



# BirdLife Australia Rarities Committee

## Unusual Record Report Form

This form is intended to aid observers in the preparation of a submission to document a major rare bird in Australia. Its use is NOT mandatory. Please attach and/or include all relevant information including any digital images. Please Email the completed form/submission to the BARC Chair, Tony Palliser [tonyp@bigpond.net.au](mailto:tonyp@bigpond.net.au)

BARC considers submissions that include a minimum of the submitter's name(s), the bird species claimed and the location and date(s) of the record. However, more information and evidence will usually be required for BARC to accept a record. So, please submit as much detailed information about the bird as possible.

If you choose not to use this form please make sure all relevant information requested in this form is included in your submission. However, it is our preference that you fully complete sections "A" and "B", or follow their headings, so that BARC has some continuity between all submissions.

Section A: Submitter details	
Your name(s) Joint submissions are fine	Warwick Allen
Your email, phone or address	

Section B: Record details	
Common and scientific names Include subspecies if relevant	Antarctic tern ( <i>Sterna vittata</i> ).
Site location (with GPS if possible)	Port MacDonnell breakwater, South Australia (-38.061412, 140.701875).
Date(s) and time(s) of record (First and last date of occurrence if known)	Saturday 30 July, 2022, 4:58 pm.
How many individuals were there?	One.
What was the distance to the bird(s)?	Closest views were ~15 m.
Habitat description	The Port MacDonnell breakwater is approximately 1.5 km long and constructed of large boulders. It shelters the inner harbour, with the open ocean to the south. It is a regular roosting location for multiple species of terns, gulls, and cormorants.
Sighting conditions (e.g. weather, visibility, light conditions)	Partly cloudy, about 8 °C, very slight breeze.
How confident are you in the identification (as a %) and why?	99%. Terns are notoriously difficult to identify, and separating Antarctic and Arctic tern can be challenging in the field. However, the photo evidence below points to multiple features that support the identification of Antarctic tern.
Did you find and/or identify the bird initially? Who else recorded the bird and do they agree with the identification?	I was the sole observer.
What experience have you had with this species?	None. This was a lifer for me.
Has this species been seen at this location before? When?	Up to three individuals were observed at various locations around the Port MacDonnell harbour during 14-22 August 2021 (based on eBird records; BARC submission under review). Single individuals were also seen just offshore from the Port MacDonnell breakwater twice in May and then once in August 2017 (David Harper, personal communication).

<p>Have photographs of the bird or discussion of it occurred on the internet? (Please provide the site name, a summary, electronic link, etc.)</p>	<p>I first uploaded images of the tern to the Australian Bird Identification (ABID) Facebook page on Sunday 31 July, but received no response. The next day, I posted on the <a href="#">Seabirds and Pelagics Australia</a> Facebook page, receiving rapid feedback on my request for help with identification. Multiple commenters suggested that it was a non-breeding Antarctic tern and described their reasoning, which is included in the evidence below. No dissenting opinions were offered. Once I had received help with the identification and realised the significance of the sighting, I posted on the <a href="#">Australian Twitchers</a> Facebook page to notify the birding community. There was only one comment regarding the identification, asking whether the mostly black bill could indicate that it was an Arctic rather than Antarctic tern. However, bill colour would be expected to be reddish-black in young Antarctic terns as they transition to adult, and multiple other characters that point towards Antarctic rather than Arctic tern (see discussion below).</p>
<p>Do you permit BARC to display your images etc. electronically (credited with your name)</p>	<p>Yes.</p>

You may choose to delete or ignore this page, but please include as much of the requested information in your submission as possible, especially Sections C and E.

### Section C: Supporting evidence

Please include evidence that supports the identification, such as photographs, video, call recordings, etc. Digital images can be pasted into this document below, at the end, or provided separately. Digital video and sound recordings can be sent separately to this form. Label photos etc or insert captions to make note of relevant features they show.

Six images were taken, all of which have been cropped to the bird and are included below (also as attachments via email). They have not been edited for this submission other than cropping, but I did find that some brightening helped to better show some of the key identifying features.



DSC\_4857\_cropped: In my opinion, this is the most helpful image. It shows the reddish colouration of the bill and feet (clearer when brightened), deeply forked tail with just a touch of dark along the outer retrieve, diffuse/smudgy smoky grey trailing edge to the primaries, chunky bill relative to body size, relatively little primary translucency, and active primary moult.



DSC\_4858\_cropped: Traits that can be noted from this image are the white rump, grey back and wings, and reddish feet.



DSC\_4859\_cropped: This image also shows the reddish colouration of the bill (more obvious when brightened), deeply forked grey tail with just a touch of dark along the outer retrieve, grey back and wings, diffuse/smudgy dark grey trailing edge to the primaries, white rump, and chunky bill relative to body size.



DSC\_4860\_cropped: This image also shows slight reddish colouration of the bill (albeit rather faint in this lighting), deeply forked grey tail, grey back and wings, white rump, and chunky bill relative to body size.



DSC\_4861\_cropped: In this image the bill appears more black than red, but it still shows reddish legs, deeply forked tail with just a touch of dark along the outer retrieve, and especially the diffuse/smudgy dark grey trailing edge to the primaries.



DSC\_4862\_cropped: This photo shows the white rump, grey back, wings, and tail, and diffuse/smudgy dark grey trailing edge to the primaries.

#### Section D: Description of the bird(s)

Please provide a description of the bird(s) including all identification features recorded.

Provide all possible details that might corroborate the identification.

<b>Plumage</b>	Non-breeding plumage. White forehead, with a partial black hood, grey back and grey wings, with a diffuse/smudgy dark grey trailing edge to the primaries, white rump, light grey tail with just a touch of dark along the outer retrieves, and largely white underparts.
<b>Bare parts</b>	The bill was reddish-black, the feet were red, and the eye was black.

<b>Moult details</b>	The plumage looks worn, indicating that the bird is likely undergoing primary moult, which would coincide with what would be expected for this species at this time of year.
<b>Structure and 'jizz'</b>	A fairly small and compact tern with a buoyant flight style.
<b>Calls</b>	Silent.
<b>Behaviours</b>	The tern was first observed as it flew past me as I walked along the breakwater. It then circled around me once (allowing time to get my camera out of my backpack), then flew away along the breakwater. It was not seen again that evening or in three hours of searching the breakwater, jetty, groyne and other coastal areas around Port MacDonnell the next day.
<b>Age, sex and/or taxonomy</b>	The reddish-black bill and faint remnant of a carpal bar suggest that this is a second-year bird, about 18 months old. Mature birds would be expected to have a 'spottier' head and a brighter red bill. First year birds would be expected to have more extensive black barring on their upperparts and a wholly black bill.

### Section E: Confusion species

Please indicate other species that the bird(s) might be confused with and how they can be eliminated

If it was a white-fronted tern (*Sterna striata*), I would expect the bird to have been larger and bulkier, with paler grey upperparts, a longer and entirely black bill, and extensive dark colouration of the outer primaries. If it was a common tern (*Sterna hirundo*), I would expect to see a strong carpal bar, a longer and slenderer bill, a fully black cap and reddish bill if in breeding plumage, or a pale grey rump and fully lack bill if in non-breeding plumage. If it was an Arctic tern (*Sterna paradisaea*), I would expect to see a more well-defined dark grey trailing edge to the primaries, obviously translucent primaries, and a greater degree of black on the outer retrieve of the undertail.

### Section F: References and aids

<b>Did you use books, journal articles or on-line sites or pages to help you prepare this submission? Which ones?</b>	Menkhorst, P., Rogers, D., Clarke, R., Davies, J, Marsack, P. & Franklin, K. (2017). The Australian Bird Guide. CSIRO Publishing, Melbourne.
<b>Would you like to acknowledge the assistance of others in the identification process or preparation of this submission?</b>	Thanks to Rohan Clarke, David Harper and Paul Sagar for specific feedback on the photos that helped to nail down the identification. Thanks also to Fraser Gurney, Chris Young, Jacob Crisp, Kye Turnbull, Ian Melbourne and Michael Szabo for their thoughts on the identification and for sharing the photos. I also wish to thank David Harper for feedback on a draft of this submission.