

The Wilson Journal of Ornithology 125(4):844–846, 2013

First Breeding Record of the White Tern, *Gygis alba*, in México

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ABSTRACT.—We report the first breeding record of the White Tern (*Gygis alba*) in México. We also provide notes on parental behavior of this species on Socorro Island, Revillagigedo Archipelago, México. We observed two adults feeding one nestling during the summer of 2012 at a nest located on the naval base on Socorro Island. The White Tern is considered a vagrant species in the Revillagigedo Archipelago. Although a breeding colony was mistakenly reported earlier, our report positively confirms for the first time the breeding status of this species in México. *Received 8 May 2013. Accepted 23 August 2013.*

Key words: breeding range, *Gygis alba*, Revillagigedo Archipelago, Socorro Island, White Tern.

The White Tern (*Gygis alba*) is widely distributed across tropical oceans (Harrison 1983). The majority of breeding colonies in the Pacific Ocean are found to the west, on Norfolk, Kermadec, Laysan, Marquesas, Hawaii and other South Pacific islands (e.g., Harrison 1983, Niethammer and Patrick 1998, Vanderwerf 2003). In the eastern Pacific Ocean, there are breeding colonies reported on Malpelo (Pitman et al. 1995) and Sala y Gómez (Vilina and Gazitua

1999) islands. In Central America, the known breeding range for the species is limited to Clipperton and Cocos islands. Clipperton is the closest breeding colony to Socorro Island (945 km); White Terns are potential casual visitors to coastal areas along tropical Central America and South America (Gifford 1913, Stager 1964, AOU 1998, Niethammer and Patrick 1998).

The species is considered vagrant on Socorro Island, México (Howell and Webb 1995). Gifford (1913) observed and collected one adult male at Roca O'Neil, México on 27 July 1905; the individual had fresh plumage indicating that molt was coming to an end. Based on this record, Friedmann et al. (1950) conjectured that a breeding colony was present at Roca O'Neil. Subsequent observers failed to find a breeding colony, and there were no further reports of the species in that area (Brattstrom and Howell 1956, Jehl and Parkes 1982, Howell and Webb 1990, Santaella and Sada 1991, Wehtje et al. 1993).

The breeding biology of the species is well documented. Breeding pairs lay one egg and in cases where two eggs have been recorded, often one of them is addled (Stager 1964). Eggs are laid directly on rock or tree ledges and there is no evidence of nest construction (Marshall 1949). On average, incubation takes about 36 days, fledgling about 43 days, post-fledgling about 70 days; the overall breeding effort is around 5 months

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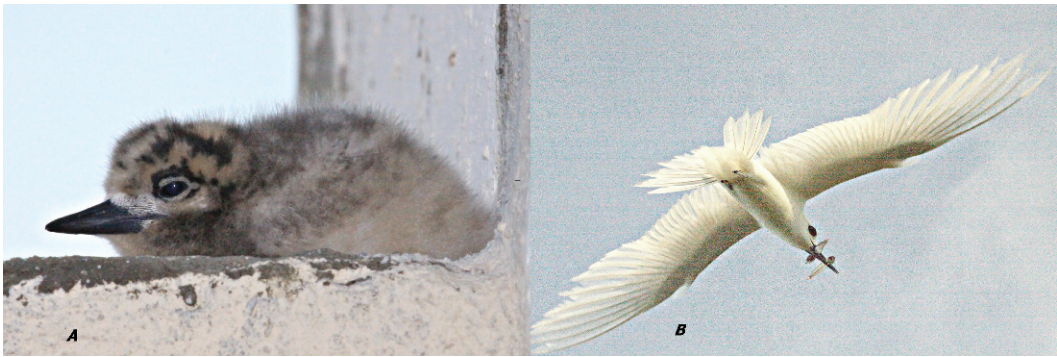


FIG. 1. White Tern (*Gygis alba*) at the naval base on Socorro Island, Revillagigedo Archipelago, México. (A) White Tern nestling on a wall at the naval base. (B) White Tern adult carrying small fish in its beak. (Photographs by JEMG).

(Ashmole 1968, Marks and Hendricks 1989, Niethammer et al. 1992, Vanderwerf 2003).

On 10 August 2012, we observed a White Tern flying above the naval base on Socorro Island and found a chick sitting on the concrete wall of a building on 14 August 2012 (Fig. 1A); the adult scolded us as we approached the chick. During 15–17 August, the chick moved along the wall during the day to avoid sun exposure. On 18–19 August 2012, both adults perched near the chick during the day on the piping of a water vat. In the evening, the two adults arrived at the naval base and perched on the flag mast to spend the night; they brought small fish in their beaks but did not deliver any food to their chick those nights (Fig. 1B). On 20 August 2012, both adults fed the chick during the morning. We left the island that afternoon and were not able to continue our observations. We later received comments from naval personnel indicating that the birds were seen until December 2012. This indicates that the chick was about 15–25 days old when we made our observations, and the egg was probably laid in late June. Our observations confirm the breeding status of the White Tern in México on the same island where the species was first collected in México (Gifford 1913). This constitutes the first verifiable record of breeding White Terns on Socorro Island.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to express our gratitude to the Mexican Navy for their continuous and generous support throughout the years. In particular to the hospitality offered by the personnel stationed at Socorro Island. Financial support was provided by the Island Endemics Foundation, Instituto de Ecología, A. C. (INECOL), and Endémicos Insulares,

A. C. We are grateful to the comments provided by two anonymous reviewers and D. Mulcahy. This work was authorized by permits SGPA/DGVS/11040/12 (SEMARNAT) granted to JEMG.

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