

Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri*



Folk Name: (none)

Status: Migrant

Abundance: Rare

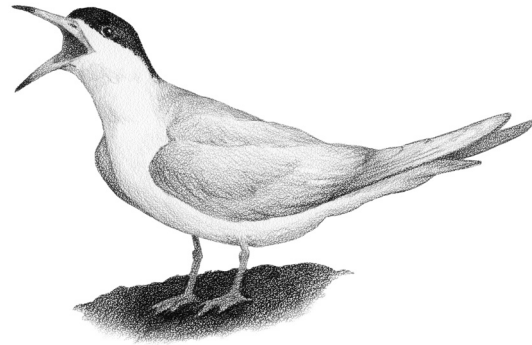
Habitat: Open water, lake edge

The Forster's Tern is a medium-sized tern that is quite similar in appearance and behavior to the Common Tern. It is just an inch bigger than a Common Tern and is almost the size of a Bonaparte's Gull. The early ornithologist Reverend Frances H. Craighill of Rocky Mount, NC, noted that these two species are hard to visually separate, even with binoculars, and that the best way to distinguish between them is by listening to the bird's call. The Forster's Tern makes a "rasping 'za-aap' instead of the harsh 'tee-arr' of the Common Tern." With a little practice, birders can learn to hear the difference.

We have relatively few records of Forster's Tern in the Central Carolinas prior to the turn of the twentieth century. Three sightings were reported after Hurricane Hugo hit the Carolinas. Allen Bryan counted a total of 200 plus near Shelby on September 22, 1989. This is by far



Forster's Tern on Lake Norman buoy. (Chris Talkington)



the highest count ever in this region. David Wright found a dozen on Lake Norman the same day and three there the following day. Eight years later, JoAnn Martin reported a Forster's Tern at Moss Lake in Cleveland County on April 18, 1997. The following year, David and Marcia Wright found seven on Lake Norman on 4 September. The second largest count of this species in the region was tallied on Lookout Shoals Lake after Hurricane Floyd hit the coast. Dwayne Martin found 150 Forster's Terns foraging along the lake.

Forster's Tern has been seen and photographed almost annually since the turn of the twenty-first century. They have been recorded on lakes and rivers scattered throughout the region. There have been four spring records between 5 April and 6 May. There have been six reports of between one and four birds showing up in winter months between 22 November and 21 February. There have been more than 20 reports during their peak flight period with migrants arriving as early as the second or third week of July and some birds lingering as late as the last week of October. The largest flocks during this period were a group of 27 birds Dwayne Martin counted on Lake Hickory "after heavy rain" on September 17, 2012, and a flock of 20 Kevin Metcalf found a few days later on Lake Norman on September 23, 2012.