

Grey Ternlets in the Andaman Sea

The Grey Ternlet (*Procelsterna cerulea*) is a sedentary noddy tern of the tropical and subtropical Pacific Ocean (Fig. 1). Its known breeding range extends from Isla San Ambrosio in the east to Lord Howe Island in the west and north to Nihoa and Necker Islands in the Hawaiian Is (Harrison 1983, Schlatter 1984, Harrison *et al.* 1984). The westernmost records of non-breeding Grey Ternlets are from the east coast of Australia (Holmes 1976, Blakers *et al.* 1984). Here, I report a sighting of a flock of Grey Ternlets in the Andaman Sea, c.6000 km from the nearest known breeding island (Fig. 1).

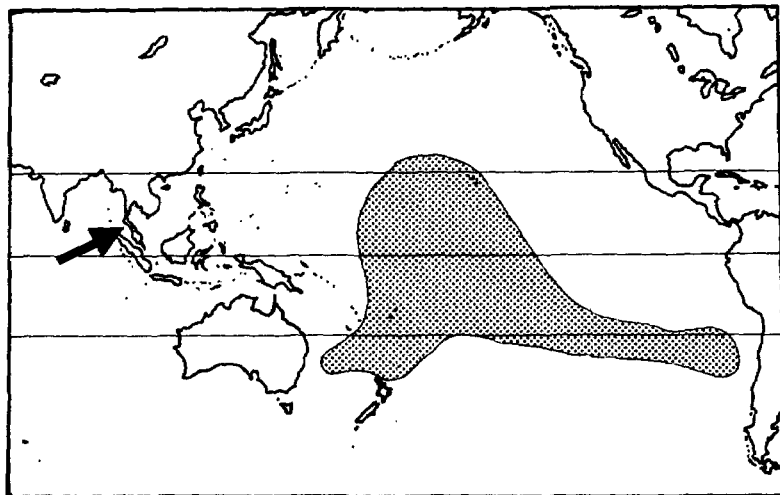


FIGURE 1 — Distribution of Grey Ternlet. Stippled area shows previously known breeding and non-breeding range. Black arrow indicates the 1988 sighting in the Andaman Sea

On 9 May 1988, I visited the twin islands of Koh Phi Phi ($7^{\circ}45'N$ $98^{\circ}46'E$) off the west coast of southern Thailand, which are about 50 km east of the southern tip of Phuket Island, a popular tourist resort. Phi Phi Don, the larger of the two, has in recent years been opened up to tourists. The smaller island, Phi Phi Le, which is uninhabited, is fringed by sheer limestone cliffs, with several caves. The largest cave contains hundreds of swiftlet nests, which are collected each year for use in soups. For this reason no one is allowed to live or stay on the island. Tourists are taken over to the cave on boats from Phi Phi Don, shown nests, and then taken around the rest of the island. It was during this trip that I saw the ternlets.

While off the western end of Phi Phi Le I was surprised to see small grey terns among the numerous Black-naped Terns (*Sterna sumatrana*). Although the heavy swell made binoculars hard to use, the weather was fine and clear with excellent visibility and the birds came to within 12 m of the boat. The birds were noticeably smaller than the Black-naped Terns and were pale grey with darker primaries and black bills. In all aspects of

appearance and behaviour they were identical to the Grey Ternlets that I have seen off the Kermadec and Poor Knights Islands in New Zealand.

About 30 ternlets were around the perpendicular cliffs. Some were flying over the water with their typically buoyant flight, and some flew up and alighted on ledges on the cliff face, where others were already perched.

The *Bird Guide of Thailand* (Lekagul & Cronin 1974) does not mention Grey Ternlets. However, as the Koh Phi Phi islands have been opened to tourists only recently, the birds may have been present for some time.

I thank Colin Miskelly for suggesting changes to an earlier draft of this note, locating some of the references and drawing the map.

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Unusual nesting site for Little Shag

Little Shags are nesting on a rock in a water-level cave at the foot of sheer cliffs in the north-west part of Lake Taupo. The cave entrance is about 2 m wide at the waterline and tapers to a point about 2 m above water level. Height increases inside the cave. The nesting rock is about 6 m from the entrance. Water depth is 2-3 m.

In November 1988 there were 4 or 5 nests. One bird had three naked chicks and another had at least one chick. Adults remained on their nests during my visit. The only access to the nesting rock is by swimming.

I have been aware of this cave and its occupants since about 1972 and have seen the nesting birds in most years. The cave and its residents are not at all obvious to a casual observer.

A nearby waterfall on the Tutaewaeroa Stream is called "The Falls Of The White-breasted Shag" on a map that I have had since the early sixties, and so they may have been nesting there for many years. The main nesting areas on the lake are Motutaiko and Motuwhara Islands.

The site is doubly unusual in that the Little Shags are nesting on a rock in a cave, rather than in trees and shrubs, which is usual for the species (Falla, Sibson & Turbott, 1979, the *New Guide to the Birds of New Zealand*).

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