

Least Tern *Sterna antillarum*

A single adult, June 24, 2008, Tualatin NWR, Washington County, Oregon

The bird was observed down to 60m range in good light through 10X binoculars and a 20x telescope for about an hour. It was seen both in flight and resting on the ground.

Description

Size and Structure: A small, short-legged tern. In direct comparison it appeared slightly shorter and much less bulky than nearby Killdeers. It appeared longer than nearby Spotted Sandpipers. In flight, the tail could be seen to be relatively short and lacked projecting tail streamers. It was distinctly forked when closed but square-ended when held wide open.

Bare part coloration: The bill was bright yellow. There appeared to be a small dark tip, but the range and lack of a quality telescope meant I was not 100% certain of this. The eye was not noted. The leg color was bright orange-yellow.

Plumage: The head pattern was distinctive. There was a black cap that connected to a black loreal line. The forehead was white and reached towards the eye in a sharply defined 'V'. The rest of face and throat and the entire underparts were a clean white. The double dark lines began at the base of the bill and continued well back to the neck. The sides of the lower neck were a rich buff. The mantle, rump, tail, and upperwings were a pale medium gray. The outer 3 or so primaries were blackish.

Voice: Not heard.

Observer: Nick Lethaby, 6807 Sweetwater Way, Goleta, CA, 93117, nlethaby@ti.com

Previous experience: Very extensive over the last 15 years. This species is a regular migrant at my local beach in Goleta with up to 15 birds at a time and was also regular (up to 100) in the salt ponds in Santa Clara county when I lived in the San Jose area.

Similar species: Little Tern is eliminated by the gray rump/tail. No other plausible species is similar.

Other observers: The bird was later seen by numerous other observers including Jeff Gilliagn and Owen Schmidt.







