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Interactions of a White-winged Black Tern, *Chlidonias leucopterus*, with Arctic Terns, *Sterna paradisaea*, at Churchill, Manitoba

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A White-winged Black Tern (*Chlidonias leucopterus*), a species of Eurasian provenance, appeared at Churchill, Manitoba, in June–July 1995, where it was persistently harassed by breeding Arctic Terns (*Sterna paradisaea*).

Key Words: White-winged Black Tern, *Chlidonias leucopterus*, Arctic Tern, *Sterna paradisaea*, agonistic behaviour.

On 24 June 1995, Arnet Sheppard of Ottawa, Ontario, videotaped an adult White-winged Black Tern (*Chlidonias leucopterus*) in alternate plumage at the mouth of the Churchill River, Manitoba. There are fewer than a dozen records for this temperate Eurasian species in Canada, and this was the first in central Canada and the subarctic. Sheppard's videotape and subsequent sightings and photographs confirmed his identification (R. Koes, personal communication).

During Sheppard's 5-minute observation period the tern's behavior was unremarkable. It flew along the shoreline, landed for a few minutes among a small flock of Arctic Terns (*Sterna paradisaea*) and Bonaparte's Gulls (*Larus philadelphia*), and then disappeared upriver toward the town of Churchill, after being attacked by a Parasitic Jaeger (*Stercorarius parasiticus*).

On 27 June, Jan van Gils and Irene Tieleman, researchers from The Netherlands, told me of a black tern whose characteristics fitted *C. leucopterus* that they had seen near the Arctic Tern colony at West Twin Lake, 26 km south-east of Churchill. That evening, Scott Yaeger and I visited the area for 15 minutes at dusk and photographed a single White-winged Black Tern (Figure 1) near a small, marshy island where 16 pairs of Arctic Terns were just start-

ing to lay. It seemed to be exploiting a major emergence of dragonflies and would fly 1 km from the island, either over the lake or to the edge of the forest, catch a flying insect, then return to the colony, where it repeatedly attempted to land. On each approach the Arctic Terns immediately left their nests and aggressively chased it (Figure 2). Although the White-winged Black Tern managed to land twice, the harassment never ceased entirely and its time on the ground was momentary. By the next morning the tern — and the dragonflies — had disappeared.

Although many observers visited the colony in the following days, the White-winged Black Tern never reappeared there, and it was not rediscovered until 13 July, when T. and B. Holcombe of Tonbridge, Kent, England, saw it back on the Churchill River near the townsite. During their 45 minutes of observation it was "savagely pursued" by Arctic Terns, which on one occasion literally knocked it into the river. The aggression was confined to flight periods, and ceased when the tern landed among Bonaparte's Gulls and Arctic Terns; interestingly, it was always the last bird in the flock to land. The following day, B. Chartier also saw Arctic Terns harassing the tern in the same region; again, chasing ceased when the tern landed. The Holcombes' and Chartiers' observa-



FIGURE 1. White-winged Black Tern (*Chlidonias leucopterus*) at West Twin Lake, Churchill, Manitoba, 27 June 1995.



FIGURE 2. Two Arctic Terns (*Sterna paradisaea*, left) chasing a White-winged Black Tern (*Chlidonias leucopterus*) as it attempted to land in their colony.

tions were made within 0.5-1 km of an Arctic Tern colony of approximately 100 birds.

The far northern and usually coastal breeding range of the Arctic Tern is so different from that of the temperate and marsh-nesting White-winged Tern that the two species can come together only by accident. Thus, it will be difficult to learn whether the interactions described above represented a general response to intruders in the colony by Arctic Terns, which are generally considered to be very aggressive, or a specific response to the bold black-and-white flight pattern of the White-winged Tern. That the former might have been the case is suggested by a further observation from Churchill (Y. Zharikov, 12 June 1996) of Arctic Terns chasing a Black Tern (*Chlidonias niger*); the latter is a dark-bodied, but less boldly-marked, North American species that is closely related to the White-winged Tern. Farther

south in the interior of North America, light-plumaged (e.g., Common [*S. hirundo*] and Forster's [*S. forsteri*]) terns nest amicably with Black Terns (W. Scharf, personal communication). Additional observations of interactions between light- and dark-bodied terns in the breeding season would be of interest.

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