

FURTHER RECORDS OF ELEGANT TERNS *STERNA ELEGANS* IN COLOMBIA AND THEIR GEOGRAPHIC SOURCE

Nuevos registros del Gaviotín Elegante *Sterna elegans* en Colombia y su origen geográfico

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ABSTRACT

The recovery of three Elegant Terns banded in southern California adds to the number of confirmed records for the country and indicates a southern California colony of origin for some of these terns wintering or migrating through Colombia.

Key words: Colombia, Elegant Tern, migration, overwintering, *Sterna elegans*

RESUMEN

La recuperación de tres ejemplares de *Sterna elegans* anilladas en el Sur de California se suma al número de registros confirmados para la especie en Colombia e indica que algunas de estas aves invernantes en Colombia o de paso en el país, provienen de una colonia del sur de California.

Palabras claves: Colombia, Gaviotín Elegante, invernada, migración, *Sterna elegans*

The Elegant Tern (*Sterna elegans*) is widely distributed on the Pacific coast of the Americas from British Columbia to Chile (Anonymous 1998, Burness et al. 1999). Despite this broad range, breeding is currently restricted to five breeding colonies, two in the northern Gulf of California, Mexico, and three in coastal southern California (Collins et al. 1991, Burness et al. 1999). In winter and during migration these terns occur from Nayarit, Mexico to central Chile. During migration they may occur offshore as well as along the coast (Ridgely & Gwynne 1989, Collins 2006).

In Colombia, Elegant Terns have been infrequently observed along the Pacific coast (Hilty & Brown 1986, Downing 2005). Four specimens confirming their occurrence were collected during the winter in Parque Nacional Natural Isla de Gorgona between 1988 and 1992 (Naranjo & Franke 1997). The recovery in Colombia of three Elegant Terns banded in southern California provides additional records of this species' occurrence and their source.

All three of these Elegant Terns were banded as pre-flying chicks with numbered aluminum bands issued by the USGS Bird Banding Laboratory. They were all banded in the breeding colony at Bolsa Chica State Ecological Reserve in coastal Orange County, California. Two of these terns (1043-96323 and 1453-81700) were banded on 8 July 1995

and recovered in Nariño in December 1996 (exact locality and date not specified on the band return form; I have been unable to contact the person who reported the bands); both were reported as having been found dead. The third Elegant Tern (1243-83083) was found near Isla Malpelo on 14 May 1998 (exact site not recorded on the recovery form). The first two terns were recovered at a time of the year when they should have been on their wintering grounds. The third tern was recovered well offshore on a date which is very late in the period of northward migration and when most adults are on the breeding grounds. This individual was banded on 23 May 1997. Some yearling pre-breeders have been reported in Central America well south of the breeding grounds (Stiles & Skutch 1989, Howell & Webb 1995, Collins 2006) during the breeding season. This may explain its presence so far south on this date.

Only four out of 21 banded Elegant Terns recovered south of their southern California breeding grounds were in South America, including these three in Colombia and one in Chile (Collins 2006). The bulk of the recoveries were from Mexico to Costa Rica with 7 from El Salvador (Collins 2006). This suggests that most of the Elegant Terns breeding in southern California overwinter in coastal Central America with only a few continuing on to South America. Other Elegant Terns wintering in Peru and Chile may be coming from the large

colony on Isla Rasa in the Gulf of California where more than 95% of the species' current population breeds (Burness et al. 1999). Further recoveries of banded birds in the years to come may clarify colony-specific patterns of migration and wintering areas of Elegant Terns in both Central and South America.

The Elegant Terns were banded at Bolsa Chica under master banding permit 08707 and protocol 154 approved by the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee, California State University, Long Beach. I am grateful to Alexander Belalcázar and Jorge Rodríguez for reporting the bands on which this account is based.

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