

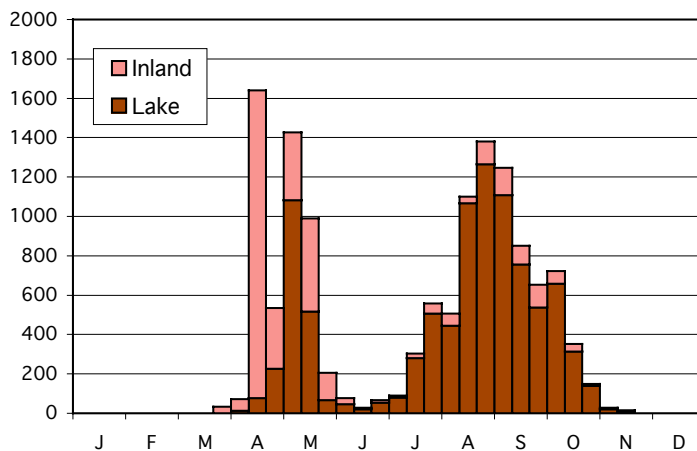
## Forster's Tern

## *Sterna forsteri*

### Historical Information

First Published Record: A 28 April 1888 report by B.W. Evermann in Vigo County, appears to constitute Indiana's earliest published record (Butler 1898).

Butler (1898) considered the Forster's Tern generally rare, but "exceedingly abundant" on Lake Michigan. Keller et al. (1979) accepted Butler's assessment after replacing "rare" with "uncommon." Mumford and Keller (1984) agreed with the latter status.



### Status

Physical Evidence: Five specimens are preserved in Chicago's museums (S.F. Jackson unpublished list).

STATUS TABLE				
Specimens				
Museum				No.
Chicago Academy of Sciences				2
Chicago Field Museum				3
20-Year Abundance Table				
	Win	Spr	Sum	Fall
Northern Tier	n	4	5	3
Central Tier	n	6	7	7
Southern Tier	n	4	7	6
Entire State	n	4	5	3

### Current Status

Today the Forster's Tern is a migrant: Common (4) in spring and Very Common (3) in fall.

### Occurrence

Forster's Tern has been reported in some 51 counties, but very likely occurs in many others. In spring it occurs in roughly equal numbers on the lakefront and at inland sites; in fall, however, it is far more prevalent on Lake Michigan. Juveniles, often in fresh plumage with the ginger-brown wash on the upperparts, appear in late July and peak about the third week of August (see migration envelopes).

### Autumn Molt

The post-breeding molt begins in late summer; by July some Forster's Terns are heavily molted and virtually all birds are in full basic plumage before 1 September. In contrast, adult Common Terns are just beginning their molt by September.

### Extreme Records

Unlike the Common Tern this species rarely appears in large flocks. The conspicuous mid-April spike on the migration histogram reflects a major exception to this rule. On 13 April 1989 L.W. Sterrenburg and Terry Taylor observed an enormous migrating flock of 1398 birds on Lake Monroe (Brown 1990). As shown in the maximum count table, this unprecedented movement exceeds the next largest tally by a factor of five. Brown summarized this event as follows, "The

birds were described as descending from the clouds in circles as if on the outer edge of a rotating cylinder and later ascending in a similar pattern with one flock forming a wedge after they reached altitude and started to leave the area.”

### Odd Plumage

On 19 August 1988 a melanistic Forster’s Tern was discovered on the Michigan City Harbor beach. A photograph of this individual is published in Brock and Fields (1989). Melanism is apparently quite rare among *Sterna* terns.

### **Breeding**

During the summer of 1957 R. Grow discovered Indiana’s first breeding Forster’s Terns in a small interdunal wetland in Gary; he observed a brood of three and another of two on muskrat houses. Nesting also occurred at this site in 1958 and 1962 (Mumford and Keller 1984). These reports constitute the state’s only breeding records.

### **Forster’s Tern Data**

<b>Maximum Single Party Counts</b>				
<b>Spring</b>				
<b>Number</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Observer</b>	<b>Ref.</b>
1398	13-Apr-1989	Lake Monroe	L.W. Sterrenburg	IAQ
220	18-May-1996	Mich. City Harbor	L.S. Hinchman	KJB
180	09-May-1983	Mich. City Harbor	K.J. Brock	KJB
<b>Fall</b>				
<b>Number</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Observer</b>	<b>Ref.</b>
200	30-Aug-1916	Miller Beach	C. Eifrig	CEi
200	26-Aug-1978	Mich. City Harbor	K.J. Brock	KJB
150	4-Oct-1956	Gary Harbor	J. Louis	JLo

### **Migration Envelopes**

<b>Spring</b>						
	<b>Earliest</b>	<b>Arrive</b>	<b>Peak</b>	<b>Depart</b>	<b>Latest</b>	<b>Records</b>
<b>North</b>	27-Mar-1978	19-Apr	6-May	23-May	Sum. Vis.	306
<b>Central</b>	7-Apr-2004	16-Apr	9-May	24-May	Sum. Vis.	61
<b>South</b>	28-Mar-1981	11-Apr	26-Apr	21-May	Sum. Vis.	130
<b>Fall</b>						
	<b>Earliest</b>	<b>Arrive</b>	<b>Peak</b>	<b>Depart</b>	<b>Latest</b>	<b>Records</b>
<b>North</b>	Sum. Vis.	28-Jul	1-Sep	13-Oct	17-Nov-94	806
<b>Central</b>	Sum. Vis.	26-Jul	2-Sep	14-Oct	18-Nov-98	38
<b>South</b>	Sum. Vis.	31-Jul	13-Sep	16-Oct	21-Nov-82	132
<b>Fall Juveniles Only</b>						
<b>State</b>	23-Jul-1988	1-Aug	21-Aug	9-Sep	22-Sep-03	87

### **References Cited**

Brock, K.J. and C. Fields (1989) A melanistic *Sterna* Tern at Michigan City, Indiana, *Indiana Audubon Quarterly*, 67:93-94.

Brown, M.R. (1990) Field Notes Spring 1989, *Indiana Audubon Quarterly*, 68:28-39.

Butler, A. W. (1898) The Birds of Indiana, Indiana Department of Geology and Natural Resources Annual Report, 22:575-1187.

Keller, C.E., S.A. Keller, and T.C. Keller (1979) *Indiana Birds and Their Haunts*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Ind. 214 pp.

Mumford, R.E. and C.E. Keller (1984) *The Birds of Indiana*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Ind. 376 pp.