

Black Tern

Swartmeerswael

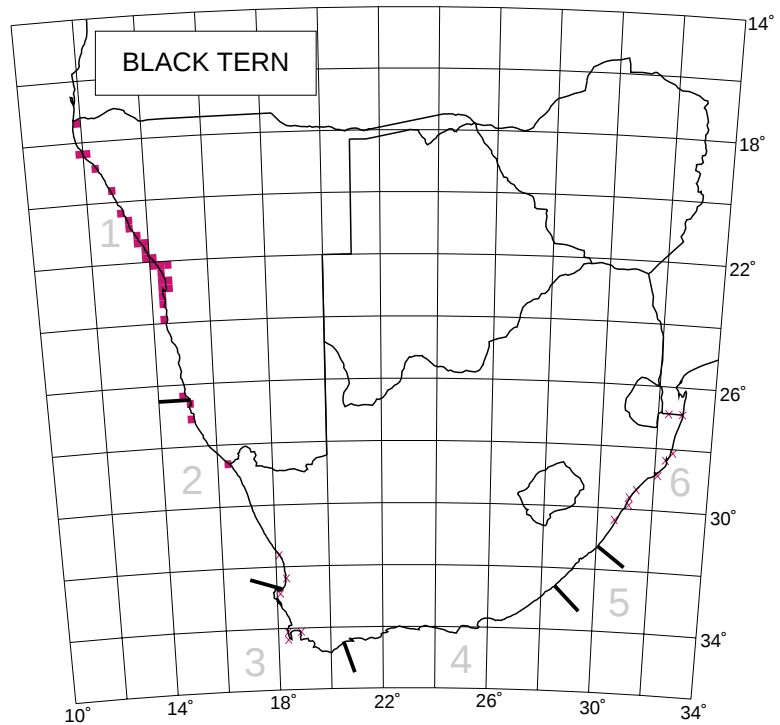
Chlidonias niger

This nonbreeding Palearctic migrant is seasonally abundant in most years along the coast of Namibia, south to Lüderitz (2615CA). Elsewhere along the southern African coastline the Black Tern is irregular or rare.

Birds of the nominate race breed in Europe from Spain to Sweden and eastwards, and in Asia as far east as central Siberia (Harrison 1983b; Rogacheva 1992). Post-breeding migration is via the Black and Mediterranean seas to the Atlantic Ocean, with peak passage through the Straits of Gibraltar August–September to the main non-breeding area off West Africa (Harrison 1983b). Some move southwards along the African coast to arrive in Namibia November–December.

In southern Africa it usually feeds out of sight of land during the day and returns to a few roosting localities in the afternoon or evening (Harrison 1983b). Its short daylight period inshore, and concentration at relatively few roosts where it may be obscured among other, more abundant species of terns, probably resulted in under-reporting. In Namibia, peak numbers, which may exceed 10 000 birds, occur January–February (pers. obs). Northward departure begins in March along the same route, passing Gibraltar April–May (Harrison 1983b). Most first-year birds remain in West African waters, it is presumed that records in the austral winter along the coast of Namibia are also of immatures.

Elsewhere in southern Africa most records are of one or a few individuals at coastal wetlands in the western Cape Province or from estuaries in KwaZulu-Natal. Strays occur inland, usually among flocks of more numerous Whitewinged Terns *C. leucopterus*, among which Black Terns are easily overlooked. Inland records are from Botswana and the Transvaal (Tree 1975b; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). A report of groups of up to 43 terns at a farm dam in the Grootfontein district (1918C) in northcentral Namibia (Sauer & Sauer 1960) were rejected by Borello *et al.* (in press) as misidentified Whitewinged Terns.



Recorded in 43 grid cells, 0.9%
Total number of records: 223
Mean reporting rate for range: 2.8%

Birds in KwaZulu-Natal may be from the west coast, moving eastwards along the south coast or, alternatively, they may have taken an eastern route with flocks of Whitewinged Terns via the Red Sea or Nile Valley (Harrison 1983b).

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