

# FORSTER'S TERNS SUMMERING IN COASTAL NORTH CAROLINA

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Forster's Terns (*Sterna forsteri*) have been found in North Carolina on but few occasions during the summer. Pearson, Brimley, and Brimley (*Birds of North Carolina*, 1959) give the summer dates as 8 July at Pea Island and 14 to 19 July in Henderson County and comment that a few may possibly breed in the state. However, no records of Forster's Terns observed throughout the summer in North Carolina have been published.

## SUMMER OBSERVATIONS

Grant found Forster's Terns regularly during the summer of 1969 at Alligator Bay, near Sneads Ferry, Onslow County, N.C., and observed one at Queens Creek, near Swansboro in Onslow County. Fussell saw them at North River, near Beaufort in Carteret County, N.C.

A single immature Forster's Tern was observed in Alligator Bay by Meys Gardner and Grant on 5 June 1969. Five individuals were present on 14 June, one on 24 June, two on 28 June, three on 4 July, one on 12 July, two on 14 July, three on 26 July, one on 27 July, six on 3 August, 10 on 11 August, and 25 on 24 August, all in New River and Alligator Bay. On 5 July Grant saw an adult in breeding plumage at Queens Creek. Both immature birds and adults in breeding plumage were studied, and on one occasion (14 June) four immatures were flying with an adult. The August sight records probably include many migrants that came through the area in small flocks between early August and early September.

On 6 July Fussell observed six Forster's Terns at North River Marsh near the North River bridge. Three birds were adults and three were immatures. No Forster's Terns were found at North River on 14 July, but 12 were present on 19 July. This immediate area is suitable for Forster's Terns. There are no sand islands, and Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*) are not frequently seen at North River Marsh. Fussell noted the distinctive call, the silver primaries, and the distinctive eye bands.

Common Terns, both adults in breeding plumage and immatures, were at the Sneads Ferry area and provided excellent comparison with the Forster's Terns. Soft part colors aid greatly in the identification of these two species of terns in full breeding plumage. Basal half of the bill is light orange and terminal half is black in Forster's Tern, whereas the Common Tern has a blood red bill with some black visible at the tip. Feet and legs of Forster's Tern are bright orange, while these of the Common Tern are bright red. Silver primaries of Forster's Tern contrast sharply at close range with the dark-tipped primaries of the Common Tern. Also, at close range the gray-white color pattern of the rectrices distinguishes the two species. The call is also diagnostic.

Three specimens were collected by Grant near Sneads Ferry and deposited in the United States National Museum. An adult male in full breeding plumage (USNM No. 532289) was taken on 28 June 1969. The left testis measured 7x4 mm and the right testis measured 6x3 mm, which are probably of breeding size. An immature male (USNM No. 532287) collected on 24 June 1969 and an immature female (USNM No. 532288) collected on 28 June 1969 both had unossified skulls. The crown, back, scapulars, wing coverts, upper breast, and the tips of the inner rectrices on the immature female were brown tinged suggesting a bird of the year. Roxie C. Laybourne confirmed the identification of these specimens at the United States National Museum.

## DISCUSSION

The A.O.U. *Check-list* (1957, p. 234) gives the breeding range of Forster's Tern as "... southeastern Texas to southern Louisiana; southeastern Maryland (Chincoteague

Bay), and eastern Virginia (Cobbs, Smith islands); formerly in . . . South Carolina (Bulls Bay)." Robbins and Van Velzen (*The Breeding Bird Survey 1967 and 1968*, United States Fish and Wildlife Service Special Scientific Report-Wildlife No. 124, p. 95) show that Forster's Terns were recorded on Breeding Bird Survey routes in Florida, Virginia, and Maryland in 1967 and in Florida, Georgia, and Maryland in 1968. It is quite probable that these birds breed in North Carolina. A thorough search during late June in the marshes and small, grassy islands in Alligator Bay and New River disclosed no nests. However, much suitable habitat exists near the gull and tern colonies of Ocracoke, Hatteras, and Oregon Inlets, in the Morehead City-Beaufort area, and in the lower Cape Fear River. Careful search by ornithologists familiar with the field marks of the Forster's Tern should be made in the above areas in late May, June, and early July to determine to what extent, if any, this species breeds in North Carolina.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

**SOUTH CAROLINA BIRD LIFE** (Revised Edition). Alexander Sprunt Jr. and E. Burnham Chamberlain, with supplement by E. Milby Burton. University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, 1970. 655 p., illus., index. \$18.50 (\$25.00 beginning 1 January 1971).

The revised edition of *South Carolina Bird Life* adds 25 species to the state list and also points out a surprisingly large number of changes in status. E. Milby Burton's 69-page supplement to the 1949 edition is a valuable contribution to the ornithological literature. On the whole he has shown excellent judgment in his evaluation of data accumulated in the past 20 years. The only problem I have noticed can be attributed to a confusing change in the vernacular name of *Buteo jamaicensis kriderii*. On page 161 this pale subspecies of the Red-tailed Hawk (formerly Krider's Hawk) is added to the state list because of a bird first seen in South Carolina but actually collected in Georgia, while on page 639 this same race is placed on the hypothetical list on the basis of recent sight records. If Dr. Murphey's specimen has been discredited, there is no mention of it in the supplement. However, the status of *B.j. kriderii* is a small point that in no way impairs the usefulness of the new state bird book to those who are primarily concerned with bird study at the species level. *South Carolina Bird Life* is a handsomely produced and thoughtfully revised book of great interest to bird students throughout the southeastern United States.--EFP

**FROM LAUREL HILL TO SILER'S BOG.** John K. Terres, illustrated by Charles L. Ripper. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York, 1969. 227 p. \$6.95.

Based on the author's experiences afield while he was living at Chapel Hill, *From Laurel Hill to Siler's Bog* gives the reader a rare opportunity to roam the North Carolina countryside with a naturalist of extraordinary keenness and charm. With him we discover the secrets of the muskrat pond, search for the old black gobbler, and wonder how the vulture finds its prey. Each chapter brings a new adventure, a new appreciation of animals we tend to take for granted. The book also includes a brief history of the Mason Farm and of the family that bequeathed the 800-acre plantation to the University of North Carolina. It should be on the shelves of every school and public library in North Carolina, though its appeal extends far beyond the boundaries of the state.--EFP