

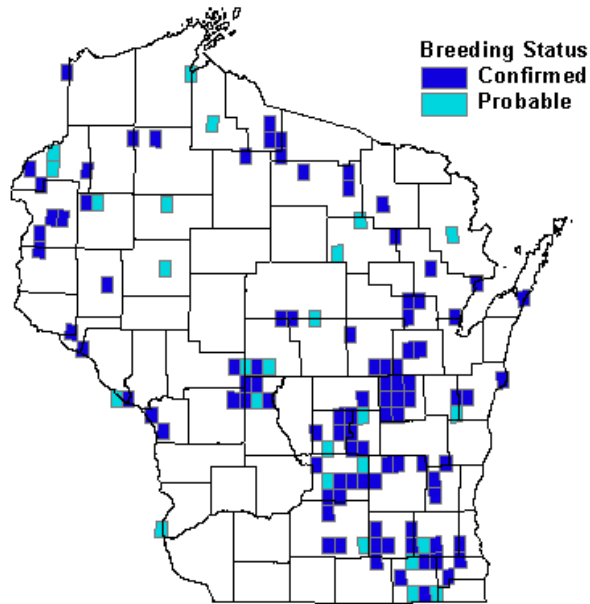


Species Survey Strategies

Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas II



Nick Anich



Black Tern

WBBA I Breeding Range

These small, graceful wetland birds are in steep decline and are a conservation priority throughout their range. They are typically associated with deep hemi-marshes characterized by an interspersed of open water and aquatic vegetation. They nest on mats of floating vegetation (cattail, bulrush, etc.), and occasionally on drier sites (mudflats). They prefer wetlands with little to no human disturbance.

Region: Found statewide in suitable habitat, though suitable sites apparently not common.

[eBird Map](#)

Time of Year: Birds arrive late April to late May, and nests with eggs have been found between 23 May–8 July. Birds begin leaving our area by mid-August.

Breeding Guideline Bar Chart: (Full chart is on [atlas handbook webpage](#))

January				February				March				April				May				June				July				August				September				October				November				December							
1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
																M	M	E	E	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	E	E	M	M																				

N = Nonbreeding Season, **M** = Migration, **B** = Breeding Season, **E** = Either (a transition period)

Time of Day: Closer to dawn or dusk works best, birds may reduce activity in the heat of the day.

Focal Habitat: Hemi-marshes, either occurring as isolated basins or part of a larger wetland complex or flowage. Prefers wetlands with little or no evidence of human encroachment or use. May feed over sedge meadows but only if marsh nest sites nearby.

Special Methods: IN 2015 ONLY, The atlas is partnering with Wisconsin DNR to help them with a monitoring project on Black Terns. What follows is specific guidance on how to enter data into the atlas and also help this larger project.

Survey between 1 June–20 July, anytime 1–2 hours after sunrise until 1–2 hours before sunset. Avoid the time of day when temperatures are hottest, especially mid-day in July.

Preferably working with another person, scan marsh from various locations along the shoreline using binoculars to detect Black Terns. If Black Terns are detected, or at larger marshes with limited access that look good for Black Terns, observers should seek to survey by boat. If that is not feasible, record as much information as you are able.

There are 4 different things to record for this protocol:

- 1) LOCATION: Boat the interior and perimeter (if possible) to increase the probability of detecting breeding Black Terns. Where terns are detected, record GPS coordinates of site. In instances of probable/confirmed breeding, report this location (and additional information) using the [Priority Species Information Form](#). For observed/possible during breeding season, include exact location and habitat description in eBird comments field.
- 2) HABITAT: Categorize the growth form of the dominant plant species either as: a) *tall-growth marshes* where emergent vegetation (cattail, bulrush, etc.) extends ≥ 1 m above the water surface, or b) *prostrate-growth marshes* where vegetation (e.g., pond-lily, water lily) extends ≤ 0.5 m above the surface. Note this in eBird details field.
- 3) ESTIMATE NUMBERS IN 3 DIFFERENT WAYS:
 - a) TOTAL COUNT - The total number of terns you observed (adults and young) should be recorded in the number field in eBird. But there are 2 other specialized counts we are interested in, and those should be reported in the details box.
 - b) SHORE COUNT - Conduct a 5-minute point count of all terns seen in the air and resting on/near surface. If working with another person, counts should be conducted simultaneously, independently, and eBirded separately. Record this in the eBird Details box, for example: "Shore Count = 5"
 - c) FLUSH COUNT - Immediately following the initial counts, enter the area of

tern activity, either by boat or on foot, and conduct a flush count of birds overhead, which will likely provide a more accurate number of the breeding adults present. **Make your visit very brief to avoid disturbing the terns any more than needed.** If working with another person, counts should be conducted simultaneously, independently, and eBirded separately. Record this in the eBird Details box, for example: “Flush Count = 8”

- 4) ASSESS BREEDING STATUS: Make a **brief** passage through the colony to determine the relative stage of the breeding season, categorized as incubation stage, when only eggs are observed (code as NE), or nestling stage, when at least one of the nests contains chicks (code as NY). **Do not linger at a nest for more than 1–2 minutes. It is not necessary (or recommended) to find all Black Tern nests at a location since the flush count revealing the number of adults present is most important .**

14 Black Tern Hide Breeding Code or Details

Breeding: NY Confirmed—Nest with Young Help... X

Details: Tall-growth marsh, Shore Count = 4, Flush Count = 9.
2 nests seen with 2 and 3 young each. Probably more nests, but we did just a quick paddle through. X

Add data... Age & Sex Breeding Code Details

Questions on this protocol should be directed to Sumner Matteson: sumner.matteson@wi.gov

Code Guidance: Probable codes used often include N for “visiting probable nest site,” or A for “agitated behavior,” or T for “territory defense.” *Confirmed* – See FL, CF, FY, NE, and NY as choices.

Other Species: Be aware of and document other marsh birds present, especially Yellow-headed Blackbird, Sora, Virginia Rail, Redhead, Red-necked Grebe, Common Gallinule, Least Bittern, American Bittern, Forster’s Tern. Maybe even the rare King Rail or Yellow Rail. Or in a shallower part of the marsh complex, a Wilson’s Phalarope.

Confusing Species: Forster’s Tern, but note marked difference in adult appearance and difference in vocalizations. In mid-summer, [molting Black Terns appear mottled](#), when the black body is largely replaced by white, and the head has a pied appearance. May be confused with molting or [fledged](#) Forster’s Terns at this time of year.

More information about Black Tern:

[All About Birds](#)

[Birds of North America Account](#) (subscription required)