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Kale, H. W., II, B. Pranty, B. M. Stith, and C. W. Biggs. 1992. The atlas of the breeding birds of Florida. Final Report. Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Tallahassee, Florida.

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Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*

The Sandwich Tern has a black bill with a yellow tip, unique among Florida terns. It breeds locally from Virginia south to Florida and west to Texas, in the Bahamas and the Antilles, and off the coast of Yucatan.

Habitat. Beaches, sandflats and bars, near inlets, and nearshore coastal waters are the chief habitats of Sandwich Terns (Kale 1978a).

Sandwich Terns feed primarily on fish and occasionally on shrimp (Howell 1932).

Younger pairs of Sandwich Terns usually lay 1 egg, while older pairs frequently lay 2 (Ehrlich et al. 1988). Eggs are creamy-white to yellowish-buff, with black, brown, and gray markings. Incubation, shared by both adults, takes 24 to 25 days. Young birds form a creche (flock) on the beach, often with young *Royal Terns*. They are capable of flight at 30 to 35 days but continue to be fed by their parents for 2 or 3 additional months (Harrison 1978).

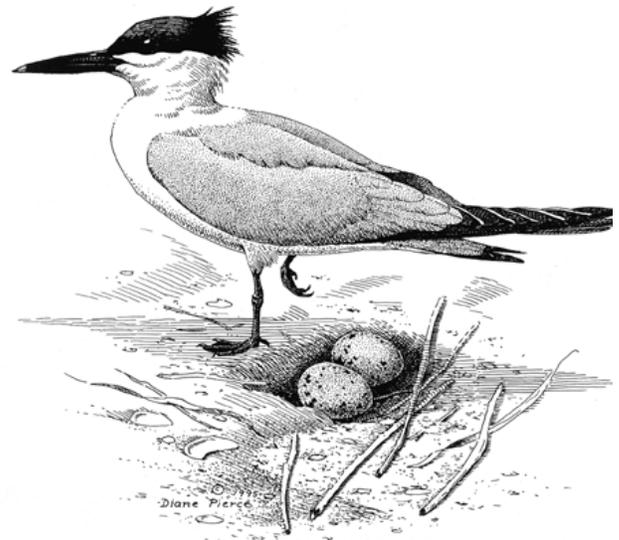


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Seasonal Occurrence. March and April mark spring migration for the Sandwich Tern, and August and September mark fall migration (Cruickshank 1980). Eggs have been found May through July.

Status. Like the *Royal Tern*, the Sandwich Tern was an established breeder on the Gulf coast of Florida up until the late nineteenth century, when all colonies disappeared (Howell 1932). The state's first twentieth century breeding record occurred in 1970, in the *Royal Tern* colony at Port St. Joe (Stevenson 1972). In 1974 the Sandwich Terns began breeding in Duval County, establishing the first Atlantic coast breeding record in Florida (Loftin and Sutton 1975). At least 2 pairs of Sandwich Terns bred in Hillsborough County in 1980 (Edscorn 1980). Because safe nesting sites are so scarce, this species is considered a Species of Special Concern by the Florida Committee on Rare and Endangered Plants and Animals (Kale 1978a).

Atlas data show that the species has continued to expand its range in the state. In 1987, 25 pairs were found nesting near Yankeetown in Citrus County (Paul 1987). The Passage Key colony at the mouth of Tampa Bay was established in 1988 with about 80 nests (Paul 1988). This colony is presently the largest in the state and contained about 200 nests in 1990 (Paul 1991). The Duval colony disappeared when the islands washed away in the late 1970s. These islands reappeared in the 1980s, and adults were observed carrying fish into the *Royal Tern* colony in 1988 (Paul 1988).

A small number of Sandwich Terns in a *Royal Tern* colony is easy to overlook. The eggs look very much alike, except for their smaller size, and the chicks are virtually identical. The *Royal Tern* colonies at Merritt Island are likely location for this species to breed.

Robert W. Loftin

Sandwich Tern

