

Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*

The Arctic Tern is famed for its migration that takes the birds from a breeding range in the Arctic to a winter range in the Antarctic. Modest numbers pass over the ocean off San Diego County. Only a few times have Arctic Terns—perhaps all injured or oiled—been seen on the county's shores.

Migration: The Arctic Tern is most numerous in fall, with up to 350 between San Diego and San Clemente Island 11 September 1976 (G. McCaskie). Fall records extend from 27 July (1968, one collected of seven seen 80 miles west of San Diego, SDNHM 36752) to 25 October (1959, 30 near San Clemente Island, AFN 14:173, 1960), except for a straggler at the 43-fathom bank 36 miles off San Diego 10 December 1977 (J. L. Dunn).

The species is less numerous in spring, with a maximum of 15 off San Diego 16 May 1981 (E. Copper). Spring records extend from 1 May (1987, four off San Clemente Island, R. R. Veit, AB 41:488, 1987) to 7 June (1978, one off San Diego, AB 32:1209, 1978).

Arctic Terns seen on shore at the San Diego River mouth (R7) 6 October 1991 (G. McCaskie, AB 46:149,



Photo by Anthony Mercieca

1992) and at the Santa Margarita River mouth (G4) 4 June 2000 (D. M. Parker, NAB 54:423, 2000) were both stained with oil.

Conservation: As with most other ocean birds, numbers of Arctic Terns off San Diego County have decreased since the early 1980s.