

BRIDLED TERN

Onychoprion anaethetus

non-breeding visitor, vagrant

S.a. anaethetus
S.a. nelsoni?

Bridled Terns occur uncommonly in warmer waters around the world (Harrison 1983, Cramp and Simmons 1985, Higgins and Davies 1996, AOU 1998). In the n. Pacific Basin they breed off Mexico and in Palau but with few additional observations of birds at sea or vagrants: a single record in the Marshall Is (Pratt et al. 1987) and a few records from southern California (CBRC 2007). They were combined along with other terns in the genus *Sterna* until tern genera were split by the AOU (2006).

There are two records for Bridled Tern from waters around the *Southeastern Hawaiian Islands*. The first record was of one photographed 8 km NW of the nw. tip of *Ni'ihau* 12 Jun 2012 ([HRBP](#) 6648-6651) and the second was of one 7 km off the Kona Airport, *Hawai'i I*, 24 Apr 2015 ([HRBP](#) 6652-6654). Based on the first record, the [HBRC](#) accepted this species to the Hawaiian Islands Checklist in Jul 2014. The two Pacific subspecies differ primarily in the shade of the back: nominate *S.a. anaethetus* of the SW Pacific has a darker back and less white in the outer rectrices than *S.a. nelsoni* found off Mexico (Cramp and Simmons 1985, Higgins and Davies 1996). The bird photographed off Ni'ihau is dark-backed, and we are confident that it represents *anaethetus*, whereas the bird off Hawai'i I appears distinctly paler and may represent *nelsoni*, though we are less-confident assigning this subspecies to it.

Prior to these records there were erroneous and dubious reports of Bridled Tern from the Hawaiian Islands. Bloxam (1827) collected and described a tern near O'ahu as *Sterna Woahuensis* or *Oahuensis*. Finsch and Hartlaub (1867), followed by Dole (1869, 1879), applied the name "*Sterna panaya*" (an old name for Bridled Tern) to Bloxam's bird, Although the specimen cannot now be located, the description may best fit a juvenile [Sooty Tern](#) (Olson 1996a). Following this, Warren (1966) lists a specimen at British Museum (BMNH1847.3.4.95) as a syntype for Bloxham's *S. oahuensis*, which was "collected by Lord Byron and presented by Admiral Sir E. Belcher", commander of the H.M.S. Sulphur that visited Hawaii in 1837 and 1839 (Olson and James 1994). The specimen, an adult Bridled Tern, does not fit Bloxam's description and is unlikely his specimen (Olson 1996a:27), although a juvenile [Sooty Tern](#) accessioned with the same batch (BMNH 1847.3.4.95) could be the individual collected by Bloxam. Bryan (1958) gives "Bridled Tern" as another name for Gray-backed Tern, perhaps relating to some of the earlier confusion. King (1967) records Bridled Tern from Hawaii but the basis for this is unknown to us. Finally, a tern photographed in a breeding colony on Eastern I, Midway Atoll 5 Jun 2008 ([HRBP](#) 5496-5497 published *NAB* 62:632) shows characters suggesting a hybrid of a [Sooty Tern](#) with either Bridled Tern (as suggested somewhat by the bird's appearance) or [Gray-backed Tern](#) (more likely in this mixed colony) but its identification remains unconfirmed (it may also be just an aberrant Sooty Tern).

[Acronyms and Abbreviations](#)

[Literature cited](#)

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<http://hbs.bishopmuseum.org/birds/rfp-monograph/>