Dryopteris carthusiana at Mt. Magazine, Logan Co., Arkansas

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A SURVEY OF THE INTERIOR LEAST TERN ON THE ARKANSAS AND WHITE RIVERS IN ARKANSAS

Potential tern sites were first identified by aerial surveillance and then explored by boat. The initial step involved a two-day helicopter search for evidence of nesting terns on the Arkansas River from Little Rock to the Oklahoma state line (26 June), and from Newport to St. Charles on the White River and again on the Arkansas River from Lock and Dam #3 to Little Rock (27 June). Due to a need to refuel frequently, and the limited availability of refueling stations, the lower 30 miles of the White River and the Arkansas River from its mouth to Lock and Dam #3 were not surveyed from the air.

All potential tern colonies identified by air on the Arkansas River, upstream from Little Rock, were visited by boat (1, 2, and 8 July), and the lower White River from Lock and Dam #1 to the Mississippi River and back up the Arkansas River to Dam #2 also was surveyed by boat (17 July).

The helicopter, provided by the Corps of Engineers and piloted by Air Reserve pilots, flew at heights of 100 to 200 feet above the ground at speeds of 30 to 75 m.p.h. Care was taken not to disturb tern colonies with prop wash. Visits to sandbars upstream from Little Rock were made in early morning (before 09:00 a.m.) and evening (after 6:30 p.m.) hours to avoid exposing young birds and eggs to the heat of the mid-day sun.

However, sandbars on the lower White and Arkansas rivers were searched from the water in mid-day due to the late start of that survey. Four rookeries were observed, one of them previously known, on the Arkansas River above Little Rock, and one rookery was found at the mouth of the Arkansas River. Approximately 80 adult least terns, 86 juveniles, and 40 eggs were counted at the five rookeries. No terns were found elsewhere on the Arkansas River or on the White.

The rookery at river mile 147, located on a side channel bar (spoilbank), was surveyed three times. On 1 July, 14 adults and one downy chick were found. No eggs or egg fragments were seen. A second trip to the ternery on 19 July proved more fruitful. Eight juvenile birds, seven of which were highly mobile, and 16 adults were counted. On a third visit, made 27 July, two flying young of the year were seen, but only six adults and no nests or flightless young. Though adults dive-bombing in one area of the spoilbank indicated that at least one nest was still active,