

LOUISIANA BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE

REPORT FORM

1. English and Scientific names: [Elegant x Sandwich Tern \(*Thalasseus elegans* x *T. sandvicensis*\)](#)
2. Number of individuals, sexes, ages, general plumage (e.g., 2 in alternate plumage):
[1 adult in alternate plumage](#)
3. Parish: [St. Bernard](#)
Specific Locality: [Chandeleur Island, northern end \(29.9795, -88.8386\)](#)
4. Date(s) when observed: [6 June 2023](#)
5. Time(s) of day when observed: [9:30 am](#)
6. Reporting observer and city/state address

Reporting observer: Erik I. Johnson
City: Lafayette
State: LA
7. Other observers accompanying reporter who also *identified* the bird(s): [Chloe St. Germain-Vermillion](#) was with me, and saw the bird from a distance, but pealed off to work on the task at hand (shorebird and breeding bird surveys) as I tried to approach this bird more closely.
8. Other observers who *independently identified* the bird(s): [None](#).
9. Light conditions (position of bird in relation to shade and to direction and amount of light): [Bright sunny mid-morning conditions, looking to the north/northwest, so the sun was more or less behind me.](#)
10. Optical equipment (type, power, condition): [Vortex Razor ED 10x42 binoculars, Vortex Razor 25-50x 65mm scope. Nikon D7200 with Sigma 150-600mm f/4.5-6.3 lens. All in good condition.](#)
11. Distance to bird(s): [Approached as close as about 80 m.](#)
12. Duration of observation: [15 minutes.](#)
13. Habitat: [Beach – bird was loafing on the wrack line.](#)
14. Behavior of bird / circumstances of observation (flying, feeding, resting; include and stress habits used in identification; relate events surrounding observation): [Loafing, periodically preening, and shifting around in the group of about 70 Sandwich Terns. The entire flock flushed when I got too close.](#)

15. Description (include only what was actually seen, *not what "should" have been seen*; include if possible: total length/relative size compared to other familiar species; body bulk, shape, proportions; bill, eye, leg, and plumage characteristics. Stress features that separate it from similar species, *or for species that are known to hybridize frequently, stress features that help eliminate possible hybrids*):

Size: As I studied it through the scope, it consistently appeared about 10-20% larger than all of the surrounding Sandwich Terns, but otherwise similar in shape, proportions, and wing length. Similar impression in reviewing the photos.

Tail/rump: I only got photos in flight (did not have a chance to study with binoculars), and didn't get a good angle to assess tail shape or rump color, although superficially these features look similar to an adjacent Sandwich Tern.

Bill: What immediately stood out to me from about 200 m away was the bill color – orange with a distinct black wash along the tomium ending both into the maxilla and mandible. The orange was richer at the base and paler toward the tip, but without any apparent delineation and was graduated in color. I tried to compare the relative bill shape to the surrounding Sandwich Terns, recognizing that the difference in color may affect my assessment. The bill seemed slightly longer, and also thicker toward the base, but differences were subtle at best. In some of the photos, I feel like this assessment is more or less supported. In the images, the gonydeal angle seemed to be in about the same relative position as in surrounding Sandwich Terns (not closer to the base, as in Elegant). All of this seems consistent with Sandwich x Elegant as reported by Dufour et al. 2021.

Head: It was in full breeding plumage, with just a couple of single white flecks in the forecrown. The crest was often flattened, but had long strands extending down the back of the nape – these feathers seemed long.

Legs: The legs were all back, like Sandwich Terns.

Back: The gray color to the back was essentially identical to surrounding Sandwich Terns, both in life and in photos.

16. Voice: Silent.

17. Similar species (include how they were eliminated by your observation):

There are lots of possibilities running through my mind here, all of which would be of interest, and none of which I can 100% confidently eliminate. “Sandwich” here may be best representative of the unsplit species, including Cabot's (North America), Sandwich (Palearctic), and Cayenne (Caribbean and South America).

1) Aberrant Sandwich Tern. The bird's larger size with a slightly different bill shape probably eliminates this.

2) Royal x Cabot's Tern (and/or backcross). This seems like an obvious hybrid pairing given the close proximity in which they breed, but this is not an option in eBird, and I cannot find a reference to case of one. So perhaps this *never* happens? The long crest seems oddly unlike either species, too.

3) Cayenne Tern. I reviewed a ton of eBird photos and there are lots of examples where the bill is yellowish with a similar black smudge. But the yellowish tones are mustard or dull yellow, not orange, thus don't match this bird. This is also how Dufour et al. (2021) describe the bill color of Cayenne Terns. I could find one potential exception in eBird, but it may not be correctly identified: <https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/339676771> South American populations are referenced to be larger than “Cabot's” Sandwich Terns.

- 4) Cayenne x Elegant. Apparently no records of these exist (Dufour et al. 2021).
- 5) Cayenne x Cabot's. Couldn't find reference to this, but I wouldn't expect them to have such orange in the bill.
- 6) Lesser Crested x Sandwich. Apparently known to hybridize, but no known reports of adult phenotypes – presumably would be very similar to Elegant x Sandwich.

18. Photographs or tape recordings obtained? (by whom? attached?): **Yes, photos submitted.**

19. Previous experience with this species: **None.**

20. Identification aids: (list books, illustrations, other birders, etc. used in identification):

a. at time of observation: **none**

b. after observation:

- eBird Macaulay library.
- Dufour, Gernigon, Crochet. 2021. Dutch Birding 43:249-256.
- Velarde and Rojo. 2012. Marine Ornithology 40:25-29.
- I also consulted with several of the bird survey crew that was on that Chandeleur Island survey, and got feedback from David Muth, Collin Stempien, and Abby Darrah.

21. This description is written from:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	notes made during the observation.	Are notes attached?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	notes made after the observation.	At what date?	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	memory		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	study of images		

22. Are you positive of your identification? If not, explain: **No. This is a best guess.**

23. Date: **25 June 2023**

Time: **3:50 pm**

24. May the LBRC have permission to display in whole or in part this report and accompanying photos on the LOS-LBRC website and LBRC Facebook page? **Yes**

If yes, may we include your name with the report? **Yes**







