

Sooty Tern specimen from Illinois

By H. David Bohlen

The remains of Hurricane Dennis came into Southern Illinois 11 July 2005. The storm apparently dropped most of the seabirds caught up in the eye in Kentucky and Tennessee. However, a Sooty Tern (*Sterna fuscata*) was observed alive, but injured in a parking lot of a tavern seven miles south of Nashville, Washington County, Illinois 12 July 2005.

On 13 July the owner of the tavern Jack Brooks, an amateur botanist, found the tern dead. He contacted Illinois Department of Natural Resources biologist Martin Kemper who in turn called me at the Illinois State Museum.

I went to Carlyle the next day and met Martin to get the specimen, which was in excellent shape. That same day I made a study skin of the Sooty Tern. It was a male with testes measuring 4.5 mm. There was little or no body fat and the weight of the tern was 138.6 grams, which is much less than the average weight of 189 grams for Sooty Terns (Olsen and Larsson, 1995). The bird was an adult in alternate plumage.

While I was skinning, the bird seemed light of weight and daintily built, but the bones, although thin were very sturdy and I had to use bone cutters to sever the humeri and tarsi. The back portion of the skull was cracked which probably accounted for its death. It must have collided with a wire. The gizzard was empty, but I found a leg of a robber fly in the birds mouth. The bill was black and measured 31.1 mm from the anterior part of the nostril or 46.4 mm from the forehead to the tip.



The tarsi were dull purplish-black in color and 23.6 mm in length. The wing measured 295 mm and the tail was 162 mm. There are two subspecies of Sooty Tern, *S.f.fuscata* and *S.f.nubilosa*, the latter being somewhat grayer below. This specimen from Illinois is the nominate *fuscata* usually found in the Caribbean. The Sooty Tern is specimen number 661450 in the Illinois State Museum collection.

Literature Cited

Olsen, K. and H. Larsson. 1995. Terns of Europe and North America. Princeton University Press. 176pp.

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*Illinois' first Sooty Tern
specimen. Number
661450 in the Illinois
State Museum collection.
Photos by H. David Bohlen.*