



*White-winged Tern at Salmon Creek, Monroe Co., New York, 19 June 1991,
Photographs by Brian W. Keelan.*

**PHOTOGRAPHS OF NEW YORK STATE RARITIES 53:
WHITE-WINGED TERN**

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On Wednesday, 19 June 1991, Brian and Eileen Keelan offered to assist my study of nesting Black Tern at Salmon Creek, Monroe Co., by providing waterborne transportation, a canoe. I had been in this area locating nests by canoe only three days prior. We had planned to check those nest sites for recently hatched chicks. The three of us met at the launch site, Docksidiers, Inc., at about 6:15 PM for a picnic dinner. At 6:45 PM we launched the canoe, after having a brief conversation with the manager of the bar, who was aware of my studies. Less than fifty seconds of paddling later Brian commented, "That bird has a lot of white." It took a fraction of a second for his comment to register, and another fraction of a second for me to check the nearby terns. The bird which had alerted Brian was flying directly toward us. The gleaming white leading edge of the wing left little doubt as to its identity. My response, "It is! It is!" Aside from comments of disbelief, that was the extent of the conversation in the canoe as we watched an adult White-winged Tern fly directly over us. We were suddenly alerted to an impending collision with a docked boat by Eileen, who was in the bow. Corrective action was immediately taken, and we continued our observation of the bird from the center of the docking area. We enjoyed watching the tern for a few minutes and then paddled to the closest empty dock, from which point I sprinted into the bar, up to the manager and with what I am sure was a wild look, shouted, "Do you have a phone?" This was the same individual who had watched the three of us launch a canoe only minutes earlier. From his reaction, I'm sure he thought that at least one of the remaining two was drowning. Upon clarification that there was a "rare tern" outside, he gave me a strange look and pointed to the wall phone. The first phone call went to my mother, Jeanne Skelly, who asked me to repeat three times what we had and where we were, and then hung up on me. The next call was to a birding family only a few miles away, whom I knew would have the phone numbers to almost all of the local birders. They agreed to make additional calls and I returned to the docks to assure myself that the bird was still around. Indeed it was. Eileen and I kept track of it while Brian went inside to make additional calls.

The ten minutes after we exhausted our list of numbers and supply of quarters were nerve-wracking. Would the bird leave? Would anyone get to

see it other than us? The tern had a bad habit of disappearing for several minutes, which made the situation worse. By 7:20 PM the first people began to arrive. Unfortunately, they arrived at one of the times that the bird had chosen to disappear. Within moments, however, we heard its call. For the next hour, it flew around the area immediately in front of us, calling frequently. At least two birders were equipped with cameras and photographed it. Two reporters for the local evening paper were among the first to arrive after the initial sighting. They stood on the docks planning an article for the following evening's paper, never taking their eyes from their binoculars. For all the birders who arrived before 8:30 PM, the tern put on a spectacular show. It loosely associated with the resident Black Terns, providing a wonderful opportunity to compare the two species. The plumage differences between Black Tern and White-winged Tern were carefully examined and studied. Also, its call was so distinct from the calls of Black Tern, that in many instances, this difference was the first method we used to locate the bird. In all, approximately twenty people were able to observe it that evening. Unfortunately, despite extensive efforts, it was not relocated subsequently. Documentation of the sighting, including photographs, have submitted to the local records committees, to the NYSARC and to *American Birds*.

I am sure that all of the birders who saw the tern, and those who looked for it the following day, are appreciative of the cooperation and patience on the part of the management of Docksiders, Inc., who, for two days, found themselves in the 'hottest' spot in town.

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