

EARLY FLEDGING OF COMMON TERNS

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On both 30 Jun and 2 Jul, 1995, four fledgling Common Terns were observed at Jaeger Rocks in Fort Erie, Ontario. Although these fledglings were observed in Canada, one can be reasonably certain that these are New York birds. There are two Common Tern colonies in New York State, Donnelley's Breakwater colony and Short Breakwater colony, only one and a half miles or less from the observation site, while the nearest colony in Canada is 18 miles to the west on the Port Colburn Breakwater. Since published dates for Common Tern fledglings are between July 10 and September 9 (Meade 1988), June 30 represents a new early record for New York State.

The four juveniles were about an inch shorter than the adults that attended them, but other than the length, the juvenile Common Terns had the same shape as the adult Common Terns. The plumage and field marks were the same as the adults with the following six exceptions:

- 1) The base of the bill was light orangish yellow in contrast to the adult's bill which was deep orange.

- 2) The feet and legs were orange-yellow in contrast to the adult's that were orange. These differences were not subtle.

- 3) The forehead and top of the crown were white. Behind the crown and eye, the hind cap and nape were black. The hind neck was also black, and this black hind neck was nearly separated from the hind cap in some of the juveniles. In contrast to the adult's cap was complete.

- 4) The folded wing showed a dark gray carpal bar.

- 5) Unlike the adults, the gray feathers of the young were edged in white on the back, upper wing coverts, scapulars, primaries, and secondaries. The primaries caused four white lines to be seen on the wing when the bird was

resting.

6) In good light the backs of the fledglings were brownish gray, in contrast to the adult's backs that were pure gray.

On both days the fledglings were observed begging for food, but no food was given to them by the adults. The fledglings were also observed flying in to this evening roosting location. These observations were made with a 50x eight inch Celestron telescope at a distances of 50-80 yards. On June 6, 1993, researchers observed eight Common Terns that were 21 days old or older, based on their feather development (which was studied in the hand) at the Short Breakwater colony. Since these observations are not uncommon and Common Terns fly at four weeks, early to mid June fledglings should not be unusual. Note: These eight Common Terns were considered fledglings based purely on their feather development (McBrayer and others 1995).

LITERATURE CITED

- Meade GM. Breeding season tables. In: Andrle RF, Carroll JR. 1988. *Atlas of Breeding Birds in New York State*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. Appendix C, page 515.
- McBrayer LD, Arnold JM, White TD, Calhoun SW. 1995. Reproductive Status of Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) Colonies on the Niagara Frontier. Final Report, FYS 1993-1995, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.