

FIRST BREEDING RECORDS OF THE CASPIAN TERN IN BAJA CALIFORNIA, (NORTE), MEXICO

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The Caspian Tern (*Sterna caspia*) is a nearly cosmopolitan species, except for South America, with a highly discontinuous breeding range (Voous 1960). On the Pacific coast of North America breeding colonies are widely scattered from Sinaloa, Mexico, to Washington, U.S.A. (AOU 1983). In the peninsula of Baja California, the only breeding colonies of Caspian Terns known so far are at Scammon's Lagoon (Bancroft 1927, Grinnell 1928, Wilbur 1987, Everett and Anderson 1991, M. Evans pers. comm.), where they nest together with Royal Terns (Bancroft 1927), and at Laguna San Ignacio (Danemann 1991, Danemann and Guzmán 1992). Both of these breeding colonies are located south of latitude 28°N, in the state of Baja California Sur. In this note, we report an additional small breeding colony at Laguna Figueroa (30°40'N), the first for the state of Baja California. We have described this closed coastal lagoon and its breeding birds previously (Palacios and Alfaro 1991).

We visited Laguna Figueroa on 7–9 May, 28 May, and 22 June 1991. During the first visit we found only the same breeding birds already reported for this lagoon, except Forster's Terns, which did not breed this year. On the second visit, we saw a pair of Caspian Terns on the ground, one of which was incubating and the other, alerted by our presence, was positioned 20 m from the nest. While we watched these birds, a third individual arrived but was attacked and driven away by the bird resting away from the nest. The nest, containing one egg, was a round depression in an off-road vehicle's track, on the salt flat at the northern end of the lagoon, 25 m from the northernmost pond. On the third visit, on 22 June, we found 22 individuals (10 pairs) at the colony, six nests with one egg, three with two eggs (average 1.33 eggs per nest), two eggs broken by predators, and a few empty nest scrapes. There were coyote (*Canis latrans*) tracks near the nests. All nests were found in the vicinity of the nest located on the first visit, and occupied a small area of about 25 m². The distance between nests averaged 4 m (range 2–5 m; $n = 6$). The Caspian Tern colony was located 50 m from the Least Tern colony, which increased from 10 pairs in 1990 when we first detected it (Palacios and Alfaro 1991) to 30 pairs in 1991.

We saw also a group of 10 Caspian Terns at La Misión, Baja California (about 35 km north of Ensenada), on 2 May 1991. One pair of this group was copulating; the male remained on its mate for about 5 minutes, alternating its copulatory movements with rest. Evans (1973) observed that Caspian Terns frequently copulate in migration to colony sites and at daytime roosting sites near colonies. Therefore, such behavior is not a good indication that the species may nest on a particular site. At San Antonio del Mar, Baja California, we observed three individuals flying and calling over a dried mud flat on 29 May 1991. Farther to the north Caspian Terns have nested at south San Diego Bay, San Diego County, and Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve, Orange County, California, since 1941 and 1986 respectively (Unitt 1984, Collins et al. 1991).

Gill and Mewaldt (1983) found that the Pacific coast population of Caspian Terns, unlike that of certain other California coastal species, has increased dramatically since the mid-1960s. They speculated that the San Diego colony could have been the source of most birds that pioneered new colonies in Oregon and Washington. This colony might be also the source of birds for Baja California.

Caspian Terns are apparently attracted to a site by the presence of individuals of the same species. Our observations indicate that most of the Caspian Terns at Laguna Figueroa colonized during June, probably attracted by the isolated pair found

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late in May. Danemann (1991) found 80% of the nests at San Ignacio Lagoon early in May, although the number of nests reached its maximum in early June. At Scammon's Lagoon the normal clutch size is two or three eggs (Bancroft 1927), at San Diego Bay, 2.08 (Kirven 1969), suggesting that the terns at Laguna Figueroa were still laying eggs at the time of our last visit.

Our record shows that bird distribution in Baja California is constantly changing and points out the continued need for long-term studies there.

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