

Hurricane Dennis delivers a Sooty Tern to Carlyle Lake

By Dan Kassebaum

By Tuesday, 12 July 2005, Hurricane Dennis had reached Southern Illinois. Realizing the potential for storm waifs associated with hurricanes, I attempted to get to Carlyle Lake that morning. Making my way in the driving rain from Belleville through Shiloh and Lebanon, I got as far as Trenton on Route 50, when better sense forced me to turn around and come home. Had I known what was being found at Kentucky Lake that morning, I probably would have risked driving nearly blind and hydroplaning all the way to Carlyle.

The weather was much better on Wednesday 13 July. After a morning of photographing a juvenile White Ibis at the Carlyle Lake Wildlife Management Area, I spent the remainder of the day scoping Carlyle Lake. From the pavilion at Eldon Hazlet State Park, I got onto a bird that was dorsally very dark and ventrally white. At the time and at such a great distance, my initial speculation was Long-tailed Jaeger. The bird flew beyond my field of view, so I moved to what I thought would be a better vantage point. Upon reaching that point I could not relocate the bird.

Thursday, 14 July and Friday, 15 July, followed a similar pattern of morning fieldwork for the Illinois Natural History Survey's Critical Trends Assessment Program and then to Carlyle to scope the lake. By Friday I was aware that Frank Bennett had observed two Bridled Terns at Mermet Lake and a potential Brown Noddy on the Ohio River, and that Marty Kemper had delivered a Sooty Tern specimen recovered in Washington County, to David Bohlen of



Figure 1. Sooty Tern at Carlyle Lake. 16 July 2005. Photo by Dan Kassebaum.

the Illinois State Museum. My hopes of finding a storm waif five days after landfall seemed slim. Twelve hours of staring into an eyepiece over three days had proved futile.

Friday evening, 15 July, I got a phone call from Craig Taylor as he was on his way to Carlyle with Mike and Kay Kutska to view the White Ibis, which had been seen again that day at the north end of the lake. I agreed to meet Craig and crew Saturday morning, and after a long hot walk on the levees at Carlyle, we finally located the ibis. Mike, overcome with chronic back pain, and not wanting to hold up the group, sent me on my way. I was to meet them at the Hazlet pavilion with hopes that we could spot a storm waif out on the lake.

Within minutes of setting up my scope at Hazlet, I spotted a dark bird with a peculiar posture resting on the water. Even at several hundred yards, it was obvious the bird was a tern with entirely black upper parts and an immaculate white throat and breast. I took a series of distant

digital photos and began to make an annotated sketch of the bird when Craig, Mike and Kay arrived. Excitedly I waved them over announcing my find. Craig, attempting to set up, took a quick peek through my scope to get a search image just as the bird flew. Craig and I were able to follow the tern through our scopes, but Mike and Kay were not able to pick up the bird from our descriptions.

After alerting the local bird hotline and forwarding messages to be posted on IBET, we quickly decided to rent a boat and sped away from Eldon Hazlet State Park to the West Access Marina to make arrangements. Craig was the first to spot the bird on the water and he eased the boat in close enough so I could get a series of documentary photographs. With cell phones we were able to direct the crowd of Jim and Charlene Malone, George and Terry Barker, Frank Holmes, Leroy Harrison, Bob Shelby, Myrna Deaton and Kevin Richmond, all scoping from South Shore State Park, onto the bird. Travis Mahan made arrangements to meet us at Allen Branch and was able to view the bird from the boat. We were hoping to get Travis close enough to the tern for a set a quality photos, but the bird remained high in the air riding thermals over the lake.

Sunday, July 17, I was due in Chicago for an Illinois Ornithological Records Committee meeting, and the Sooty Tern (*Sterna fuscata*) based on my photographs, was duly accepted as a valid record. From mostly second-hand reports, birders said to be present at Carlyle that day included: David Bohlen, Andy Sigler, Al