

Submission Date	2013-03-09 22:37:22
Observer's Name	Bill Etter
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Observer's Address	Street Address: 407 S Cigar Rd City: Northampton State / Province: United States Postal / Zip Code: 18067 Country: United States
Names of additional observers	Bill Etter
Species (Common Name)	Royal Tern
Species (Scientific Name)	Sterna maxima
Number of individuals	1
Age(s) and Plumage(s) and Sex (if known)	probable adult
Observation Date and Time	10-31-2012 8:45 AM
Did you submit this sighting to eBird?	Yes
Link to eBird checklist	http://ebird.org/ebird/pa/view/checklist?subID=S11924368
County	Bucks
Location (City, Borough, Township)	Haycock / Bedminster Twps.
Exact Site (E.g. Name of park, lake, road)	Lake Nockamixon / Nockamixon State Park
Habitat	Large rural lake
Distance to bird	Less than a quarter mile...best estimate is 700-900 feet at closest pass
Viewing conditions	overcast but fairly bright; no precipitation
Optical equipment used	good 8x Celestron binoculars, good Nikon 24-30x scope
Description	A large, stocky looking tern, mostly pale over all. Long pale orange pointed bill, pale plumage, almost uniformly pale wingtips above and below. Distinctly pointed wings and flight style eliminated any of the expected gulls at this location on this day, even from over a mile away.

Forked tail, dark, streaked/smudged cap extending from behind eye and pale forehead.

Behavior (be as detailed as possible about what the bird was doing)

Tern was flying leisurely but systematically down the lake. I first picked it up from well over a mile away and identified it as a tern due to bouncy flight style punctuated by random dips and dives toward water surface. I was able to watch it for several minutes through the scope as it slowly approached my vantage point from the east; as it came closer, it was obviously a large tern. Details became more clear as it approached. The bird dove toward the water several times, but did not appear to capture prey. It continued past me, passing within 750-900 feet, and slowly moved west until it was out of sight beyond the tree line.

Separation from similar species (How you eliminated others)

By comparing this tern's size to the Ring-billed gulls in the area, it was clearly a very large tern; significantly larger than the gulls. Caspian Tern would be the obvious species most similar: Caspian should have a more massive bill (granted, a judgement call at this distance). Caspian should also have much more dark plumage from the base of the bill (in front of the eye) to the back of the head; this bird had a definite clean pale face, with the only dark well behind the eye. I would also expect Caspian to have obvious dark primaries; this bird's primaries (above and below) seemed to be uniformly pale.

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

This bird was found following the passage of Hurricane Sandy through the area, and was certainly displaced by the "superstorm". Since Royal and Caspian are the only two terns I am aware of that fit this bird's size and general description: I see Caspian Terns in the mid Atlantic states and with PA more or less annually, and am very comfortable with this species. I've also closely observed and photographed Royal Terns many times from NC, FL, and the East Indies (and once previously in PA), and am also comfortable with this species. The attached photo is of little use, but was the best I could obtain. I feel it may show the pale forehead, in part.

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

Yes, I feel very comfortable that the suite of identification points noted above eliminate all species but Royal Tern.

During

None

After

None

Supporting evidence (check all that apply)

Photograph

Upload images, audio, video or drawings

[ROTE_2012Bucks_005b.jpg](#)

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