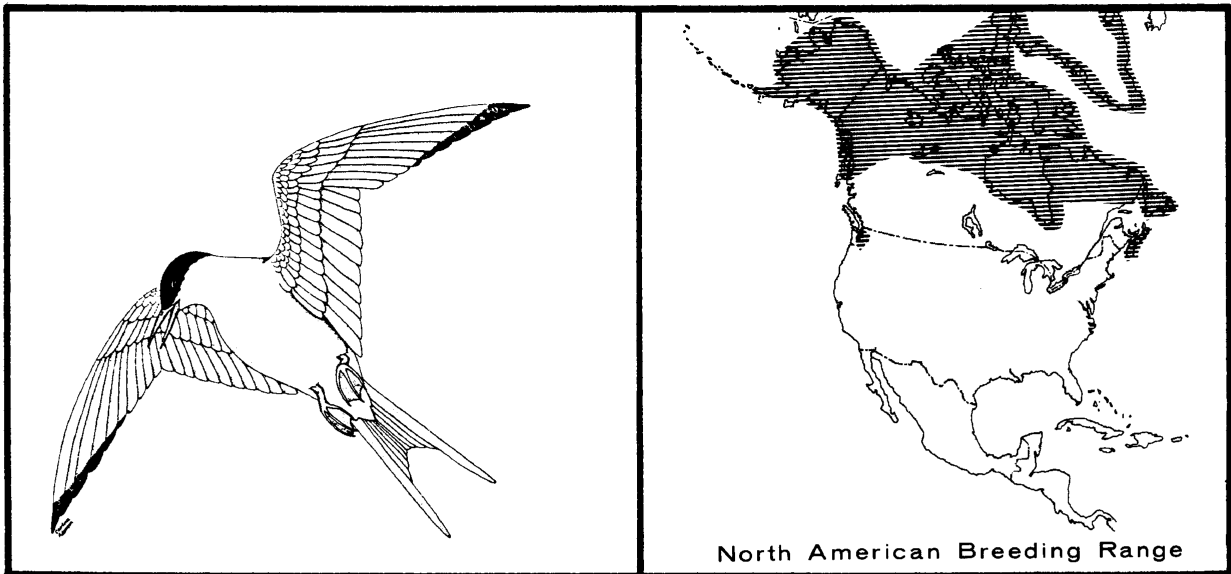


Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*)



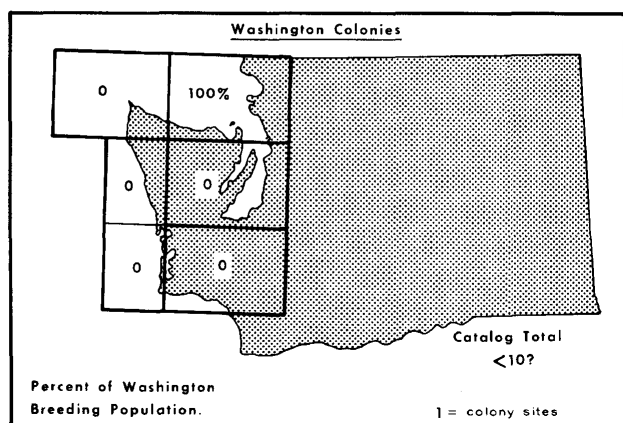
Arctic Terns generally nest in western North America in Alaska and northern Canada and migrate at sea to winter in the Southern Hemisphere. They appear on the list of birds nesting in Washington's marine habitats due to an extremely unusual nesting occurrence in 1977 and 1978 (Manuwal et al. 1979a). It appears that the species does not nest in the State at the present time.

Arctic Terns are small terns, generally gregarious in nesting habits and in foraging behavior and migration. They nest in open areas on tundra, sand and gravel shorelines, or islands, laying two eggs in a scrape. They are aggressive in nest defense and attempt to drive off suspected predators with harsh calls and diving attacks, sometimes striking vigorously.

Like other similar small terns, this species seeks its prey of small fish and planktonic organisms by searching above the sea surface, hovering and plunging to strike below the surface, and emerging quickly to take flight again. Unlike gulls, terns (even pelagic species like this one) seldom are seen resting on the water. During their migration at sea, Arctic Terns may be seen resting on floating logs and debris.

WASHINGTON COLONIES

A small group of Arctic Terns nesting at the gull colony on Jetty Island, a dredge-spoil island off Everett harbor, in 1977-1978 represented the southern-most known colony of this species in western North America (Manuwal et al. 1979a).



HISTORICAL STATUS AND VULNERABILITY

Checks of the Jetty Island colony site subsequent to 1978 (Richter, pers. comm.) have failed to find Arctic Terns there, and it is doubtful the species is

nesting in Washington presently. Whether or not Arctic Terns reoccupy this site may depend on its preservation in suitable form.

Terns are extremely vulnerable to disturbance on nest sites, and wholesale flights and colony abandonment are recorded, resulting from what might be minimal disturbance to other species like gulls. It is unknown whether disturbance from recreation caused abandonment of the one Washington colony or whether this small outlier colony, far outside the species' normal range, was simply abandoned. Because terns feed principally on small fish and other marine organisms and apparently do not shift to other foods, they are much more vulnerable to perturbations in food supply or to contamination of food webs.