

## LBRC Report Form

1. English and Scientific names: White-tailed Tropicbird (*Phaethon lepturus*)
2. Number of individuals, sexes, ages, general plumage (e.g., 2 in alternate plumage):  
One individual—unknown sex; age difficult to ascertain but presumed immature based on photographs illustrating lack of tail streamers and faint carpal bar across upper wing.
3. Parish:  
Terrebonne Parish
4. Specific Locality:  
Gulf of Mexico (25.995092, -90.730193) – water depth unknown
5. Date(s) when observed: June 23, 2024
6. Time(s) of day when observed: 1:49 PM
7. Reporting observer: Aaron Boone
8. Other observers accompanying reporter who also identified the bird(s):  
none
9. Other observers who independently identified the bird(s):  
none
10. Light conditions (position of bird in relation to shade and to direction and amount of light): Light was even afternoon light under clear skies – bird was not backlit. The bird stood out immediately. Heavy shadowing on the bird was absent.
11. Optical equipment (type, power, condition): Zeiss Victory SF 10x42 binoculars (near mint with mint glass); Canon 7dMk2 with 100-400mm IS2 lens (good condition with mint glass)
12. Distance to bird(s): Difficult to ascertain in the field, but my gut impression even considering the wide open seas and no references was that I first detected the bird at approximately 800-1000 meters. Over the course of the entire observation (approximately three minutes of observation time), the tropicbird did not approach closer than 800 meters.

13. Duration of observation: Observed the bird through binoculars and DSLR camera viewfinder over the course of three total minutes.

14. Habitat: Open ocean – pelagic environment over deep water south of the Sigsbee Escarpment.

15. Behavior of bird / circumstances of observation (flying, feeding, resting; include and stress habits used in identification; relate events surrounding observation): Bird was in flapping flight and on occasion dropping down to the water to plunge feed.

16. 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):

An all white tern-like bird with a relatively long tail and rather stout proportions detected naked eye flying a SSE direction past the cruise vessel -- the overall gestalt of the bird screamed tropicbird and most of my observation time was spent viewing the bird through the viewfinder of my camera to make sure I could capture as many diagnostic photos as possible during my brief observation period.

Considering the date and geography, I assumed this bird would likely turn out to be a Red-billed Tropicbird. Upon further inspection of my suite of photographs, White-tailed Tropicbird is the best identification for this tropicbird.

When observing this bird through 10 power binoculars, I could pick up faint black markings in the wings but it was impossible to place position and distribution of the darker coloration across the wing. During my observation period of approximately three minutes, I observed the bird dive into the water twice--in general the flight was direct and somewhat tern-like, reminiscent of the flight style of Royal Tern.

Key ID points in favor of WTTR: 1) white primary coverts--position of black in wing compared with bend of wing not consistent with black present in the primary coverts; 2) seemingly broad white tips to primaries; 3) black markings of upper wing coalescing into a distinct carpal bar; 4) fairly long-tailed impression despite appearing to be an immature bird.

17. Voice: None detected.

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

Red-billed Tropicbird (*Phaethon aethereus*) – I ruled out this tropicbird species based on extensive review of photographs I was able to obtain. Comparison of my photos with other photos of distant White-tailed Tropicbird show that position of black patch in hand of wing does not include primary coverts. (For example, see <https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/478232181>)

19. Photographs or tape recordings obtained? (by whom? attached?):

I managed to capture more than ten photographs of this bird. I have uploaded cropped and touched-up images to my eBird checklist.

20. Previous experience with this species: I do not have extensive experience with tropicbirds, but I realized that coming across a tropicbird on this cruise was a possibility. I had briefly reviewed identification features of both white-tailed and red-billed species prior to the cruise. I observed White-tailed Tropicbirds at a breeding colony from land in Maui, Hawaii during summer 2007.

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

Howell and Zufelt. 2019. *Oceanic Bird of the World: a Photo Guide*

Dunn and Alderfer. 2017. *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America (7th Edition)*

Sibley Guide iOS app

22. Identification aids used when?

At time of sighting, After observation

23. Are you positive of your identification? If not, explain:

Yes, I am 100% positive that this individual is a White-tailed Tropicbird after extensive research into the finer identification points of immature tropicbirds.

24. Date report completed:

Original observation notes taken down June 23 2024. Rare bird form draft completed on August 1, 2024 and finally revised and submitted October 5, 2024.

25. 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

26. If yes, may we include your name with the report?

Yes







