

The first records of Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea* and Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* in Kuwait

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Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*

This species was first recorded in Kuwait, a single bird, by ST Spencer and CWT Pilcher at Jahra Bay on 26 May 1995. There was no further record until 22 May 2005 when I found and photographed (Plate 1) a single bird on the shore by the Jahra East wastewater Outfall. It was an adult Arctic Tern in summer plumage: the bird had an overall red bill with no dark tip, very short red legs and long white tail streamers projecting beyond the primaries. Compared with a very close Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*, the Arctic Tern had a shorter and thicker dark red bill, very short red legs and long tail streamers. What was presumably the same bird was seen and photographed again on 5, 11 and 22 June 2005 at the same site, suggesting it may have over-summered.



Plate 1. Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*, Kuwait.
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The third record for Kuwait was on 12 June 2006 when I observed and photographed five Arctic Terns at Jahra East Outfall, four adults and one first summer. All three records were accepted by the Kuwait Ornithological Rarities Committee, KORC.

Arctic Tern, a first-summer bird, was first recorded at Eilat in Israel on 2 July 1982. Subsequent records there, about 20 in all, occurred chiefly from late May through to August from 1983–1990 and some were photographed in 1996 (Shirihai 1999). Two first-summer birds were photographed in mid-July 1996 off Egypt's Tawila Island, Red Sea (Shirihai 1999). The species has also been recorded at least three times in Oman off the north coast of Masirah, an adult on 22–29 July 1989, up to three 9–14 July 1990 and up to six (three adults and three immatures) 18 July through 2 August 1991 (Eriksen *et al* 2003). There is one record from United Arab Emirates: Al Wathba Lake, 24 April 1997 (www.tommypedersen.com). It is a vagrant to Cyprus and Turkey (Porter *et al* 1996).

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*

Since first seeing and photographing White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* in May 2003, I knew that the occurrence of Black Tern *C. niger* in Kuwait required confirmation. I learned the differences between the two species, always checking every White-winged Tern in any flock and concentrating on birds that have less white on the wing. I checked the underwing coverts of every bird that I could for over two years without success.

On 11 June 2005, as I was driving along the seashore, leaving Jahra East Outfall just behind me, I saw what I was sure was a Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*. It certainly looked different from all the previous birds that I had thought might have been this species. I took my initial photographs from c200 m range. Close to the bird were a Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*, three Curlew Sandpipers *Calidris ferruginea*, a Slender-billed Gull

Larus genei, two Common Terns, two Little Terns *Sternula albifrons*, a Saunders's Tern *S. saundersi*, two Whiskered Terns *Chlidonias hybrida* and a White-winged Tern. I approached the bird very slowly to obtain better photographs (Plate 2), which I obtained from 20 m range. The bird then took wing enabling me to photograph the underwing coverts.



Plate 2. Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*, with two Little Terns *Sternula albifrons*, Kuwait. © Abdulrahman al-Sirhan.

Description: From field observation and photographs the bird appeared to be an adult in summer plumage probably a female. It had dark grey upperparts including mantle, the head appeared darker than the breast and underparts. The vent and undertail coverts were white; tail and rump were pale grey. The tail appeared obviously forked when the bird took wing. The legs were dark red, although they were in the shade. The bill was all black, the upper mandible being down-curved, and was stouter and longer than that of the nearby White-winged Tern (which had a dark red bill). The underwing was pale dusky.

The Black Tern is designated in Cramp (1985) and Snow & Perrins (1998) as accidental in Kuwait, without citation. However, Gregory (2005) mentioned: "PR Haynes (1979) stated that there were 'One or two records' of this species in Kuwait. However, no details are accessible, and confusion with White-winged Tern (*C. leucopterus*) or Whiskered Tern (*C. hybridus*) is possible for these records".

On 4 June 2006 I saw an adult Black Tern flying over South Doha Nature Reserve, the second record for Kuwait. The third record was a bird seen on 8 June through 10 July 2007 at Jahra East Outfall, which was photographed by me and later by Rashed Al-Hajji. On 3 August 2007 Mike Pope saw and photographed the fourth record, an adult moulting to winter plumage. The fifth record of Black Tern for Kuwait was a single bird seen by K Haataja, V Jouhki and Pekka Fågel, on 7 December 2007. All five records were accepted by KORC.

There are eight accepted records from United Arab Emirates of Black Tern (www.tommypedersen.com), and seven records from Oman (Eriksen *et al* 2003, www.birdsoman.com). In Bahrain it is considered a vagrant (www.hawar-islands.com).

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