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COMMON TERN STERNA HIRUNDO MATING WITH TWO FEMALES SUCCESSIVELY IN ONE SEASON

Re-pairing – taking a new mate after failure of the first breeding attempt – within the breeding season is unusual for seabirds (Schreiber & Burger 2002). In the monogamous Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*, mate change may happen between, but not within the season (González-Solís 1999a). For a long-term study on the population ecology of Common Terns, since 1992, all fledged chicks in the Banter See colony in Wilhelmshaven (North-West Germany) have been fitted with transponders (TROVAN ID100, 11 x 2 mm), allowing remote identification of individuals. The transponders are subcutaneously implanted, require no battery and have an unlimited life. Since 1993, all breeders in the colony were checked by placing portable antennas at the nests to identify the marked breeders (see Fig. 1). Around the colony, there is a registration system consisting of 44 resting platforms equipped with antennas to record marked terns whenever they use them (for more details see Wendeln & Becker 1997; Becker *et al.* 2001; Ludwigs & Becker 2005), allowing to gather information on individual arrival.

In 2001, the male “Birk” (transponder ID 0015FE81, ring number 7729576, fledged in 1996) bred with the female “Ronja” (ID 0134EB35, ring 7745054, fledged 1997), just as in the previous year. “Ronja” arrived at the colony on 4th May, and “Birk” on 8th May, and terns were observed on nest number 529 during day and night. The first egg was laid on 20th May. After the clutch was completed (3 eggs), the female was observed incubating for the last time on 30th May, and disappeared during the beginning of June (she probably died). “Birk” incubated the clutch for a few days, but then deserted it. Later in the season, “Birk” was observed incubating a new clutch of nest no. 917 with a new partner (the female “Hanni”, ID 01D207AF, ring 7728684, fledged in 1998).

“Hanni” bred for the first time in 2001, arriving at the colony on 6th June in that year. The first egg of her clutch with Birk was laid on 22nd June. Birk and Hanni incubated the clutch, fed the young and one daughter fledged (ID 0604A654, ring 7793500), despite having laid very late in the season. Both terns were recorded at the colony until late August, and returned the following year to breed together again.

This is probably the first documented case of a male which was paired with two females successively within one season in the Laridae. Nisbet *et al.*



*Figure 1. Antenna (black frame) placed around a clutch of a pair of Common Terns *Sterna hirundo* within the "Banter See" colony to detect and identify pair mates (the transponder is placed in the breast area of the bird; the part of the body, which is closest to the antenna).*

*Figuur 1. Antenne (zwart frame) rond een legsel van een paar Visdiefjes *Sterna hirundo* in de kolonie "Banter See" om de aanwezigheid en de identiteit van paargenoten vast te stellen (de transponder bevindt zich in de borst, waar het lichaam het nauwst in contact staat met de antenne).*

(1978) reported two cases where the females died leaving chicks 7-11 days old and the male successfully reared one young. Males are usually contributing the majority of food to the chicks (Becker & Ludwigs 2004). So, fathers can raise chicks to fledging if the mate dies during the rearing period and the chicks are more than one week old.

It is well known that arriving late at the colony often results in divorce and subsequent loss of breeding status in Common Terns (González-Solis *et al.* 1999b). It is therefore remarkable that the male was able to re-pair so late in the season after an unsuccessful first breeding attempt.

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