

Extended abstract

Ed Buijsman, *The Gull-billed Tern (Gelochelidon nilotica) and nature reserve De Beer, The Netherlands. Mededelingenreeks Natuurmonument De Beer 9, September 2014*

The Gull-billed Tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica* Gm.) is a bird that is not sighted very often in The Netherlands and has hardly ever bred there. This publication aims to focus on the presence of the Gull-billed Tern at the famous nature reserve 'De Beer', once situated near Hook-of-Holland. It was in this area – in 1931 - that the first breeding event of a Gull-billed Tern in The Netherlands was documented. After the Second World War the Gull-billed Tern brooded once more in 'De Beer'. The post-war history of the Gull-billed Tern is closely related to the experiences of Simon de Waard and Frans Kooijmans, two of the best nature photographers The Netherlands has even known.

The Gull-billed Tern was first sighted in The Netherlands by Schlegel (Schlegel, 1853). More sightings followed in 1897 (Thijssen, 1897), 1900 (Snouckaert van Schauburg, 1900), 1908 (Snouckaert van Schauburg, 1909) and 1910 (Snouckaert van Schauburg 1910). However, these were incidental sightings. Around 1925 the Gull-billed Tern was suspected to locate in the north of the Netherlands after summer. These birds were possibly originated from breeding colonies in Denmark (Eyckman, 1927).

The first mentioning of the Gull-billed Tern in the nature reserve 'De Beer' dates back to 1928. Then, the bird was not seen, but only heard (Tijmstra, 1928). Simon de Jager, the first supervisor of 'De Beer', documented an observation of the Gull-billed Tern for the first time at the end of the 1920s. Due to the rarity of the bird, De Jager's claims were initially only partly believed. In 1931 De Jager reported that the Gull-billed Tern was brooding, as he had found a nest. These reports were confirmed by naturalist and publicist Jan Pieter Strijbos, who published twice about the Gull-billed Tern (Strijbos, 1931a, 1931b). The Gull-billed Tern was sighted several more times after 1931, observations were documented with some regularity by the supervisors of 'De Beer' between 1935 and 1939. However, nests were not reported. The famous nature photographer Frans Kooijmans reported an observation in 1935 and by supervisors De Jager and Van Doorn in 1941. After 1941, due to the Second World War, no more observations at 'De Beer' were documented until the end of the war.

After the war, many birdwatchers put in effort to locate nests of the Gull-billed Tern at 'De Beer'. The Gull-billed Tern was possibly heard but not seen in 1947 and 1948, Wabe Korfmaker, supervisor of 'De Beer' after the war, included this in his report about the bird population of 'De Beer' in 1947. In an ornithological report of an excursion on 25th July 1947 an observation reads: 'On the Green Beach two hunting Gull-billed Terns'. In 1948 supervisor Korfmaker reported observations of the Gull-billed Tern in his report of early June. Ornithologist Anton van den Oord wrote in his article 'In weer en wind' from 1949 about observations he had done in 1946 of the Gull-billed Tern in the 'Spanish polder' near Rotterdam, as well as observations done in 'De Beer' together with Simon de Waard in 1948. De Waard would later document these same observations (De Waard, 1950a).

In 1949 De Waard and Van den Oord were more successful. On 29th May they found a Gull-billed Tern nest with two eggs. They build a shelter close to the nest, which would lead to unique photographs and film footage by De Waard. Frans Kooijmans was informed about the Gull-billed Tern by De Waard. Afterwards, Kooijmans wrote about his observations in a diary that was preserved. On 6th June Kooijmans located the nest and build a shelter as well to make photographs. Supervisors Korfmaker and Stehouwer located a second nest on 20th June. This nest was visited by De Waard and Korfmaker the next day, but it turned out to be empty. Kooijmans discovered a third nest on 25th June.

The breeding events of the Gull-billed Tern in 1949 led to several publications. The first was done by Van den Oord, he wrote an article in 'In weer en Wind' (Van den Oord, 1949). Kooijmans published his observations in 'Limosa' in 1950 (Kooijmans, 1949). De Waard devoted three stories to the Gull-billed Tern, in 1950 'In Weer en Wind' and in 'Ardea' and in 1952 in the prestigious 'British Birds' (De Waard, 1950a, 1950b, 1952).

Between 1950 and 1956 small numbers of Gull-billed Tern bred at 'De Beer' (table 1). In 1957 and 1958 the Gull-billed Tern was seen, but no longer as a breeding bird. After this the Gull-billed Tern was no longer seen at all at 'De Beer'. Shortly after this the degradation of 'De Beer' started due to the construction of the industrial area of 'Europoort'. 'De Beer' would eventually close on 1st January 1964. The last documented breeding event of the Gull-billed Tern in The Netherlands was in 1958 (Conradt & Ebels, 2004).

Table 1 Occurrence of the Gull-billed Tern, Nature reserve De Beer, The Netherlands, 1927-1958.

Jaar	Omschrijving
1927	Possibly present
1931	One proven breeding; number of nestlings unknown
1934	Observed
1935	Observed
1936	Observed
1937	Observed
1938	Two birds
1939	Observed
1941	Four birds
1947	Two birds
1948	Observed; mogelijk gebroed
1949	Two, possibly three breedings; at least three nestlings
1950	Three breedings; three nestlings
1951	Three, possibly four breedings; four nestlings
1952	Three, possibly four breedings; at least one nestlings
1953	Two breedings; two nestlings
1954	Three, possibly four breedings; at least two nestlings
1955	Two, possibly three breedings; at least one nestling
1956	Possibly one breeding
1957	Observed
1958	Observed

Literature¹

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¹ Most articles were written in Dutch. For a better understanding, the titles have been translated into English. For the full list of references, see the original publication.