

flood pool. This number is the third highest number of Least Terns reported from one location in Illinois during the breeding season, with the apparent estimates of 100 (60 ad., 40 imm.) and 50+ (50 ad. + "young present") from southern Alexander County and southeastern Massac County, respectively, during the summer of 1996, being the only higher counts (Kleen 1997). In addition to the above 45 birds, a few were noted occasionally flying off in a northerly or slightly northeasterly direction.

After about 20 minutes of observation, I drove to another area to the north-northeast I knew was also flooded (where I had observed a Black-necked Stilt [*Himantopus mexicanus*] earlier in May). This area was approximately 2-2 1/4 miles away, at a large bottomland agricultural field, which has flooded several of the last six to eight years, and which has a small stream flowing alongside it (near the intersection of Illinois Routes 3 and 127). At least six Least Terns were immediately found feeding along the edge of the large "lake" formed by floodwaters of the Cache River and Lake Creek. A few birds were noted flying away with small fish in a south-southwesterly direction. Although no actual nests were found, the fact that birds were paired, with many appearing to be sitting for long periods on the ground, as well as birds engaged in courtship or apparent nest feeding, strongly suggests the terns were trying to utilize this site for nesting in wake of the prolonged flooding of their normal nesting islands not too far away in the Mississippi River.

Unfortunately, there were no terns remaining when I returned to this site a couple of weeks later, and the "island" had become a "peninsula", which had then likely made it easily accessible to any number of ground predators. Studies on interior nesting populations have shown or suspected mink (*Mustela vison*), longtail weasel (*Mustela frenata*), striped skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*), red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), Norway rat (*Rattus norvegicus*), domestic cat (*Felis domesticus*) and dog (*Canis familiaris*), raccoon (*Procyon lotor*), and coyote (*Canis latrans*) as ground based predators of these terns; Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), Great Horned (*Bubo virginianus*) and Barred Owls (*Strix varius*), American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*), Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*), Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*), Great Egret (*Ardea alba*), gulls (sp.), American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*), and Black-billed Magpie (*Pica pica*) have been found or suspected in other predation events. Flooding, thunderstorms, and hail as well as a long list of human caused disturbances have also caused death of adults and young or nesting failure (Castrale et al. 1999, Dinsmore et al. 1993, Johnson and Castrale 1993, Kirsch 1993, Kruse et al. 1993, and Lingle 1993).

Interestingly, this general area of southern Alexander County has supported small nesting colonies in agricultural fields on at least two other occasions. Robinson (1996) relates three colonies established near the above area within a mile of the Mississippi River in 1990, when prolonged high floodwaters had inundated this species' normal nesting areas on both the nearby Ohio and Mississippi River sites. He found from four to twenty-seven nests at these sites, but they too were either depredated or plowed under when floodwaters receded. After a major flood caused a levee to

break near the tiny town of Miller City during the massive flooding along the Mississippi River in 1993, several inches of fine sand were deposited over a few thousand acres of nearby bottomland agricultural fields. Some of this sand was bulldozed into islands of artificial sand dunes out in these agricultural fields. While birding this area in the late spring-early summer of 1995, I located a small colony (six-to-eight pairs) of Least Terns in one of these artificial sand dune areas. I was able to locate three nests, with from one-to-three eggs per nest in early June. Unfortunately when I returned in a few weeks, the landowner had planted sorghum in the exact area of the colony, for the fall-winter goose-hunting season. I actually found tractor tire tracks across two of the "nests" and eggs I had found earlier. Only one or two adults were still flying around the area. Other observers located a few adults and at least two young in the same general area later in July (Kleen 1996).

A more interesting find occurred on 20 June 2001, and may represent the first non-traditional nesting attempt by Least Terns at a truly "inland" nesting location in Illinois. After conducting a breeding bird survey just below a small levee, which encircles an area of artificial ponds and grassland area created by the Illinois Power Company at their Baldwin Lake Power Plant, I decided to check the waterfowl there. While scanning through a flock of Canada Geese (*Branta canadensis*) and Mallards (*Anas platyrhynchos*), I noticed several small white birds sitting in some of the flat, open areas of fly-ash, some near the edge of the water of the large pond, and others back in toward the drier fly-ash slurry. To my surprise, I counted a minimum of ten Least Terns, all of which appeared to be paired. They were sitting side by side in scattered pairs. Occasionally, a tern arose and flew in a northerly or north-northeasterly direction across the maze of small, artificial wetlands, and continued to the large, man-made cooling lake about a half mile away. A few returned with very small minnows, to where their apparent mates were sitting. It was rather hot by the time I left the area, and I did not see several of the sitting birds fly or otherwise leave their positions during the hour or so I observed them. Unfortunately my work schedule precluded my returning to the site for a follow-up to verify nesting.

The Baldwin Lake location is at least 18 to 19 miles from the Mississippi (although it is within one mile or so from a major tributary, the Kaskaskia River), and is much farther than that from any known or regular nesting colony on the Mississippi River, the closest being the Grand Tower colony, at least 55 miles to the south-southwest. If the birds were indeed nesting, this would be the first record of Least Terns nesting on an "artificial," man-made substrate in Illinois. However, Least Terns have been documented nesting on very similar fly-ash ponds in Iowa owned by the Iowa Power and Light Co. (Dinsmore et al. 1993). They have nested every year except one between 1984 through at least 1993, with an average of about 11 pairs present each year. Interestingly, a Least Tern was reported from the Baldwin Lake area on 21 June 1980 (Kleen 1980), and two were noted at Kaskaskia State Park (the area along the Kaskaskia River just west, northwest, and southwest of Baldwin Lake) for more than two weeks in July 1976 (Kleen 1976). Another