

The occurrence of a nesting colony of the Royal Tern, *Sterna (Thalasseus) maxima* on the south coast of Puerto Rico

An account of what may be the first recent breeding colony on the Puerto Rican mainland

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A nesting colony of the Royal Tern, *Sterna (=Thalasseus) maxima* settled on a shifting sandbar in Guayanilla Bay ($66^{\circ}45'50''\text{W}$, $17^{\circ}59'25''\text{N}$), on the South Coast of Puerto Rico, during the early summer of 1976. The sandbar is approximately 8 by 14 meters but its shape, size and position are constantly under modification by the incoming oceanic waves. The site characteristics of the Guayanilla sandbar fit all of the four prerequisites for the establishment of a Royal Tern colony. These are: 1) complete absence of quadruped predators; 2) general inaccessibility and excellent visibility of surroundings; 3) extensive areas of adjacent shallows for feeding; and 4) location at or very near an inlet between bay and ocean (Caribbean Sea) (Buckley and Buckley 1972).

On May 4, 1976 a colony of approximately 20 Royal Terns was observed nesting on the eastern side of the bar, but only one of the nests had a 2-egg clutch while the other nests were empty. There were signs of human disturbance on the nesting site.

This appears to be the first record of a nesting colony of the Royal Tern on mainland Puerto Rico. Biaggi (1970) could not place this species of bird as migratory or resident for Puerto Rico because nesting habits on Puerto Rico were not previously reported. On the other hand, this species has been reported to nest on some small islands surrounding Puerto Rico. McCandless (1958) mentioned nesting of the Royal Tern on Mona Island. P. A. Buckley (personal communication) informed me



Fig. 3. Two-egg clutch of the Royal Tern inside nest. Photo/V. Vincente.

that they do (or did) nest on Mona and/or Desecheo and possibly on Vieques.

It is of interest to note that the nesting period for the Guayanilla colony coincides with the nesting season of the Fisherman's Island colony in Virginia (Buckley and Buckley 1972): early in May.

LITERATURE CITED

- BIAGGI, VIRGILIO. 1970. Las Aves de Puerto Rico. Editorial Universitaria Universidad de Puerto Rico. 1-371 pp.
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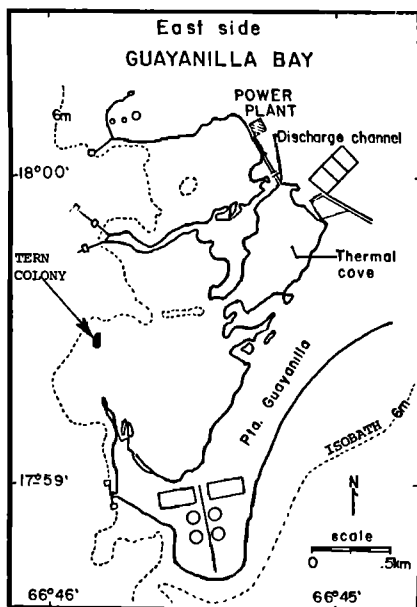


Fig. 1. Location of nesting colony of Royal Tern. Guayanilla Bay, Summer, 1976.



Fig. 2. Sandbar where nests were observed, surrounded by shallow bed of seagrass. The sandbar undergoes structural changes during high wave periods. Photo/V. Vincente.