

LOUISIANA BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE

REPORT FORM

This form is intended as a convenience in reporting observations of species on the Louisiana Bird Records Committee (LBRC) Review List. The LBRC recommends the use of this form or a similar format when submitting records for review to assure that all pertinent information is accounted for. Attach additional pages or files as necessary. Please print or type for hard copy. For electronic copy, be sure to save this file to your computer before entering text. Attach field notes, drawings, photographs, or tape recordings, if available. Include all photos for more obscurely marked species. When completed (if hard copy), mail to Secretary, Louisiana Bird Records Committee, c/o Museum of Natural Science, 119 Foster Hall, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803-3216, or e-mail electronic copy as an attachment to Paul Edward Conover at <zoiseaux@lusfiber.net> .

1. English and Scientific names: Red-billed Tropicbird, *Phaethon aethereus*

2. Number of individuals, sexes, ages, general plumage (e.g., 2 in alternate plumage):
1 immature

3. Parish: Plaquemines

Specific Locality: Out of Venice, 28 37 187; 88 58 137—depth 2200, T H₂O = 88 degrees

4. Date(s) when observed: 26 July 2021

5. Time(s) of day when observed: 13:22-13:33

6. Reporting observer and city/state address

Reporting observer: Paul E. Conover
City: Lafayette
State: LA

7. Other observers accompanying reporter who also *identified* the bird(s): All participants on the pelagic trip, most of whom will hopefully submit reports.

8. Other observers who independently identified the bird(s):

9. Light conditions (position of bird in relation to shade and to direction and amount of light): Full sun on an open sea above blue water, bird seen at various angles to the sun, overhead, and on the water.

10. Optical equipment (type, power, condition): Mainly my camera, Nikon D3500 with 200 mm lens. Also briefly with Zeiss 10X binos.

11. Distance to bird(s): Probably about 40 feet at closest point.

12. Duration of observation: about 11 minutes according to time stamps.

13. Habitat: Open ocean, blue water, about 3200 feet deep.

14. Behavior of bird / circumstances of observation (flying, feeding, resting; include and stress habits used in identification; relate events surrounding observation): We came upon the bird as we were traveling. For my part, I saw a startlingly white spot ahead and thought aloud that it would probably be a Clorox jug but could be a bird. Muth predicted tropicbird. It turned out to be a bird, and we started photographing it as it flushed and flew. We chased and got under the bird, then Muth threw a few fish to no avail and decided to stop and lay a slick. At this point the bird got to a distant point, ascended, then dived on a straight, fast plunge into the sea before taking off again. It then landed nearby and we cruised slowly toward it, approaching to perhaps 40 feet. It eventually went airborne again and we left it to fly off, having enjoyed it well.

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*):

A black-masked, strikingly white bird resembling a chunky tern with various black markings on wings and body.

Upperparts of body with black vermiculations forming series of thin wavy black lines on white background from nape and sides of neck to the end of the uppertail coverts. To the naked eye at a distance this area looked dingy white or grayish. Wings with brilliant white background color, but with vermiculations of mantle extending onto wing as broad and diffuse carpal bar fading into white about half or two-thirds of the way to the wrist. Outer wing with wide black wedge formed by the outer 5 or so primaries and perhaps 7 outer greater primary coverts and narrow black streaks extending down from base of inner primaries. In flight photos, the black on the primaries is clearly seen to be on the outer webs of the feathers, with the inner webs bright white. Area of mottled black at the base of the black primary wedge formed by bold black chevron-marked barring on median primary coverts and black on outer webs of inner central greater primary coverts.

Underparts of body white. Thin black axillary line on rear half of wing forming wishbone pattern with black line along base of inner secondaries. Secondaries and inner primaries translucent white vs. opaque fore edge of wing and ghost of black wedge of upperwing bleeding through and tipped by dark tips on undersurface of outer primaries.

Tail white, narrow and attenuated when compressed, central rectrices elongated slightly beyond rest of tail forming slight spike tail. Narrow but distinct black band along tips of rectrices; when folded, appeared as terminal and subterminal bands due to different lengths of banded rectrices.

Head white, with dark eye set in dark eyeline, broadened and extending to gape in front of eye, narrowing into a streak thinner than eye behind eye, extending back in descending curve toward nape.

Bill yellow or orange yellow, shaped somewhat like smaller Black-crowned Night Heron bill, broad-based and deep with straightish edge of lower mandible and only slight bulge at gonys, and culmen of upper mandible curving downward to point of bill.

Feet webbed. Legs appeared grayish, with darker webs.

In flight the bird employed frantic wingbeats as if the heavy body required extra effort to keep it aloft. Wings swept back somewhat and wing angle accentuated by translucent/opaque pattern of wings. The impression with the wing profile and wingbeat pattern made me imagine it as a giant Least Tern.

16. Voice: I didn't hear it.

17. Similar species (include how they were eliminated by your observation): Terns eliminated by structure. Other tropicbirds eliminated by pattern.

18. Photographs or tape recordings obtained? (by whom? attached?): We all probably took hundreds. I took over 380.

19. Previous experience with this species: None, a lifer.

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

a. at time of observation: We discussed it aloud during the sighting. The possibility of White-tailed was discussed, but as we discerned more markings we knew what we had.

b. after observation:

21. This description is written from:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	notes made during the observation.	Are notes attached?	No, verbal.
<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:
Yes. Photos confirm fieldmarks and ID is straightforward.

23. Date: 28 July 2021







