

SPECIES PROFILE

Arctic Tern

Sterna paradisaea

Federal Listing: Not listed

State Listing: Threatened

Global Rank: G5

State Rank: SNA

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ELEMENT 1: DISTRIBUTION AND HABITAT

1.1 Habitat Description

Arctic terns inhabit rocky coastal islands, coastal beaches, and marshes with ample supplies of fish and crustaceans (Gavutis 1994, Kress and Hall 2004). They breed in rocky, gravelly islands, barrier beaches, gravel bars, and occasionally in marshes and bogs (Hatch 2002). When nesting among other tern species, Arctic terns nest in open ground with little or no vegetation and when nesting with members of the same species, Arctic terns nest in low vegetation (Hatch 2002, Kress and Hall 2004). Arctic terns forage in waters up to 20 km away from breeding colonies where their prey is driven to the surface by predatory marine mammals and fishes, as well as in rocky shores, bays, and tidal flats (Hatch 2002). In winter, Arctic terns inhabit pack ice in open water and near-shore icebergs in the Antarctic Region, feeding in the channels between ice floes and along the edges of pack ice (Hatch 2002).

1.2 Justification

Arctic terns were once frequent nesters on the Isles of Shoals, but the species drastically declined due to an increased demand for tern feathers for the millinery trade in the 1900s and the displacement from preferred nesting habitats by gulls (Kress and Hall 2004). The primary threats to Arctic terns are competition for nesting sites and predation and displacement by

gulls (Hatch 2002). This species is of high conservation concern under the North American Waterbird Conservation Plan and Bird Conservation Region 14 (Kushlan et al. 2002).

3.3 Protection and Regulatory Status

The Arctic tern is listed as threatened in New Hampshire and is protected under RSA 212 and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

1.4 Population and Habitat Distribution

In North America, the breeding range of Arctic terns extends from the Canadian Arctic down the eastern coastline to Massachusetts. The Gulf of Maine, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and the Gulf of St. Lawrence are significant breeding areas (Kress and Hall 2004). Populations of Arctic terns in Bird Conservation Region 14 are estimated at 19,000. In New Hampshire, Arctic terns historically nested on the Isles of Shoals, Seabrook Beach, and several islands in Portsmouth Harbor and Little and Great Bays (Gavutis 1994, Kress and Hall 2004, New Hampshire Bird Records). Since intense gull control was initiated in 1997 on Seavey Island in the Isles of Shoals, Arctic terns have increased. The first pair returned and nested in 2002 and 14 pairs have now nested on the island (New Hampshire Fish and Game (NHFG), unpublished data).

1.5 Town Distribution Map

Not completed for this species.

1.6 Habitat Map

1.7 Sources of Information

Sources of information include the Breeding Bird Atlas of New Hampshire, Birds of North America, Tern Restoration Handbook, New Hampshire Bird Records, and NHFG and New Hampshire Audubon annual field surveys and reports.

1.8 Extent and Quality of Data

Arctic tern distribution and habitat use are well known in New Hampshire through annual surveys and historical reports. Little is known regarding wintering habitat.

1.9 Distribution Research

Continue to restore Arctic tern populations and monitor productivity on Seavey Island. Continue studying foraging, researching migration routes, and identifying winter habitats and their use.

ELEMENT 5: REFERENCES

5.1 Literature

- Gavutis, G. W. 1994. Arctic tern. Pages 378-379 *in* C. R Foss, editor. Breeding bird atlas of New Hampshire. Arcadia, Dover, New Hampshire, USA.
- Hatch, J. J. 2002. Arctic tern (*Sterna paradisaea*). *In* A. Poole and F. Gill, editors. The Birds of North America, No 707. The Birds of North America, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA.
- Kress, S. W. and C. S. Hall. 2004. Tern management handbook: Coastal Northeastern United States and Atlantic Canada. National Audubon Society. Ithaca, New York, USA.

5.2 Data Sources

New Hampshire Bird Records. New Hampshire Audubon, Concord, New Hampshire, USA.