

Second Nesting of the Sooty Tern in South Carolina

PHILIP M. WILKINSON

407 Meeting Street

Georgetown, South Carolina 29440

On 3 June 1987, I found a pair of Sooty Terns (*Sterna fuscata*) nesting on the Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge, Charleston County, S.C. The nest was on a sand spit that had extended in recent years westward from the western point of Cape Island (Lat. 33°0.4', Long. 79°25.3'). I was accompanied by Stephen Kyles and Tom Kohlsaar of the South Carolina Wildlife and Marine Resources Department. The single egg was in a shallow scrape on bare sand under a small, sparse clump of *Spartina patens*. The egg was slightly larger than nearby Black Skimmer (*Rynchops niger*) eggs and was buff-colored, with fine lilac spots. The nest was on a small dune near the center of a Black Skimmer and Gull-billed Tern (*Sterna nilotica*) colony. There were four Black Skimmer nests 51, 89, 107, and 142 cm from the nest and one Gull-billed Tern nest 127 cm away.

On 8 June, S. Kyles and I photographed one incubating adult. We saw the other member of the pair only briefly. On 30 June we found an almost complete eggshell in the nest. It appeared to have recently hatched. The adult showed defensive behavior of a 1.5X4.5 m clump of Beach Elder (*Iva imbricata*). We found six small Black Skimmer chicks hiding in this clump of vegetation, but were unable to locate the Sooty tern chick.

On 1 July, Chris Marsh, S. Kyles and I returned to photograph the chick. Numerous Black Skimmer and Gull-billed Tern chicks sought the cover of the clump of Beach Elder. However, we were unable to associate either of the adult Sooty Terns with a chick. Again we saw territorial behavior by the Sooty Terns. They flew around the clump in an apparent attempt to discourage chicks of other species from gaining access to the clump of Beach Elder. We also saw and photographed courtship behavior by the pair. This behavior and other evidence cited above suggest that hatching had occurred, but that the chick had not survived. On 15 July, Sid Gauthreaux, Will Post and I returned to determine whether renesting had occurred. Although the pair was still on the territory at this time, they apparently had not re-nested. Color transparencies of the Sooty Terns are on file at the Charleston Museum.

The first Sooty Tern nesting record for South Carolina was a single pair nesting on Bird Key Stono, also in association with Black Skimmer and Gull-billed Terns (Chat 51:51, 1987).