

A6.88a Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis* (breeding)

1. Status in UK

Biological status		Legal status	Conservation status
Breeding	✓	Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 General Protection	Species of European Conservation Concern SPEC 3 Unfavourable conservation status (declining) and concentrated in Europe
Migratory	✓	Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 General Protection Schedule 1(1)	(UK) Species of Conservation Importance
Wintering		EC Birds Directive 1979 Annex I Migratory	All-Ireland Vertebrate Red Data Book

2. Population data

	Population sizes (pairs)	Selection thresholds	Totals in species' SPA suite
GB	14,000	140	10,107 (72% of GB population)
Ireland	4,400	44	1,333 (30% of all-Ireland population)
Biogeographic population	132,000	1,320	11,440 (9% of biogeographic population)

GB population source: Lloyd et al. 1991

All-Ireland population source: Gibbons et al. 1993

Biogeographic population source: Hagemeyer & Blair 1997

3. Distribution

The Sandwich Tern has a restricted global distribution encompassing Europe (including the Caspian Sea), the east coast of North America, the Caribbean and eastern South America. The species is polytypic, and of the three races recognised, only the nominate sub-species *S. s. sandvicensis* occurs in Europe (Cramp *et al.* 1974).

The European breeding distribution of Sandwich Tern stretches from north-west Europe from western France to the Baltic, as well as in scattered traditional localities around the coasts of the northern Mediterranean, Black and Caspian Seas (Hagemeyer & Blair 1997). After the end of the breeding season, European breeding Sandwich Terns move south to winter along the western and southern coasts of Africa, and the southern coasts of East Africa.

British colonies are very scattered and mostly confined to coastal shingle beaches, sand dunes and offshore islets. In a few places, small islets in coastal freshwater bodies are used. The largest colonies are on the east coast of Britain, especially north-east England and East Anglia, with smaller but important colonies in north Wales, north-west England, north-east

Scotland and Northern Ireland (Ratcliffe *et al.* 2000). Migration between more southerly wintering areas and UK breeding colonies occurs in spring and autumn with significant numbers of birds passing through inshore waters and some estuarine areas (Stone *et al.* 1995; see also section A6.88b).

Feeding takes place mainly in inshore coastal waters and within a few kilometres of the colonies, but much longer distances may be travelled, up to 70 km (Cramp *et al.* 1974).

4. Population structure and trends

The Great Britain population of Sandwich Terns is 14,000 pairs with a further 4,400 pairs around the whole of Ireland (Ratcliffe *et al.* 2000). They breed in colonies varying from less than 10 to c. 4,000 pairs. These populations form part of the European biogeographic population of 132,000 pairs (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997).

Assessing trends in the numbers of breeding Sandwich Terns and the reasons for any changes is made harder by the occurrence of marked fluctuations in numbers at individual colonies, as well as the desertion of some sites and the establishment of new ones. In common with other terns, the colonies of this species appear to fluctuate significantly, apparently linked to changes in numbers at adjacent colonies (Lloyd *et al.* 1991). The main identifiable causes of colony change appear to be loss of habitat – when nesting beaches or islets are washed away – and predation, especially persistent predation, by Foxes *Vulpes vulpes* for example. Some of the newly formed colonies have been established on nature reserves, especially those where predator control is exercised.

The two national seabird censuses, in 1969–1970 and 1985–1987, covering Britain and Ireland, were considered reasonably complete for this species and found 12,000 pairs and 18,400 pairs respectively (Cramp *et al.* 1974; Lloyd *et al.* 1991). Most recent data since the 1985–1987 survey indicate continuing declines at many sites over the last ten years (Thompson *et al.* 1999). Cramp *et al.* (1974) considered that the population in 1969–1970 was higher than at any time in the previous 70 years, with a marked overall increase since the first available counts in 1920.

Between 1969–1970 and 1985–1987, colonies on the south and east coast of Britain increased, while those in the north and west decreased. Changes since 1985–1987 have continued that general trend and have involved the complete desertion of former large colonies in the north, and further declines in Northern Ireland, with some further growth elsewhere (Thompson *et al.* 1999).

It is clear from limited data that numbers in other countries of Europe also fluctuate greatly. Evidence from ringing indicates movement of birds between different parts of the range with first-time breeders regularly nesting at considerable distances from their natal colony and experienced breeders changing colony site (Cramp 1985).

5. Protection measures for population in UK

SPA suite

In the breeding season, the UK's SPA suite for Sandwich Terns supports, on average, 11,440 pairs. This amounts to about 72% of the British breeding population, about 30% of the all-Ireland population and about 9% of the international population. The SPA suite contains 16 sites (Table 6.88a.1) where Sandwich Terns are a qualifying species.

6. Classification criteria

All sites in the UK that were known to support more than 1% of the national Sandwich Tern breeding population were considered under Stage 1.1, and all were selected after consideration of Stage 2 judgements.

The sites within the suite are distributed throughout the breeding range of the population in the UK, and cover major population centres, from sites on the east coast of Scotland, to the west, east and south coasts of England, and three sites in Northern Ireland. All sites are multi-species SPAs, of importance also for a range of other breeding seabirds. There is a very long recorded history of occupancy at some of these SPAs with records from the 19th century for a few sites (Holloway 1996). However, the historical impacts of disturbance, habitat change and, in the 19th century, persecution, mean that the exact locations of many colonies have changed.

As the selection of sites under Stage 1.1 resulted in a suite of SPAs which includes the main population centres of breeding Sandwich Terns throughout their UK distribution, there was no need to consider additional sites for selection under Stage 1.4

Distribution map for breeding Sandwich Tern SPA suite

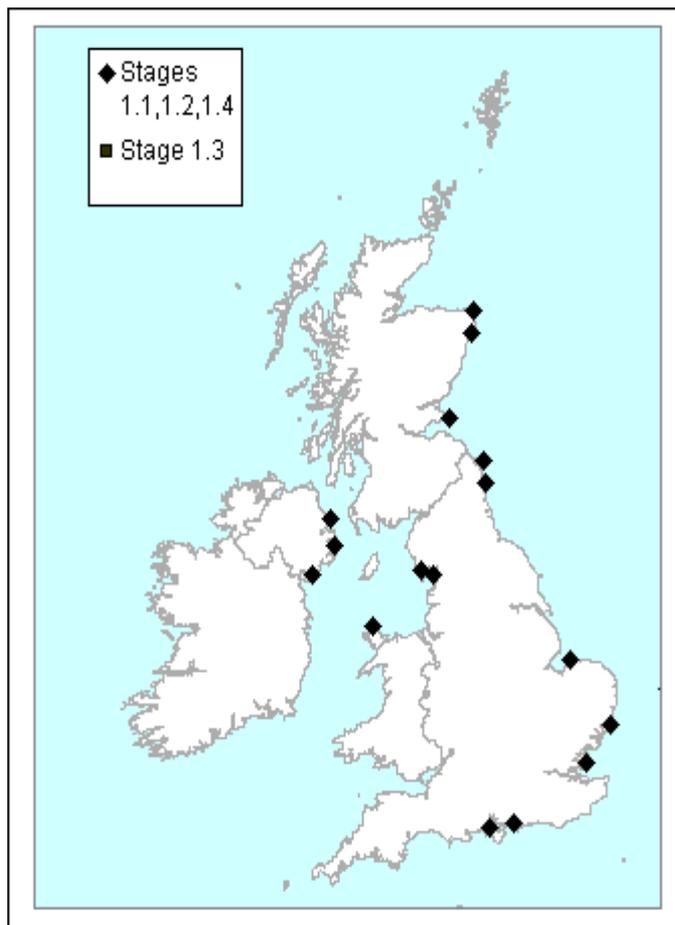


Table 6.88a.1 – SPA suite

Site name	Site total	% of biogeographical population	% of national population	Selection stage
Alde-Ore Estuary	169	0.1	1.2	1.1
Carlingford Lough	575	0.4	13.1 (Ire)	1.1
Chichester and Langstone Harbours	158	0.1	1.1	1.1
Coquet Island	1,590	1.2	11.4	1.1
Duddon Estuary	210	0.2	1.5	1.1
Farne Islands	2,070	1.6	14.8	1.1
Firth of Forth Islands	22	<0.1	0.2	1.1
Foulness	320	0.2	2.3	1.1
Larne Lough	165	0.1	3.8 (Ire)	1.1
Loch of Strathbeg	530	0.4	3.8	1.1
Morecambe Bay	290	0.2	2.1	1.1
North Norfolk Coast	3,457	2.6	24.7	1.1
Solent and Southampton Water	231	0.2	1.7	1.1
Strangford Lough	593	0.5	13.5 (Ire)	1.1
Ynys Feurig, Cemlyn Bay and The Skerries	460	0.4	3.3	1.1
Ythan Estuary, Sands of Forvie and Meikle Loch	600	0.5	4.3	1.1
TOTALS	11,440	8.7%	72.2% 30.3% (Ire)	