

First Nesting Record of the Caspian Tern in North Dakota

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On June 28, 1977, we observed a single pair of Caspian terns (*Sterna caspia*) with two young on an island in Lake Williams in central North Dakota. This is the first confirmation of actual nesting by the Caspian tern in the State. Previously, breeding records had been postulated from sightings during the breeding season (Kantrud 1973; Robert Randall, personal communication; and Robert Stewart, personal communication).

Lake Williams is a shallow, saline, 420-hectare lake located near the town of Turtle Lake in east-central McLean County. Mean depth during the breeding season (May-June) can range from 0 to 50 centimeters. The island consists of a gravel base covered by sand and is approximately 75 meters long with a tapering width of 33 meters to 66 meters. It covers an approximate area of .4 hectare. The closest point of land is 480 meters from the island. The only vegetation noted was Russian thistle (*Salsola kali*), which was 30 to 60 centimeters high and covered roughly 60 percent of the island.

The terns were observed during a survey of the gull colony breeding on the island. The young terns were predominantly downy with some wing and tail feather development. These chicks were in the early phase of plumage class 3b, according to the classification system for gulls used by Kadlec et al. (1969). A subsequent check on July 12, 1977, indicated these young had fledged, as they were observed roosting on the eastern shore of the lake.

Breeding records for Caspian terns in central North America are uncommon. Canadian records (Salt and Salt 1976; Houston 1956; Evans et al. 1970; Vermeer 1970) document the presence of colonies at the west end of Lake Athabasca in northeastern Alberta, Dore Lake in central Saskatchewan, and Lakes Winnipeg and Winnipegosis in south-central Manitoba. Conservation Officer, Bruce Harris (personal communication), says sightings of migrating Caspian terns are common in South Dakota but there are no breeding records for the State. Breeding pairs have been recorded at Leech Lake in north-central Minnesota and in the Great Lakes area (Warner and Beimborn 1969). Sightings in Montana are rare and no breeding records exist (Skaar 1975), although they do breed nearby at Yellowstone Lake in extreme northwestern Wyoming (Diem and Condon 1967).

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