

Rare Animals of Louisiana



Sooty Tern

Onychoprion fuscatus

Rarity Rank: S1B/G5

	1	2	3	4	5
State					
Global					
	imperiled		rare		secure



Photo by Dan Lane

Identification:

- Medium sized tern, 36 to 45 cm long with a wingspread of 82 to 94 cm
- Sexually monomorphic
- Adults in breeding with completely black back, white belly, forked tail with white edges, white brow, sharp pointed bill, with black feet and legs
- Adults in non-breeding have plumage similar but blackish feathers of crown and nape with white margin
- Immature birds are dark brown with white flecks along back and wings

Taxonomic comments:

Some consider the Sooty Tern to be a superspecies with *Onychoprion anaethetus*, the Bridled Tern

Habitat:

- Stays out at sea unless nesting
- Nests on remote islands and beaches with scattered or no vegetation

Food habits:

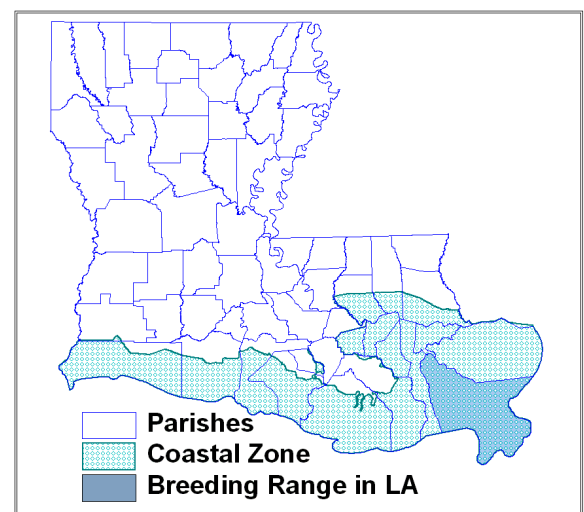
- Small fish as well as squid and insects
- Individuals in flock generally remain 1 to 20 meters above water when hunting for food, descending simultaneously when food is spotted
- When prey descend, flock rises up again
- Unlike diving birds, must catch prey within a few centimeters of surface

Range:

Tropical islands and coasts along the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans

Reproduction:

- Individuals begin to breed at about 6 to 8 years of age
- Nest is a simple depression in the sand, sometimes surrounded by sea plants
- A single white egg with brown spots is laid between April and June (more variable in other locations) and is tended by both parents throughout a month of incubation
- Young fledge about 1 to 2 months after hatching



Range based on occurrences in Natural Heritage database

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Threats:

- Predation by cats
- Egg collection by other seabirds and humans
- Coastal land loss

Beneficial Management Practices:

- Create beach habitat with dredge materials
- Create nesting areas

LA River Basins:

Pontchartrain, Mississippi, Barataria

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