

BRIDLED TERN AND AUDUBON'S SHEARWATER IN ALABAMA

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This account reports the second and third records of Bridled Tern (*Sterna anaethetus*) and the first and second records of Audubon's Shearwater (*Puffinus lherminieri*) in Alabama.

On the 11th of June, 1978, a party consisting of Howard Einspahr, Ralph Havard, Paul Johnson, Phillip Kilpatrick and the author were birding approximately 50 kilometers south of Sand Island Light in a 23-foot boat fitted with twin 140-hp engines. The weather was fair, seas very calm and visibility above 20 km with virtually no haze.

At about 2 p.m. as we were cruising generally westward along the smooth water of a diatom slick, we saw a Parasitic Jaeger (*Stercorarius parasiticus*). Before we could complete our observations of this bird, a storm-petrel was seen. We changed course and gave chase until we could positively identify it as a Wilson's (*Oceanites oceanicus*). Less than ten minutes after returning to the jaeger, we saw an unusual tern and again gave chase. The bird was soon joined by a second tern. Both were identified as Bridled Terns on the basis of the following characteristics: Direct size comparison showed them to be much larger than Black Terns (*Chlidonias niger*). Moreover, the wings and mantle were dark gray-brown (not black). A dark line projected from the bill through the eye, and the white of the forehead extended behind the eye. A white collar circled the neck behind the black cap.

Havard found two more Bridled Terns off Orange Beach at the 100-fathom curve (some 100 km from the first sighting) on July 22, 1978. All four birds were apparently quite healthy and were probably not storm-driven into these waters.

The only previous record of Bridled Tern in Alabama is one from September, 1932, when six were seen and a specimen found at Gulf Shores immediately after a hurricane. (Imhof, T.A., 1976, Alabama Birds, 2nd ed., University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa: 214).

On June 30, 1978, Havard, Kilpatrick and the author were foiled in an attempt to return to the area off Sand Island Light described above because of thunder squalls off the entire Alabama coast. Instead, we cruised in the sheltered waters between Dauphin and Sand Islands. At about 10 a.m. under an overcast sky, we saw a small shearwater, scarcely larger than the Black Terns and noticeably smaller than the Laughing Gulls (*Larus altricilla*) both of which were nearby. We chased this bird, approaching it sometimes to within 10 meters.

Our identification of the bird as Audubon's Shearwater is based on the entirely dark back (no white on the upper tail coverts) which in the color slide is seen to contain some dark brown (eliminating Little Shearwater, *Puffinus assimilis*), size, dark vent and white lower half of the lores (eliminating Manx Shearwater, *Puffinus puffinus*). We also noted the white mark behind the eye ("ear patch?", "suggestion of a white collar?") which is depicted but undescribed in the standard field guides for Audubon's but not Manx Shearwater. We are uncertain if this is a reliable mark.

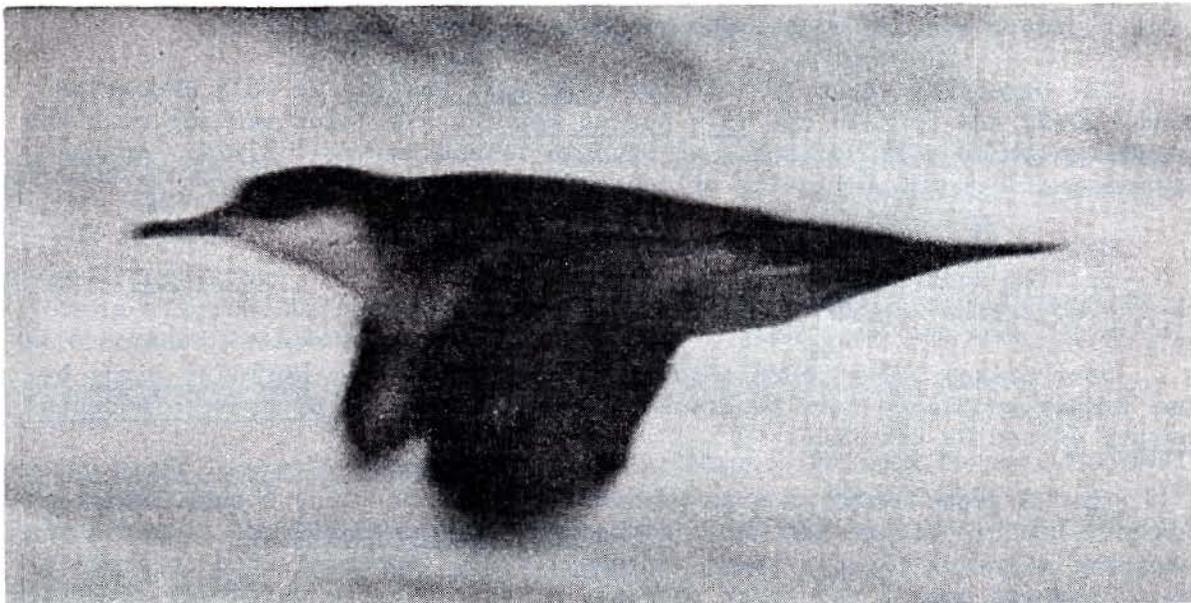
Audubon's Shearwater, while previously unrecorded in Alabama, has recently been found in July and September off Northwest Florida and in winter off the Texas coast.

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Bridled Tern



Audubon's Shearwater

Photos from color slides by the author