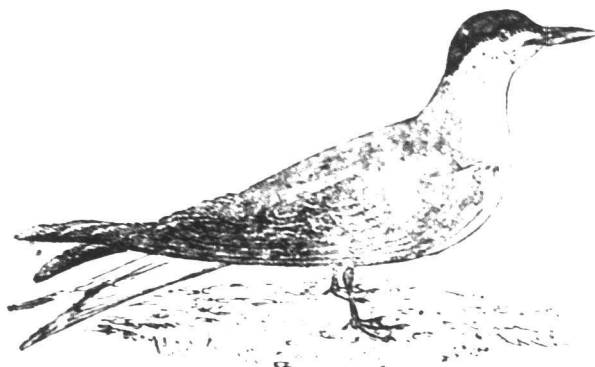


FERNDALE SCHOOL.

No. XXVII.—A LONG WINGED SWIMMER.

THE COMMON TERN. (*Sterna hirundo*, Linn.) No. 56 A. C. C.

Between two seas the sea-bird's wing makes halt,
Wind-weary; while with lifting head he waits
For breath to re-inspire him from the gates
That open still toward sunshine on the vault
High-domed of morning.

SWINBURNE—*Songs of the Sea and of the Sky*.

T. Let us examine this most common of our sea-birds. Is its hind toe connected by a web with the other toes?

S. No; therefore it is not one of the full-web-toed swimmers.

T. Correct. Are its nostrils tubular?

S. No; therefore it is not one of the tube-nosed swimmers.

T. Right again. Are the cutting edges of the bill fringed or finely toothed?

S. No; therefore it is not one of the lamel-billed swimmers or geese.

T. Very good. You clearly remember our previous lessons. Are its legs so far behind that the bird, when standing, is nearly erect as if its feet were placed near the rump?

S. No. It stands horizontally on its feet, which appear to be placed near the middle of its body. What are the rump-footed swimmers called?

T. Very good. The Greek word for "rump-footed" birds is "*pygopodes*." We have called them the diving swimmers, from their expertness in diving. Is our specimen a diver?

S. No. It is not one of the *pygopodes*, judging from the manner in which it stands.

T. Correct. You will notice that its front toes are distinctly webbed showing that it must be a —

S. Lover of the water.

T. Very good; and its tail is longer than its legs (tarsus) and its wings are also —

S. Long.

T. So from two Latin words meaning "long feathered" we get the scientific name of the order *Longipennes*, which may be translated —

S. Long-winged.

T. The long wings and webbed toes of this order of birds fits them for —

S. Flying over long stretches of water.

T. What birds have you observed to be nearly continuously flying over the water by the sea shore.

S. Gulls, Terns, Jaegers.

T. Very good. About twenty different species of this order have been observed in the Atlantic Provinces. The Skuas and Jaegers have three distinct coverings on the hard bill, a terminal hook, a side piece, and another on the ridge of the bill nearly overhanging the nostrils.

S. Our specimen has not these, and must therefore be a Gull or a Tern.

T. Correct. Gulls have their bills thicker at the angle than at the nostrils and their bills are generally more or less curved.

S. This must be a Tern then, because its bill looks thicker at the middle and it is pretty straight. The tail is deeply forked.

T. You are right. Seven Terns have been reported in these provinces; but this one and the Arctic Tern are the only common ones to our provinces. Note the principal points of description in our specimen.

The mantle is —

S. Bluish gray.

T. The tail —

S. Chiefly white.

T. Top of the head —

S. Black (in summer).

T. Is the outer tail feather entirely white?

S. No. The inner web of the feather is entirely white and the outer web quite dusky.

T. Correct. The *Roseate Tern*, seen in Nova Scotia, has both webs of the outer tail feathers white. Our common Tern has a bright vermillion-red color bill, blackish at the tip, and the feet a vermillion-orange. The Arctic Tern has the color a deep carmine red.

T. How long is our specimen?

S. Fourteen or fifteen inches.

T. Length of wing —

S. Ten to eleven inches.

T. Tail —

S. Six inches. Fork, three and a half inches deep.

T. Its nest is usually a depression in the sand. Its eggs, two, three or four, are about one and a half inch by one and one-sixth inch, olive-buff or olive-brownish, blotched with dark brown or blackish, scarcely distinguishable from those of the Arctic Tern, and more or less similar to those of the Roseate Tern.

S. What is its name?

T. *Sterna hirundo*. The specific name is the Latin for swallows. It is often called the sea swallow.