

MORPHOMETRICS OF EGGS OF LITTLE TERN

The purpose of this note is to seek clarification about the dimensions of the eggs of the Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*.

I have been involved in monitoring the Little Tern colony at Botany Bay since the 1988/89 breeding season. During that time I have measured some eggs at random and have found that none agree with the measurements given in some of the popular identification books which have been published recently. I question those which state that the eggs of the Little Tern measure 28 × 22 mm (length × diameter) (Pringle 1987; Beruldsen 1980; Slater 1995). The first edition of the Reader's Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds (1976) states 28 × 22 mm. This was revised in the 1986 and subsequent editions to 32 × 24 mm.

Hitchcock (1959) from a sample of 69 eggs gave a maximum range of 38.0 × 24.9 mm and 32.3 × 25.5 mm and a minimum range of 30.0 × 32.2 mm and 32.7 × 22.6 mm, an average of 32.8 × 24.2 mm. The Handbook of Birds of The Western Palearctic Vol. 4 (Cramp 1985), states them to be variable and from a sample of 400, a mean of 32 × 24 mm is given, range 30–37 × 21–26 mm. Serventy *et al.* (1971) from a sample of 10 eggs gives a mean of 32.8 × 24.8 mm, range 31.7–35.0 × 23.2–26.2 mm. Hoehner (1974) gives 32.9 × 24.9 mm, sample number not stated.

In the recently published HANZAB Vol. 3 (Higgins *et al.* 1996), I am pleased to see the egg sizes given in the format 32.2(30–36.3 13) × 24.1(22.9–24.9) (North). This format shows the mean length × diameter of the eggs measured, outside the brackets. Within the brackets, the range for each dimension is given, the last number being the sample size.

Table 1. Ranges for length and diameter, mean and standard deviation for 43 Little Tern eggs.

No.:	Range for length:	Range for diameter:	Mean (length × diameter):	SD:
43	30.2–35.6 mm	22.5–26.6 mm	32.5 × 24.1 mm	±1.5 × 0.6 mm

It was suggested to me by Durno Murray that a uniform method should be adopted such as the above for publishing all egg measurements.

Although my sample is small (43 eggs) the measurements agree with the larger ranges and averages given above (Table 1). None were as small as 28 × 22 mm.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Dave Pridell and Geof Ross NPWS for allowing me to assist in monitoring the Tern colony since 1992. Also, Ern Hoskins for making available the South Australian Ornithologist publication, Graham Fry, Jonathan Starks and Alan Leishman for supplying some of the references and Durno Murray for his assistance and advice.

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Received: 12 March, 1996

CORRIGENDUM

The following amendment should be made to Volume 20, Number 3, September 1996.

Page 111, Seabird Islands

Riptide Cay, Great Barrier Reef, Queensland should read No. 232 not No. 231.