

COLOUR-BANDED CASPIAN TERN SIGHTED AT WILLIAMS LAKE, BRITISH COLUMBIA

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On 22 July 2009, I photographed a colour-banded adult Caspian Tern (*Sterna caspia*) around 1900 hrs while it perched on a log at Scout Island in Williams Lake, BC. Unfortunately I could not read the number on the metal band but the bird was colour-banded with green over red plastic bandettes on the left leg and a combination of yellow over blue plastic bandettes on top of the regular aluminum band on the right leg (Figure 1). Caspian Tern is a rare but regular summer visitor to the Cariboo region (Roberts and Gebauer 1992; pers. obs.) and in 2009 appeared to be reported more frequently than usual.



Figure 1. Colour-banded adult Caspian Tern photographed at Scout Island, Williams Lake, BC, on 22 July 2009 (Kris Andrews). BC Photo 3729.

After some investigative work I learned from Yasuko Suzuki, a Ph.D. candidate at Oregon State University in Corvallis, that the tern was banded as a chick in July, 2004 as part of a co-operative demography study at East Sand Island, which is located in the mouth of the Columbia River in

Oregon. This 62-acre, low-lying island supports the largest known Caspian Tern nesting colony in the world (United States Fish and Wildlife Service 2005). Y. Suzuki (pers. comm.) mentioned that reports have been received of their colour-banded Caspian Terns from Pacific coastal areas, including Vancouver, British Columbia, but not as far inland as Williams Lake, which is about 670 km in a direct line northeast from East Sand Island.

In western North America, Caspian Tern breeds at scattered colonies along the Pacific coast from Baja California Sur to the Copper River delta in Alaska and inland through the western United States to Alberta and the southern Northwest Territories (Cuthbert and Wires 1999). In British Columbia, successful isolated breeding has been reported for the Fraser River delta (Campbell et al. 1990) and a small colony has been established on Fraser Lake in the central interior (R.W. Campbell pers. comm.).

Unsuccessful breeding attempts have occurred at Shuswap Lake (R.W. Campbell pers. comm.). Over the past 15 years or so birders in many other locations in the southern interior of British Columbia have reported increasing numbers of Caspian Terns throughout the spring and summer months. At some locations (*e.g.*, Eagle Lake in the Chilcotin region - see Campbell et al. 2009) their presence is being closely monitored as their behaviour suggests they might nest. Also, at Scout Island in Williams Lake, two adult Caspian Terns with a begging juvenile were observed from 16 to 19 September, 2004 (pers. obs.). Photographs were taken.

Acknowledgements

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About the Author

Kris has lived in Williams Lake, British Columbia, for 36 years and has been a keen birder since 2001 when she and husband Darcy built a house near Scout Island Nature Centre. She participates in the British Columbia Breeding Bird Atlas project surveying two squares south of the Chilcotin River near Chilco Ranch and has taken over Breeding Bird Survey route No.11045 near Williams Lake. She is co-author of a comprehensive species account for Common Loon in British Columbia (see *Wildlife Afield* 5:54-146, 2008).