

Common Tern Action Plan

Current Status

In 1993 the British common tern population was estimated at about 12,300 pairs (Gibbons et al, 1993) with a significant proportion of this population breeding in Scotland. The European breeding population is estimated at between about 195,000 and 227,000 pairs (Hagemeijer & Blair, 1997).

In 1969-70 there were an estimated 10,800 pairs of breeding common terns in Great Britain. In 1985-87 this figure had risen to an estimated 12,000. Over this period there had also been a shift northwards with numbers in Scotland increasing from 4300 to 6200 pairs. While there may have been some short-term fluctuations in breeding numbers, indications are that the UK population is relatively stable at present.

The only known local breeding colony of common terns is on the mooring dolphins in a generally disused basin at Grangemouth Docks. This site has been monitored intermittently since 1975 and annually since 1991. These records suggest that the number of nests was in the range of 30-60 from the mid-70s to mid-80s, and then increased somewhat in the late 80s sometimes reaching as many as 100 nests up to 2003. There also appears to have been an expansion of the nesting area to the nearby cairns on the River Carron, although the use of some of these cairns by gulls seems to deter common tern nesting. Importantly, the Grangemouth colony is probably the most successful in Scotland in terms of the numbers of young reared per nest per year.

Ecology

Common terns are widely distributed across the lower latitudes of the northern hemisphere. They winter off the West African coast and migrate north to breed, generally arriving off the Scottish coast in April. They nest colonially at sites offering protection from ground predators, usually on off-shore islands, although freshwater islands, undisturbed sandy or shingle coasts and man-made habitats such as mooring islands and even buildings are also used. They feed by flying some 10 feet or so above the water, looking downwards and plunge diving to capture prey or to pick food from the surface of the

SPECIES PROFILE



David Jones

Common name: Common Tern
Scientific name: *Sterna hirundo*
Status: Conservation concern

Protection:
Protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.
Additional protection is afforded under the EC Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds, and the Bern and Bonn Conventions.

Associated Habitat and Species Action Plans

Habitats:
Estuary
Mudflats
Saline lagoons
Saltmarsh
Standing open water
Urban greenspace

water. Nests are unlined scrapes or hollows on the ground where the female lays 2-3 creamy white eggs blotched with black. Incubation lasts for 20-30 days and the young fledge after a further 28 days. Their diet is mainly fish, generally sand eels. A pair may have a second brood but this is dependent upon the availability of suitable food supplies. The autumn migration commences in August, and by November all the terns have left our shores.

The common tern, or sea swallow as it is often referred to because of its deeply forked tail, is pale grey above with white under parts, a black cap, red legs and a red bill which generally has a black tip. The common tern can easily be confused with the arctic tern and roseate tern which are very similar species and which share the same habitats. However, neither of these species has nested at the Grangemouth site.

Current Factors Affecting the Species

- Disturbance of breeding colonies.
- Poor weather

Cold, wet conditions can reduce the success of nesting terns.

- Predation

Predation of tern nests by mink and in some cases hedgehogs can be a serious threat to breeding colonies, although the threat from hedgehogs is absent on many offshore islands and rafts where most terns breed.

- Water pollution

Water pollution can be a threat to the various species of tern.

- Over-fishing

Terns are affected by over fishing of the species they primarily feed on, e.g. sand eels, and other factors that may reduce the availability of food.

Current Action and Opportunities

Regular monitoring of the tern colony has been undertaken for many years. Apart from this monitoring of the nest site at Grangemouth docks, no further action is currently being taken to conserve the species locally.

Advice has been given on limiting shore disturbance near the tern colony resulting from a new lorry park on adjacent land.

There is scope for establishing additional raft nest sites between the mooring dolphins currently being used by common terns at Grangemouth docks. This might ease the over crowding at the mooring dolphins and allow for expansion of the breeding colony. A new raft would have to take account of the windy conditions of this site providing a surrounding 'wall' to prevent chicks being blown overboard and possibly some low cover within the raft to increase shelter.

Objectives and Targets

Objective 1

Maintain the current common tern breeding population in the Falkirk area.

Target 1.1

- Monitor the existing common tern colony at Grangemouth Docks, annually.

Target 1.2

- Establish whether or not nest sites exist on islands in inland freshwater sites within the Falkirk area. Check all potential freshwater sites by 2005.

Target 1.3

- Protect the existing colony from disturbing / damaging development. (Ongoing).

Target 1.4

- Limit disturbance of the existing colony through raising awareness of the colony and issues of disturbance during the breeding season. (By 2004, then ongoing as necessary).

Objective 2

Increase the size of the existing breeding common tern colony.

Target 2.1

- Locate a man-made raft nest site between the mooring dolphins currently used by nesting terns at Grangemouth Docks, to provide more space for nesting birds. (By 2006).

Target 2.2

- Monitor the success of the new raft nest site annually.

Action	Potential Deliverers		Year to be completed or in place						Meets objective
	Lead	Partners	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2012	
A. Policy and Legislation									
1. Ensure that this species is afforded adequate consideration and where possible its associated habitats are protected from damaging development through the planning process by: a) developing appropriate policies within local and structure plans and other strategies as they are written or revised.	Falk C (DS)	EAG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1
2. Ensure that this species is afforded adequate consideration and where possible its associated habitats are protected from damaging development through the planning process by: b) production of supplementary planning guidance	Falk C (DS)	EAG	✓						1
B. Site Safeguard and Management									
1. Provide an additional raft nest site at the existing breeding site. a) Investigate the type of raft required, indicative costs and sources of funding.	EAG	RSPB, SOC		✓					2
2. Provide an additional raft nest site at the existing breeding site. b) Contact the site owner/manager to discuss this potential project and gain agreement of all parties.	EAG	RSPB, SOC			✓				2
3. Provide an additional raft nest site at the existing breeding site. c) Having achieved B1 & B2 put in place a nesting raft beside the existing colony.	EAG	RSPB, SOC			✓	✓			2
C. Species Management and Protection									
D. Advisory									
1. Establish the current level of awareness of the requirements of the Grangemouth tern colony for limited disturbance amongst site owners and adjacent landusers.	EAG	SOC	✓						1,2
2. Inform site owners and adjacent landusers of the Grangemouth tern colony (if not already aware) and this action plan.	EAG	SOC	✓						1,2
E. Research and Monitoring									
1. Monitor the existing common tern colony annually.	SOC			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1
2. Establish whether any inland waters support nesting common tern colonies. By 2005.	SOC				✓				1
3. Monitor any new nest sites if identified in action E2	SOC					✓	✓	✓	1
4. Monitor the success of the new nesting raft, annually.	EAG	RSPB, SOC					✓	✓	2

Action	Potential Deliverers		Year to be completed or in place						Meets objective	
	Lead	Partners	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2012		
F. Communication and Publicity										
1. If deemed appropriate after action D1, raise awareness of the need to limit disturbance around the existing tern colony during the breeding season (targeting local landowners and regular users of adjacent land).	EAG	RSPB, SOC		✓						1,2
2. Include this species in local biodiversity awareness raising and education initiatives, wherever possible.	EARAG	EAG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		1
G. Plan Monitoring and Review										
1. Monitor the implementation of actions in this plan annually.	EAG	All partners	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		1,2
2. Monitor the completion and effectiveness of the actions in detail and review this plan every 5 years to ensure continued effectiveness, starting in 2007.	EAG	All partners					✓	✓		1,2

Abbreviations

EAG	- Estuary Action Group
EARAG	- Education and Awareness Raising Action Group
Falk C (DS)	- Falkirk Council Development Services
RSPB	- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
SOC	- Scottish Ornithologists Club

Key contacts

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Bibliography

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