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RARE OCCURRENCE

**Indiana's first White-winged Black Tern: an inland sight record**

*Kenneth J. Brock*

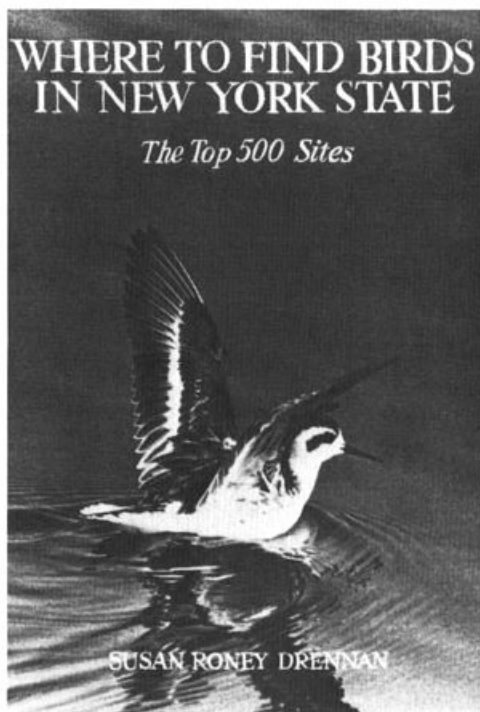
**K**UMLIEN AND HOLLISTER (1903) document North America's first White-winged Black Tern (*Chlidonias leucopterus*) as follows: "the only known . . . occurrence of this European species on the Western Continent is that of a breeding female shot by L. Kumlien in a large marsh near Black Hawk Island, Lake Koshkonong (Wisconsin), July 5, 1873." In recent years this species has appeared with some regularity along the Atlantic seaboard (e.g., Smith *et al.*, 1978) and once in Alaska (Gibson, 1976); however, a search of the literature has failed to reveal any additional inland occurrences prior to 1979.

On July 17, 1979, a White-winged Black Tern was observed flying over a small lake, locally known as Roxana Pond, in East Chicago, Indiana (184km southeast of Lake Koshkonong). This shallow pond is situated inside a meander of the Grand Calumet River and is

surrounded by a thick cat-tail growth; a plant that abounds throughout the river floodplain. The tern was discovered at 3:15 p.m. when near perfect direct sunlight was available for observation; I studied the bird for at least 15 minutes as it continuously circled above the pond feeding with a loose flock of Black Terns (*Chlidonias niger*). At times it approached within 30m of my position, providing an excellent view of all plumage characteristics. Except for a dark bill and some white mottling on the otherwise black head, the bird appeared to be in full breeding plumage. On several occasions brief glimpses of the feet and legs revealed that they were bright red.

At 3:30 p.m., I left the pond for about two hours to notify other birders, and during this absence the feeding terns apparently dispersed because upon my return the vagrant was not visible. A

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few Black Terns remained in the area, however, so I took up a vigil hoping the rarity would reappear. Two local birders, Peter Grube and George Pyle, joined me and, after an agonizing wait, identified the tern as it made a single pass over the pond at 7:00 p.m. Within an hour Steve Mlodinow and Gerald Rosenband arrived from Chicago and made positive identifications as the bird executed what ultimately proved to be its final sortie across Roxana Pond. Despite intense searching of the surrounding marshes throughout the following week, the tern was not seen again. Sight documentations, completed by each of the observers, were evaluated and approved by the Indiana State Check List Committee; and accordingly, *Chlidonias leucopterus* has been added to the official state check list.

One is tempted to speculate about the remarkably close proximity of North America's two inland records of this Eurasian species. Both sites are located near the southern termination of Lake Michigan (Lake Koshkonong is about 80km west of the lake, whereas, Roxana Pond is only 6km from the lakeshore), and each apparently offers a suitable marshy habitat. These factors, in conjunction with a southward migration, may well be the critical ingredients necessary to explain both occurrences. Although a few Black Terns nest at Roxana Pond, the individuals with which the White-winged Black Tern associated were not local birds, suggesting that this vagrant was moving southward with migrating Black Terns. It seems plausible that a southbound wanderer in the Maritime Provinces might be diverted inland along the St. Lawrence River and ultimately "lake-hop" to Lake Michigan. This contention is supported

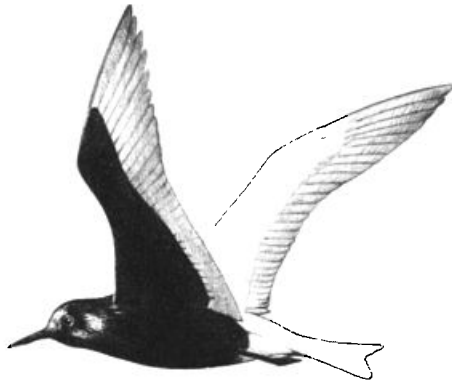
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White-winged Black Tern. Drawing by Peter Grube.

by at least three records of *C. leucop-  
terus* in New Brunswick (Finch, 1977).  
Alternatively, a bird in the Arctic could  
proceed down Hudson Bay and fly over-  
land to the Great Lakes where the elon-  
gated shores of Lake Michigan might  
eventually guide it to the Wisconsin-  
Indiana area. This "funneling effect"  
has been frequently invoked to explain  
the regular autumn appearance of a  
number of Arctic breeders, and other-  
wise pelagic species (e.g., Red Phala-  
rope, Parasitic Jaeger and Black-legged  
Kittiwake), that routinely occur in the  
southern reaches of Lake Michigan.

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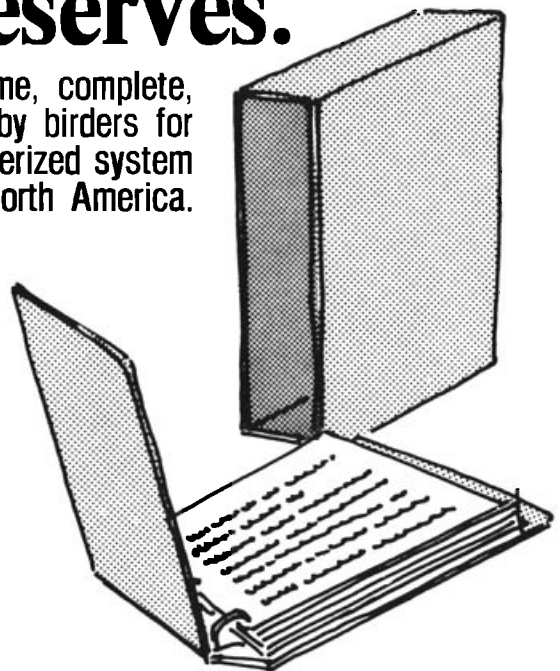
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