

Sabine's Gull *Xema sabini*



Folk Name: Fork-tailed Gull, Xeme

Status: Migrant

Abundance: Casual

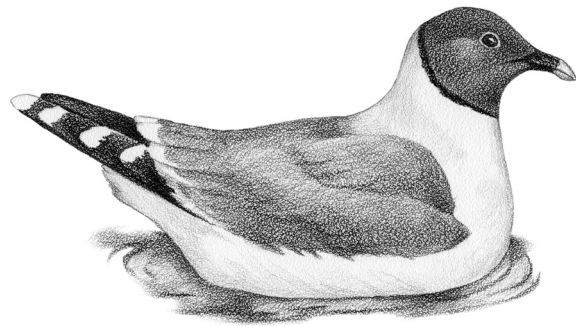
Habitat: Open water of lakes or rivers

The Sabine's Gull nests in the Arctic tundra and winters in the tropics. It is a very rare migrant in the offshore waters of the Carolinas. Most fall migrants are reported in September and October. Spring migrants are generally seen in May. This gull has only been confirmed three times in South Carolina (1985, 1992, and 2013), and each sighting was during the month of September. Before 1990, there had been 10 sightings in North Carolina. Since 1990, there have been about 30 sightings in the state. Nine of these were inland records with seven seen in the Piedmont and two reported from the mountains. Amazingly, five of the seven Piedmont records are of birds found along the Catawba River corridor, here in the Central Carolinas.

The first Sabine's Gull recorded here was a first-year bird sighted by David and Marcia Wright while they were boating on Lake Norman in Mecklenburg County on September 4, 1995. This sighting was the second inland record of Sabine's Gull in the Carolinas. The Wrights were able to both videotape and photograph the bird, and it was relocated the following day by several additional



Sabine's Gull juvenile over Lake Norman. (Jeff Lemons)



observers.

Eight years later on September 25, 2003, David Wright was birding by boat and discovered another first-year Sabine's Gull in the same general area of the lake. At first it flew by the boat and then it landed and remained on the water with a pair of Ring-billed Gulls. Again video footage and photographs were taken. Later, other observers were able to observe the gull through spotting scopes set up on a pier at the end of a pump station right-of-way, located off Torrence Chapel Road in the Town of Cornelius.

Five days later, Dwayne Martin sighted a juvenile Sabine's Gull on Lake Hickory at the Dusty Ridge Access in Catawba-Alexander County on September 30, 2003. Fortunately, this bird lingered in the area for several days, and more than 60 birders were able to stop by and see this rarity. Several observers speculated that this may have been the same individual sighted earlier in the week on Lake Norman.

Jeff Lemons and David and Marcia Wright photographed a third Sabine's Gull on Lake Norman on September 12, 2008. It was flying back and forth from the main channel in Lincoln County to the Davidson Creek channel in Mecklenburg County. This too was a first-year bird. At one point, the gull landed only 20 feet away from their boat. This bird only stayed about an hour before disappearing.

In late September 2012, Jeff Lemons and David Wright took three boat trips out on Lake Norman specifically searching for a Sabine's Gull. Their efforts were rewarded when, on September 23, 2012, they spied yet another first-year bird from their boat while they were idling behind the Cowan's Ford Dam in Mecklenburg County. They were able to follow this bird and photograph it well. Later that afternoon, unexpectedly, a second Sabine's Gull flew in and joined it. These were the fourth and fifth Sabine's Gulls recorded in Mecklenburg County. As birders watched, the two gulls flew over the dam, headed downriver, and they were not reported again.