



GENERAL NOTES

LEAST TERNS NEST IN THOMASVILLE, GEORGIA – On 28 April 2004, at about 0915 hours, I walked out of the Winn-Dixie supermarket in Thomasville, Thomas County, Georgia, and heard bird cries overhead. I looked up and was surprised to see two Least Terns (*Sternula antillarum*) fluttering together and calling about 9 m above me.

Previously, the only Thomas County record of Least Terns was that of two birds on 16 August 1994, associated with Tropical Storm Beryl (Crawford 1998). There had been no tropical or other strong storms just prior to 28 April 2004, the weather generally having been clear and dry. Moreover, the Winn-Dixie and contiguous buildings in the shopping center (2830 E. Pinetree Blvd.) have flat, graveled roofs, well known as artificial nesting habitat for terns and other species (Fisk 1978, Krogh and Schweitzer 1999). For example, there is a Least Tern nesting colony on the roof of a Winn-Dixie north of Tallahassee, Leon County, Florida, about 40 km south of the Thomasville Winn-Dixie (R. Todd Engstrom, Florida State University, personal communication).

In Georgia, observations of nesting Least Terns have been restricted to coastal counties, although nesting is considered “highly probable” farther inland at Vidalia, Toombs County, about 145 km from the Atlantic Coast (Beaton et al. 2003:61). The Winn-Dixie roof-nesting site in Leon County, Florida is about 45 km north of the Gulf of Mexico.

For the next several days, I observed the birds and attempted to photograph them. The façade of the storefront and the angle from the rear of the store prevented any observations of behavior on the surface of the roof. On 2, 3, and 8 May 2004, I saw a tern arrive at the roof with a food item held in its bill. Before landing, the bird gave a loud four-note call; these actions correspond to “fish flights” and “fish flight calls” described for this species (Thompson et al. 1997).

On 4 May 2004, R. Todd Engstrom and Leon Neel both visited the site and saw the birds. Leon and Julie Neel saw a tern harassing a crow (*Corvus* spp.) on 9 May 2004. American (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) and Fish Crows (*C. ossifragus*) frequented the area, sometimes calling, but often not. Both are known predators of Least Tern eggs and chicks



(Thompson et al. 1997). I saw another instance of a tern pursuing a low-flying crow on 21 May 2004. Thompson et al. (1997) stated this behavior occurred “only when eggs and chicks are vulnerable.” If this is true, then the action the Neels saw suggests that an egg(s) may have been present on 9 May 2004. Given this possibility, and using known incubation and fledging periods, I expected the egg or eggs to hatch on or about 29 May 2004, and fledging to occur on or about 20 June 2004.

I noted that a bird often departed from the roof in a southeasterly direction. There is a large, ca. 8.5-ha impoundment called Timber Lake (formerly, Wheelin’ and Dealin’) just 1 km southeast of the shopping center. Twice, on 10 May and 2 June 2004, I drove to this lake after a tern departed in that direction, and both times I saw a Least Tern flying about the lake. On 2 June 2004, I saw a Least Tern make a typical shallow plunge (Tomkins 1959).

On 21 June 2004, I arrived at the shopping center at 0820 hrs and heard a tern calling, seemingly close, but I could not spot it in the air. It called again, and I saw it, an adult, sitting on top of a telephone pole. It called again from there, and another adult tern flew over and down onto the roof. Then, there were three terns (two adults, one juvenile) in the air, flying about the shopping center; the juvenile had fledged safely on schedule.

Least Terns were seen at the same site in 2005. I saw one tern on 26 April 2005, and Jack Dozier and I saw two the next day. Whereas I had seen a maximum of three terns in 2004, Wilson Baker counted 13 individuals (12 in flight and one perched) at one time on 12 May 2005, and I saw 11 in the air at one time on 19 May 2005. The use of this site for nesting by Least Terns may increase over time, thus future surveys will be conducted.

Literature Cited

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RECOVERING BIRD BANDS: THE JOY OF DISCOVERY – One afternoon in early May 2005, I walked across my yard to see what kind of carcass my old dog had pulled from the waters of Lake Sinclair, Putnam County, Georgia. Actually, what I found was more of a chewed partial-skeleton than a carcass, but a few remaining feathers let me know that it was the remains of a large bird. Being a student of natural history (more specifically a mammalian paleontologist), I was obligated to pick up the remains and attempt a species identification.

As a novice-to-intermediate birder, I have had the pleasure of using my Peterson's field guide to identify species from Alaska to Trinidad. However, Peterson's (or any other field guide that I am aware of) does not show you a picture of what a particular species looks like following decomposition and scavenging by the family dog. From the bones that remained, I convinced myself that the carcass was the remains of a "hawk." As I scoured the area to make sure I had retrieved all of the fragments, I noticed a metal bird band attached to a scrap of bone. This was the first bird band that I had ever found and I began to feel the "thrill of discovery." I picked up the band and looked for names and numbers. My thoughts jumped from "what species is this" to "where and when was it banded" to "who is studying this species and what are they hoping to learn?"

The following day I showed the band to Dr. Bob Chandler, the