

## LOUISIANA BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE REPORT FORM

This form is intended as a convenience in reporting observations of species on the Louisiana Bird Records Committee (LBRC) Review List. The LBRC recommends the use of this form or a similar format when submitting records for review to assure that all pertinent information is accounted for. Attach additional pages or files as necessary. Please print or type for hard copy. For electronic copy, be sure to save this file to your computer before entering text. Attach field notes, drawings, photographs, or tape recordings, if available. Include all photos for more obscurely marked species. When completed (if hard copy), mail to Secretary, Louisiana Bird Records Committee, c/o Museum of Natural Science, 119 Foster Hall, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803-3216, or e-mail electronic copy as an attachment to Paul Edward Conover at <[zoiseaux@lusfiber.net](mailto:zoiseaux@lusfiber.net)> .

1. English and Scientific names: **Artic Tern, *Sterna paradisaea***
2. Number of individuals, sexes, ages, general plumage (e.g., 2 in alternate plumage): **1 adult in alternate plumage**
3. Parish: **Plaquemines**  
  
Specific Locality: **GOM, approximately 29 miles SW of South Pass.**
4. Date(s) when observed: **09-23-17**
5. Time(s) of day when observed: **approx. 1500 h. (others should have exact coordinates).**
6. Reporting observer and address: **David P. Muth, 2765 Orchid St., New Orleans, LA 70119**
7. Other observers accompanying reporter who also *identified* the bird(s): **Pelagic participants; Bryan White, Cathy DiSalvo, Curtis Sorrell, Janine Robin, Jeff Cowell, Jody Shugart, John Sevenair, Lynn Hathaway, Marybeth Lima, Michele McLindon, Nancy L Newfield, Ned Coleman, Paul Conover, Van Remsen, Joan Garvey, Dan Purrington (and others).**
8. Other observers who *independently identified* the bird(s): **n/a**
9. Light conditions (position of bird in relation to shade and to direction and amount of light): **Sunny with scattered clouds; Bright mid-afternoon light over blue water, glare a problem at certain angles; bird circled boat providing various viewing angles as it banked, dove, and flew by us, from water surface to approximately 10-15 meters above.**
10. Optical equipment (type, power, condition): **Eagle Optic Platinum series, 10x.**
11. Distance to bird(s): **Closest approach 15-20 meters.**
12. Duration of observation: **< 5 minutes?**
13. Habitat: **Blue water in GOM, scattered sargassum, depth about 300-320 meters.**

14. Behavior of bird / circumstances of observation (flying, feeding, resting; include and stress habits used in identification; relate events surrounding observation): **At first it was circling low to mid-level and feeding with four Bridled Terns in loose association; frigatebirds were high overhead, occasionally dipping lower, which is what first drew us to area. In retrospect I have this minor observation for what little (perhaps) it is worth: In the company of Bridled Terns it looked like it "belonged" with them, analogous to the way Common Terns "belong" with Black Terns. Its flight was buoyant, graceful, elegant, like Bridled Terns, in contrast to the plodding yeoman-like working flight of Black and Common terns. I don't want to make too much of that, but it struck me in retrospect.**

Marybeth Lima, still alert, had reported a circling frigatebird far southwest of our position. In desperation, being over 8 hours into a voyage without a moment's avian excitement, we turned the boat to head in that direction, searching for birds underneath the frigatebird circling high overhead. Soon it became clear there were multiple frigates circling, and then we could see up to five terns below them—four dark and one smaller white bird, which meant either 4 Black Terns and a Least Tern or four Bridled Terns and a “Comic” Tern. (At some point a Royal was seen but I can't remember when.) Since we had not seen a certain Common Tern all day, and no candidates in blue water, and with the memory of RNPH from Sept. 1 fresh in my fevered brain, I was barely containing my excitement as we approached.

Once we got close enough it was clear the dark birds were Bridled Terns and then the “white” tern flashed the classic field mark for Arctic—a thin dark trailing edge to the gleaming white primaries. Conover and I (at least) began directing all those with cameras on board the foredeck to ignore the Bridled Terns (which were putting on a show) and get photos of the “Comic Tern”.

Since I was surrounded by people with better cameras I left mine sheathed and concentrated on getting looks at the bird through binoculars and keeping track of it while also trying to keep the photographers focused on the bird's location. The Arctic did a complete circuit of the boat once, leading some on board to think there might be two birds. Eventually the flock flew past the boat and by the time we had the lumbering boat turned around (seas were running 2-3 feet), we had lost track of the flock.

15. Description (include only what was actually seen, *not what "should" have been seen*; include if possible: total length/relative size compared to other familiar species; body bulk, shape, proportions; bill, eye, leg, and plumage characteristics. Stress features that separate it from similar species, *or for species that are known to hybridize frequently, stress features that help eliminate possible hybrids*):

A Common-sized tern, short-necked and long-tailed. Cap entirely black as far as I could tell; bill thin (appeared dark to me but color impossible to discern on bouncing boat in bright, sometimes glaring light); bill medium length—not too long, not all that short (this bothered some but I thought the bill fairly petite, certainly on the thin side). Upperparts gray and bright white—no dark wedge in primaries, no carpal bar, no dark bar trailing secondary flight feathers. I got no impression of leg/foot color or tarsal length.

**Underwing very bright white or silvery, with even, narrow, dark contrasting trailing edge to primaries. Back silvery gray; rump and upper tail white; outer tail feathers long and forked, edged darker, contrasting with tail and rump.**

I did not realize the underparts were actually grey (and not in shadow) until I saw photos.

Flight buoyant and elegant, fairly powerful and effortless in forward motion; mostly hovered and dived from higher elevation than Bridled. Unlabored—a dancer compared to a marcher.

While I almost unconsciously noted the full black cap, I did not realize its significance until the return voyage, when in discussions with Conover it dawned on me a full black cap in September meant a breeding-plumaged adult.

16. Voice: **silent**

17. Similar species (include how they were eliminated by your observation): My reeach indicates **Common Tern in alternate plumage would be freakish at this date, but even an arrested adult in breeding plumage should show darker gray upper primaries (not silvery white) and a broader more diffuse trailing edge below. Subtleties like head, bill and tail proportions, as well as flight style, favor Arctic.**

18. Photographs or tape recordings obtained? (by whom? attached?): **many others:**

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S39378073>

**Ebird list appended below.**

19. Previous experience with this species: **One in Louisiana in July 2015, and a number of October migrants in flight on Monterrey Bay in October about 20 years ago.**

20. Identification aids: (list books, illustrations, other birders, etc. used in identification):

- a. at time of observation: **none**
- b. after observation: **everything including photos made by others; Dunn, Sibley, Olsen and Larsson; etc.** Date: 9/23-25.

21. This description is written from:

- a. Field notes: **No—mental only, discussion with Conover, Sorrells, etc.**
- b. Notes made after observation—**no**.
- c. Examination of photos/videos: **yes, briefly as they came in, but mostly only after this description from memory was entered in draft.**
- d. Memory: **yes**

22. Are you positive of your identification? **Yes.** If not, explain:

23. Date: **09/25/2017**

24. May the LBRC have permission to display this report or portions of this report on its website? **yes**

If yes, may we include your name with the report? **Yes**

**Ebird Checklist (entered by JVR):**

**Location:** LA: Plaquemines Par.; GOM, ca. 28-30 mi. SW of South Pass, Plaquemines County, Louisiana, US ([Map](#))

**Date and Effort:** Sat Sep 23, 2017 2:40 PM

Protocol: Traveling

Party Size: 20

Duration: 1 hour(s)

Distance: 6.4 mile(s)

Observers: [Bryan White List](#), [Cathy DiSalvo List](#), [Curtis Sorrells List](#), [David Muth](#), [Janine Robin List](#), [Jeff Cowell List](#), [Jody Shugart List](#), [John Sevenair List](#), [Lynn Hathaway List](#), [Marybeth Lima List](#), [Michele McLindon List](#), [Nancy L Newfield List](#), [Ned Coleman List](#), [Paul Conover List](#), [Van Remsen List](#), [joan garvey List](#)

Comments: eBird pelagic protocol except location plotted at approximate midpoint. Seventh leg away from shore of pelagic trip out of Venice on the Cougar with Capt. John Coulon. Blue water. E/10-15; 2-4 foot seas; mostly sunny to pc, hot.



**Species --4 species total**

**16 Magnificent Frigatebird**

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ML69915371 [Macaulay Library](#) © joan garvey

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**4 Bridled Tern**

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**1 Arctic Tern**

alt. plumage adult. First pelagic record for LA; 2nd from SE LA; 2nd from fall (and first adult)

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Conover description: "A Common/Arctic type tern in apparently full breeding plumage with solidly dark cap extending to bill base. Underparts gray except for thin whitish chin/throat stripe extending along lower edge of black cap, and at rear end of bird from the trailing edge of the wing through the undertail coverts and tail (with the exception of gray extending from belly onto vent area). Underwing lining color difficult to assess; either white or an extension of the gray of the underparts. Flight feathers below without obvious sign of molt line, translucent with the exception of thin but dark and distinct trailing edge on all but innermost primaries. Upperparts medium silvery gray on mantle from level of leading edge to trailing edge of wing and onto upperwings; upperwings fairly uniform with wide white trailing edge to secondaries, no sign of molt. Dark trailing edge to upperwings similar to that of underwings. Rump white, forked tail white with dark outer edges to pointed outer rect(s). Bill in some photos appears dark, but in others appears dull reddish with dark tip. Eye dark, legs tucked during flight. Flight style consisted of light hovering 20-30 ft high over a small area for perhaps 10 seconds duration (while 2 associated Bridled Terns patrolled the area at a constant, lower altitude), dipping down toward surface, then drifting to nearby area and repeating. Eventually looped widely around the area and flew out of sight."

#### Age & Sex

	Juvenile	Immature	Adult	Age Unknown
Male				
Female				
Sex Unknown			1	



**ML69835071** [Macaulay Library](#) © Bryan White



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**ML69836661** [Macaulay Library](#) © Ned Coleman



**ML69857451** [Macaulay Library](#) © Paul Conover



**ML69863871** [Macaulay Library](#) © Paul Conover

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**ML69912551** [Macaulay Library](#) © Jody Shugart



**ML69912561** [Macaulay Library](#) © Jody Shugart

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**ML69915381** [Macaulay Library](#) © joan garvey

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ML69915391 [Macaulay Library](#) © joan garvey

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**1 Royal Tern**

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Are you submitting a **complete checklist** of the birds you were able to identify?

**Yes**