

IDENTIFICATION OF MEDIUM (STERNA) TERNS			
	FORSTER'S	COMMON	ARCTIC
Range in Texas	Most common of the medium terns in Texas. On coast year round and at inland water bodies in winter.	Primarily a spring and fall migrant on coast. A few may linger into summer or fall.	Primarily Pelagic. Occasionally seen inland.
Habitat	Prefers Marshes	Prefers Beaches	Nests in marshes.
Stance	Holds body more vertically.	Holds body more horizontally. Slightly smaller than Forster's.	Slightly smaller than Common. Very low to ground due to short legs.
Legs	Longer, clearly orange during breeding.	Little bit shorter, reddish or black.	Very short
Body	Whiter.	Grayer. Contrast between white on face and gray on breast.	Very gray
Bill	Lighter orange with more extensive black tip. Slightly larger, thicker than Common.	Deeper orange to reddish orange with smaller black tip. Little bit smaller & thinner. Bill is largely orange-red by late July, reverting to black in September–October	Small and straight with no black tip. Black in basic, red in alternate.
White above gape	Largest	Medium	Smallest. Pale cheek contrasts sharply with gray lower face
Head	Larger head	Smaller head	Round top of head, very short neck
Black on Head	Black eye patch which encapsulates the eye. Black eye patch is also discernable during molt when remainder of hood is somewhat salt-n-pepper. Full cap acquired in late March or early April. Lost, sometimes as early as July, but more regularly by August.	Black semi-hood. Eye USUALLY NOT encapsulated in black. <u>Black extends to hind-neck & head</u> . Retains full black caps into late August.	Extends further towards bill in front.
Tail	Very pale gray, tending to look white in bright sunlight. Tail extends beyond folded wings. White rump stands out against gray (flight).	Tail extends ~same length as wingtips	Projects well beyond folded wings.
Outermost Tail Feathers	Dark gray or black on the inner web, white on the outer web	White on the inner web, dark gray or black on the outer web	
Wings	Grayish primary tips. Wings are 2-toned gray near body, very pale gray away from body. White upper wing outer primaries stand out against gray back and inner wing. Dark trailing edge of underwing sometimes present (always present in Common and Arctic). Wingbeats usually appear to be shallower and less labored than Common. Wings broader than other sterna.	Extensive black on the outer primaries is conspicuous on the closed wing, although it is covered by white ‘frosting’ when the feathers are freshly molted. In flight, both the leading and trailing edges of the outer primaries are dark; black inner webs of the primaries show as a dark wedge in the spread wing. Most (not all) show this broad dark wedge on upper primaries in flight.	Very gray. Dark trailing edge.
Carpal Bar	None	Black carpal bar during juvenile and non-breeding plumages	Dark carpal bar when wing coverts quite worn.
Molt	Molt earlier than Common in fall. Loses black cap in July or at least by August.	Molts earlier in spring. Often in breeding plumage while on Texas coast in spring.	
RERERENCES: <i>Terns of North America, A Photographic Guide</i> , Cox, Cameron, Birds of the World Website. NOTE: Best field marks are highlighted.			