

Seventh Illinois Arctic Tern Record and Attempted Breeding with Common Tern in Lake County, With a Summary of Regional Records and Notes on Identification

by David B. Johnson

Illinois recorded its seventh confirmed record of Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisea*) when Robert Hughes observed an adult bird at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center (hereafter GLNTC) marina, Lake County Illinois, on 19 May 2001. While H. David Bohlen came to GLNTC marina to look for the alternate-plumaged Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*), which had been present since 10-13 June, he re-discovered the adult male Arctic Tern actively courting a Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) at the marina on 14 June 2001. The entire afternoon and evening of 14 June the Arctic Tern spent most of the time flying in pursuit of a Common Tern. From this date until 31 July 2001 this Arctic Tern was observed often by numerous observers at the marina island, flying and foraging beyond the breakwater on Lake Michigan, actively pursuing, courting, and copulating with a Common Tern on the marina island (Fig. 1).

Since hybridization is rare among *sterna* terns (Olsen and Larsson 1995), this Illinois summering occurrence of an Arctic Tern and the courting and breeding attempt with a Common Tern, was a noteworthy event on Lake Michigan. In fact, almost no evidence exists for Common X Arctic Tern hybridization, despite 9 of 23 North American and European tern species having been known to or believed to have hybridized with one or more sympatric species (see Whittam 1998). The only evidence that can be found in the literature of hybridization between Common and Arctic Tern is that suggested by Degland and Gerbe (1867: page 459). However, there are records of other *sterna* hybrids, including those between a Gull-billed Tern (*Sterna nilotica*) and Forster's Tern (*Sterna forsteri*). Several instances exist of Common X Roseate Tern (*Sterna dougllaii*) hybrids (Perry 1972, Robbins 1974, Hays 1975, Zingo et al. 1994), as well as at least one instance of Roseate and Arctic Tern hybridization (Whittam 1998). Interestingly, F1 crosses and back crosses with either parental species (in

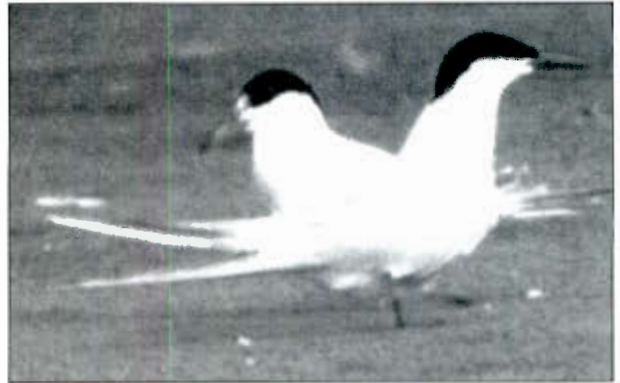


Figure 1. Arctic Tern (facing right, apparent male) courting Common Tern (apparent female). 29 June 2001. Great Lakes Naval Training Center Marina, Lake County. The Arctic Tern has a cocked tail and drooping wings, both part of its courtship display. Note that the tail projects beyond the folded wing in the Arctic Tern. Common Tern's wing is longer than its tail. The Arctic Tern also has a blood red bill (seen in the original color photo), while the Common has an orange-red bill with a black tip to the end. Photo by David B. Johnson.

Roseate X Common hybrids) have been documented to raise young to fledging (Hays 1975, Zingo et al. 1994), including two pairs that involved only F1 crosses, suggesting preference of hybrids for other hybrids (Hays 1975). Also, it is possible the hybridization of *sterna* species may result from an excess number of breeding males in one *sterna* species colony and/or an excess number of breeding females in another *sterna* species colony (see Nesbit 1997).

Observations at GLNTC

While no nest or scrape was found on the island with eggs (pers. comm. B. Semel), the Arctic Tern at GLNTC was observed by Scott Carpenter courting by bill pointing, exchanging fish, and copulating with a Common Tern on 16 June 2001 from 4 p.m. to 5:20 p.m. According to Carpenter, "at approximately 5 p.m., the Arctic Tern mounted the Common Tern it