

## SHORT NOTE

### A possible record of black-fronted tern *Sterna albostrata* from Norfolk Island

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During recent research into the birds of the South-west Pacific, I came across a hitherto overlooked reference to a specimen of black-fronted tern *Sterna albostrata* collected on Norfolk Island. Saunders (in Saunders & Salvin 1896) refers to an adult skin of this species collected on Norfolk Island and presented in his collection to the British Museum (Natural History).

Michael Walters has been able to confirm for me that this specimen is still in the Natural History Museum at Tring and was correctly identified as a black-fronted tern. The bird is part of the Howard Saunders collection of gulls and terns registered in 1894 as a single lot (1894.10.28.1-496), but registration numbers were not assigned to individual specimens. The only details on Saunders's own label are the locality, followed by the words "new loc" and Saunders's catalogue number 3861.

Saunders himself never travelled to the western Pacific (Anon 1908) and so the specimen must have been acquired from another collector or collection. There are two possibilities as to the collector of this bird. Dr P. Herbert Metcalfe, the Resident Medical Officer on Norfolk Island during the mid to late 1880s, collected specimens for W.M. Crowfoot and the Australian Museum (Crowfoot 1885; North 1889). Evidently, some of his specimens were acquired by Howard Saunders (Saunders & Salvin 1896: references to *Gygis candida* and *Procelsterna cinerea*). Ernest H. Saunders collected specimens on Lord Howe Island for the Australian Museum in late 1887. Although the literature on the area

suggests that E.H. Saunders collected only on Lord Howe Island, Saunders & Salvin (1896) also list specimens in the British Museum (Natural History) collected by E.H. Saunders on Norfolk Island (although intriguingly this includes a specimen of flesh-footed shearwater *Puffinus carneipes*, a species at present not known to breed on Norfolk Island). It is unclear if there was any relationship between Ernest Saunders and Howard Saunders. Ernest was the son of John Saunders, an attendant at the British Museum (Natural History) (Whittell 1954).

Black-fronted terns breed on the South Island of New Zealand and are partial migrants to the North Island (Latham 1981; Higgins & Davies 1996), and so vagrancy to areas beyond New Zealand may be possible. Such vagrancy has recently been confirmed for the partial migrant, the South Island pied oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus finschi*, now recorded as far afield as Port Vila in Vanuatu and near Ballina on the northern coast of New South Wales (Hay 1984, 1985; Totterman pers. comm.).

Although it would be easy to assert that the specimen concerned was the first record of black-fronted tern from Norfolk Island and therefore the first record beyond New Zealand, the lack of detail (such as collector and date of collection) precludes formal acceptance of the record. It only remains to alert bird watchers that black-fronted terns could possibly occur at localities to the north and west of New Zealand.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank Michael Walters for information on the specimen at Tring and help from Paul Andrew, Walter Boles, and Bo Totterman.