



# NSW Ornithological Records Appraisal Committee Unusual Record Report Form

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<b>Species Name:</b> <b>Bridled Tern</b>	<b>Scientific Name:</b> <i>Onychoprion anaethetus</i>
Date(s) and time(s) of observation:	10 March 2012, 1:30pm
How long did you watch the bird(s)?	1 minute
First and last date of occurrence:	10 March 2012
Distance to bird:	150 meters

<b>Site Location</b> Continental shelf break, approximately 20 nm east of Sydney, NSW
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<b>Habitat</b> (describe habitat in which the bird was seen, together with any neighbouring habitats): Pelagic. Continental shelf break.
<b>Sighting conditions</b> (weather, visibility, light conditions etc.): Clear visibility, calm sunny weather.
<b>Optical aids used:</b> Leica 12x50 BA and others

<b>To your knowledge, is the species seen frequently at this site?</b> Rarely. ORAC has accepted three previous records for NSW: 1. November 27, 1994 off Wollongong submitted by Chris Brandis (NSW ORAC Case 157) 2. November 28, 2009 off Wollongong submitted by Martin Cachard (NSW ORAC Case 498; also seen by NKH) 3. December 18, 2009 at Flat Rock, Ballina submitted by Steve McBride (NSW ORAC Case 499) This is the second Bridled Tern seen by NKH in NSW. The other one was the one reported by Martin Cachard off Wollongong 28 November 2009 (this bird was first identified by NKH and seen by Martin Cachard, Lindsay Smith, Raja Stephenson and others and was accepted as the second Bridled Tern for NSW (NSW ORAC Case 498).
<b>Did you use a field guide?</b> The bird was identified in the field without using a field guide. References used subsequently to prepare this report were: BEAMAN, M. & S. MADGE (1998): The Handbook of Bird Identification for Europe and the Western Palearctic. London. • CRAMP, S. (1985): Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. Vol. 4. Oxford, New York. • ENTICOTT, J. & D. TIPLING (1997): Seabirds of the World. London. • HARRIS, A., H. SHIRIHAI, & D. CHRISTIE (1996): The Macmillan Birder's Guide to European and Middle Eastern Birds. - London. • HARRISON, P. (1983): Seabirds, an identification guide. Beckenham • HARRISON, P. (1987): Seabirds of the World. A Photographic Guide. London. • HIGGINS, P.J. & S.J.J.F. DAVIES (eds) (1996). Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds. Volume 3: Snipe to Pigeons. Melbourne. • HOYO, J. DEL, A. ELLIOTT & J. SARGATAL (1996): Handbook of the Birds of the World. Vol. 3: Hoatzin to Auks. Barcelona. • JAMES, D.J. & T. REID (1999): Bridled Terns nesting and a review of their status in the Coral Sea. <i>Australasian Seabird Group Newsletter</i> 34: 2-9. • KRATZER, D. (2000): Aberrant Common Tern <i>Sterna hirundo</i> near Helgoland. <i>Limicola</i> 14: 36-38. • LEWINGTON, I., P. ALSTRÖM & P. COLSTON (1991): A Field Guide to the Rare Birds of Britain and Europe. St. Helier. • MALLING OLSEN, K., & H. LARSSON (1995): Terns of Europe and North America. London. • PIZZEY, G. & F. KNIGHT (2007, 8 <sup>th</sup> ed.): The Field Guide to the Birds of Australia. Sydney. • SIMPSON, K. & N. DAY (2004, 7 <sup>th</sup> ed.): Birds of Australia. Princeton.

**Were other observers present Do any of the other observers disagree with your identification, if so, who?** (please give names, addresses and phone numbers)?

Other observers: There were 25 participants on the pelagic trip. Perhaps half of the participants saw the bird, including experienced observers: Hal Epstein, Steve Anyon-Smith, Roger McGovern, Tobias Hayashi. Nobody disagreed with the identification.

**How confident are you of your identification?**, e.g. 70%, 100%. If not 100%, why not?

100%

**Other details:** e.g. Do you have historical and or anecdotal information/comments relating to the prior occurrence/status of the species within or near this location?

The status of Bridled Tern in NSW was discussed above.

This particular bird was seen during the regular Sydney pelagic birding trip that is scheduled for the second Saturday of each month. It was only seen in flight. It was early afternoon; the sun was high in the sky and quite strong. We were headed westwards back to Sydney, but still beyond the continental shelf break. Steve Anyon-Smith and DM located the bird flying from right to left, but some 500 m away. They called it instantly as a Sooty-type Tern even at that distance. DJJ immediately suggested it was a Bridled Tern (based on shape, flight style and the colour of the dorsum) and NKH soon confirmed this (with views of the head pattern) as the bird passed about 150 m across the bow.

### **Physical Description.**

(1) One individual was observed;

(2) Age: adult, based on the uniformity of the upperparts and upperwings lacking any contrast, the presence of elongated outer tail feathers and the facial pattern (see below); sex: unknown;

(3) Size and shape: Long and slender appearing medium-sized tern with very long tail streamers (outer rectrices). The bird appeared more slender and dainty than Sooty Tern. The inner wing appeared subtly narrower and the outer wing was slightly more elongated than is typical of Sooty Tern, giving an overall impression of a slightly lankier bird.

(4) Plumage colour and pattern (including any details of moult): Conspicuously uniform grey-brown upperparts and upperwings lacking any contrast. Mantle and back were neither pale grey like in a Spectacled Tern nor dark blackish-brown to black like in a Sooty Tern. The underparts were whitish. The head pattern was black-and-white, consisting of a black cap and lores (contrastingly darker than mantle), white forehead and long white supercilium reaching behind eye (as opposed to short triangular forehead patch in Sooty Tern). Neither the underwing nor the tail were contrastingly bicolored as one would have expected in Sooty Tern (however, these two characters were not studied in detail during the observation).

(5) Colour of bill: black, colour of eyes: dark, colour of legs/feet: not seen

(6) Calls: none heard

(7) Behaviour, movements, flight pattern, and anything else that might help to identify the bird e.g. feeding, interactions with other birds, describe where the bird was – on ground, in canopy, flying etc. Were comparisons made with other species?

The flight style was swift, elegant and direct. The body was moving up and down slowly, not jerkily with the slow and buoyant wingbeats. The wingbeats were smooth and flowing (not clipped and jerky) and shallow on the down stroke (not deep) compared with Sooty Tern. Thus the bird appeared more elegant and buoyant than a Sooty Tern.

Other birds seen: 50 Grey-faced Petrels (all *P. m. gouldii* except for one bird that showed some characteristics pointing toward a possible Great-winged Petrel *P. m. macroptera*), one White-necked and one **White-chinned Petrel**, a few Short-tailed, 300 Wedge-tailed, 150 Flesh-footed, 6 Fluttering and one Hutton's Shearwater, 2 Black-browed, 8 Shy and 1 Buller's Albatross, one **Red-tailed Tropicbird**, 3 Australasian Gannets, 2 Arctic, 40 Pomarine and 2 Long-tailed Jaegers, 80 Silver Gulls and 9 Crested Terns.

### **Other species with which you think it might be confused and how these were eliminated?**

Sooty Tern *O. fuscatus*: Less elegant and buoyant flight with clipped wingbeats. Slightly broader appearing wings. Blackish upperparts show little contrast with the cap. Short triangular white forehead patch and no narrow white supercilium. Strong black-and-white contrast between upper and underparts, between coverts and remiges on underwing and between upper and lower tail; strong light actually accentuates the dorsal colour difference between Bridled and Sooty Terns because it makes Bridled Tern appear paler and washed out (like this bird), but does not reduce the strong, black-and-white contrast of Sooty Tern.

Spectacled Tern *O. lunatus*: Much paler and almost neutral grey mantle and back, contrasting with dark upperwings.

Aleutian Tern *O. aleuticus*: Much paler and entirely neutral grey upperparts and upperwings; white rump and tail; greyish underparts.

Other terns: All ruled out by above physical description (including aberrantly coloured ones (e.g. KRATZER 2000)).

**Was the description written from notes and/or sketches made** (tick box):

during the observation or;  shortly after the observation or;  from memory?

**Please indicate supportive evidence available.**

Was the bird:  photographed,  taped or  video taped? If yes to any of these, by whom?

Unfortunately no one on the boat managed to get photographs of this bird.

**What experience have you had with the species in question?** (Did you know it was a Rare bird when you first saw it?)

**NKH** has extensive experience with seabirds having been pelagic trip leader on many trips off of California, New Jersey/New York and Delaware/Maryland and having participated on many pelagic trips off of North Carolina, Galapagos, Queensland, New South Wales, Tasmania and New Zealand. NKH has been an active member in the Rare Birds Committees of Hessen, Germany, Schleswig-Holstein, Germany, and New Jersey, USA. NKH has seen 30 tern species around the world, 18 in Australia and 15 in NSW. Specifically, he is familiar with Bridled Tern from many observations at the Dry Tortugas, FL, USA; off Cape Hatteras, NC, USA; Tobago, Trinidad & Tobago, West Indies; Michaelmas Cay, QLD, and one off Wollongong, NSW, 28 November 2009 (NSW ORAC Case 498). Of the mentioned similar species, NH has observed Sooty Tern on many places around the globe and Aleutian Tern in Alaska, USA.

**DJJ** has seen 28 species of terns around the world, 20 in Australia, and 14 in NSW. He wrote plumages accounts in HANZAB for seven species. He has studied the field identification and marine habitat requirements of Bridled Tern in the Coral Sea (James, D.J. & Reid, T. (1999), 'Bridled Terns nesting and a review of their status in the Coral Sea', *Australasian Seabird Group Newsletter* 34: 2-9.), the Great Barrier Reef and the Bismarck Sea.

**DM** has seen a couple of Bridled Terns on the Great Barrier Reef, ten years ago. He is very familiar with Sooty Terns, as he was on the famous December Wollongong pelagic when about 500 were seen in one day. Also, he has seen about 100 Sooty Terns off Mistral Point, Maroubra (including 39 in ten minutes) over the last 14 years. Additionally, Lord Howe Island and Great Barrier Reef are places DM has seen them in nesting mode. None were as pale on the upperwing as the Bridled Tern described here.



Fig. 1: Adult Bridled Tern off Sydney, 10 March 2012. Illustration of the contrasting black-and-white head pattern with the long supercilium and the conspicuously uniform grey-brown upperparts and upperwings lacking any contrast. Two different postures of the same bird are shown. (Pencil drawing: Nikolas Haase)

**Signature:**

**Date: 11 March 2012**

Please forward all material to: The Secretary, NSW Rarities Committee, 1/67, Cremorne Road, Cremorne, NSW 2090