

Black Tern

Chidonias niger

General Information:

-A black-bodied tern that prefer to breed and nest in the inland marshes of the Northern American Prairie country but winters at sea. It is distinguishable by its overall black breeding plumage, gray upper-parts, and dark red legs and feet. Its head and under-parts turn white in winter and prduce a strange-looking pied bird in late sumer as winter molt beings. Winter adults have a black crown with anattached ear patch, a white collar, and a dusky black side bar.

Song:

-Drawn out squeaky *ka-sheek* and abrasive *kik-kik-kik*.

Behavior:

-In summer prefers inland lakes and freshwater marshes. Hovers to spot insects. Catches insects in the air or swoops down to water or ground to pick them up with its bill. They will plunge into the water on occasions. Easts mostly large flying insects but also takes spiders, small fish, crayfish, and small mollusks.



Breeding:

-Monogamous and colonial.

Nesting:

-Incubation of 17-22 days by both sexes. Semi-precocial young leave nest after 2-3 days but remain in nearby grasses. First flight at 19-25 days, but may be fed by both sexes for up to 2 additional weeks. 1 brood per year in most regions; 2 broods per year in the South.

Population:

-Common to fairly common in the East; common in middle and western parts of its range; uncommon to rare on the West Coast.

Conservation:

-Has declined inland and on the East Coast from wetland drainage.

Shoreline Restoration Issues:

-The Black Tern will perch on trees and shrubs near the shore and will nest in the buffer zone as long as there is plenty of cover. Suitable cover can be created by planting shrubs such as Ninebark, Winterberry, and Sweet Gale along with Wool-Grass, Sweet Flag, Blue Flag Iris, and Tussock's Sedge.