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DEFINITE BREEDING RECORD FOR THE ALEUTIAN TERN IN SOUTHERN ALASKA

(WITH FOUR PHOTOS)

By ERNEST P. WALKER

IN THE May-June, 1920, Condor, I recorded "Probable Breeding of the Aleutian Tern in Southeastern Alaska," citing my own sight record of the birds at Situk River flats, near Yakutat, from July 18 to 23, 1916, and again at the same place the first week of July, 1917; also July 6 and 7, 1917, at the Alsek River flats (Dry Bay) about 60 miles easterly from Yakutat. Because of the rarity of this bird, and of there having been only one previous record of it on the southern Alaska coast line (at Kodiak Island, over 500 miles to the west), my sight record was seriously doubted, and properly so, as I had not taken specimens.

About the middle of August, 1921, in Icy Straits and Glacier Bay, I saw terns, in postbreeding plumage, which I was confident had not all nested in the vicinity. I collected and watched carefully, but found only the Arctic, our common form, although we were only about a hundred miles southeasterly from Dry Bay. Conditions were not sufficiently different to enable me to account for the absence of *aleutica*, if they really did occur at Dry Bay, as my sight record of 1917 had convinced me.

It was July 12, 1922, before I had an opportunity to visit the Situk flats. As this stop was early in a long cruise for general work along the southern Alaska coast line in the Biological Survey's small vessel, *Sea Otter*, I did not feel warranted in spending time to go into a thorough inquiry relative to the terns nesting at that point. Accordingly, I only spent from about 10 A. M. to 4 P. M. of that day on the flats and in their vicinity.

This tract of land is a treeless strip from half a mile to two miles wide between the timbered coastal plain and the Gulf of Alaska. Roughly, it extends for about 60 miles easterly and there is a somewhat similar country west of Yakutat Bay for a like distance. The coastal plain is cut at close intervals by rivers from mountains and glaciers not far inland. The treeless portion of the flats is composed for the most part of grass-grown alluvial flats of glacial mud, but near the beach there are sand hills with sparse herbaceous vegetation, and on the less shifting portions, an occasional small spruce. The greater area of the grass-grown flats is covered about twice a year by the highest

tides, and there are numerous pools of fresh or brackish water. The flats are cut by occasional sloughs.

The tern colonies occupied both the grass-grown flats and the sand hills. Shortly after entering the grass flats (Black Sand Island) terns came toward us and evinced some concern at our presence. There did not seem to be so many terns as I had observed in 1917, and as it was earlier in the nesting season they did not show so much concern as they would later, when the young are out. They did not come so close as would have been the case later in the season, so it was not possible to identify all the birds, but apparently about 20 to 30 per cent were *Sterna aleutica* and the remainder *S. paradisaea*. Fifteen terns were taken, of which seven were Aleutian. Search in the grass flats revealed only three tern nests, of one, two, and three eggs, respectively. The two-egg nest was constantly hovered over by an Aleutian tern and undoubtedly belonged to that bird. This nest was in an apparently abandoned, broad *Microtus* runway less than a foot above water level on a hummock about ten feet in diameter in one of the small shallow ponds. Incubation was well ad-

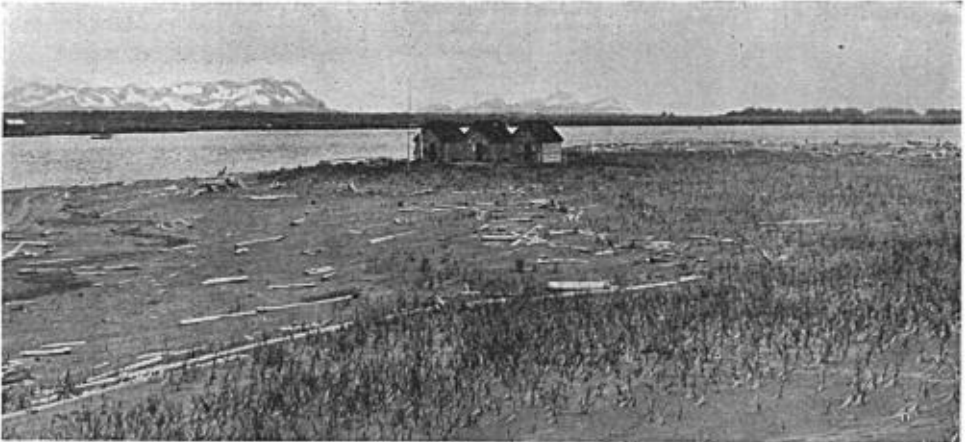


Fig. 35. NESTING GROUNDS OF ALEUTIAN AND ARCTIC TERNS ON STRAWBERRY ISLAND, AT MOUTH OF SITUK RIVER, NEAR YAKUTAT, ALASKA. THE EGGS WERE MAINLY IN THE UPPER HALF OF THE DRIFT-WOOD ZONE. PHOTOGRAPHED BY THE AUTHOR JUNE 12, 1922.

vanced in this set. The three-egg nest was certainly Arctic, and the one-egg nest was of uncertain identity.

On the protected, or river, side of Strawberry Island, a sandy ridge on the west side of the river, was a line of drift at the extreme high tide line. In the vicinity of this line of drift, a dozen tern nests were found in a short time by six of us.

Both the Aleutian and Arctic terns were about here and we did not make certain of the identity of the eggs. The nests were of one and two eggs, and the eggs were of two types, one being dark and slender, and the other lighter in color and more oval. The former I suspect were Aleutian. This colony was confined rather closely to the drift line at the end of the island. Some search by two of us over higher portions of the ridge and farther up the river failed to find more than an occasional tern and only two more nests. It was notice-

able, however, that the few terns seen away from the colony were, so far as we could identify them, all Aleutians. One set of one egg was in the sparse growth of strawberry, beach rye, and other herbaceous growth in a gulch a quarter of a mile from the edge of the sandy ridge, at an altitude of about fifty feet. The other set of one egg was on similar ground but not so far from the water.

The characteristics by which I most easily distinguished between the two birds at a distance were the black beak of the Aleutian, where the Arctic has red, and the white band on the forehead below the black cap, whereas the breeding plumage of the Arctic lacks this band. The plaintive note of the Aleutian is more musical and less strident and harsh than that of the Arctic.

Throughout the entire cruise of nearly three months, from Juneau in southeastern Alaska along the southerly coast line and adjacent islands to Unalaska and return, I kept constant watch for terns, hoping to find Aleutians at other points. About 80 miles westerly of Yakutat, at Icy Bay, I saw half a dozen terns at a long distance but could not identify them. Men of a Coast Survey party stationed there said there was a colony of terns some

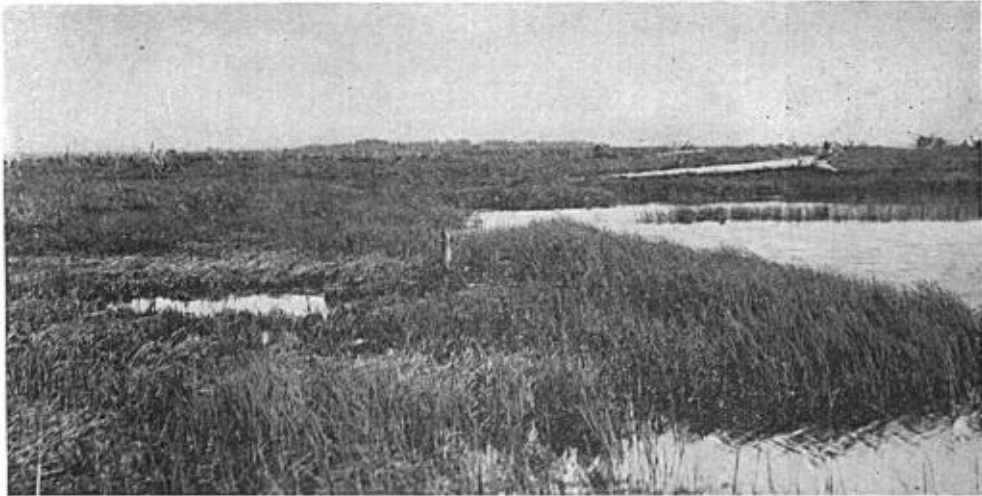


Fig. 36. NESTING SITE OF ALEUTIAN TERN, ABOUT ONE FOOT TO THE RIGHT OF STICK IN CENTER OF PICTURE. PHOTOGRAPHED BY THE AUTHOR JUNE 12, 1922, ON THE SITUK RIVER FLATS NEAR YAKUTAT, ALASKA.

miles down the beach. Terns were scarce and did not come close enough for collection or identification at the Bering River flats. At Middleton Island, there were a few terns, June 26; but all that I identified were Arctics. In Alitak Bay, at the southern end of Kodiak Island, there was a small colony of Arctic terns, but no Aleutians were seen. Arctic terns were common at Simeonof Island at the southern end of the Shumagin group, but no Aleutians were observed. Mr. Donald H. Stevenson, of the force of the Biological Survey, who had been in False Pass until about the end of June, told me at Unalaska that Aleutian terns were nesting on Isanotski Islands in False Pass at the extreme western end of the Alaska Peninsula. On my return trip I visited the islands, July 26, but saw only one tern and that at a long distance. This was, perhaps, too late in the season, although gulls were still plentiful about

the island. Throughout the cruise we were, as a rule, not far from land, and made numerous stops in bays and reasonably favorable places for terns, but few were seen other than those mentioned.

It would seem as though the southeastern Alaska colony of this tern is



Fig. 37. NEST AND EGGS OF ALEUTIAN TERN, AT SITE SHOWN IN FIGURE 36. PHOTOGRAPHED BY THE AUTHOR JUNE 12, 1922.



Fig. 38. DEAD ALEUTIAN TERN, PHOTOGRAPHED BY THE AUTHOR ON STRAWBERRY ISLAND, AT MOUTH OF SITUK RIVER, ALASKA, JUNE 12, 1922.

wholly isolated from the remainder of its kind, although the Arctic is common and breeds as far south as Taku Glacier, near Juneau, and undoubtedly breeds at least another hundred and fifty miles farther south, near Wrangell. The

exact area occupied by the Aleutian Terns in this region remains to be determined.

In what direction, if any, does the Aleutian Tern of southeastern Alaska migrate?

If the Situk colony of terns is being reduced, it is hardly to be wondered at, for the rivers of this coast are fished by crews of natives, aliens, and some white citizens, who camp on the nesting ground of the birds. When fishing is slack or they wish a change of diet, they search for the eggs of the terns. Unfortunately, the terns can not command the sympathy that such a beautiful bird deserves, for here they feed to at least some extent on young salmon coming down the streams in the spring and early summer. Commercial fishermen are eager to lay heavy blame for destruction of fish on any other agency than their own operations, so the extent of the damage by the terns is being studied to ascertain the truth about the matter. Fox tracks were seen in the sand on Strawberry Island and no doubt the foxes take their toll of the birds.

U. S. Biological Survey, Juneau, Alaska, February 28, 1923.

NOTES ON THE SONG AND THE NEST OF THE RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET

By WINTON WEYDEMEYER

EARLY IN THE spring of 1921, in a brushy flat along an old slough near Fortine, Montana, in northeastern Lincoln County, I heard a Ruby-crowned Kinglet (*Regulus calendula*) give a song which differed from the ordinary lay of this species. The first two parts were the same as in the usual song, but the final notes were quite different and much more pleasing. The song sounded something like this: *Kezee, kezee, zeek, zeek, eek, eek, eek, eek, chiva, chiva, chiva, chiva, chiva, chiva, chiva-lete! te-telete! te-telete! te-telete! te-telete!* Nearly every day that summer and fall, except during the molting season, this song, or a portion of it, was heard in the flat. As the nesting season approached, the song was not so often heard, and usually when it was, only the last part was given. During August it was seldom heard; by September, the last part was heard occasionally; and by the middle of that month the song was again given as in the spring.

Whether or not the first part of this song was ever omitted during the nesting season I could not determine, as I was never able to distinguish between the first two parts of this song and the corresponding parts of the kinglet's ordinary song. During the nesting season the ruby-crowns of that locality, at least, usually give only the first two parts of their characteristic song. The second part is usually quite prolonged, and broken off rather suddenly: *Kezee, kezee, zeek, zeek, eek, eek, eek, eek, chiva, chiva, chiva, chiva, chiva, chiva, chiva, chiva, chiva, chiva, chiva, chiva, chiva*— . As they also sometimes omit these parts and sing only the last part, as with the song in which a variation occurred in the final notes, it is probable that the last part of the latter song was also sometimes omitted.

As this unusual song was never heard that summer except from one partic-