

Pennsylvania Rare Bird Report Form

Species (Common and Scientific Name)

Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis*

Subspecies, if known

Not known - assumed *accuflavida*

Number of individuals

1

Age(s) and Plumage(s)

Adult basic, sex unknown

Date and Time of Observation

August 28, 2011 approximately 4:30 PM

Location (City, Borough, Township)

Philadelphia

Exact Site (E.g. Name of park, lake, road)

Abandoned pier between Reed St. and Pier 70 Shopping center

39.92687,-75.140625

<http://g.co/maps/vg22>

Observer Reporting:

Matt Sharp

7135 Bryan St. Phila. PA 19119

E-mail: msharp01@gmail.com

Phone: 267-505-1499

Other Observers: None

Habitat:

Old pier on PA bank of Delaware River surrounded by heavy commercial development and abandoned industrial sites.

Distance to Bird (Specify feet, yards, etc.)

Approximately 20 yards perched & 20-100 yards in flight

Viewing Conditions (sky, weather, position of sun relative to you)

Clearing skies and warm afternoon light from the west and south (to my back and right)

Optical Equipment Used

Zeiss 65mm Diascope with zoom eyepiece @ 25x

Swarowski EL 8x42

Behavior & Description (include as much detail as you observed – size relative to other species present; “jizz”= e.g. posture, body shape, and proportions; colors and patterns of plumage; bill, eye, and leg characteristics; other features relevant to this individual):

The bird flew in to a flock of resting terns and gulls from the direction of the river with 2 Forster's Terns (FOTE). I spotted it as it was landing among a group of FOTE and got my bins on it then alerted the rest of the group while getting the bird in my scope. Once I located the bird with my scope I started to give directions to its exact location, and took my eye off the bird to look for reference points. As I did the bird took off again and flew off upriver close to the shore and out of sight.

In total I had the bird in bins/scope for 10 seconds while it landed and maybe 20 seconds as it flew off upriver.

Observation while landing/perched (Scope and bins)

As the bird came in to land, it immediately struck me as a pale tern, slightly but obviously larger than the FOTE in direct comparison. It landed facing and at a slight angle to me giving a clear view of the relatively long, thin, black, bill with pale tip, and dark legs. The forehead was white, the crown was mottled dark and white and become more solidly dark distally to the

rear crown and nape. As it settled and fluffed, arranging wings and feathers I was able to see a short, shaggy, dark crest along the nape. The bird was as pale as FOTE above and below, only slightly darker gray on the mantle and upper wings relative to the whitish under parts. The visible primaries were dark gray.

Observation in flight:

Before everyone else could get on the bird it took flight with a couple FOTE and went upriver, away from us, flying low over the water providing a solid dark background for most of the remainder of the observation with the light from behind me. The bird was longer winged, and slightly larger bodied than FOTE with which it was in close proximity while flying. The upper wings were dark gray distally on the outer primaries contrasting with pale gray coverts and inner secondaries and primaries. The tail was short, forked, and appeared white without noticeable contrast between the rectrices and rump/lower back.

I have included a drawing I made about a half-hour after I saw the bird and prior to checking any field guides. The drawing is obviously not true to life and is really just a simple way to note the field marks I saw.

Vocalizations

None heard

Supporting evidence if any: (Check all that apply)

Drawing attached as pdf made about 20-30 minutes after the bird was seen.

Separation from similar species

Size ruled out all *Sterna* terns, bill color & plumage/age eliminated other *Thalasseus* sps. (Caspian, Royal, Elegant, and the crested terns). Pale mantle eliminated Sooty/Bridled.

Discussion – anything else relevant to the observation that will aid the committee in evaluating it:

Earlier in the day George Armistead alerted me to a Sandwich he had seen in the Penn's Landing area, about a mile or two upriver from this location. I was not seeing much from my

first viewing spot in the NE section of the city so headed down to where he was, specifically to try to relocate the SATE. I arrived about an hour or two after he last saw the bird and after he had left the area. After checking the river from several spots in the Penn's Landing area and not seeing much I headed further downriver to the Pier 70 shopping center (Wal-Mart parking lot) where I found a mixed group of resting terns and gulls on an big concrete pier about 200-300 yards upriver which included 4 Least Terns. Access to the river is tricky and many areas are fenced off until someone cuts a whole in the chain-links. The pier with the birds was clearly fenced off by a new-looking chain link fence so I assumed it was inaccessible. I started bushwhacking my way towards the group in search of a decent vantage point. From the first vantage point I found spotted a partially obscured tern with a dark rear crown and nape and all dark bill with a pale tip while trying to get better looks at the Least Terns, but could only see the birds head. After some more bushwhacking I was still not able to get a better view of this bird but despite my uncertainty I called Frank Windfelder who I knew was out on the river with Tony Croasdale and Todd Fellenbaum and alerted him to a possible Sandwich Tern then went back to scoping the flock. After another 10-15 minutes of trying to relocate the bird I suspected of being a SATE a young couple strolled into my scope view. Cursing myself and assuming the couple would flush the flock, I covered the 100-200 yards to the pier as fast as my equipment and 6 foot tall growth of ragweed would allow. When I got to the fence blocking off the pier I found a well-worn path skirting the chain-link and allowing easy access to the pier, and the couple had made it past the flock with minimum disturbance to the birds. I then finally relocated the suspect bird and confirmed that it was not a Sandwich Tern but rather a young common with a dark bill with pale tip. I immediately called Frank again to tell him I jumped the ID but he was already at the Wal-Mart parking lot and about to call me for directions to my location.

After 20-30 minutes of chit chat and scanning with Frank, Todd, and Tony the bird described above flew in but I was the only one who saw it long enough to confidently identify it before it took off again. I realize this tale stretches credulity but after nearly an hour of trying to string several FOTE and COTE into a Sandwich, the identification of a real Sandwich Tern was

glaringly obvious. Plus I know Frank well enough to know he is not one to curb his skepticism and while he was not willing to make the ID he did not dispute it based on what he (and the others saw) and I doubt he was just being polite when he said it looked good for SATE.

Previous experience with this and/or similar species

Not extensive but I have seen many SATE in FL, TX, in Nov-Dec and multiple times in Cape May in July-Aug and am very familiar with all regularly occurring east coast terns and am aware of the challenges in identification of the group.

Are you positive of your identification? (Why or why not) See above

References Consulted:

During Observation - none

After Observation – Sibley, Collins Guide to Birds of Europe 2nd Ed., National Geo, (most recent Ed.), Terns of Europe and North America (Olsen and Larsson)

Date of this Report: 8/30/2011

SATE

Reedst +

Pic. 70
about

Pale upperwing - w- Dark
Outer Ps (2 or 3)

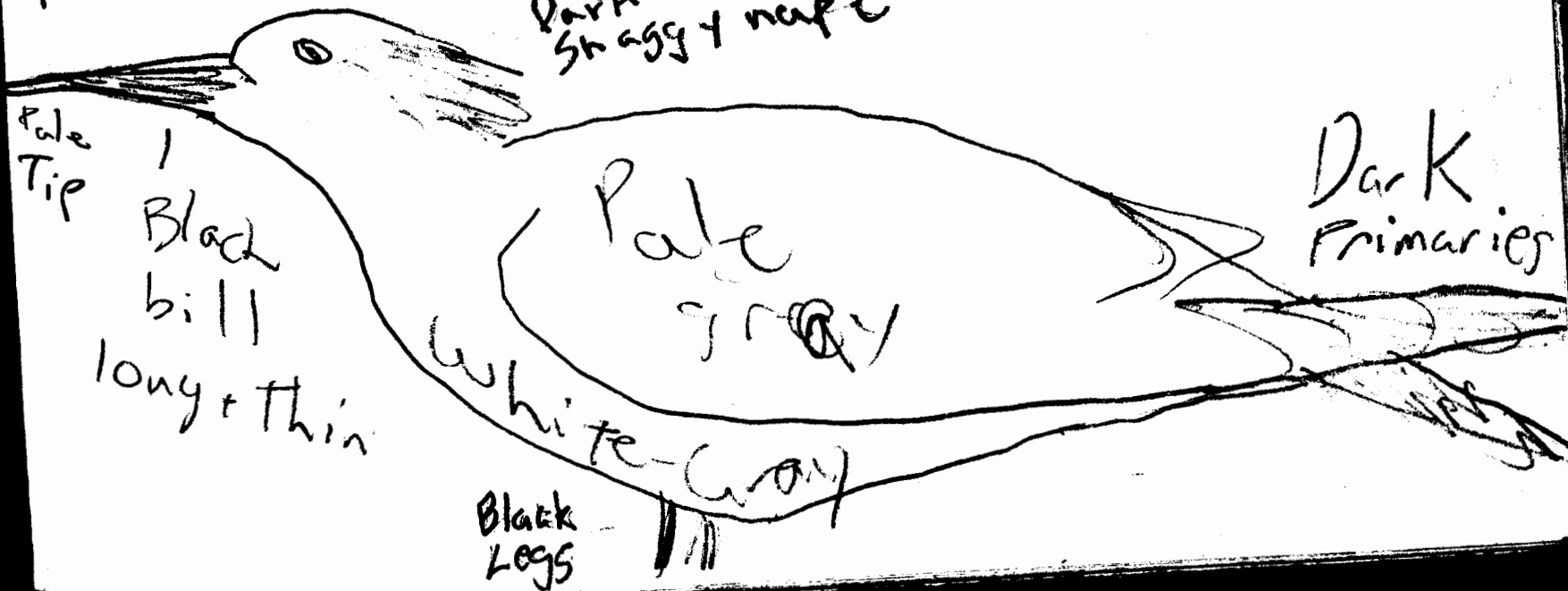
Short Forked
Tail
white

Slightly larger

Than COT = + FOTE

Pale as FOTE above + below

Dark
shaggy + napl



Pale
Tip

Black
bill

long + thin

White - Gray

Black
Legs

Dark
Primaries

SANDWICH TERN

Date: 8/28/2011

Philadelphia, Philadelphia Co., PA

Observer: George Armistead

optics used: 10 x 42 Leica binoculars, 25-55x Leica telescope.

Located just after 1pm, ~1km south of the Race St. Pier. It was feeding with a flock of Common and Forster's Tern (<20 terns total) in front of the Philadelphia Belle boat/restaurant. It was initially about 1km to my south and right away through binoculars the larger size, relatively broad *Thalasseus* structure, and the very pale upperparts (esp. secondaries) with a moderate-small amount of black in the primaries, were striking. With more prolonged study through the scope, the rather stout (compared to the *Sterna*) black bill was visible, and the head pattern could be seen to good advantage. The bird was a nonbreeding adult showing signs of wear/molt in the wing coverts, but appeared to have all its flight feathers. The head pattern (white forehead with black confined to rear-crown and crest) much more recalled a Royal Tern (1 seen ~20mins. prior) at this season than either of the smaller *Sterna*. (All Forster's were either fresh juvs., or molting adults and white-crowned with black eye-patches. All Commons were adults and nearly all still appeared essentially in breeding plumage, or having only whitened in the forehead). The Sandwich Tern continued to feed in this area for at least another 30 mins. I watched it periodically, while searching for other storm-birds, and noted it wandering upriver towards me, as near as <.5km several times. I tried a couple times with the scope to see the yellowish tip to the bill, but was confounded by poor angles or buffeting winds. I was not disturbed by this, as the bird was in all respects clearly a Sandwich Tern, a bird I've seen thousands of. Later in the afternoon ~3:45pm Matt Sharp relocated presumably the same bird, about a mile downriver from here (still feeding with Forster's and Common terns), near the new Pier 53 Park (still under construction), not far from the Columbus Blvd Wal-Mart.

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation – Round One

Species: Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*

Date of Sighting: 28 August 2011 to 28 August 2011

County : PHILADELPHIA

Location : PHILADELPHIA

Observer(s): George Armistead, Matt Sharp

Date of Submission: 2011

Submitted by: George Armistead, Matt Sharp

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
D. DeReamus		X					
A. Guarente		X					
T. Johnson		X					
B. Coulter		X					
R. Koury		X					
D. Weber		X					
G. Malosh		X					
TOTALS		7					
DECISION		X					

Comments:

7/0

1ST STATE RECORD - PROVISIONAL LIST

Signature (Secretary)

Nick Pulcinella

Date:

4/8/12