal observations). When the anchors are dislodged by autumn and winter storms, masses of *Codium* wash ashore and form windrows on beaches and rocky shores, still attached to pebbles, rocks or columns of slipper shells (*Crepidula fornicata*). When the

algae disintegrate, these "floating rocks" and shells remain scattered along the winter tidelines. By this means, objects denser than water are raised from the sea bottom and transported to elevations well above mean high water mark. This might explain how 892-92800 came to encounter the hook, although it was then a bizarre mischance that the hook somehow became threaded through its band.

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An Extraordinary 2004 Outbreak of Conjunctivitis in an Adirondack Purple Finch Breeding Population

In an earlier note (Yunick, R.P. 2002. Disappearance of conjunctivitis symptoms in a Purple Finch. *N. Am. Bird Bander* 27:125-126), I reported on the occurrence of conjunctivitis in a Purple Finch (*Carpodacus purpureus*) breeding population 1999-2002, and on an infected individual in 2001 which returned a year later symptom free. Here I report on an extraordinary outbreak of the disease symptoms in 2004, affecting 19.5% of the Purple Finches handled in July, and the disappearance thereof later in 2004 or in 2005 in 27.3% of the 2004 infected individuals. I include also observations of apparent recovery in an infected Evening Grosbeak (*Coccothraustes vespertinus*)

Banding occurred at a year-round feeding operation in Adirondack mountain habitat at Jenny Lake, near Corinth, Saratoga County, NY. The first conjunctivitis symptoms of 2004 were noted on 7 May in an after-second-year (ASY) male, known to be three yrs old based on prior banding history. The bird had slight swelling in the right eyelids, and 26 days later when recaptured on 31 May was asymptomatic. Then, two ASY return birds presented symptoms on 20 and 25 Jun. One, a female, had a completely swollen shut right eye; the other, a male, had slight swelling on the right eye and severe swelling on the left eye, and was emaciated to the extent it weighed only 16.7 g compared to a more normal 22-25 g for this species. The male may not have survived, but the female was recaptured 21 days later on 11 Jul with only slight swelling of the eyelids, and the orbital feathers missing—an improved, recovering aspect of the disease.

In July, evidence of the disease was observed at an unprecedented level as 17 infected birds were captured during 2-19 Jul. On the night of 15 Jul, a bear appeared and began raiding my feeders, causing me to feed thereafter only intermittently at first, then not at all in the hope that the bear would move on. None of this worked until on 20 Aug I installed electric fences around each of my three pipe-supported feeders and resumed feeding. But by then, I had missed the peak of the season for