

RECOVERIES OF ROYAL TERNS BANDED IN THE CAROLINAS

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Thirty years ago John Grey (1940) wrote a lively account of an expedition to band Royal Terns (*Thalasseus maximus*) on Green Island, south of Oregon Inlet, N.C. Harold S. Peters had prompted the expedition stressing that the recoveries would be both of value and interest. Since that date, thousands of bands have been placed on Royal Tern chicks in the Carolinas, and much has been learned about the population dynamics and dispersal patterns of this outstanding bird. Readers of the *Chat*, however, have not been treated to much news concerning the results of this banding except for eight recovery locations given for terns banded near Ocracoke, N.C. (Davis, 1961). These recovery locations are shown in Figure 1. Until such time as more information may be presented, this paper will give some idea of the dispersal pattern of these terns after they leave their nesting areas.

In 1964, in conjunction with the study of colonial species by T.A. Beckett III, I banded a sample of 979 Royal Terns out of 5,070 banded on Deveaux Bank, near Charleston, S.C. To date, 2% (21) of the bands have been recovered. This recovery rate is nearly the same as that received from 1,559 Royal Terns banded in Virginia during 1964 and 1965 (Van Velzen, 1968).

Table 1. Recoveries of Royal Terns banded on Deveaux Bank, S.C.

Band No.	Date Banded	Date Recovered	Recovery Location	How Obtained**
615-87535	14 June 1964	30 Dec. 1964	Clearwater, Fla.	26
-87572	"	02 Dec. 1964	Matheson Hammock, Fla.	56
-87575	"	25 Jan. 1965*	Sebastian Inlet, Fla.	47
-87645	"	22 Jan. 1965	Englewood, Fla.	47
-87698	"	12 April 1965	Sarasota, Fla.	47
-87765	"	13 April 1965*	St. Petersburg, Fla.	47
-87814	"	11 Nov. 1966	Uribia, Guajira, Colombia	59
-87816	"	10 March 1965*	off Ft. Meyers Beach, Fla.	52
-87837	"	15 Dec. 1964	Santo Domingo, D. Repub.	28
-87872	"	20 Dec. 1964*	Boca Grande, Fla.	47
-87918	"	07 Dec. 1964*	Clearwater, Fla.	26
-87927	"	14 Sept. 1964	Savannah, Ga.	47
-88039	13 June 1964	13 Sept. 1964	St. Simons Light, Ga.	56
-88055	"	15 Sept. 1964*	Yulee, Fla.	47
-88072	"	19 Jan. 1968	New Smyrna Beach, Fla.	47
-88250	"	01 May 1965*	Treasure Island, Fla.	26
-88293	"	15 March 1965	off Sarasota, Fla.	34
-88334	"	28 Nov. 1967	Crescent Beach, Fla.	47
-88364	"	30 Jan. 1965	off Tavernier, Fla.	26
-88435	"	15 Dec. 1964	Fort Pierce, Fla.	47
-88453	"	07 March 1969	Samana Bay, Dom. Repub.	59

*Letter date only.

**How Obtained Codes:

26 Entangled in fishing gear	52 Injured
28 Caught by hand	56 No information
34 Eaten by fish	59 Shot
47 Found dead	

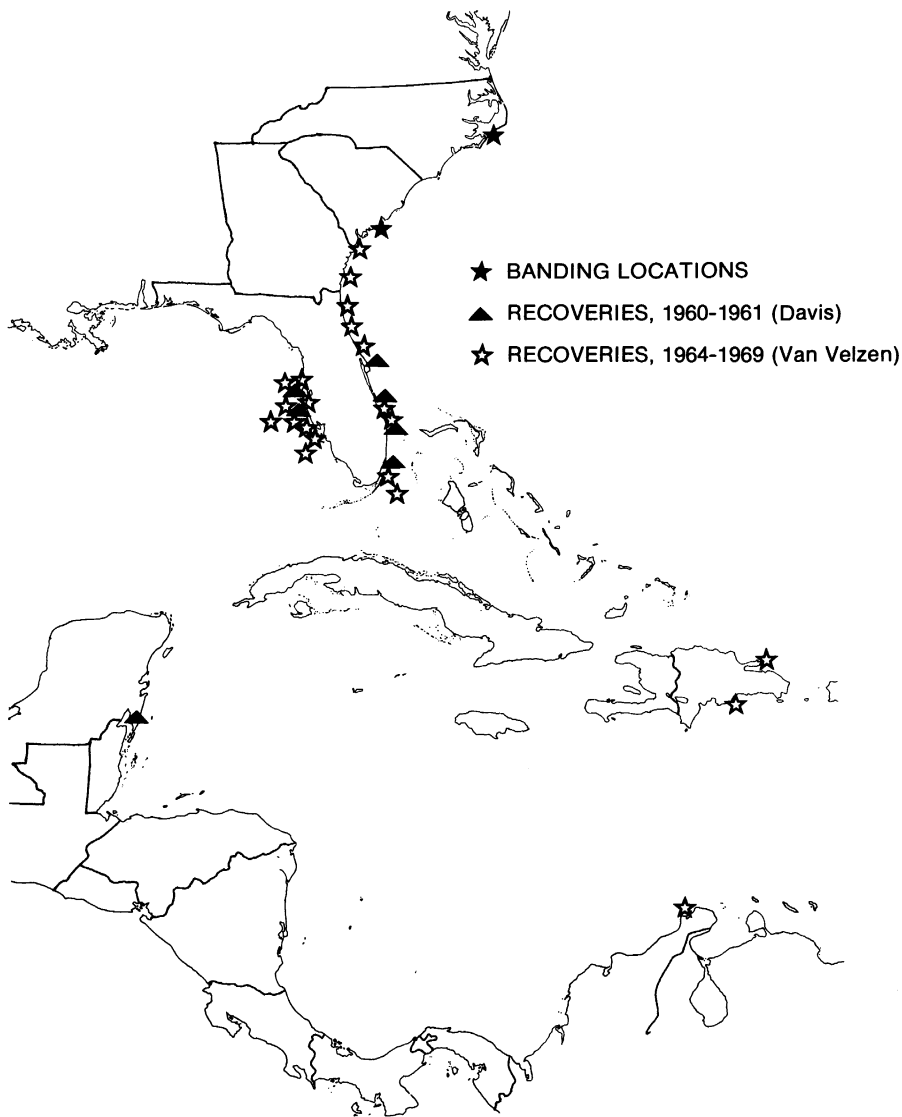


Figure 1. Recovery locations of Royal Terns banded in the Carolinas (excluding Ecuador and Peru).

The majority of recoveries were received during the first fall and winter following banding. Most of the recoveries came from Florida (Figure 1), indicating that a good proportion of the South Carolina birds winter in that area. Only three reports were received from areas outside the United States: two from the Dominican Republic and one from Colombia.

The distribution pattern shown by these recoveries is quite similar to that of the Royal Terns banded in Virginia. From a total of 46 recoveries received by the author, 17 came from Florida, 6 from other points along the Atlantic coast of the United States, 11 from the Caribbean, and 12 from Central and South America. Davis (1961) received recoveries from Mexico and Ecuador, and two of the Virginia terns were found as far south as the coast of Peru. These recoveries suggest a movement across Central America and down the *western* coast of South America. Although Royal Terns are found along the eastern coast of South America as far south as Argentina, Escalante (1968) suggests that these birds do not originate from the Caribbean or the coast of the United States, but likely breed somewhere in the Southern Hemisphere.

Half of the birds recovered were reported as found dead. The next largest number (4) were entangled in fishing gear. The remainder were recovered by miscellaneous means, as shown in Table 1. Of special interest was the recovery of one bird from the stomach of a Tiger Shark caught in the Gulf of Mexico (Van Velzen, 1966).

To date, the oldest bird recovered from the Virginia and South Carolina bandings discussed above was 4 years 9 months of age. Sprunt and Chamberlain (1949), however, mention a South Carolina Royal Tern recovered 10 years 8 months after banding.

Details concerning the 21 recoveries of South Carolina Royal Terns banded by the author are given in Table 1.

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