

**From:** azfo@azfo.org  
**Subject:** ABC Report of Arctic Tern observed on 01\_June\_2009 by Paul Lehman  
**Date:** June 6, 2009 at 12:32 PM  
**To:** kurtrad@mexicobirding.com, drbrdr@worldnet.att.net, ghrosenberg@comcast.net  
**Cc:** lehman.paul@verizon.net

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## Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*)

**Date observed:** 01 June 2009  
**Initial observer(s):** Paul Lehman, 11192 Portobelo Drive, San Diego, CA 92124  
**Exact location:** north end Lake Havasu, in both AZ and CA waters  
**County:** Mohave  
**City:** Lake Havasu City  
**Elevation:**

**Submitted by:** Paul Lehman.

**Number observed:** 1  
**Age:** one-year-old  
**Sex:** unknown

**Time observed:** 5:40-6:20 AM  
**Duration of observation:** actual 30 minutes  
**Minimum distance from bird:** 75 yards to infinity, usually 100-150 yards  
**Optics used:** 32X Leica scope  
**Position of sun:** excellent light--early-morning sun behind me  
**Habitat:** open waters of upper end of Lake Havasu

**Others who observed this bird:** none  
**Anyone known to disagree:** N/A

**Was the bird identified before consulting any guides:** yes  
**Identification guides used:** none  
**Were notes taken before or after the observation:** After  
**How well was the bird seen:** Very Well

### Detailed description:

ARCTIC TERN north end Lake Havasu, AZ and CA 1 June 2009 Paul Lehman At around 5:40AM on 1 June 2009 I was conducting a 'seawatch' at the north end of Lake Havasu when I spied a *Sterna* tern flying north over the open lake, coming in my general direction. I fairly quickly determined that it was a one-year-old Forster's Tern, with a black patch through the eye and a somewhat paler, dusky wash continuing around the nape, and with dark outer primaries that were somewhat worn. It wasn't long before I realized there was a second *Sterna* trailing behind the Forster's, and it was immediately apparent that it was much more interesting looking! It was smaller bodied, paler gray on the primaries, narrower winged at the base, looked in fresh plumage, and had a deeper, even, rowing-like wing-stroke. Also quickly apparent was its white forehead and black extending through the eye and around the back of the head—all the same blackish color. This bird was clearly either a one-year-old Common or Arctic Tern, and it didn't take long until I was certain it was an Arctic. Identification as an Arctic was based on: --smaller body size but approximately same overall length as the Forster's, with narrower-based wings, and deeper, even-paced, rowing-like flight style, especially when the bird decided to cover ground more quickly (accelerations were quick) --bill was clearly smaller/shorter than the Forster's bill, and appeared entirely dark --head was smaller and rounder than the Forster's head, and the neck was fairly short; in contrast, the part of the body behind the wings looked rather long and attenuated, thus there was more body behind the wings than in front. While the tail section looked longish, the bird did not actually have long tail points shown by an adult. --on the upperwing the distal part of the secondaries were clearly whitish, which then blended in to a very pale pearly gray remainder of the secondaries, inner primaries, and coverts, which in turn smoothly blended in to a very slightly darker (though still pale-ish to medium) gray on the outer primaries. The outer primaries were every bit as fresh looking as the rest of the wing (same generation of feathers), and they were not particularly dark. The leading edge of the inner wing was barely darker than the coverts, and, again, there was a smooth transition; thus there was no obvious, well-defined, dark carpal bar, although that part of the wing was arguably the darkest (barely). --the underwing was markedly whitish, sometimes glissening in the early-morning sun, and the only dark was a very thin, sharp blackish trailing edge to the primaries. The dark was not broad and not blurry; in fact, it was so thin that at times it was difficult to see. I watched the Arctic and the Forster's flying around the upper end of the lake back and forth for about ten minutes. The Arctic fed by swooping down to the surface and picking unknown items off the surface—much like a Black Tern does—rather than plunging in to the water. At this point both birds flew north to where the lake narrows down to just a wide river full of cattails and disappeared. I thought they had migrated north. But 10 minutes later the Arctic Tern came flying back south and again started flying back and forth out in front of me, feeding, and clearly occurring in both Arizona and California airspace (as it had before). It remained for almost another 20 minutes—during which time I attempted to video the bird but always at too great a distance to show much on the tape. I will include a copy, nonetheless. After these 20 minutes it proceeded to head south down over the middle of the open, main lake. I thought I might be able to re-locate it later on off Pittsburgh Point or perhaps standing with the gulls on the Rotary Park beach, but no such luck. I also looked for the bird again that evening and early the following morning back at the north end, but it did not reappear. June is one of the better months for Arctic Tern in the interior West and Great Plains, although I was somewhat surprised that this bird was a one-year-old rather than an adult on the relatively early (for an Arctic!) date of 1 June. I would have more expected a one-year-old in latter June or even July. But there are, in fact, two early June records of one-year-old Arctics at the Salton Sea, for example—on 2 June 1993 and 9 June 1990 (as well as one on 14 July 1990).

**Vocalizations:**

none heard

**Behavior:**

always flying around the lake, including a number of swoops down to the surface to pick up presumed prey items from the surface

**What similar species were considered and why were they eliminated:**

Forster's Tern: see above details Common Tern: eliminated by equally fresh, same-generation outer primaries that were a pale-to-medium gray (one-year-old Commons have darker outer primaries that are retained juvenal feathers and thus more worn looking); by the whitish distal secondaries (darker in Common); by the very thin, sharp trailing edge to primaries on underwing (broader and blurrier in Common); and by the short neck and longer rump/tail region for clearly more body behind the wing than in front.

**Experience with species:**

Have seen several thousand Arctic Terns, but mostly adults, and a good number (100+) of juveniles. Probably have seen only about 10 one-year-olds.

**Experience with similar species:**

Have seen zillions of Forster's and Commons of all ages.

**Was the bird photographed: yes**

**Submitter name:** Paul Lehman

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**Date and time submitted:** 6/6/2009 3:32:16 PM

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Url:[http://www.azfo.org/ArizonaBirdReview/SubmittedHtml/ARTE\\_Lake\\_Havasu\\_City\\_Lehman\\_01\\_June\\_2009.html](http://www.azfo.org/ArizonaBirdReview/SubmittedHtml/ARTE_Lake_Havasu_City_Lehman_01_June_2009.html)