

Queensland TERNS - an identification comparison table

Terns in their many different plumages can be difficult to identify & this table only attempts to provide some of the major identification features.

At almost no time does plumage stay the same for more than a few weeks !

Revised 7/3/2004

FIELD GUIDES																	Found
SSS Page	S&D No.	S&D No.	P&K Page	Mor' Page	length cm		Species	Breeding				Non-breeding	Tail	Some other features	Inland		
								Bill	Legs	Head	Other						
142	299	271	236	150	20	28	Little	Yellow Black tip	Yellow	Cap-black	Forehead-white	Beak, legs & nape-black. Carpal bar-dark		Similar to Fairy Tern ! see below.			
142	288	260	228	152	20	23	White-winged Black	Red	Reddish Black	Black	Body-black	Beak-black. Legs-variable (grey in summer) Head-patchy black	Stubby appearance in flight	Flight erratic, often dipping to surface <i>Non-breeding birds mainly seen in Aust.</i>	yes		
142	287	259	228	152	23	25	Whiskered (was Marsh)	Red	Red	Cap-black	Cheeks-white	Nape & beak-black	Slightly forked	Head-large.	yes		
142	296	268	232	148	30	32	Black-naped	Black	Black	White	Eye stripe	Same as breeding plumage	Deeply forked	Very pale on the wing.			
148	298	270	238	154	30	32	Bridled	Black	Black	Cap-black	Back-brown.	Back & wings-scalloped	Forked, adults have streamers	Eyebrow-white. Compare with Sooty			
144/6	294	266	232	148	31	38	Roseate	Red	Red	Cap-black		Beak & nape-black.	Forked, & longer than folded wings	<i>Exception: Northern Hemisphere birds when here are moulting and tail often shorter than wing</i>			
								<i>For a short period both Bill & Legs are Black and cap is fully reeded.</i>									
144/6	292	264	234	150	32	37	Common	Red + Black tip	Dark Red	Cap-black	Cheeks-white	Beak & legs-black. Nape-smudgy black. Carpal bar-dark	Deeply forked	<i>Non-breeding birds mainly seen in Aust.</i> To differentiate from Common listen for voice Common emits a pronounced 'kreeek'			
148	297	269	238	154	33	36	Sooty	Black	Black	Cap-black	Back-black	Belly & forehead-white	Forked, adults have streamers	Different call to the similar Bridled			
140	291	263	230	146	36	42	Gull-Billed	Black	Black	Cap-black		Eye-shadow	Shallow forked	Legs-longish. Very pale tern	yes		
148	303	275	238	154	37	41	Common Noddy	Black	Black	White	Body-brownish						
140	302	274	230	146	38	43	Lesser Crested	Orange	Black	Cap-black		Nape-smudgy black.	Forked				
140	301	273	230	146	43	48	Crested	Yellow	Black	Cap-black		Nape-smudgy black.	Forked				
140	290	262	230	146	48	54	Caspian	Red	Black	Cap-black		Nape-black		Beak-black tipped	yes		
Ed'n Rev'd	Ed'n 3 & 4	Ed'n 5 & 6															
Fairy vs Little Tern Shorter legged/ Front on-rather bull-chested/ Outer primaries-paler grey/ Little T-When wing folded-dark line along lower wing edge																	

Field Guides	
SSS	= Slater, Slater & Slater
S&D	= Simpson & Day
P&K	= Pizzey & Knight
Mor'	= Morcombe

Glossary	
Carpal	= bend in the wing = the 'wrist'
Nape	= back of the bird's head

Notes	
1	Lengths obtained from Hanzab & Morcombe
2	Hanzab & Morcombe length sizes for Sooty & Bridled Terns are about 10cm less than shown in SSS, S & D, P & K

I thank Jill Dening & Paul O'Neill for their comments and encouragement.
Any errors or omissions are mine.

Monographs	
The handbook of Australian Sea-birds, D.L.Serventy, Vincent Serventy, John Warham, Reed, 1971, ISBN 0-589-07079-7	
A Field Guide to the Seabirds of Australia & the World, G.S.Tuck, H.Heinzel, with D.L.Serventy, Collins, 1980, ISBN 0-00-219720-0	
Seabirds of the World, Eric Hosking and Ronald Lockley, Croom Helm UK, 1983. Facts on File, USA, 1984, ISBN 0-87196-249-7	
Seabirds, an identification guide, Peter Harrison, Christopher Helm, Rev'd 1985, ISBN 0-7136-3510-X	
The Shorebirds of Australia, John D. Pringle, The National Photo Index of Australian Wildlife, A & R, 1987, ISBN 0 207-15348-3	
Terns of Europe and North America, Olsen & Larsson, Christopher Helm, 1995 and Princeton University Press, 1995, ISBN 0-7136-4056-1 (p117,123)	
Hanzab', Vol 3, Snipe to Pigeons, P.J.Higgins, S.J.J.F.Davies (Eds) OUP, 1996, ISBN 0-19-553070-5 (p738, 753)	
Photographic Handbook of the The Seabirds of the World, Jim Enticott and David Tipling, New Holland, 1997, ISBN 1-85368-945-9	

Other Sources	
The Australian Birdwatcher, Vol. 5, No. 4, 1974, March, p 103-111, "Some Tern Observations in North Queensland", R.A.Noske	
Atlas Newsletter, No.11, Sept 1979, p 3 & 4, Identification of Four Medium-sized Terns, Common/Arctic/White-fronted/Roseate, Carter, Corben, Curry	
The Slater Field Guide, 1986, p 144-5 provides some pointers to identify the 'Commic' Terns	
Wingspan, No.16, December 1994, p 16-19, "The Commic Terns" (Identification of 4 medium-sized Terns - Common, Arctic, White-fronted & Roseate)	
largely the work of Mike Carter, Chris Corben & Peter Curry and collated by Simon Bennett	

Recipients of this Guide are requested to support the **Royal Flying Doctor Service**, PO Box 744, Mount Isa, Qld, 4825.

Please advise errors/improvements to **Bob Forsyth**, PO Box 933, Mount Isa, Qld, 4825, tel (07) 4743-3210, Email: isabirdo@austarnet.com.au
Other Identification Tables are available from <http://birdsqueensland.org.au/>