

Little Tern Protection Scheme at Kilcoole

Background

A colony of Little Terns, one of Ireland's rarest breeding seabirds, nests on the shingle beach between Kilcoole and Newcastle, Co Wicklow. This colony is the largest in Ireland, with 50-100 nesting pairs, and is one of only three or four along the east (Irish Sea) coast. The others are at Baltray (Co Louth), Wexford Harbour and sometimes Cahore (also Co Wexford).

What threats do they face?



sometimes Kestrels and Sparrowhawks. The eggs and chicks are also exceedingly well camouflaged and it is very easy to accidentally trample on them.

Are Little Terns protected by law?

Little Terns, their nests, eggs and chicks are fully protected under Irish law (Wildlife Act 1976, amended 2000) and European law (Annex I, EC Birds Directive). It is an offence to deliberately disturb, interfere with or otherwise harm these birds in any way.

Why are Little Terns so rare?

Little Terns have very specific ecological requirements. They only nest on certain kinds of shingle and sandy beaches which provide camouflage for their eggs. They need a reliable and abundant supply of small fish in close proximity to their colony and to feed themselves and their chicks. A nearby source of fresh or brackish water is also preferred for bathing. The lagoons at Kilcoole Breaches are ideal for this.

Should the public beach be closed during the nesting season?

Yes, but only a small part of it! The Murrrough runs for about 20 km from Greystones to Wicklow town. The Little Terns only require the 'exclusive use' of about 400-500 metres of it, and most of this is enclosed with an electric fence to keep out foxes at night and you (and your dogs) from getting into trouble with the wardens during the day! Please read the signs around the colony and follow any given instructions; the wardens are usually close and are happy to talk to you about terns and their conservation, seabirds and other wildlife interests in the Kilcoole and Murrrough area.

Thank you for taking the time to read this poster. More information can be found on the BirdWatch Ireland website, www.birdwatchireland.ie.

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Kilafin, Laragh, Co Wicklow

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Photographs by Michael Finn, Martin Parr, Andrew Kelly, Liam Ryan, Dick Coombes

Courtship



Mating



Nest with eggs



Newly hatched chicks



Feeding young



Fledgling

