

COMMON TERN *STERNA HIRUNDO* AT LUANSHYA, ZAMBIA At about 09:30 hrs on 5 October 1979 I was watching waders at Makoma Sewage Ponds, Luanshya (13°07'S, 28°22'E) when a Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* flew in and began to dive for fish. It was strikingly different in appearance and behaviour when compared with several White-winged Black Terns *Chlidonias leucopterus* which were present. I revisited the ponds at mid-day with R. Casalis de Pury and photographed the tern. On 6 October C. Carter and I observed it at the same locality, and it was last seen by me on the morning of 7 October.

The Common Tern was considerably larger than the White-winged Black Terns, had long slender wings, a deeply forked tail and a heavier bill than the smaller species. Features which identified it as *S. hirundo* were the upper-wing pattern (dusky primaries, paler grey secondaries and coverts, broad blackish band along the leading edge of the wing, white trailing edge to the secondaries), underwing pattern (off-white with dark tips only to the primaries, and translucent inner primaries forming a pale wedge at the bend of the wing), the pale grey rump, greyish-white tail with darker colouring along the outer feathers, red legs, and head pattern (white forehead and forecrown, blackish hindcrown and nape). The flight was buoyant and graceful with deep wingbeats. When not fishing at the ponds it roosted on a tree stump in open water at the nearby Makoma Lake. A call was heard once, a single, long grating keee-rrrr.

My observations were made with x10 binoculars in excellent conditions and at times the bird approached to within a few metres. My experience of terns in Europe and East Africa led me to conclude that the bird could only be *Sterna hirundo*, and the other observers who saw the bird agree. Colour transparencies and a description have been examined by P.J. Grant who confirms (*in litt.*) that the bird was a Common Tern in first winter plumage, i.e. hatched in 1979. The slides and a full description are on file at the Zoological Museum, Tring, England.

The Common Tern winters on the coasts of Africa south to Cape Province, but is only a vagrant inland (Moreau 1972). In East Africa it is known to occur in flocks at the coast, mainly in December to April (Britton 1977). Inland, one was ringed at Lake Nakuru, Kenya on 26 September 1970 (Backhurst, Britton & Mann 1973) and a probable was at Lake Baringo in November 1978 (EANHS 1979). There have been no previous records from Zambia but there is one published record from Malawi of an exhausted bird picked up on 29 October 1975 (Benson & Benson 1977). The same authors give a record of a possible Common Tern in Malawi on 28 November 1974 but the published description is not sufficient to identify the bird conclusively as this species. At the time of the appearance of the Zambian bird, strong winds had occurred locally for several days and it is possible that the bird was displaced from its normal migration route by bad weather, as was suggested for the 1975 Malawi bird by Benson & Benson (*op. cit.*), but weather conditions outside Zambia at the time of the sighting are not known, and the tern did not appear at all exhausted when first seen.

#### REFERENCES

- BACKHURST, G.C., BRITTON, P.L. & MANN, C.F. 1973. The less common Palaearctic migrant birds of Kenya and Tanzania. *Journal of the East Africa Natural History Society and National Museum* 140: 1-38.
- BENSON, C.W. & BENSON, F.M. 1977. *The birds of Malawi*. Limbe: Montfort Press.
- BRITTON, P.L. 1977. Status and identification of East African terns. *Scopus* 1: 29-34.

P.B. Taylor, Box 70415, Ndola, Zambia

Received 14 April 1980

*Scopus* 4: 70, September 1980





Taylor, P. B. 1980. "Common tern *Sterna hirundo* at Luanshya, Zambia." *Scopus* 4, 70–70.

**View This Item Online:** <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/137798>

**Permalink:** <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/118455>

**Holding Institution**

Harvard University, Museum of Comparative Zoology, Ernst Mayr Library

**Sponsored by**

Harvard University, Museum of Comparative Zoology, Ernst Mayr Library

**Copyright & Reuse**

Copyright Status: In copyright. Digitized with the permission of the rights holder.

License: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>

Rights: <https://biodiversitylibrary.org/permissions>

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.