

and that in this respect I have been perverse ; but even if this paper serves only to lead to the establishment of exactly opposite conclusions to those which I have drawn, it will still appear to me to have served a useful purpose, and to have directed renewed attention to a very interesting phase in the history of birds.

XV.—On *Sterna hirundo* Linn. and on the Name of the Common Tern. By Prof. EINAR LÖNNBERG, of Stockholm.

[PROF. EINAR LÖNNBERG has sent us the following contribution to the question as to which species of Tern Linnæus was referring when he described *Sterna hirundo*. Prof. Lönnberg was asked for his opinion on the matter, as being a great authority on the life and writings of Linnæus and on the avifauna of Sweden, by the Committee at present engaged in revising the B.O.U. List of British Birds. The matter is of special importance, as, if a conclusion is come to that Linnæus' *Sterna hirundo* is indeterminable, it would logically follow that the genus *Sterna*, which is founded on that species, cannot be used either, and a new generic term would have to be provided for the Terns.]

In order to solve the question as to which bird Linnæus meant when he, in 1758, gave the name "*Sterna hirundo*" ('Systema Naturæ,' ed. x. p. 137), it is necessary to study the earlier writings of the author himself. He quotes 'Fauna Svecica' (1746) in the first rank, and it is evident that "*Sterna hirundo*" 1758 was a common Swedish bird familiar to him.

The short diagnosis in 'Fauna Svecica' does not settle whether the *Common* or the *Arctic* Tern is intended, although it is more probable that the former was in his mind when he says: "rectricibus maximis dimidiato-albis nigrisque." The outer web of the lateral rectrices in the Common Tern is, as a rule, much darker than that in the Arctic Tern, and in the latter it is often difficult to call it "niger."

The expression "*Habitat ubique ad lacus & stagna*" (*i. e.* in Sweden) only fits in with the Common Tern, especially if some little stress is laid on "*ubique*," as, of course, should be done. The Arctic Tern in this country is chiefly a coast bird, breeding in our Baltic archipelago; it may be found on freshwater lakes occasionally, but this is chiefly in the northernmost parts of the country. The Common Tern is really the common one, "*ad lacus & stagna*," in Sweden.

The subsequent longer description does not appear to give much evidence, as most of it can be applied to both forms. When, however, it is said "*rectricibus utrinque duabus extimis exteriore margine fuscis*," this suits the Common Tern better than the Arctic. It is chiefly the description of the bill, "*Rostrum rectum, coccineum uti & pedes*," which has by some authors been regarded as a proof that Linnæus by this really meant the Arctic Tern, because he does not mention the blackish tip characteristic of the Common Tern. Even some Swedish ornithologists, as, for instance, the late Professor Sven Nilsson, have favoured such an opinion. It is, however, very possible that it is due to an omission that Linnæus did not mention the black tip. He meant, perhaps, that this was of little importance, and the by far greater part of the bill was really red, and that appeared to him the main thing. Linnæus always tried to be concise, and therefore often omitted more important characteristics than this.

Fortunately I am able to give rather conclusive evidence, by means of an analogy, in this case from Linnæus's own hand.

In the library of the Royal University, Upsala, is a Linnean manuscript with the title "*Methodus Avium Svecicarum*," which was published by the present writer in 1907. This manuscript is of a certain value, because it is in the shape of a small book, and it is quite evident that Linnæus carried it with him in his pocket during his travels to different parts of Sweden and wrote in it notes on birds which were observed by him. Now in this book (p. 39 of the printed



Lönnberg, Einar. 1913. "On *Sterna hirundo* Linn, and on the Name of the Common Tern." *Ibis* 1(2), 301–302.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1474-919x.1913.tb06553.x>.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/85342>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1474-919x.1913.tb06553.x>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/378336>

Holding Institution

Smithsonian Libraries and Archives

Sponsored by

Smithsonian

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: Public domain. The BHL considers that this work is no longer under copyright protection.

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>.