

August 26, 2005

Rudy Keller

Thank you for submitting the description of the tern you found September 19, 2003 at Blue Marsh Lake. The report was nearly unanimously accepted as Bridled/Sooty (7-1).

Hurricane Isabel produced a historic fall-out of birds for PA, and even though this report did not result in a specific identification it will add a piece of information to the record of Isabel.

Thanks again for sending in the description.

Sincerely

Matt Sharp
Chair: Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee.

375-01-2003

Probable adult Sooty Tern (*Sterna fuscata*),
Blue Marsh Lake,
Berks County

On the morning of 9/19/03, I was checking Blue Marsh Lake in Berks County for birds blown in by Hurricane Isabel. Shortly before 9:00 a.m., I was standing on the shore at Dry Brooks Boat Launch, scanning the lake through Zeiss 10X40 binoculars. The sky was heavily overcast with swiftly moving clouds being blown from the SSE. The wind was very strong. At Dry Brooks, I was sheltered from its full force by a hill, enabling me to hold my bins fairly steady, but at my previous stop, gusts had been strong enough to push me back a step if I faced directly into the wind. While scanning the lake surface, I spotted a dark backed, light bellied bird flapping laboriously into the wind not far above the water, rather in the manner of the hundreds of Tree Swallows I had just seen at L. Ontelaunee. I saw the bird only against the backdrop of water, shoreline and trees, as it never rose above the horizon line while I had it in view. Distance is hard to gauge over water, but I estimate the bird was 1/8 to 1/4 mile away. Viewing time was not more than one minute. It was obviously a medium-large tern, having a slender streamlined body; long, narrow pointed wings sharply bent back at the wrists; a fairly thin bill tapering to a sharp point; and a long, deeply forked tail. Though the bird was laboring against the wind, the buoyant wingbeat typical of terns was apparent. The color of the upperwing surfaces, back, crown and upper tail surface was slaty or sooty with a brownish cast, not crow black. The brownish cast was especially apparent on the primaries. The bill was uniformly dark. I could see a black loreal bar running from the base of the bill through the eye to the base of the dark crown, separating the white forehead from the white cheek and throat. The white forehead was prominent, but I could not see if a white line extended above and behind the eye, as illustrated in Bridled Tern. I discerned no white or pale gray collar on the hindneck separating the dark crown from the dark back, but I was far away from the bird, my view was brief and I did not see the hindneck from above, only in profile. From my angle, it seemed dark. The underwings were rather broadly edged with shadowy gray on the trailing edge, from the primary tips to the body. This color was much lighter than the color of the upperwing surfaces, but dark enough to provide some contrast with the bright white of the rest of the underwing surfaces, as well as the throat, breast, belly and undertail surface. I could not see the exact extent of gray on the undersides of the primaries. The forked tail seemed long in relation to the bird's body. The upper tail surface was the same dark color as the back, from the base of the tail all the way out to the tips of the long streamers. The outer edges of the tail looked lighter, but I could see no white on the uppertail surface at my viewing distance. This field mark would seem to favor Sooty over Bridled Tern, at least as these spp. are illustrated in Peter Harrison's *Seabirds*, an identification guide. For once in my case, chance favored the prepared mind, as I had spent some hours the previous evening studying the more common storm strays in several field guides. However, I was very lucky to have seen so many field marks on this tern in such a short time. It quickly disappeared around a bend of shoreline, and at this point I made a mistake. Instead of following it with just binoculars in hand, I opted to make the short sprint back to my car for my scope. Bad choice. By the time I had set up the scope, the bird was gone. A few minutes later, Joan Silagy pulled up with her Aussie sidekick. We circled the lake for 2 hours, scanning from

every good viewpoint, but never saw the bird again.

A Laughing Gull was also at Blue Marsh that day, standing on the swimming beach with Ring-billed Gulls, and Ken Lebo spotted a Common Tern at L. Ontelaunee later in the day.

Rudy Keller
Boyertown, PA
Berks County

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation – Round One

Species: Sooty Tern (*Sterna fuscata*)

Date of Sighting: 19 September 2003 to 19 September 2003

Location: BLUE MARSH LAKE

County : BERKS

Observer(s): Rudy Keller

Date of Submission: 2003

Submitted by: Rudy Keller

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

Specimen: No

Recording: No

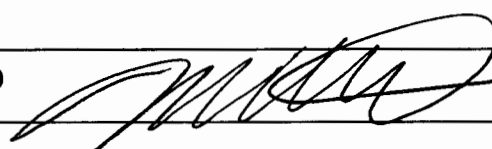
Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A	Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	Abstain
G. Armistead				X				
D. Heathcote				X				
P. Guris				X				
J. Stanley			X					
E. Witmer			X					
R. Leberman				X				
M. Sharp				X				
TOTALS			2	5				
DECISION								

Comments: Stanley - Class III Bridled/Sooty Tern
 Guris - Class III Bridled/Sooty Tern
 Sharp - Class III Bridled/Sooty Tern

2/5 - Sooty Tern

7/0 - Bridled/Sooty Tern

Signature (Secretary)



Date: 11/9/04