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Winter Sightings of Common Terns Banded in Eastern North America

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INTRODUCTION

There are two breeding populations of Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*) in eastern North America: the Atlantic coast population, which breeds along the Atlantic coast from Newfoundland to southern Virginia; and the Central population, which includes colonies on the Great Lakes and in the upper St. Lawrence River (Austin 1953). These two populations have been studied intensively during the breeding season; but as few banded terns have been recovered on the wintering grounds, comparatively little is known about their distribution at that time. The purpose of this report is to add to the literature base of winter sightings of Common Terns with observations, made in Peru in February and March 1984, of terns banded in the Great Lakes and on Great Gull Island in Long Island Sound, New York.

Most of the Atlantic coast population are thought to winter in the Caribbean east of Cuba, in northern South America, and along the coast of Brazil (Austin 1953, Erwin et al. 1986, Harrington et al. 1986, Spaans 1978), although Bull (1974) has reported recoveries of Atlantic coast Common Terns on the west coast of South America from Colombia, Ecuador, and Chile. The wintering grounds of the majority of the Central population seem to be centered further west than those of the Atlantic population and include the coastline of the Gulf of Mexico, Cuba, and the Pacific coasts of Central and South America (Austin 1953, Blokpoel et al. 1987, Haymes and Blokpoel 1978).

Band recoveries indicate that there is little movement between these two populations during the breeding season (Austin 1953, Haymes and Blokpoel 1978, Courtney and Blokpoel 1983, Blokpoel et al. 1987), but this report presents the

first data suggesting that there may be more mixing of the Atlantic coast and Central populations on the wintering grounds.

METHODS

During the 1981-1983 breeding seasons, 618 adult Common Terns and 847 juveniles from the Eastern Headland in Toronto, Ontario, and 117 adult terns from Tower Island in the Niagara River, New York, were given a standard, aluminum band on one leg and a yellow plastic band with a black horizontal stripe on the other leg, and then individually marked with colored and coded wing tags. This banding was done in an effort to obtain detailed information about the distribution of Great Lakes Common Terns during the non-breeding season (Blokpoel et al. 1987).

Two of us—HB and GDT—then visited South America in three successive winters (1983-1985) for two to four weeks each time to search for wing-tagged Common Terns. From 24 February to 28 March 1984, our efforts were focused on sections of the Peruvian coast from Callao Harbor, Lima, south to Mollendo (Blokpoel et al. 1987, 1989). As Common Terns do not roost on water (Blokpoel et al. 1989), small boats were chartered wherever possible to cruise the harbors; and terns roosting offshore on buoys, platforms and moored boats were surveyed using 9x36 binoculars. On beaches, resting terns were approached as closely as possible, and then binoculars or 20x telescopes were used to obtain band details.

The Common Tern colony on Great Gull Island has been the subject of studies of breeding biology since 1966 (Cooper et al. 1970, Hays 1970). From

1968 through 1983, 68,444 Common Terns were banded on the island, 34,150 of these were banded as adults and 34,294 were banded as chicks. All adult terns from Great Gull Island were banded with a unique combination of three colored plastic legbands and a standard aluminum band (Hays 1970, DiCostanzo 1980).

RESULTS

On four separate days in early March 1984, 1-3 wing-tagged (Great Lakes) and 1-2 color-banded (Atlantic coast) Common Terns were observed in mixed-species groups of larids loafing on the Mollendo beach. These groups consisted mainly of Common and Elegant terns (*Sterna elegans*) with smaller numbers of Franklin's Gulls (*Larus pipixcan*). The maximum numbers of Common Terns in these groups ranged from 155 to 270 individuals.

In total, four wing-tagged birds and eight color-banded Common Terns were seen. Of these eight color-banded birds, only four had all four bands and could consequently be identified with certainty. The first of these, seen in Callao Harbor, was originally banded as a chick in 1974, and then rebanded in 1980. The other three known individuals were all banded as adults. One bird, first banded in 1973 and rebanded in 1981, was seen in Ancon Harbor; and the final two, banded in 1981, were observed on the Mollendo Beach. The four additional color-banded terns were likely also Great Gull Island birds, as Common Terns were not being color-banded elsewhere in North America at that time.

DISCUSSION

This report provides additional information on the winter distribution of Common Terns from eastern North America, confirming Bull's (1974) report of Atlantic coast Common Terns wintering along the southwest coast of South America. The identification of four (and possibly more) color-banded birds and four wing-tagged birds in the same areas in southern Peru may indicate that mixing of Common Terns from the Atlantic coast and the Great Lakes is more common in the winter than it is during the breeding season (Haymes and Blokpoel 1978).

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A Comparison of Long-term Banding Data from Two Rose-breasted Grosbeak Populations in New York State

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INTRODUCTION

The Rose-breasted Grosbeak (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*) is a Neotropical wintering species that breeds in northern deciduous woodlands of North America and winters in Middle America south to Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru (AOU 1983). Between 1969 and 1994, I operated two banding stations where data were gathered on 589 grosbeaks and another 137 returns of 92 birds.

I operated one station at a feeder location at Jenny Lake, near Corinth, New York, in mature Adirondack forest, for the period 1972-1994 (24 years). At Vischer Ferry near Schenectady, New York, I operated a second station (with three other banders) in a riparian floodplain, part of which was already established woodland in 1969, and part of which was abandoned meadows beginning to go through woodland succession, through 1991 (23 years).

The banding data were used to assess seasonal abundance, return rates, and longevity by age/sex class; variations in return rate based on month of banding; age ratios among males; and annual variation in the numbers of grosbeaks captured at both sites.

METHODS

At Vischer Ferry—In 1967, I began a spring banding operation at what is now known as the Vischer Ferry Nature and Historic Preserve, managed by the Town of Clifton Park. In 1969, I relocated the net lanes within the Preserve to an area where banding continued through 1991 (23 years).

The Preserve is located in Saratoga County, seven km east of Schenectady, New York. The area was within the floodplain of the Mohawk River (47 m above sea level), between the river and the former Erie Canal. It consisted of a mixture of meadows, shrubs and woodland, marshes, and some man-made ponds. In the 1950's and 1960's, it had been managed as a wildlife area by New York State Department of Environmental Conservation for hunting. Through the 1960's to 1990's, some of the meadowlands reverted to floodplain woodland.