ANTARCTIC TERNS *STERNA VITTATA* FEEDING ON STRANDED KRILL AT KING GEORGE ISLAND, SOUTH SHETLAND ISLANDS, ANTARCTICA

MARCO FAVERO

Laboratorio de Vertebrados, Facultad Ciencias Exactas y Naturales, Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata, Funes 3350 (7600) Mar del Plata, Argentina

Received 22 August 1994, accepted 6 July 1995

Sterna terns feed mainly in marine habitats by surface plunging or dipping into water (Ashmole 1971, Harper *et al*. 1985), but there are a few observations of this genus taking prey from terrestrial habitats, such as Kerguelen Terns *S. virgata* (Berruti & Harris 1976, Weimerskirch & Stahl 1988) and Common Terns *S. hirundo* (Dunn 1984, Fraser & McMahon 1990a, 1990b, 1990c). Antarctic Terns *S. vittata* have been previously reported feeding on the ground in open pastures at Tristan da Cunha (Ryan 1985) and on low sand dunes near the Cape of Good Hope, South Africa (Fraser & McMahon 1990c). This is the first report of Antarctic Terns taking prey from the ground in Antarctica.

On 16 December 1993, four Antarctic Terns were seen foraging actively on the shore on the west coast of Potter Cove (62°14'S, 58°38'W), King George Island, South Shetland Islands, close to a breeding site of *c*. 30 pairs. All were flying over the shore 2–3 m up, looking for euphausiid crustaceans stranded on the beach by the ebbing tide. Two birds were seen on three occasions taking euphausiids from the shore by means of low and uninterrupted flight ("ground dipping") as reported for Common Terns (Fraser & McMahon 1990b). At the South Shetland Islands, krill (mainly *Euphausia superba* and *E. crystallorophias* during the observations) often accumulates on the shore due to strong winds, and usually Antarctic Terns feed on this resource in shallow waters, but rarely on land.

Ryan (1985) cites birds walking and feeding through 30–50 mm high pastures at Tristan da Cunha, and mentions as unlikely that terns could have employed this feeding method before the advent of human settlement and the creation of short pastures. This note reports terns feeding from the ground but in a natural and unmodified environment. At the time of the observations stranded krill was scattered and scarce. On other occasions, when krill was stranded in large aggregations due to the combination of the ebbing tide and strong winds, the main scavengers were Kelp Gulls *Larus dominicanus*, with smaller numbers of Subantarctic Skuas *Catharacta antarctica* and South Polar Skuas *C. maccormicki*, but terns were absent. The highest densities of birds observed during the 1993/94 summer season were recorded form 22 to 24 December at Potter Cove after several days of strong southwesterly winds. At this time 123 Kelp Gulls (34 juveniles), 10 Subantarctic Skuas and 20 South Polar Skuas were observed. Both skua species and the majority of the gulls were feeding on the ground while walked slowly. A few Kelp Gulls and 5 to 10 Pintado or Cape Petrels *Daption capense* were foraging in shallow waters by surface seizing, together with 20 to 30 Antarctic Terns which were foraging by means of surface plunging or dipping.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank J. Cooper for helpful comments on the paper and bibliographic assistance, and Dr. P. G. Ryan for criticism on the original manuscript.

REFERENCES

ASHMOLE, N. P. 1971. Seabird ecology and the marine environment. In: Avian biology, Vol. I. Farner, D. S. & King, J. R. (Eds). New York and London: Academic Press. pp. 223–286.

BERRUTI, A. & HARRIS, A. 1976. Breeding schedules of Antarctic and Kerguelen Terns at Marion Island. *Notornis* 23: 243–245.

DUNN, E. K. 1984. Common Tern feeding while walking . *Br. Birds* 77: 485–486.

FRASER, M. & McMAHON, L. 1990a. Common Terns feeding on the ground. *Promerops* 192: 10–11.

FRASER, M. & McMAHON, L. 1990b. Unusual feeding technique of Common Terns. *Promerops* 193: 7.

FRASER, M. & McMAHON, L. 1990c. More terrestrial

terns. *Promerops* 196: 11.
HARPER, P. C., CROXALL, J. P. & COOPER, J. 1985. A guide to foraging methods used by marine birds in Antarctic and Subantarctic seas. *BIOMASS Handbook* 24: 1–22.
RYAN, P. G. 1985. Antarctic Terns *Sterna vittata* feeding on ground at Tristan da Cunha. *Cormorant* 13: 64–66.
WEIMERSKIRCH, H. & STAHL, J.-C. 1988. The breeding and feeding ecology of the Kerguelen Tern *Sterna virgata*. *Ornis Scand*. 19: 199–204.