

## SEASONAL HIGHLIGHTS - Spring Migration 1997

### Two Individual Arctic Terns on Waukegan Beach

After hearing about a Gull-billed Tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) seen at Waukegan Beach in Lake County, Beckie Dyer and I drove there the morning of 31 May 1997. Even though we looked all day for the Gull-billed Tern we did not find it. However, while maintaining the vigil, I spotted a short-legged grayer-looking tern sitting somewhat apart from a flock of 40 to 50 Common Terns (*Sterna turundo*). I alerted Dan Kassebaum, who was standing next to me, and both of us saw that the bird had an all blood-red bill to the tip. This was an Arctic Tern (*S. paradisaea*).

A small group of birders and I noted the following field marks compared with the Common Tern. The gray tern was smaller and less robust. Its legs were shorter and darker red. The bill was slimmer and upon close examination showed no black on the tip. Its head was more rounded and the neck was shorter. The round-headed look was also evident when it flew. There was a well-defined white area between the black cap and the gray of the lower cheek. The tern had a long tail extending well beyond the folded wings, perhaps as much as two inches. The outer vane of the outer tail feather was edged with gray. The underwing had a narrow but well-defined black edge on the primary tips. The upper wing surface lacked the black areas seen on a Common Tern. The folded wing of the Arctic Tern looked frosted while the Common Tern's looked blackish.

The Arctic Tern, which we watched for about one hour through 40 x 60 power Kowa scopes, usually sat alone. It occasionally tried to sit with the Common Terns, but was harassed by Ring-billed Gulls and Common Terns. Several times it flew and landed on the water. I never heard it call.

*Arctic Tern, sub-adult, foreground. Compare with Common Tern, sub-adult, in background. The Arctic Tern constitutes the 5<sup>th</sup> Illinois record. Waukegan Municipal Beach. Lake Co. 14 June 1997. Photo by David B. Johnson.*

It was cool at the beach. A brisk northeast wind blew and fog rolled in toward the shore. These conditions attract migrating terns into the beach from Lake Michigan.

A second Arctic Tern (sub-adult) was discovered at Waukegan Beach by Scott Hickman on 14 June 1997. It was seen through 16 June, and had a faint gray carpal bar and dark forehead, indicating it was a different bird from my 31 May sighting. Both individuals were documented with photographs. They represent the fourth and fifth state records of the Arctic Tern.

Illinois' first Arctic Tern, confirmed with photos, was seen on 28 June 1992 at Lake Springfield in Sangamon County. See *Meadowlark* 2:12, "First Illinois Record of the Arctic Tern". Another record occurred on 27 May 1993 at Brandon Road Lock and Dam in Will County. See *Meadowlark* 2:140. The third record was recorded during the Spring Bird Count at Braidwood Lake in Will County on 6 May 1995. See *Meadowlark* 4:140.

The Arctic Tern might prove to be a regular Waukegan Beach visitor if observers check the area in late May or early June when winds are from the northeast.

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