

CALIFORNIA LEAST TERN
(Sterna antillarum browni)

STATUS: Endangered (35 FR 8495, June 2, 1970).

SPECIES DESCRIPTION: The Least Terns are the smallest members in subfamily Sterninae and family Laridae, measuring 21 to 24 cm (8 to 9 inches) in length with a 45 to 51cm (18 to 20 inches) wingspan. It has a black crown and loreal stripe on their head, a snowy white forehead and underside with gray upperparts. The outer two primary wing feathers are black, bill is yellow or orange with a black tip, tail is deeply forked, and legs orange. Males have a wider dark loreal stripe but sexes are mostly distinguished by behavior. Juveniles have extensive U- or V- shaped markings on gray to yellowish-brown shoulder feathers.

HABITAT: Gregarious, forms nesting colonies on barren to sparsely vegetated areas. Nests in shallow depressions on open sandy beaches, sandbars, gravel pits, or exposed flats along shorelines of inland rivers, lakes, reservoirs, and drainage systems.

RANGE: Primarily in California, may occur in different parts of Arizona where habitat components are adequate for nesting or feeding such as large lakes, recharge basins, or wetland areas. Breeding documented in Maricopa County. Transient migrants occur more frequently and have recently been documented in Mohave and Pima counties.

REASONS FOR DECLINE / VULNERABILITY: Habitat loss or degradation associated with flooding behind dams, channelization, water diversion and other changes in vegetation resulting from controlled water flow behind dams have eliminated most historical least tern habitat. Coastal or shoreline nesting habitat continues to be replaced by urban development and other human activities, which also increases their vulnerability to predation.

LAND MANAGEMENT / OWNERSHIP: Varies.

NOTES: The California least tern is also protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) (16 USC 703 *e. seq.*) and its implementing regulations (50 CFR Parts 20 and 21) which protects Least terns, their eggs, nests, and feathers from being killed, taken, captured, or pursued. The first documented nest site for the species in Arizona occurred in June 2009 in Maricopa County.

Updated July 2009.