

Least Tern

Sternula antillarum

The smallest of American Terns, the Least Tern is found nesting on sandy beaches along the southern coasts of the United States and up the major river systems far into the interior of the continent.

Keys to Identification

Adult Description

Small tern. During breeding, black cap ending at white forehead. Short white eyestripe. Bill yellow with black tip. Back light gray. Underside white. Black leading edge to wing. In nonbreeding plumage has black eyestripe extending to back of head, white top of head, and black bill.

Immature Description

Juvenile with U-shaped marks across back. Immature resembles winter adult.

Cool Facts

- The Least Tern prefers sandy beaches for nesting, but it will use a flat gravel roof of a building. On sunny days the hot tar showing through the gravel can burn the feet of chicks or become stuck in their down.

Measurements

Both Sexes

- Length - 8.3 - 9.1 inches
- Wingspan - 18.9 - 20.9 inches
- Weight - 1.1 - 1.6 ounces

