

Sooty Tern *Onychoprion fuscatus*



Folk Name: (none)

Status: Migrant

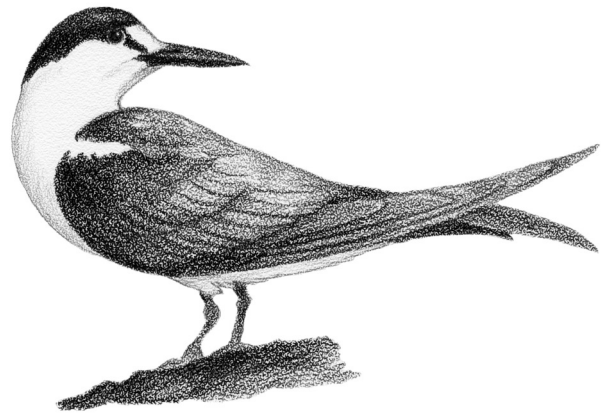
Abundance: Accidental

Habitat: Open water

The Sooty Tern is an ocean-faring bird that is widely distributed in equatorial waters around the world. It is well known for its ability “to stay airborne for years”—never resting on the water and also for its constant, loud cacophony of cries at its tropical island breeding sites. Sooty Terns can be found in the ocean waters off the coast of both Carolinas, and there are a few published reports of successful nesting in both states. This tern is seldom found inland.

We have three records of Sooty Tern in the Central Carolina region. All are associated with hurricanes. John Cely, an ornithologist with the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, found an exhausted bird in a parking lot in Chester, South Carolina, after Hurricane David had moved through on September 6, 1979. The second report came 10 years later when a Sooty Tern was found about 40 miles from where Cely found his. Allen Bryan discovered one while checking Moss Lake in Cleveland County on September 22, 1989, just after the passing of Hurricane Hugo. Bryan’s report of his finding this rarity and several others, was later published in *The Chat*.

Our most recent report is of a bird observed flying over Lake Norman in Mecklenburg, Lincoln, and Iredell counties, on September 12, 2017, after the passage of Hurricane Irma. Rob Van Epps, Jeff Lemons, and Chris Talkington photographed this bird as they followed it flying over the lake.



J F M A M J J A S O N D



Sooty Tern over Lake Norman. (Chris Talkington)