

Genus STERNA, Linn.

GEN. CHAR. *Bill* as long or longer than the head, nearly straight, compressed, drawn to a fine point, with both mandibles of equal length, and the upper slightly convex; tomia rather intractated and sharp-edged; lower mandible having a prominent angle near its middle part. *Nostrils* basal, lateral, linear, oblong, pervious. *Wings* very long, acuminate, the first quill-feather the longest. *Tail* more or less forked. *Legs* having the tibiae naked for a short space above the tarsal joint. *Tarsi* short. *Feet* of four toes, three before, one behind; the three former united by a membrane more or less scalloped, the hind toe small and free. *Claws* arched and sharp.

CASPIAN TERN.

*Sterna Caspia*, Pall.

L'Hirondelle de Mer Tschegrava.

THIS large and powerful species is dispersed over the northern shores of Africa, the eastern portion of Asia, and all the temperate parts of Europe, where it appears to evince a partiality to inland seas rather than to the wide ocean, and hence we find it most abundant in the Mediterranean, Black, and Caspian Seas, from the latter of which it takes its name. Of its visits to the shores of Great Britain the instances are but few, and at no regular or definite periods.

In size this noble bird is not exceeded by any other member of its race: it is even larger than many of the Gulls, from which tribe the Terns differ much in their structure, and are moreover destined to fill a very different station in the scheme of creation.

Its food consists of fish, crustacea, mollusca, &c.

The sexes of the Caspian Tern offer no external difference in the colouring of the plumage, but the crown of the head, which is white in winter, becomes on the approach of spring of a deep rich and glossy black, which change is common to both sexes.

The nest is merely a hollow scraped in the sand or shingle; the eggs are four in number, and we have ourselves received them from the small shingly islands at the mouth of the Baltic, which, from the numerous specimens we have seen from that locality, we conceive must form one of the stations to which the Caspian Tern resorts in great numbers for the purpose of breeding: it doubtless also breeds on most of the shores of the Black and other seas before mentioned.

In summer the forehead, crown of the head, and occiput, are black; back, scapulars, wing-coverts, and tail pearl grey; quills greyish brown; the remainder of the plumage pure white; bill rich vermilion; legs and feet black.

The young of the year are clouded and transversely barred with marks of brown, much after the manner of the young of the Sandwich and other European Terns.

The Plate represents a male in summer of the natural size.