



Documentation for the PORC

375-01-2006

Species: Sooty Tern

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Other Observers: Deuane Hoffman, Bob Schutsky, and Tom Amico (as well as a few others from shore)

Location: The bird was seen flying south over the east side of the Susquehanna River between the boat launch at the end of Blue Rock Road and Avocet Point. The three above observers and I were standing on Avocet Point when the bird flew past. Avocet Point is one of the first islands reached by heading west by boat from the east shore of the river. This region is part of the Conejohela Flats, Washington Boro, south of Columbia, Lancaster County.

Date and Length of time observed: September 2, 2006. The bird was observed for a brief amount of time. With all of the excitement as well as trying to locate and relocate the bird, I can't give a good estimate for the amount of time the bird was observed; it was only a matter of how long it took the bird to fly past us and out of sight. During the course of the observation, the bird really did not stray at all from its direct flight.

Optics: The bird was seen through both my Swarovski 8.5 by 42 EL binoculars and my Swarovski ST-80 scope with a 20x-60x zoom eyepiece. Fortunately, the bird flew past us on a very narrow strip of the Susquehanna River. I would estimate that at its closest distance, the bird was around 200-300 feet away.

Habitat and Behavior: The Sooty Tern was observed flying south, low over the Susquehanna River with a fairly large flock of larids. Although the flock mostly consisted of gulls (primarily Ring-billed Gulls), there were also 3 Black Terns cruising quickly low over the water. The Sooty Tern was in close proximity to the Black Terns and all the terns seemed to favor flying low over the water compared to the gull flock.

Weather: Since Saturday (2 September 2006) was full of the effects of Ernesto, the morning was quite miserable, being overcast, rainy, and accompanied by a fairly strong southerly wind at times.

Description: The field marks obtained in the brief look were limited, but certainly enough to pin this bird to the species level. The bird was initially picked up slightly upriver (I believe) from our vantage point on Avocet Point. However, I don't think I first saw it until it was about straight out (perpendicular) to where I was standing. I was then able to watch the bird off and on until it disappeared downriver. The reason I say off and on was due to the fact that when I switched from binoculars to scope it took me a few precious seconds to re-find the bird.

The nearby Black Terns served as an excellent tool for comparison. It was quite evident that we were looking at a tern and this tern was larger and longer-winged than the Black Terns. Its flight still was decidedly different (as to be expected for a larger, more robust bird) than the smaller Black Terns as it had more powerful, determined wingbeats. I was able to see the white underwing coverts on this otherwise very black bird (from above). In fact, it was the degree of black, evident at quite a distance, which enabled me to re-find the bird in my scope. I initially got on a Black Tern or two before coming upon the Sooty Tern and the dark creamy gray upperwings

of the Black Tern was very different than the jet black upperparts of the Sooty Tern. This was apparent at a considerable distance.

Unfortunately, in the fleeting observation, I did not obtain good looks at the underparts, head, or tail of this bird. We believed this individual to be an adult.

**Similar Species:**

**Black Tern:** As noted in the above description, the larger size, longer wings, more powerful flight, combined with the jet black upperparts, and white underwing coverts eliminated this species.

**Bridled Tern:** Although similar in size and shape to a Sooty Tern, the dark gray upperparts of a Bridled Tern (similar in tone to a Black Tern's wings) set this species apart from the bird we observed. The very black upperparts of the bird were obvious among the dark gray Black Terns from some distance. Although possibly not as good as the direct observation made between the flight style of the Sooty Tern and the Black Terns, Bridled Terns are described as being more buoyant and graceful in comparison to the more powerful flight of a Sooty Tern.

**Black/Brown Noddy:** Any noddy could be quickly eliminated by the white underwing coverts observed on our bird.

**Black Skimmer:** As with the Bridled Terns, Black Skimmers have a buoyant and graceful flight (and quite distinctive) unlike the bird we observed. Black Skimmers also have a noticeable white trailing edge to their secondaries and inner primaries and a much more distinctive bill with an orange base. No color other than black was observed on the wings of our bird and a bill like that of a skimmer would likely have been much more noticeable than that of the Sooty Tern we saw.

# Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

## Voting Tabulation – Round One

Species: Sooty Tern      *Sterna fuscata*

Date of Sighting: 2 September 2006 to 2 September 2006

Location: WASHINGTON BORO

County : LANCASTER

Observer(s): Cameron Rutt, D. Hoffman, B. Schutsky      T. Amico et al.

Date of Submission: 2006

Submitted by: Cameron Rutt

Written Description: Yes

Photo: Yes

Specimen: No

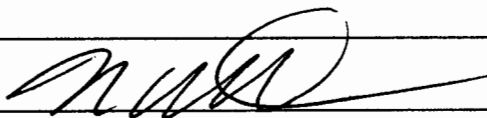
Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A	Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	Abstain
R. Wiltraut			X					
A. Guarente	X							
T. Johnson	X							
J. Stanley								
E. Witmer	X							
J. Heller	X							
G. Malosh	X							
TOTALS	5		1					
DECISION	X							

Comments:

6/0

Signature (Secretary)



Date:

7/30/07