

# TAYSIDE TERNS

## Information & Code of Practice Leaflet

### Tern Identification

Five species of "sea tern" breed in the UK. They are:

**Sandwich tern** - largest, (black-headed



gull size) with black shaggy crest and a black bill with yellow tip.

**Arctic tern** – medium sized, with blood red bill, currently breeding inside Glaxo SmithKline Welcome factory, Montrose.

**Common tern** – medium sized, with orange/red bill and black tip, one or two pairs nesting alongside Arctic terns at Glaxo, Montrose.

**Roseate tern** – medium sized, with black bill, which has a reddish base, the rarest.

**Little tern** – the smallest, with a yellow bill that has a black tip, in serious decline.



### Information

All five species are regularly seen in Tayside on passage and have been recorded breeding. The chances of encountering nesting birds are therefore pretty high if you find yourself near the coast in summer. Terns visit Europe from West Africa, arriving to breed in Scotland (in some cases) as early as March and leave in September, with late birds lingering into November. They feed on small fish (Sand eels when they can find them), which they catch by plunge-diving or surface-dipping. Terns historically have always nested on the ground, the nest containing two or three eggs more usually on a sandy or shingle beach but increasingly amongst grass or on rooftops, which can be well away from the sea. Rooftop nesting by Arctic terns has never been recorded anywhere else in the UK other than at Montrose. Such behaviour is surely an attempt by the birds to try to reverse the decline in numbers suffered by other species, at their traditional nesting sites. Terns try to nest as near to the best fishing as possible, this is often close to the mouth of an estuary. It's here, "where the river meets the sea" that birds have suffered most over the years. Their chosen nest sites often coincide with those most favoured by human holiday-makers for recreation.

**May** - Birds return to Scotland to breed. Terns don't build nests but instead lay eggs in small scrapes on the ground.

**June** - The first chicks are beginning to hatch. Look out for parents returning with small fish for their young.

**July** - The chicks are now learning to fly

and will soon leave Scotland and begin the long journey back to their wintering grounds further south.

### A vulnerable life

Birds can tolerate some disturbance, but constant passage of people backwards and forwards over the site can eventually lead to desertion. This is because when the parent birds are flushed eggs and chicks can become chilled when not properly incubated, and eggs can be unwittingly trampled on because their camouflage is so good.

### Disturbance

- Disturbance can increase the risk to eggs and chicks through exposure to the elements in particular extremes of temperature and climate.
- Disturbance increases the likelihood of predation by gulls and crows
- Disturbance can also lead to delayed and less successful breeding, or no breeding at all. Reduced fledging weight, and lower juvenile survival.

Unfortunately unwitting disturbance and destruction by humans is by no means the only dangers faced by nesting birds, others include high tides, wind blown sand, foxes, rats, kestrels and cats

### Terns and the law

All wild birds are offered protection under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), and by the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004. Little terns and Roseate terns receive addition special protection, being listed as Schedule 1 species on the Wildlife and Countryside Act. It is an offence:

- To kill or injure, take or keep any bird or its egg.
- To take, damage, destroy or otherwise interfere with any bird's nest whilst it is in use.
- To obstruct or prevent any wild bird from using its nest.
- To intentionally or recklessly disturb or harass any specially protected bird at its nest, or its young before they are wholly independent.



Arctic tern in flight (Image Chris Gomersall rspb-images.com)



Arctic tern (Image Andy Hay rspb-images.com)

The maximum penalty that can be imposed under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 in respect of a single bird, nest or egg is a fine of up to £5,000 and/or six months' imprisonment.

## SO PLEASE.....

### Informal recreation – walking, dogs

1. Follow any agreed information aimed at avoiding disturbance to nesting terns. E.g. If asked to follow a specific route to minimise disturbance please do. If signage asks you to keep dogs under close control, please do. If tern wardens are present and ask you to move away please listen to them.
2. If nesting sites have been fenced please keep away from the enclosed area as directed by any signage.
3. Please follow the SOAC – responsible access to the countryside [www.scottish-outdooraccess-scotland.com](http://www.scottish-outdooraccess-scotland.com)

### Bird watching

1. *Be Aware:* before you go tern watching learn as much as you can about the ecology of the species you might expect to see <http://www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/birdguide/families/terns.asp>
2. *Take responsibility* for your own actions. Use binoculars or a telescope to get better views. If the terns are showing signs of disturbance move away quietly. (e.g alarm calls, sudden movements or aggressive behaviour such as 'dive bombing' individuals).
3. *Have respect* for other people. Leave the environment as you find it. Take litter home.



Common tern in flight (Image David Tipling rspb-images.com)

*The Tayside Tern Working Group is part of the Tayside Biodiversity Partnership's Coast & Estuaries Sub-Group who are working together to conserve and enhance tern populations in the area.*

*The Working Group consists of representatives from SWT, Angus Council, RSPB, SNH, and GlaxoSmithKline. Support for the project has been received from the SITA Tayside Biodiversity Action Fund.*

