

## ADDITIONAL RECORDS OF THE LEAST TERN FROM THE WEST COAST OF MEXICO

THOMAS P. RYAN, San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory, 1290 Hope Street, P. O. Box 247, Alviso, California 95002

DANIEL A. KLUZA, Natural History Museum and Department of Systematics and Ecology, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas 66045

Little is known of the distribution of the Least Tern (*Sterna antillarum*) along the Pacific coast of Mexico. It breeds locally (April–August) from northwestern Baja California and the northern Gulf of California south to Chiapas (Howell and Webb 1995, Thompson et al. 1997). From Nayarit south, it has been reported as a migrant (Schaldach 1963, Escalante 1988) or uncommon permanent resident (Alvarez del Toro 1980, Binford 1989, Villaseñor 1990, Thompson et al. 1997). These broad statements are based on relatively few specific observations.

On 23 March 1997 we observed four Least Terns an estimated 20–25 km off the coast of San Blas, Nayarit. Two individuals were flying west to southwest; another two were photographed roosting on the back of a Green Sea Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*). These could be wintering birds, spring migrants, or resident birds that breed at nearby colonies at Rto Cuixmala and near Puerto Vallarta (Grant 1964, García and Ceballos 1995). The following winter, we saw two Least Terns on 10 January 1998 flying southwest, out to sea. The first was 20.5 km, the other 23 km off the coast of San Blas (20° 25' 21.91" N, 105° 27' 12.58" W and 20° 24' 41.26" N, 105° 29' 08.98" W).

Winter records of the Least Tern in Mexico are few. Along the Pacific coast, Howell and Webb (1995) reported the species to be an irregularly uncommon to rare winter visitor north to Nayarit on the basis of unpublished observations by Howell and Peter Pyle. Absent from recent reviews of this species' distribution are records from Christmas bird counts near San Blas, of two on 1 January 1977 (Am. Birds 31:623–624), 30 on 30 December 1983 (AB 38:819–820), one on 30 December 1984 (AB 39:815), three on 29 December 1985 (AB 40:1022–1023), and six on 28 December 1987 (AB 42:1147–1148). The only other specific published records are those of Massey (1981), who reported that Alan M. Craig found 75 "at an estuary in Colima, south of the city of Manzanillo" in the winter of 1979–1980 and that she saw 20–30 at three estuaries in Colima south of Manzanillo in January 1981.

There are few previous references to Least Terns occurring in the pelagic zone, but our observations suggest that the poorly known winter range and migratory routes of the Least Terns breeding in California and northwestern Mexico may be largely pelagic, accounting for the dearth of records away from the breeding range. Least Terns have been reported pelagically on few occasions, mostly during migration. Ridgely (1989) stated that near Panama these birds often migrate well offshore (>25 km). R. Rowlett (pers. comm.) observed Least Terns in the Gulf of Panama during the winter months working "school-fish" tuna schools with Black Terns (*Chlidonias niger*). On 1 May 1976 two Least Terns were reported resting on kelp 37 km off San Diego, California (Unitt 1984). Howell and Engel (1993) reported seeing Least Terns 2–30 km off the west coast of Baja California in late April and early May with flocks of other seabirds.

We thank Jonathan L. Atwood and Emir Rodríguez Ayala for supplying us with their observations, Armando Santiago for guiding us to the San Blas birds, Amy Hinshaw for her participation on our 1998 surveys, El Dorado Audubon Society and Ed Pandolfino for their financial support in 1998, and Charles T. Collins, Gjon Hazard, David S. Lee, Adrian del Nevo, and A. Townsend Peterson for their contributions to the manuscript, and Eduardo Palacios, Michael Patten, and Philip Unitt for their reviews.

## NOTES

### LITERATURE CITED

- Alvarez del Toro, M. 1980. Las Aves de Chiapas. Univ. Aut. Chis., Tuxtla Gutiérrez.
- Binford, L. C. 1989. A distributional survey of the birds of the Mexican state of Oaxaca. Ornithol. Monogr. 43.
- Escalante, B. P. 1988. Aves de Nayarit. Univ. Aut. Nay., Tepic.
- García, A., and Ceballos, G. 1995. Reproduction and breeding success of California Least Terns in Jalisco, Mexico. Condor 97:1084–1087.
- Grant, P. R. 1964. Nuevos datos sobre las aves de Jalisco y Nayarit, México. An. Inst. Biol. 35:123–126.
- Howell, S. N. G., and Engel, S. J. 1993. Seabird observations off western Mexico. W. Birds 24:167–181.
- Howell, S.N.G., and Webb, S. 1995. The Birds of Mexico and Northern Central America. Oxford Univ. Press, Oxford, England.
- Massey, B. W. 1981. A Least Tern makes a right turn. Nat. Hist. 90(11):62–71.
- Ridgely, R. S. 1989. A Guide to the Birds of Panama, 2nd ed. Princeton Univ. Press, Princeton, N.J.
- Schaldach, J. W., Jr. 1963. The avifauna of Colima and adjacent Jalisco, Mexico. Proc. West. Found. Vert. Zool. 1:1–100.
- Thompson, B. C., Jackson, J. A., Burger, J., Hill, L. A., Kirsch, E. M., and Atwood, J. L. 1997. Least Tern (*Sterna antillarum*), in The Birds of North America (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.), no. 290. Acad. Nat. Sci., Philadelphia.
- Unitt, P. 1984. The birds of San Diego County. San Diego Soc. Nat. Hist. Mem. 13.
- Villaseñor, J. F. 1990. Avifauna costera de Michoacán, México: Composición, estacionalidad, abundancia relativa y hábitos alimenticios. Univ. Michoacana, San Nicolas de Hidalgo.

Accepted 15 March 1999