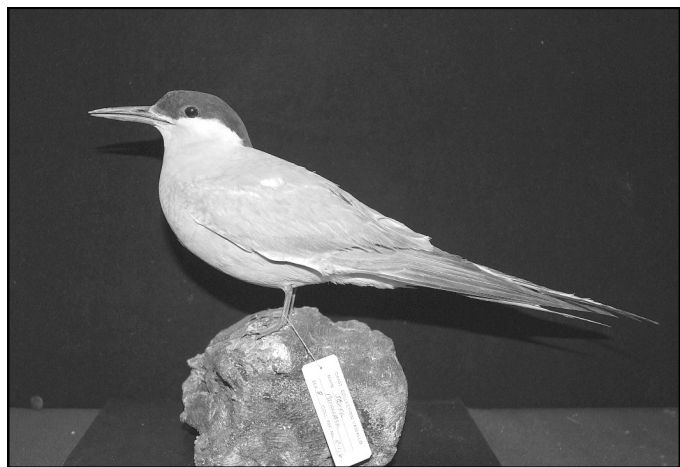


First record of the Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea* and Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis* in the Maltese islands

Arctic Tern

A medium-sized tern was shot on 25th July 1985 at Marsaxlokk very close to the old fishponds referred to as "Il-Magħluq". The specimen was brought to my attention and at first glance it looked like an adult Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*. But on close examination and comparing it with a mounted specimen of the Common Tern I noticed different characteristics and concluded it was an Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea* based on the following parameters. The upper breast and underparts were pearl grey as compared to a much lighter tinge on the Common Tern. The grey margin next to the shaft of the inner web of the two longest primaries was narrower than that of the Common Tern. Unfortunately the long tail streamers were extensively worn and could not be used for identification purposes.



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The measurements of the specimen were as follows: Bill feathers to tip = 33mm, Bill height at gonys = 6.5mm, Bill height at base = 8.5mm; Tarsus = 18mm, Wing = 267mm; Tail = 146mm (tips much abraded), Tail fork = 74mm (tips much abraded).

In the Western Palearctic, the Arctic Tern breeds mainly on the northernmost parts of Europe and winters chiefly in Antarctic waters. Its main passage is on the Atlantic seaboard, but it is accidental to several European and Mediterranean countries (Cramp 1985). There are four dated records from Sicily, three of which occurred in July and once in November (Corso 2005). It has never been recorded in Tunisia (Isenmann *et al* 2005).

Lesser Crested Tern

In September 1989 I examined a 'tern' specimen which had been shot by a fisherman from a boat very close to the shore at Munxar Point, limits of St. Thomas Bay. The size and plumage looked very similar to an adult Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*. The bird, which still assumed much of an adult summer plumage, that is grey upper parts and a black hood and crest but with a white forehead, had two particular characteristics: (i) The bill was wholly yellow and not black with a yellowish tip; and (ii) the rump and upper tail were light grey not white.



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After referring to identification guidebooks (Beaman & Madge 1998, Mullarney *et al* 1999) the bird was identified as a Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis* in post breeding plumage. The measurements of the specimen were as follows: Bill tip to feathers = 57mm, Bill height at gonys = 10.5mm, Bill height at base = 12.5mm; Tarsus = 25mm, Wing = 305mm; Tail = 140mm, Tail fork = 55mm .

Since that time I have seen two other such specimens in full adult breeding plumage in local private collections and was informed by Marsaxlokk fishermen, that the same kind of tern is sometimes encountered, even in small flocks, amongst tuna pens at sea off the SW coast during late summer. However, I cannot confirm the veracity of this statement.

The Lesser Crested Tern has a wide distribution from Australia through the Indian Ocean to the Gulf and the Red Sea. The Mediterranean population, which belongs to the subspecies *emigrata*, has one of the smallest global populations and its restricted breeding range is found in Libya. During a survey carried out in 2007 in Libya the breeding population

was estimated at 1600 – 2080 pairs, with the largest colony of 1500-1800 pairs on Gezirat Garah (Hamza *et al* 2008). The birds which nest in the Gulf of Sirte migrate and pass along the coast of Tunisia on their way to and from their winter quarters on the West African coast (Cramp 1985) and there is a single breeding record in Tunisia in May 1983 (Isenmann *et al.* 2005). There are eight records from Sicily from 1933 to 1998; once in March, July and August respectively, twice in May and three times in June (Corso 2005).

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First record of the Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus* in the Maltese Islands

In 2002, while undertaking a re-examination of the National Museum of Natural History collections it was noted that there were two Pygmy Cormorants; one was on display and another in the reference collection. The one on display was an imported specimen (from Holland Zoo, reference number Orn.2500) but the one in the reference collection, an adult in non-breeding plumage was labelled as taken at Ġnejna (North-west Malta) in October 1983 bearing catalogue number 1298 (new reference number = Orn.0316). In addition a third specimen (reference number Orn.2653) was added to the museum's collection in 2008. However it was a confiscated bird that had almost certainly been imported along with other specimens from eastern Europe (which were all included in the confiscated collection) and cannot therefore be considered to have been taken in Malta.

Biometrics of Orn.0316: Bill 30.5mm; tarsus 37mm; tail 13.5mm; wing length 220mm.

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In 1959, De Lucca and De Lucca reported that two Pygmy Cormorants, one of which was shot and preserved, were found in a pond at Buskett in the winter of 1935. The specimen was later acquired by NMNH along with the rest of the De Lucca collection in 1969. This specimen however turned out to be a juvenile Shag *P. aristotelis* (Sultana *et al.* 1975).

The Pygmy Cormorant breeds in south-east Europe (east from Italy), Russia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, and winters primarily in Albania, Greece, the Balkan states, Turkey, Cyprus, Iraq, Iran, Azerbaijan and also Israel, Bulgaria, Romania and Syria (BirdLife International 2009). Brichetti and Fracasso (2003) give the wintering population in Italy at

400-600 individuals, with a marked increase starting in the late 1990s. There are six sightings in Sicily (Brichetti & Fracasso 2003). This record was submitted and accepted by the National Rarities Committee on 10th December 2007.

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