

BLACK TERN (*Chlidonias niger*)

IDENTIFICATION

23-24 cm. In spring, dark plumage, grey and black; white undertail coverts; pale wings on underside; black bill and legs. In autumn, grey plumage on upperparts; white underparts.

SIMILAR SPECIES

Dark plumage makes this species unmistakable with **breeding plumage**. In **non breeding** plumage recalls a **Whiskered Tern** with uniform pale colours on lesser coverts and outer primaries. **Juvenile Whiskered Tern** has feathers on the upperparts rufous edged.

PHENOLOGY

I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII

- Summer visitor
- Wintering
- Resident
- On passage

SEXING

In **breeding** plumage, **male** with green gloss on crown and nape; head and neck jet-black; mantle black contrasting with slate grey of rump and wing coverts; chin and throat dark grey; sometimes with pale grey on the outer web of the outermost tail feather. **Female** without green gloss on crown and nape; head, neck and mantle slate-grey, similar to rest of upperparts and wing coverts; chin and throat pale grey; rarely with pale grey on the outer web of the outermost tail feather. **CAUTION:** a few **males** have chest and belly as pale as **females** but recognizable by darker sides of head and without contrasting pale chin and throat.

Non breeding birds in autumn, **2nd year birds** and **juveniles** cannot be sexed using plumage characters.

AGEING

3 types of age can be recognized:

Juvenile with grey brown feathers on mantle and scapulars fringed buff; dark grey median coverts with brown to off-white tips; scapulars and tertials broadly fringed white.

2nd year similar to **non breeding adults**, but body with some dark grey feathers; usually with two ages of primaries, the outer older than the inner.

Adult in **spring** with black or slate grey plumage; in **autumn** with grey feathers on mantle and scapulars without buff fringes; grey median coverts without brown to off-white tips; scapulars and tertials uniformly light grey.

MOULT

Complete **postbreeding** moult changing in breeding places most of the body feathers and outer primaries (usually 5 or 6); then suspended prior to migration and finished in winter quarters. Complete **postjuvenile** moult but rarely started before arrival in winter quarters (**CAUTION:** some **juvenile** birds retain flight feathers till their first **postbreeding** moult). Both types of age have a **prebreeding** moult where **adults** acquire the **breeding** plumage and **2nd year** birds change only some body feathers (**CAUTION:** **immature** birds acquire their first dark breeding plumage in their **3rd year**).