

Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata*

Among the tropical ocean birds that began to appear in southern California in the 1990s was the Sooty Tern. The four reports for San Diego County include two pairs in tern colonies. But the nesting attempt that got as far as incubation of an egg ended in failure when both adults were killed by a Peregrine Falcon.

Breeding distribution: Brian Foster and Patricia A. Campbell found a Sooty Tern at the Santa Margarita River mouth (G4) 6 July 1996 and photographed a copulating pair there the following day (McCaskie and San Miguel 1999). Later that summer, probably the same birds accounted for reports of one at San Elijo Lagoon (L7) 28 July and two in the south San Diego Bay salt works (U10) 23 August 1996 (N. Shany, J. Konecny, NASFN 50:997, 1996).

The following year, in 1997, a pair nested in the salt works. Smith (1999) noted the first adult 15 April, saw the pair together 30 May, and found the egg 3 June. But on 6 June one adult, and on 10 June the other adult, were dead and partially dismembered, indicating predation by a Peregrine Falcon, which had been seen in the area. The egg and remains of both adults are preserved (SDNHM 49807, 49966).

Migration: The California Bird Records Committee accepted the identification of an immature Sooty Tern, California's first of this species, at the San Diego River



Photo by Brian Foster

mouth (R7) 27 September 1982 (R. E. Webster, Morlan 1985). Another Sooty Tern was reported on the ocean off Coronado (T9) 2 September 1998 (B. Foster, FN 52:126, 1998).

Conservation: The appearance of the Sooty Tern and other warm-water birds in southern California presumably reflects the increase in ocean temperatures. The Sooty Tern nests normally on predator-free oceanic islands; the pair at the salt works did not engage in the mobbing defense typical of the other terns nesting there (Smith 1999).

Taxonomy: The gray lower belly and crissum of the birds at the salt works are typical of the subspecies of Sooty Tern in the Pacific Ocean (Smith 1999). *Sterna f. crissalis* (Lawrence, 1871) was described from Socorro Island in the Revillagigedo archipelago, one of the nesting sites nearest San Diego.