

## NOTES

### A SANDWICH TERN IN CALIFORNIA

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For at least 9 days during May 1980 a Sandwich Tern (*Sterna sandvicensis*) was present near Imperial Beach, San Diego Co., California. All sightings were made at the Elegant Tern (*S. elegans*) breeding colony located in the saltworks at the south end of San Diego Bay. I first saw the Sandwich Tern the afternoon of 11 May with a group of about 150 Elegant Terns, 50 Forster's Terns (*S. forsteri*) and 6 Least Terns (*S. albigrons*) which were foraging in an outer evaporating pond on numerous small (2-10 cm) fishes, mostly Topsmelt (*Atherinops affinis*) and Longjaw Mudsuckers (*Gillichthys mirabilis*).

The Sandwich Tern periodically landed on the dike with the largest Elegant Tern breeding group, carrying a fish in its bill, and attempted to stand among the incubating birds or with other small groups of Elegant Terns on the dike. The Elegant Terns never allowed the Sandwich Tern the same proximity as other Elegant Terns and consistently drove it off if it approached closer than about 0.5 m. It went from group to group, and several times after being driven off it swallowed its fish, flew off to catch another, and tried again. After about 45 minutes the bird left the saltworks and headed out towards the bay.

Hoping to see the tern again when it came to roost, I returned to the same spot that evening. About 1815 it reappeared. The scenario was much as before and I observed the bird until dusk.

The Sandwich Tern was next seen the morning of 13 May by Michael Evans and myself. Shortly past 0900 we observed the bird making fish offering displays to individual Elegant Terns in a manner generally similar to that of male Elegant Terns. The Sandwich Tern would approach an Elegant Tern obliquely or perpendicularly in an upright posture with a small fish held crosswise in its bill. The Sandwich Tern's wings were held out from the body at the carpal joints, with the primaries slightly drooped. The crest was held erect, the neck vertical and the head horizontal, with the bill nearly parallel to the ground. The tail angled down at the tip but would occasionally raise to approximately horizontal as the tern made distinct vertical flicking motions with its bill. The stance would change to nearly parallel to and slightly behind the Elegant Tern to which the Sandwich Tern was offering as the Elegant Tern rejected the offering and walked away. If the Sandwich Tern persisted in offering and followed the Elegant Tern, the Elegant Tern would drive it off with the bill using a threat gaping posture typical of many tern species. We observed this behavior nearly 40 minutes until the tern flew out of sight.

The bird was also seen at about noon on 13 May by Guy McCaskie and again that evening by McCaskie, Elizabeth Copper and Jon Dunn. As far as is known, the last sighting was made the morning of 20 May when I saw the bird standing on the dike about 2 m from a group of six Elegant Terns. Within just a few minutes it flew off and was not seen again.

A description of the tern by another observer is on file with the California Bird Records Committee and the record, the first for California, has been accepted by the committee.

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The Sandwich Tern (with its subspecies *sandvicensis*, *acuflava* and *eurygnatha*) has a wide distribution, breeding at the Black and Caspian seas in western Asia, locally from northern Europe to North Africa, along the southern United States coast from Virginia to Texas, the Caribbean coast of Mexico, the Bahamas, Curaçao and the Atlantic coast of South America south to Argentina. Beyond its typical breeding range the Sandwich Tern winters commonly in North Africa (although it is rarer towards eastern North Africa; Etchecopar and Hue 1964), West Africa (Brown 1979), south to South Africa and across the Indian Ocean very spottily to northwest India. In the western hemisphere beyond its typical breeding range the Sandwich Tern winters along the Caribbean coast of Central America and Colombia and in the Pacific from Tehuantepec, Oaxaca, Mexico (Peterson and Chalif 1973) south to Peru (Junge and Voous 1955, Meyer de Schauensee 1966, Blake 1977).

It should be noted that the San Diego saltworks were also visited by a few Royal Terns (*S. maxima*). Buckley and Buckley (1972) indicate that the Sandwich Tern often associates closely with the Royal Tern, a species which shares much of the Sandwich Tern's African and Neotropical distributions. Like the Elegant Tern and often associated with Elegant Terns, the Royal Tern can be seen at various times of the year from Peru (Ashmole and Tovar-S. 1968) north along the Pacific coast and Gulf of California to San Francisco, California (Cogswell 1977).

Thus, the three tern species (Elegant, Royal and Sandwich) occur together at least casually on the Pacific coast from Peru north to Central America (Blake 1977) giving Sandwich Terns ample opportunity to come in contact with Elegant and Royal terns. Considering that all three species are highly social, one could conclude that the Sandwich Tern in San Diego had become disoriented during the spring migration and followed the next most similar species, Elegant and Royal terns.

### LITERATURE CITED

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