

ANIMAL SECTION – Birds

LEAST TERN

ABOUT

The Least Tern (*Sterna antillarum*) is the smallest American tern, weighing 1 ounce (28 grams) and measuring 9 inches (23 cm) in length. It can be recognized in spring and summer by a white forehead that contrasts with the black on top of its head and back of the neck. Its body is slate grey on top and white below with pointed wings, with a forked tail that is typical of most terns. This tern's bill and feet are yellow and its wing beats are uniquely fast. The Least Tern breeds in colonies (groups) of up to 200 birds and their nests are scraped in sand, shell or gravel. They usually lay two eggs, with both parents helping to sit on the eggs for twenty-one days.

DID YOU KNOW?

In the early 1900s the Least Tern was in danger of disappearing from the northeastern United States because they were hunted for their feathers to decorate hats. Laws passed in 1918 helped the species to recover through the 1920s and '30s. Development of coastal areas destroying habitat and breeding grounds, as well as general human activity, has once again been causing a decline in the populations of this bird. The Least Tern has a nearly worldwide distribution and on the Atlantic Coast it breeds from Maine to Argentina. Its wintering grounds range from the Gulf Coast and Central America south to Peru and Brazil. This bird's New York status is threatened and its Federal status is endangered in the interior U.S., but not on the coast.

For more detailed information visit: www.dec.state.ny.us.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

The feathers of the Least Tern were used to decorate what in the 1900s?

- a. Coat collars
- b. Hair bands
- c. Hats
- d. Scarves

Answer is C.

