

## Bird Note

# The occurrence of White-fronted Tern, *Sterna striata*, in the South East of South Australia

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This note reports on observations of the White-fronted Tern, *Sterna striata*, in the South East of South Australia and updates the reports of Cox (1977) and Cox and May (1977). Included in this note are records of the species in relatively large numbers in the Port MacDonnell area during 2016.

### OBSERVATIONS IN PORT MACDONNELL AREA, 2016

#### 3 August 2016

Maureen Christie (MC) and others observed a flock of terns, about 30 of which were actively feeding and six of which were roosting on rocks at the outlet of Hammond Drain. The terns were described as medium-sized birds with black bills. Photographs of the roosting birds were taken; however the quality was unfortunately not of a high standard. The photographs were sent to Danny Rogers for clarification of the species. His

opinion was that the species involved was White-fronted Tern (pers. comm.).

#### 14 August 2016

40+ White-fronted Tern were seen flying west near the western end of the Port MacDonnell boat harbour breakwater by Jeff Campbell (JC). It was noted that the White-fronted Tern were invariably flying out over the water whereas around 200 Greater Crested Tern, *Thalasseus bergii*, flying with them were flying over the shoreline.

#### 20 August 2016

There were at least 60 White-fronted Tern and 200 Greater Crested Tern on the asphalt-paved carpark of the Port MacDonnell boat ramp. The birds were constantly taking off in small numbers to the west of the carpark whilst others were landing from the east. The birds were observed by JC as well as Sarah and Michael Campbell.



Figure 1. Mixed flock of White-fronted Tern and Greater Crested Tern at Stony Point, South East, South Australia, 4 September 2016  
Image Bob Green



**Figure 2. Immature White-fronted Tern at Stony Point, South East, South Australia, 4 September 2016** Image Bob Green



**Figure 4. Immature White-fronted Tern at Port MacDonnell breakwater, South East, South Australia, 4 September 2016** Image Bob Green



**Figure 3. Adult White-fronted Tern in breeding and non-breeding plumage (with Greater Crested Tern on far left), at Port MacDonnell breakwater, South East, South Australia, 4 September 2016** Image Bob Green

#### 4 September 2016

Bob Green (BG) observed 25 White-fronted Tern roosting and in flight around the reef at Stony Point, 6 km east of Port MacDonnell, with a mixture of adults in breeding and non-breeding plumage as well as immature birds (see Figures 1 and 2). Shortly afterwards, on the same day, BG observed a number of White-fronted Tern roosting on the breakwater in Port MacDonnell amongst a large number of Greater Crested Tern. An estimate of 50+ White-fronted Tern was made but was likely much higher as this count could only be done on approximately the first third of the total tern roosting flock, which extended for many hundreds of metres along the breakwater; some of the closer birds could be photographed (see Figures 3 and 4).

#### DISCUSSION

The population of White-fronted Tern that breeds in Australia (in Bass Strait) is listed as Near Threatened D1, while the population visiting Australia from New Zealand is listed as Least Concern (Garnett, Szabo and Dutson 2011). The species was said to be uncommon, almost non-existent, on Kangaroo Island until 2006 when 263 birds were seen (Baxter 2015), possibly the largest flock ever recorded in South Australia. Later sightings at the same locality include 61 in 2007 and 33 in 2011 (Baxter 2015). It is strangely not listed for the Fleurieu Peninsula by Gower (2013), as occurrences are listed for Parson's Head (southern Fleurieu Peninsula) by Cox (1977). The species was regarded as probably accidental in South Australia in the now rather out of date systematic list in Condon (1968), and Cox (1977) suggested that records indicate the species to be an occasional rather than an accidental visitor.

Records for the Lower South East of South Australia from 1977 to the present are shown in Table 1. The White-fronted Tern is more often encountered at sea (Higgins and Davies 1996) than on land and it is probable that most of these birds are from the huge New Zealand population rather than the small population which breeds in Bass Strait (Danny Rogers pers. comm.).

Further to Cox (1977) we suggest that the species is most likely a regular visitor to the coastline

**Table 1. Records of occurrence of White-fronted Tern in South East South Australia. BG= Bob Green, JC= Jeff Campbell, MC= Maureen Christie, MJC= Michael Campbell, SC= Sarah Campbell.**

Date	Location	Number	Comments	Observer
30/4/77	Nora Creina	3		I. May
21/5/77	McIntyres Beach, Canunda	1		J. Eckert
25/10/77	Penguin Island	38		J. Cox
3/5/96	Pelagic off Robe	3		J. Hatch
9/5/96	Pelagic off Port MacDonnell	1		C. Rogers & others (pelagic trip)
5/6/05	Cape Douglas	1		C. Rogers
21/6/05	Nora Creina	1		MC & others
30/4/06	Port MacDonnell Jetty	2		BG
14/9/08	Pelican Point, Carpenter Rocks	1		BG
31/5/09	Pelagic off Port MacDonnell	3		C. Rogers & others (pelagic trip)
4/10/09	Pelagic off Port MacDonnell	3		C. Rogers & others (pelagic trip)
11/10/09	Pelagic off Port MacDonnell	13		C. Rogers & others (pelagic trip)
31/10/09	Port MacDonnell, W of breakwater	1		P. & R. Barrand, C. Connelly
23/5/10	Pelagic off Port MacDonnell	2		C. Rogers & others (pelagic trip)
2/10/10	Port MacDonnell breakwater	1		K. Stracey
10/10/10	Port MacDonnell breakwater	2		C. Rogers & others
18/5/12	French Point, Port MacDonnell	2		J. Berggy
21/8/12	Pelican Point, Carpenter Rocks	4		Friends of Shorebirds SE
11/5/13	Port MacDonnell breakwater	45		C. Rogers & others (pelagic trip)
29/5/16	Pelagic off Port MacDonnell	2		B. Haywood & others (pelagic trip)
3/8/16	Hammond Drain, Port MacDonnell	30+	Few roosting, others feeding	MC & others
14/8/16	Port MacDonnell W of breakwater	40+	Flying past	JC
20/8/16	Port MacDonnell boat ramp carpark	60+	On tarmac with Greater Crested Terns	JC/SC/MJC
28/8/16	Stony Point	12	On rocks	BG
4/9/16	Stony Point	25	On reef	BG
4/9/16	Port MacDonnell breakwater	50+	Roosting on breakwater	BG

**Table 1 continued**

Date	Location	Number	Comments	Observer
24/10/16	Port MacDonnell breakwater	12	Several showing pink breeding flush on breast	S. Hull & C. Rogers
6/8/18	Beachport breakwater	10		S. Hull & C. Rogers
7/8/18	Port MacDonnell, rainwater pond on grass near boat ramp	10+	Photographed	S. Hull, N. Cheshire, C. Rogers, P. Koch
21/10/18	8 Mile Creek	1	Feeding with Greater Crested Terns, White-fronted Tern further out	JC
29/7/19	Pelagic off Port MacDonnell	1		S. Hull & others (pelagic trip)
25/8/19	Pelagic off Port MacDonnell	6		S. Hull & others (pelagic trip)

**Table 2. White-fronted Tern records September 2003 – September 2019 from Port MacDonnell pelagic seabird boat trips. The table reflects the number of occurrences of White-fronted Tern, not the number of birds.**

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
0	0	0	4	10	3	3	1	1	5	0	0

of the South East of South Australia. Records sourced from a pelagic table, posted on the 'Port MacDonnell Seabirds and Pelagics – South Australia' Facebook page by Sue Harper on 3 October 2019 (Table 2) show the White-fronted Tern to be a winter visitor to the offshore region around Port MacDonnell. It is also noted that the non-Port MacDonnell pelagic records in Table 1 likewise fall within the same April to October period as those shown in Table 2.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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