

China's rarest bird discovered wintering in Indonesia

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The photograph confirming the first
wintering record of Chinese Crested Tern
for 70 years (credit: C Robson)

A wintering Chinese Crested Tern *Sterna bernsteini* has been seen and photographed in Pulau Lusaolate, north Seram, Indonesia, representing the first record of the species outside the breeding season for over 70 years. First discovered in 1861, Chinese Crested Tern was largely presumed extinct until 2000, when four adults and four chicks were found amongst a colony of other tern species on Matsu Island off the Fujian coast in China. In 2004, it was discovered breeding on the Jiushan Islands. At present these and the Wuzhishan Islands in Zhejiang province, are the only known breeding sites in the world. Asian bird expert, Craig Robson was leading a bird tour when he came across the remarkable record. He recounts, "I took the group out to Pulau Lusaolate on 4 December 2010 to see the well-known population of Olive Honeyeater *Lichmera argentauris*, that have been known from this tiny islet for many decades. Soon after arrival I noticed a roosting group of 30-40 Greater Crested Terns *Sterna bergii* on some rocks just off the beach. Checking through the flock quickly with binoculars, I noticed one that I thought might be a Lesser Crested *S. bengalensis*. Checking with the telescope, I immediately realised that I was looking at perhaps the first ever winter 'sighting' of a Chinese Crested Tern. I quickly got a series of photos through the 'scope. The bird flew off with a few Greater Crested Terns and was briefly seen foraging offshore before it disappeared around the island." This amazing record begs-the-question of how many more are wintering in this region, and birders, should be encouraged to survey wintering groups of Greater Crested Terns around the numerous islands in the Seram Sea and perhaps even further south in the Banda Sea. With an estimated population of not more than 50 birds, the Critically Endangered Chinese Crested Tern is China's most threatened bird and much rarer than the Giant Panda. The greatest threat to the tern's survival is egg collection by fishermen for food, which continues even though the breeding sites are within protected areas Chinese Crested Tern is one of the species benefitting from the BirdLife Preventing Extinctions Programme. The programme is spearheading greater conservation action, awareness and funding support for all of the world's most threatened birds, starting with the 190 species classified as Critically Endangered. Find out more [here](#)