

upper tail-coverts and tail, with the grey of mantle, back and wings. Black is extensive on nape and crown, white being confined mainly to forehead and fore-crown. Their flight is light and buoyant and they feed often by diving from a considerable height. The habitat of the Common is both coastal, including harbours and estuaries, and maritime and of Arctic largely maritime.

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## SHORT NOTES

## WHISKERED TERN ON LOWER WAIKATO RIVER

An unusual tern first seen on 27 August 1978 by Anton Habraken and a junior member, Ian Southey, stayed for about a month near Hood's Landing, on the lower Waikato River. It was seen by a woman white-baiter in mid-August and remained until 17 September.

In the lower reaches, 8 km from its mouth, the river is tidal and about 3 km wide. Many islands covered in tangled willow, alder, reeds and weeds divide it into a maze of channels. The tern frequented a blind channel close to the boat ramp and parking area of Hood's Landing, which is on a main channel. It could be watched from the landing without difficulty. Many boats are launched and landed there. The banks are dotted with whitebaiters' shelters, one of which gave us a vantage point.

AH returned with B. Brown on 29 August, when we were fortunate in having the bird present for about 40 minutes. During half this time it rested 30 m distant on water weed in sunlight. Telescopes of X 75 and X 15-60 were used, full notes and sketches made and the bird identified as a Whiskered Tern (*Chlidonias hybrida*).

It was studied again on 30 August and 7, 9 and 17 September by various members including M. S. Field, K. J. Fisher, A. J. Goodwin, H. R. McKenzie, G. J. H. Moon (who took movie photographs), R. B. Sibson and J. Trollope.

The bird was of medium size, larger than a Little Tern (*Sterna albigrons*), pale grey above, white below, had short squarish tail, black cap much reduced, legs long and red, bill reddish.

Upper surfaces except head: even, very pale grey, no defined collar but whitish across nape. Undersurfaces: white, "very lightly smudgy on belly" (HRMcK), "faint mottling on flanks" (BB), "at close range odd dark feathers showed along belly to legs" (AH). Head except cap: white. Cap: incomplete; entire crown with grey effect but in fact closely streaked black on white. Lower edge of cap had solid black band starting as a narrow line from a little above centre of bill, widening behind eye to meet at the hind crown with a downward dip and point. White of cheek met eye and went forward to lower mandible. Eye showed below cap-line giving upward curve to lower edge of cap at and just behind eye. Eye: large, brown. Eye streak darkest part of bird (GJHM). Forehead: less spotted than crown, looked whiter. Wings: upper, pale grey, darker grey primaries. At rest, primaries showed white quills plainly. Underwing: white, with tips of primaries grey. Wings extended far beyond tail. Tail: pale grey, short, squarish, with only a hint of fork; white on outer tail seen in flight. Undertail: white. Outer tail feathers had rounded ends (AH). Tail when spread, fan-shaped, seen just before bird dropped to take food.

Bill: heavy, long, deep for about two-thirds of length, then tapering rapidly to tip, upper mandible decurved. Brownish-red upper and deeper red lower mandible. Bill appeared blackish in poorer light conditions. Gape: bright orange-red.

Legs: bright red at close range in good light, but at times seemed brownish, very long for size of bird; "length (of legs) at least twice that of White-fronted Tern (*Sterna striata*)."

 (GJHM).

Stance: hunched at first in windy conditions but later, in calm weather and especially on 17 September, upright, when the long legs showed markedly.

Voice: a sharp *keeet* uttered when a Welcome Swallow (*Hirundo neoxena*) repeatedly dived at it as it rested on weed.

The bird fed regularly over its beat, resting nearby unless disturbed, when it flew down-river and out of sight for varying periods. The flight was direct with deliberate wing-beats. At first it fed by flying into the stiff breeze partly in the lee of a 9-m high willow tangle. It dipped from a height of about 6 m to pick (? insects) from the still surface of a semi-stagnant side channel and would then sweep downwind, to begin again. In calmer weather it fed, at times in both directions, as low as 2-3 m above the water, with an altered technique. Flight was more leisurely. It would stall, execute a half-

twist with fanned tail, dropping in a bounce on to the water. The feet seemed to touch the surface lightly. Bill and head went under 50% of the time. It did not hover, but flew in on to prey. The back arched at lift-off. The tail was flicked after a splash-dive (AJG) and the bird was once wet to the mantle (KJF). Doubtless tide height, as well as wind strength, influenced feeding technique. A Caspian Tern (*Hydroprogne caspia*) also fished the same reach at high water, providing a useful size comparison. The short squarish tail gave the bird a compact look in flight. AH noted that the second primary was missing from the left wing so that the bird may have been in moult. It was seen to rest on a willow log, on aquatic weed at low water and on a tangle of dead vegetation about 60 cm above high water level, when the long-legged upright stance was most apparent.

Identification was made after careful examination of the literature. In addition to the text, we found the illustrations in Slater (1970, *A field guide to Australian birds*, Sydney: Rigby), King, Woodcock & Dickinson (1975, *A field guide to the birds of South-East Asia*, London: Collins) and Ferguson-Lees & Hayman in Gooder (1969, *Birds of the World*, 4 (11), London: IPC Magazine) of the three species of *Chlidonias* very helpful. The distinctively streaked cap joined on hind-crown (as previously described), clearly defined facial pattern, heavy reddish bill, long red legs, the pale even-grey upper surfaces and short blunt tail excluded all but Whiskered Tern. Both AH and BB are familiar with the Black-fronted Tern (*C. albobristatus*) and BB has studied White-winged Black Terns (*C. leucopterus*) in the Firth of Thames. RBS had watched Whiskered Terns in Spain during the previous (northern) summer. He saw the bird on 30 August and agreed with the identification.

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### ALBINO WHITE-FACED STORM PETREL

A completely albino White-faced Storm Petrel (*Pelagodroma marina*) was brought into the Museum by Mr Ray Froggatt of Dargaville. It had been found by a farmer on 5 March 1979 about 1 mile inland from Bayleys Beach after a period of strong westerly winds.

*Measurements:* Culmen 16.6, wing 15.2, tarsus 40.7, mid toe & claw 38, tail 82.3.

Bill yellow with a few reddish patches on both mandibles. Legs dull yellow shading to red on tarsal joint. Webs bright yellow as in normal specimen.

If proved suitable for mounting, this bird will be displayed at the Dargaville Museum.

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