
January 1996

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Recommended Citation

Coburn, Lara M. (1996) "Gull-billed Tern Nesting on a Roof in Northwest Florida," *Florida Field Naturalist*.
Vol. 24 : Iss. 3 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/ffn/vol24/iss3/3>

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Fla. Field Nat. 24(3): 76-77, 1996.

GULL-BILLED TERN NESTING ON A ROOF IN NORTHWEST FLORIDA

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Gull-billed Terns (*Sterna nilotica*) have a scattered, worldwide distribution (Spendel and Patton 1988). Typically, these terns nest with or near other colonial seabirds, such as Least Terns (*Sterna antillarum*), Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*), Royal Terns (*Sterna maxima*), and Laughing Gulls (*Larus atricilla*) (Hallman 1960, Portnoy 1977, Sears 1978, Clapp et al. 1983, and Spendel and Patton 1988). On the Gulf Coast of Florida, Gull-billed Terns are found most often in association with Black Skimmers (*Rynchops niger*) (Spendel and Patton 1988, Smith et al. 1993).

There have been few published records of Gull-billed Terns nesting in northwest Florida. The earliest record is of one nest near Pensacola, Escambia County, in 1932 (Weston 1933). In the years since, there have been reports of Gull-billed Terns nesting on an island in St. Joseph Bay, Gulf County (Hallman 1960, 1968), on St. George Island, Franklin County (Stevenson and Anderson 1994), and on the St. George Causeway, Franklin County (Smith et al. 1993). Gull-billed Terns have nested on sandy coastal beaches, coastal marshes, natural and man-made islands (Weston 1933, Nicholson 1948, Portnoy 1977, Soots and Landin 1978, and Spendel and Patton 1988), causeways (Smith et al. 1993), and disturbed inland habitats (Layne et al. 1977). Herein, I present a nesting record for Bay County and the first known record of a Gull-billed Tern nesting on a gravel-covered roof in Florida.

On 7 June 1995, I noticed two adult Gull-billed Terns flying overhead while I surveyed a Black Skimmer/Least Tern colony. The colony was located on the roof of the Walmart Store in Parker, Florida, on Highway 98, Bay County. The roof, 10 m off the ground, was covered with a 2.0-2.5-cm layer of brown gravel. Thirty-eight Black Skimmer nests were clustered on the western end of the roof and 195 Least Terns nests were scattered over the roof.

On 14 June, one adult Gull-billed Tern was present on a nest containing one egg. The nest was in the middle portion of the roof and was a scraped-out, 2.1-cm deep, hollow of gravel. It was unlined and was not near any protruding object as are many ground Gull-billed Tern nests (Sears 1978). While I examined and marked the nest, the adults circled overhead and gave their characteristic call, but did not approach. The egg within the nest appeared undamaged.

I visited the Walmart roof colony once a week until 19 July. The adult Gull-billed Terns, however, were not seen after 27 June. The nest and egg were still intact, but the egg never hatched. Eggs of roof-nesting Black Skimmers often crack (Greene and Kale 1976, Fisk 1978, Gore 1987), but no cracks were found in the Gull-billed Tern egg. The reason for the nest abandonment was not apparent.

I thank the management of Walmart in Parker for allowing me access to the roof. I also thank J. A. Gore for his help with observations. W. K. Taylor, B. Jackson, and an anonymous referee provided helpful review comments on an earlier draft of the manuscript.

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