

Rare Animals of Louisiana



Caspian Tern

Hydroprogne caspia

Rarity Rank: S1S2B,S3N/G5

	1	2	3	4	5
State					
Global					
	imperiled		rare		secure



Photo by Greg Gillson, The Bird Guide, Inc., <http://thebirdguide.com>

Identification:

- Largest tern in North America
- Upperparts pale gray, white underparts and tail
- Wings are relatively wide, distal primaries dark above and below
- Tail shallowly notched, bill stocky and orange-red with dark tip
- Legs and feet are black
- Breeding-plumaged adults have black cap with only a trace of a crest
- Immatures and winter adults have considerable white streaking in black cap
- Adults up to 58 cm in total length with a wingspread of 1.4 m
- Least social of all terns

Habitat:

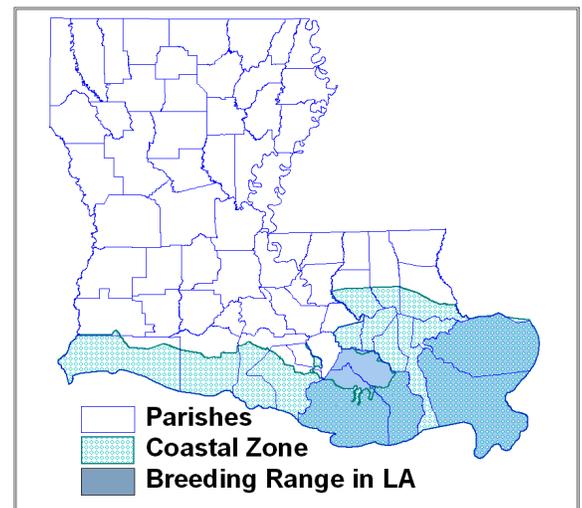
- Nests on barrier islands or shell berms in coastal salt marsh
- Found mostly along the coast during the nesting season, but may occur near large ponds, lakes and rivers during migration and winter

Food habits:

- Feeds on surface fishes and regularly robs smaller terns
- Also eats eggs and young of other terns and gulls

Range:

- Breeding Range: Locally in interior North America, along the Pacific coast from Washington to northern Mexico, and along Atlantic and Gulf coasts from Newfoundland to Texas
- Winters along coastal areas in southern portion of breeding range, south to northern South America; Also found in Old World
- In Louisiana, only ten known nesting colonies, all in the southeastern part of the state; locally common winter resident coast wide and on larger water bodies inland



Range based on occurrences in Natural Heritage database

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Reproduction:

- Nest is a shallow scrape, lined with vegetation, shells or other debris
- Lays one to three eggs and incubates from May through July for 25 to 27 days
- Egg color is pinkish to light buff, with spots or blotches that are brown and black

Threats:

- Water contamination and pollution
- Collisions with electric wires and vehicles
- Breeding colonies are very sensitive to human disturbance, which may cause nest desertion
- Coastal land loss

Beneficial Management Practices:

- Protection and enhancement, especially of nesting colonies
- Creation of habitat (dredge material islands) and artificial nests
- Prevent or limit public access to breeding and nesting sites
- Prevent aircrafts from flying low over colonies

LA River Basins:

Pontchartrain, Mississippi, Barataria, Terrebonne

References:

Cuthbert, F. J., and L. R. Wires. 1999. Caspian Tern (*Sterna caspia*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 403 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Birds of North America, Inc., Philadelphia, PA.