

FORSTER'S TERN BREEDING ON LONG ISLAND

JOHN ZARUDSKY

On 1 June 1981, Jim Browne, a biologist with the Department of Conservation and Waterways, Town of Hempstead, was engaged in a nesting survey on Hewlett Hassock, in Hewlett Bay, Town of Hempstead, Nassau County. Hewlett Hassock is a salt marsh island of approximately 27 acres, dominated by salt marsh cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*). Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*) had been recorded nesting here for the past four years.

On the date of Mr. Browne's visit, there were approximately forty pairs of nesting Common Terns. His attention was attracted by a call that was distinctly different from that of the Common Terns, and when investigating further, he was able to identify a pair of Forster's Terns (*S. forsteri*) by the combination of the unique call and the light primaries. Alerted to the possibility that they might be breeding in the Common Tern colony, he watched the actions of the birds but was unable to actually locate the nest. However, he felt sure that he had the choice narrowed down to three or four nests.

On 8 June, the author visited the colony and was able to determine to which nest the birds returned each time, and marked the nest accordingly. It was situated in *Spartina* grass, about 15" high, and contained three eggs which were quite similar to the eggs of the Common Tern. The nest was constructed of *Spartina* drift and situated on a broad platform of wrack, measuring some 36 by 20 inches. The Common Tern nests on Hewlett Hassock were of the same construction as the nest of the Forster's Terns. This is the typical nest built



Forster's Tern nest and eggs—Hewlett Hassock, Nassau County
8 June 1981
John Zarudsky



*Forster's Tern chick—Hewlett Hassock, Nassau County
23 June 1981* *Michael Gochfeld*

by Common Terns when nesting on salt marsh island.

On 16 June one darkly spotted chick was noted on the nest. This chick closely resembled those of the Common Terns, except that it seemed somewhat darker. On 23 June two chicks were located, one of which was banded by Michael Gochfeld, who accompanied the author on this trip along with Joanna Burger, Carl Safina, and Richard Wagner.

There is no previous breeding record for Forster's Tern in New York State, although it is an uncommon spring migrant and common fall migrant. It does breed on the Atlantic coast from Virginia northward to New Jersey, where it has been nesting at Brigantine since 1956. There are two other breeding populations in North America, one being on the western Gulf coast, and the other being on inland lakes in central United States and south central Canada.

It now becomes a welcome addition to the breeding avifauna of New York State (Atlas block 6049B) and will be eagerly looked for again next year.

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