Rare Animals of Louisiana

Gull-billed Tern
Gelochelidon nilotica

Rarity Rank: S2B, S2S3N/G5

Identification:
- Resembles a gull in body shape and behavior
- Thick, black bill
- Upperparts are light gray and underneath is white
- Wings are unmarked and wider than other terns
- Tail is short and notched in the middle
- Crown and nape of breeding adults are black
- Adults can be up to 38 cm in length and have a wingspread of 94 cm

Habitat:
- Coastal beaches and estuaries, sparsely vegetated nearshore islands, and barrier islands
- Generally nests within colonies of Black Skimmers (*Rynchops niger*) on open beaches above high tide level
- Feeds and nests around marshes
- Most nests are on sandy beaches or barrier islands along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts

Food habits:

Feeds primarily on insects caught in the air, but also on small fish, reptiles and amphibians

Range:
- Breeding Range: Locally along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts from New York to Mexico; southern California, the Caribbean, and coastal South America; also Old World
- Winters from the Gulf coast through coastal Central America to South America
- In Louisiana, an uncommon and local summer resident along the coast, but may be found coast-wide in the winter

Reproduction:
- Lays three eggs in a shallow depression that is usually lined with rocks or shells
- Incubation period of 22 to 23 days
- Brooding and feeding carried out by both parents
**Threats:**
- Major concern is human disturbance through boating, recreation and development
- In many areas colonies can be overrun by gulls
- Coastal land loss

**Beneficial Management Practices:**
- Protection of occupied as well as potential nesting sites
- Gull control for established tern colony sites

**LA River Basins:**
Pontchartrain, Mississippi, Barataria, Terrebonne, Atchafalaya, Vermilion-Teche, Mermentau

**References:**