

## Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*

**Habitat Preference:** Prairie marshes and wetlands at least 12 hectares (~ 30 acres) in size, where nests are built on muskrat houses, floating cattail rootstocks, or on piles of floating vegetation

### Threats:

- Loss of wetland habitat
  - Many natural wetlands have been drained throughout Iowa for agricultural practices and especially in the Prairie Pothole Region.
- Inappropriate wetland restoration
  - Many basins that have been restored are too small to be used by Black Terns. They will nest in wetlands 12-27 hectares (~30-67 acres) only if they are within a large wetland complex (140 acres within 3 miles).
  - Black terns do not seem to use areas that have regular water level manipulations due to the unstable nesting conditions that are created.
- Age of restored wetlands may be a significant factor
  - Black Terns are a late successional wetland species and seem to prefer to nest in large marshes where the ratio of emergent vegetation to water is 50:50.



### Practice Guidelines:

- Restore Wetlands:
  - Important to restore natural wetland areas.
  - These areas need to have a considerable amount of open water +6 ha (~15 acres). Prefer wetlands with relatively equal components of open water and emergent vegetation with the emergent vegetation interspersed throughout the open water.
  - Keep adequate stable water levels through the nesting season.
  - Restored wetlands should be greater than 20 ha (~50 acres) in size and work best as part of larger wetland complexes.
- Control monotypic stands of cattails
  - Black terns will not use wetlands when dense stands of cattails cover most of marsh
  - Cattail stands can be controlled with herbicide, removal of cattails, and with muskrat populations (muskrats use the cattails to build lodges and for feeding).
- Manage for tern nest sites
  - Dead floating cattail mats are attractive black tern nest sites, as are old muskrat houses. When other nest sites are lacking, artificial nesting structures can be used with some success.
- Preserve existing wetlands, since Black Terns prefer to nest in a natural wetland over a newly restored wetland.