

**ABSTRACTS FOR CONDOR 104(1) FEBRUARY 2002 C.E.**

**SHORT COMMUNICATIONS**

**EXPERIMENTAL ASSESSMENT OF THE INFLUENCE OF GULL-BILLED TERNS  
ON NEST SITE CHOICE OF BLACK SKIMMERS**

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*Abstract.* The hypothesis that members of one species might benefit from nesting with heterospecifics has been proposed to explain the existence of mixed-species breeding colonies. Black skimmers (*Rhynchops niger*) usually nest in close association with one of several tern species (*Sterna* spp.); benefits of this association might lead skimmers to use different nesting substrates than terns, thus facilitating coexistence. Manipulating availability of substrates, we found that skimmers exclusively nested on substrates normally occupied by terns, indicating that habitat partitioning detected in previous studies was not a result of species-specific preferences. Using arrays of tern, skimmer, and control decoys, we found that skimmers nested more often with conspecifics than with terns. Our results suggest that the tendency of skimmers to nest in association with terns, but on different substrates, may be more influenced by nesting sequence than from a preference to nest near terns.

*Key words:* colonial waterbirds, competition, mixed-species colony, nest site selection, *Rhynchops niger*, seabird, *Sterna nilotica*.

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