

Arctic Tern

Arktiese Seeswael

Sterna paradisaea

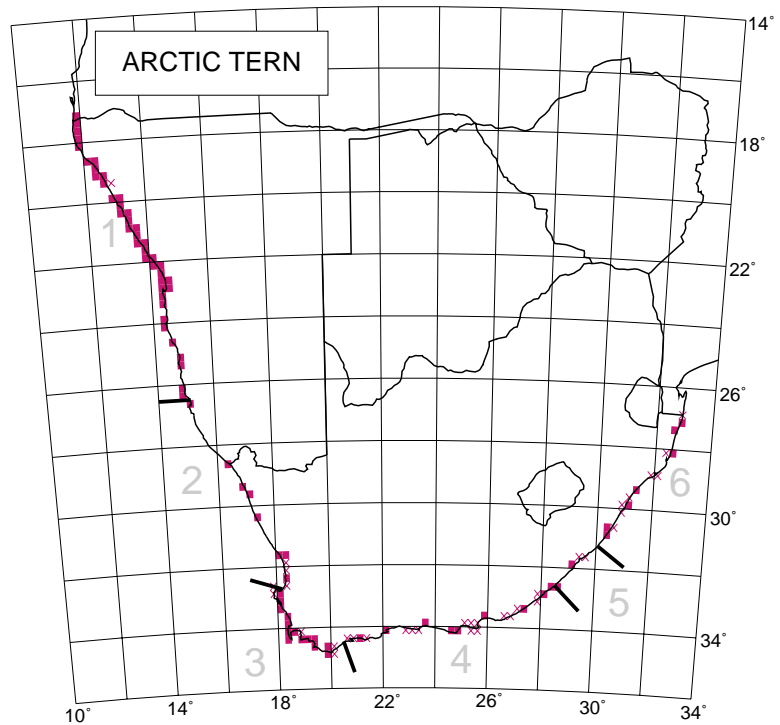
The Arctic Tern breeds in the northern hemisphere along northern temperate, subarctic and arctic shores, and migrates to Antarctic waters for the nonbreeding season (Cramp *et al.* 1985). Recoveries of ringed birds indicate that birds from Labrador, Greenland and the White Sea may reach southern Africa, but that most are from populations which breed around the Baltic and North seas (Elliott 1971; Saurola 1978; Morant *et al.* 1983; Vandewalle 1988a). These populations migrate southwards over the Atlantic Ocean; Saurola (1978) considered that Finnish Arctic Terns migrated across Sweden and Norway and passed to the west of Britain and Ireland, far out to sea.

Migration from the breeding grounds starts mainly in September with peak passage past southern Africa October–December (Saurola 1978). Most probably continue southwards far offshore, migrating on to Antarctic waters, mainly to the edge of the pack-ice, either directly southwards, or drift eastwards with prevailing westerly winds. An adult ringed on Saltholm Island, near Copenhagen, Denmark, in May 1958 must have rounded southern Africa before being recovered on the pack-ice off Wilkes Land, Antarctica (65°S 111°E), in February 1959 (Salomonsen 1967). The Arctic Tern is the only species breeding in the Palearctic with the status of passage migrant in southern Africa.

Westerly winds carry some migrating birds inshore, and these may then move eastwards along the southern coast of Africa. Atlas records show that Arctic Terns occur along the entire coast of southern Africa. Most records are from the Atlantic Ocean shore with peak occurrence along the northern coast of Namibia October–November. Possibly this is because young birds, exhausted by their flight past West Africa, come inshore here.

Northward migration of freshly moulted adults is directly via the mid-Atlantic Ocean, and few are then recorded along southern African shores, arriving on the breeding grounds in late May (Salomonsen 1967; Saurola 1978). Some occur along southern African coasts during the austral winter but are seldom reported owing to lack of differentiation between this species and Common Tern *S. hirundo*.

Although 19% of 307 recoveries of ‘Commic’ terns along southern African shores were Arctic Terns (SAFRING), and



Recorded in 110 grid cells, 2.4%
 Total number of records: 1035
 Mean reporting rate for range: 4.7%

although 13% of 403 dead ‘Commic’ terns during beach patrols between 1978 and 1985 were Arctic Terns (Avery 1989 and references therein), the overwhelming majority of birds in inshore flocks of ‘Commic’ terns are Common Terns. For example, of 2395 Common and Arctic Terns ringed in Algoa Bay (3325DC), 1.6% were Arctic Terns (A.J. Tree *in litt.*). The Arctic Tern is primarily an offshore species; the higher proportion of dead than alive Arctic Terns suggests that inshore occurrence must relate mainly to sick or exhausted individuals.

Arctic Terns rarely occur inland in southern Africa (none were reported during the atlas period) and probably do so only as a result of being caught up in storms. Nevertheless, there are possibly more inland records than of any other marine tern species (Rudebeck 1956; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

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