

## STERNULA PLACENS, *Gould.*

### Torres-Straits Tern.

*Sternula placens*, Gould, Ann. Nat. Hist. [4] viii. p. 192 (1871).

A SINGLE example of this species has been in my collection for many years ; but I hesitated to describe it until 1871, when I received from Mr. Waterhouse, the Curator of the Adelaide Museum, a second individual. I carefully compared these materials with the Australian *Sternula nereis* and the European *Sternula minuta*, as well as with its allies inhabiting North and South America ; and with none of these did it agree. Its nearest ally seemed to be the European species ; but from this it differs in having considerably longer wings, in the snow-white hue of the shafts of the primaries, and in the larger and well-defined mark of black on the tips of the mandibles. From *S. nereis* it is distinguished by having black instead of white lores.

It is now nearly five years since I placed the description of this little Tern before the scientific world, and as yet I have seen no attempt to reconcile the species with any one previously described. But it would be unfair to my friend Mr. Howard Saunders, who is making the family of *Laridæ* his especial study, if I did not admit that he has privately given me his opinion that my supposed new species may ultimately prove to be the *Sterna sinensis* of Gmelin. At present, however, he is not quite prepared to assert this positively ; and therefore, in view of the different opinions at present prevailing in the mind of one amongst our best authorities, I have deemed it not unadvisable to give a careful figure of the bird, to aid in the further disentanglement of the question. At the same time there would be nothing extraordinary in the fact of a Chinese Tern wandering into Australian waters, as the range of the species, even then, would be small compared with that of some of the allied species—to wit, *Sternula minuta* &c.

The following is the description published (*l. c.*) :—

*Adult male*.—Bill yellow, with the apical third of both mandibles black, as sharply defined as if they had been dipped in ink ; forehead white, advancing over each eye to near its posterior angle ; lores, a narrow line above the eyes, crown, and nape black ; upper surface of the body and wing-coverts grey ; the first primary slaty black on the outer web, and along the inner web next the shaft ; the shaft itself and the outer half of the inner web white ; the second primary similarly but a little less strongly marked ; the remainder of the primaries silvery grey, with lighter shafts ; throat and all the under surface of the body silky white ; tail white ; feet yellow.

Total length 10 inches, bill from gape  $1\frac{5}{8}$ , wing  $7\frac{1}{2}$ , tail  $4\frac{3}{8}$ , tarsi  $\frac{3}{4}$ .

*Hab.* Torres Straits.

The figure given in the Plate is taken from a male, and is of the natural size.