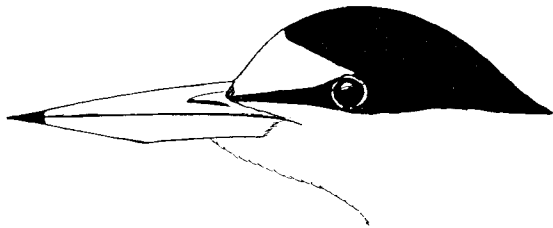


BIRD IN THE HAND

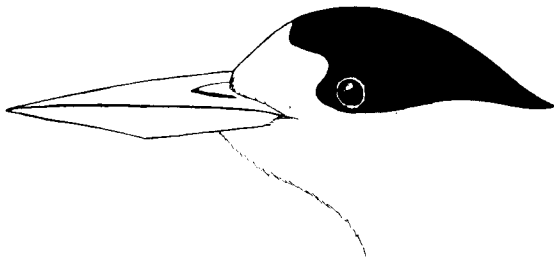
W. B. HITCHCOCK

The Little Tern (*Sterna albifrons*) and Fairy Tern (*S. nereis*) are the smallest found in Australia. Both choose similar nest sites: shingle and sand beaches, especially on low-lying barren islets in bays and inlets, and on islands within the confines of the continental shelf (200-metre depth line). The breeding ranges of the two species do not, apparently, overlap: *albifrons* breeds from about Broome, east to Cape York, south and west to Lakes Entrance, Victoria; *nereis* from the Dampier Archipelago, mid-Western Australia, south and east to Port Albert, Victoria, and Tasmania.

There is one specimen, and several sight records, in February-March, from Port Phillip Bay (Hitchcock, *S.Aust. Orn.* 22: 100, 1959), and one sight record of *nereis* (the only accept-



LITTLE TERN - Adult Breeding



FAIRY TERN - Adult Breeding

able one to date from N.S.W.) from Quibray Bay, near Sydney, in December (Hoskin and Hindwood, *Emu* 63: 335-6, 1964).

Neither species can be positively sexed on external characters. The diagnostic features are in the bill, head, the two outermost primaries, and possibly weights.

R.A.O.U. No. 117 Little Tern

(*Sterna albifrons*)

Length 203-254 mm. (8-10 inches);
wingspan 445-495 mm. (17½-19½ inches).

Adult: Breeding: bill olive-yellow or chrome-yellow, nearly always tipped black (90 per cent. of 41 skins—Hitchcock 1959). Tarsus, toes and webs orange-yellow. Lores completely black. White on forehead extending over eyes in thin line. On inner of two outer primaries next to the shaft, a well-defined strip of black, narrow at base but widening to cover whole tip. Weight 48-60 gm. (mean 56.6 for 13 specimens).

Winter: similar to breeding plumage, except that apical third or half of bill becomes black, the black lores are lost, and the crown becomes pale greyish-white.

R.A.O.U. No. 118 Fairy Tern

(*Sterna nereis*)

Length 216-267 mm. (8½-10½ inches);
Wingspan 457-508 mm. (18-20 inches).

Adult: Breeding: bill orange or orange-yellow, rarely tipped black (39 per cent. of 46 skins—Hitchcock 1959). Tarsus, toes and webs orange or orange-yellow. Lores white, black spot only in front of eye. No black strip on primaries, only an ill-defined greyish line. Weight 65-85 gm. (mean 73.4 for 11 specimens).

Winter: similar to breeding plumage, except that bill darkens, leaving only a yellowish centre, and the crown becomes pale greyish-white.