

spring record. The first Indiana bird was photographed from the Falls of the Ohio (on the Indiana/Kentucky border) on 27 August 1994. The second record was seen among 1,500 Common Terns at Miller Beach on Lake Michigan on 31 August 1995. The third bird was photographed just weeks later at Lake Monroe (southwest Indiana) on 10 September 1995. (Note: to identify Gull-billed Terns in the fall, similar tern species need to be eliminated. First summer plumages of Black and Least Terns have dark bills and legs, and are pale above. Many adult Forster's Terns have acquired winter plumage by mid-August and have a fairly thick, dark bill and look very pale in flight. The Forster's legs might pass for being dark in weak lighting, but likely wouldn't be noticed in flight.) The Illinois bird constitutes the fourth inland record.

The absence of other accepted North American records this far inland

and the occurrence of four confirmed sightings within three years from fairly close locations suggest that all four observations involve the same individual. Gull-billed Terns can live many years; one was found to be nearly 14 years old (Parnell et al. 1995). Since the age at first breeding is at least 5 years old (Parnell 1995), this individual is probably a non-breeding adult with no reason to defend territory. Perhaps initially helped by a summer hurricane,

this bird found its way to the Lake Michigan region where it has returned to the same general area for several years.

Indeed, when a Sandwich Tern visited this same Waukegan Beach in 1989, the observer suspected that all seven records of this species recorded throughout the Great Lakes region between 1986 and 1989 were the same individual (Binford 1993). The same scenario could be repeating itself with the Gull-billed Tern.

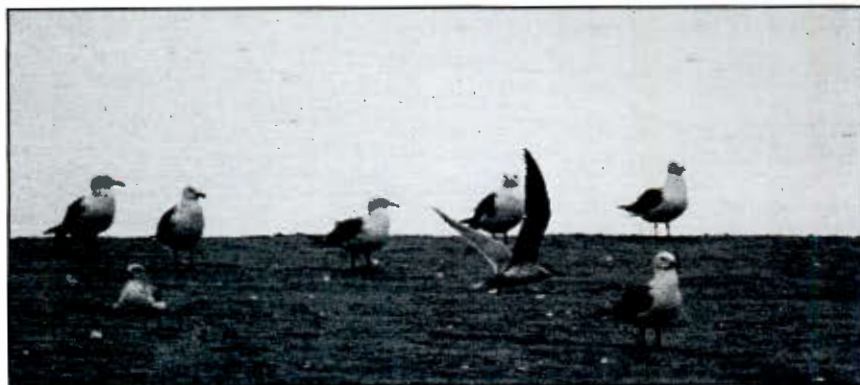


Photos by Eric Walters.

Gull-billed Tern landing on the beach (far right). Notice the lack of a forked tail.

Gull-billed Tern landing on beach. Notice the very pale back and flight feathers relative to the Forster's Terns in front of it.

Gull-billed Tern taking off at Waukegan Beach. Notice the broad width of the wings where they attach to the body, and the dark trailing edge of the primaries.



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