

## **WHEN IS A SPECIES ENDANGERED? FOR THE BLACK TERN, IT COULD BE NOW.**

Port Rowan, Ontario, 24 September, 2002: Scientists from Bird Studies Canada's National Research Centre have released a study which reveals a severe decline of Black Terns along the Great Lakes shoreline. The study compared data from 1991 and 2001 in coastal areas of the Canadian portions of Lake Huron, Lake St. Clair, Lake Erie, Lake Ontario, St. Clair River, Detroit River and Niagara River. The data showed an apparent overall decline of about 35% over the 11-year period.

"While the overall decline is 35%, there are many sites where we found as much as a 80-90% drop in population," said Jon McCracken, one of the study's authors.

"For example, Presquile Provincial Park, on Lake Ontario, had 250 birds in 1948, but this number had diminished to 20 to 30 pairs by the 1980s, further declined to 12 to 13 pairs during the 1991 survey and still further to 2 birds in the 2001 survey. And the frustrating reality is that while we can now tell you about the severity of the decline, we don't know why it has happened."

McCracken called for further research, but also suggested that widespread conservation strategies be put into place in the meantime. These might include protecting nesting areas from destruction and/or degradation so that adequate breeding habitat is available across all water level regimes, minimizing human disturbance at nesting colonies, controlling water levels to prevent dense stands of cattails from developing, and providing artificial nesting platforms in marshlands that lack sufficient natural nesting materials.

Bird Studies Canada's (BSC) results are corroborated by findings from two other independent surveys. The Breeding Bird Survey, an international volunteer program coordinated by the U.S. Geological Service and Canadian Wildlife Service, shows a 62% decline in the Black Tern over a 36-year time period.

The Marsh Monitoring Program, a wetland bird-monitoring program delivered by Bird Studies Canada, in partnership with Environment Canada and the United States Environmental Protection Agency showed that the abundance index of the Black Tern has declined by 18% from 1995 through 2001.

The Black Tern is a graceful water bird, sometimes described as resembling a large swallow because of its pointed wings and forked tail. It is the only black-bodied tern, with wings, back and tail of dark gray.

Bird Studies Canada is the preeminent, non-profit, organization committed to advancing the understanding, appreciation and conservation of wild birds and their habitats. Its National Research Centre is located in Port Rowan, Ontario.

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