

THE SANDWICH TERN.

†STERNA CANTIACA, *Gmel.*

PLATE CCCCXXXI.—ADULT.

On the 26th of May, 1832, while sailing along the Florida Keys in Mr. THRUSTON's barge, accompanied by his worthy pilot and my assistant, I observed a large flock of Terns, which, from their size and other circumstances, I would have pronounced to be Marsh Terns, had not the difference in their manner of flight convinced me that they were of a species hitherto unknown to me. The pleasure which one feels on such an occasion cannot easily be described, and all that it is necessary for me to say on the subject at present is, that I begged to be rowed to them as quickly as possible. A nod and a wink from the pilot satisfied me that no time should be lost, and in a few minutes all the guns on board were in requisition. The birds fell around us; but as those that had not been injured remained hovering over their dead and dying companions, we continued to shoot until we procured a very considerable number. On examining the first individual picked up from the water, I perceived from the yellow point of its bill that it was different from any that I had previously seen, and accordingly shouted "A prize! a prize! a new bird to the American Fauna!" And so it was, good reader, for no person before had found the Sandwich Tern on any part of our coast. A large basket was filled with them, and we pursued our course. On opening several individuals, I found in the females eggs nearly ready for being laid. The males, too, manifested the usual symptoms of increased action in the organs distinctive of the sex. I felt a great desire to discover their breeding grounds, which I had the pleasure of doing in a few days after.

The vigour and activity of this bird while on wing afforded me great pleasure. Indeed its power of flight exceeds that of the Marsh Tern, which I consider as a closely allied species. While travelling, it advances by regular sharp flappings of its wings, which propel it forward much in the manner of the Passenger Pigeon, when, single and remote from a flock, it pushes on with redoubled speed. While plunging after the small mullets and other diminutive fishes that form the principal part of its food, it darts perpendicularly downwards with all the agility and force of the Common

and Arctic Terns, nearly immersing its whole body at times, but rising instantly after, and quickly regaining a position from which it can advantageously descend anew. Should the fish disappear, as the bird is descending, the latter instantly recovers itself without plunging into the water. Its cries are sharp, grating, and loud enough to be heard at the distance of half a mile. They are repeated at intervals while it is travelling, and kept up incessantly when one intrudes upon it in its breeding grounds, on which occasion it sails and dashes over your head, chiding you with angry notes more disagreeable than pleasant to your ear.

How many days these birds had been laying, when I discovered the key on which they breed, I cannot say; but many of them were still engaged in depositing their eggs, and none were as yet sitting on those which, being three together, seemed to form the full complement. They had been dropped on the sand, at short intervals, with scarcely any appearance of a hollow for their reception. In some instances they were laid at the foot of a scanty tuft of grass; but all were fully exposed to the heat of the sun, which at this time I thought almost sufficient to cook them. The eggs varied as much in colour as those of the Arctic Tern and Foolish Guillemot, and were equally disproportionate to the size of the bird, their average length being two inches and one-eighth, their greatest breadth one inch and three and a half eighths. They are of an oval form, but rather sharp at the larger end. The ground colour is yellowish-grey, varying in depth, and all more or less spotted, blotched, or marked with different tints of umber, pale blue, and reddish. I may add that these eggs are most capital eating.

I never saw the Sandwich Tern on any other portion of our coasts than between the Florida Keys and Charleston, and from whence it first came there, or how it went thence to Europe, is an enigma which may perhaps never be solved. On asking the wreckers if they had been in the habit of seeing these birds, they answered in the affirmative, and added that they paid them pretty frequent visits during the breeding season, on account of their eggs as well as of the young, which, when nearly able to fly, they said were also good eating. According to their account, this species spends the whole winter near and upon the keys, and the young keep separate from the old birds.

SANDWICH TERN, Nutt. Man., vol. ii. p. 276.

SANDWICH TERN, *Sterna cantiaca*, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. iii. p. 531.

Adult, $15\frac{3}{4}$, $33\frac{3}{4}$.

From Texas, during spring and summer, to the Floridas, where it breeds

in great numbers. Never observed in any other part of the coast of America. Migratory.

Adult Male.

Bill longer than the head, slender, tapering, compressed, nearly straight, very acute. Upper mandible with the dorsal line slightly arched, the ridge rather broad at the base, very narrow towards the tip, the sides sloping at the base, slightly convex and nearly perpendicular towards the end, the edges sharp and inflected, the tip very acute. Nasal groove extending to a little beyond the middle of the bill and deflected towards its edge; nostrils basal, linear, direct, pervious. Lower mandible with the angle very narrow and acute, extending nearly to the middle, the dorsal line beyond it straight, the sides convex, towards the end more erect, the ridge very narrow, the tip extremely acute.

Head of moderate size, oblong; neck of moderate length; body slender. Feet very small; tibia bare for a considerable space; tarsus very short, anteriorly scutellate, laterally and behind reticulated; toes small, slender, the first extremely small, the third longest, the fourth about the same length, the second much shorter, all scutellate above, the anterior connected by reticulated webs of which the margins are deeply concave. Claws arched, compressed, acute, that of hind toe very small, of middle toe by much the largest, and having the inner edge thin and dilated.

Plumage soft, close, blended, very short on the fore part of the head; the feathers on the occiput and upper part of hind neck pointed and elongated. Wings very long, narrow and pointed; primary quills tapering, the outer slightly curved inwards at the end, the first longest, the rest rapidly graduated; secondary short, broad, incurved, rounded, the inner proportionally longer and narrower. Tail rather long, deeply forked, of twelve feathers, the outer tapering to a point.

Bill black, excepting the tips, which are yellow; inside of the mouth deep blue. Iris brown. Feet black. The upper part of the head, occiput and part of hind neck bluish-black. Sides of the head, neck all round, and the rest of the lower parts white, the breast frequently tinged with pink. The fore part of the back, the scapulars and the upper surface of the wings pale greyish-blue; the tips and the greater parts of the inner webs of the scapulars, and quills, white, as are the rump and the tail; the four outer quills blackish, but covered with light grey down, on the outer webs and over a considerable extent of the inner, their shafts white.

Length to end of tail $15\frac{3}{4}$ inches, to end of wings $16\frac{8}{12}$; to end of claws $12\frac{3}{4}$; extent of wings $33\frac{3}{4}$; wing from flexure $12\frac{1}{4}$; tail 6; bill along the back $2\frac{1}{4}$, along the edge of lower mandible $2\frac{10}{12}$; tarsus $1\frac{1}{12}$; middle toe $\frac{9\frac{1}{2}}{12}$, its claw $\frac{5}{12}$. Weight $6\frac{1}{2}$ oz.

The Female is similar to the male.

The young, after the first moult, are of a light greyish-blue colour on the upper parts, the feathers tipped and banded in an undulating manner with brownish-black; the upper part of the head and the hind neck are of the latter colour, but mottled with white. The quills are as in the adult, the tail grey, with irregular brownish-black markings towards the tips of the feathers. The lower parts are also pale grey, but much lighter than the upper. The bill and feet are black, but the tip of the former has not yet assumed a yellow tint.

THE SOOTY TERN.

+ STERNA FULIGINOSA, *Lath.*

PLATE CCCCXXXII.—MALE.

Early in the afternoon of the 9th of May, 1832, I was standing on the deck of the United States revenue-cutter Marion. The weather was very beautiful, although hot, and a favourable breeze wafted us onwards in our course. Captain ROBERT DAY, who stood near me, on looking toward the south-west, ordered some person to be sent to the top to watch the appearance of land. A young lad was instantly seen ascending the rigging, and not many minutes after he had attained his post, we heard from him the cry of "land." It was the low keys of the Tortugas, toward which we had been steering. No change was made in the course of the "Lady of the Green Mantle," who glided along as if aware of the knowledge possessed by her commander. Now the light-house lantern appeared, like a bright gem glittering in the rays of the sun. Presently the masts and flags of several wreckers shewed us that they were anchored in the small but safe harbour. We sailed on, and our active pilot, who was also the first lieutenant of the Marion, pointed out to me a small island which he said was at this season the resort of thousands of birds, which he described by calling them "Black and White Sea Swallows," and again another islet, equally well stocked with another kind of Sea Swallow, which he added were called Noddies, because they frequently alighted on the yards of vessels at night, and slept there.



Sanderling Tern

Adult

Drawn from Nature by J. J. Audubon, F.B.S.F.L.S.

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