



Blakeney Point Breeding Bird Summary 2024



Compiled by
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Introduction

Location and context

Blakeney Point is a four-mile shingle spit backed by saltmarsh with an expanse of sand dunes at the western end. During summer the Point hosts nationally and internationally important Tern colonies and in winter is home to England's largest Grey Seal rookery. The spit encloses Blakeney Harbour, and forms part of the 1097 hectare Blakeney National Nature Reserve which comprises Blakeney Point, Blakeney Freshes, Chapel Island, Stiffkey Meals and Morston Marshes.

Morston Marshes, an expanse of saltmarsh, lie to the south of Blakeney Point. To the west are Stiffkey Meals, a ridge of sand on the northern edge of the saltmarsh. And to the east are Blakeney Freshes, an area of freshwater grazing marsh enclosed by a sea wall, containing reedbed, ponds and ditches. The Freshes was previously saltmarsh prior to being reclaimed in the early eighteenth century. Chapel Island, previously part of Blakeney Freshes, was created in 2005 when the River Glaven was re-routed to alleviate flooding upstream.

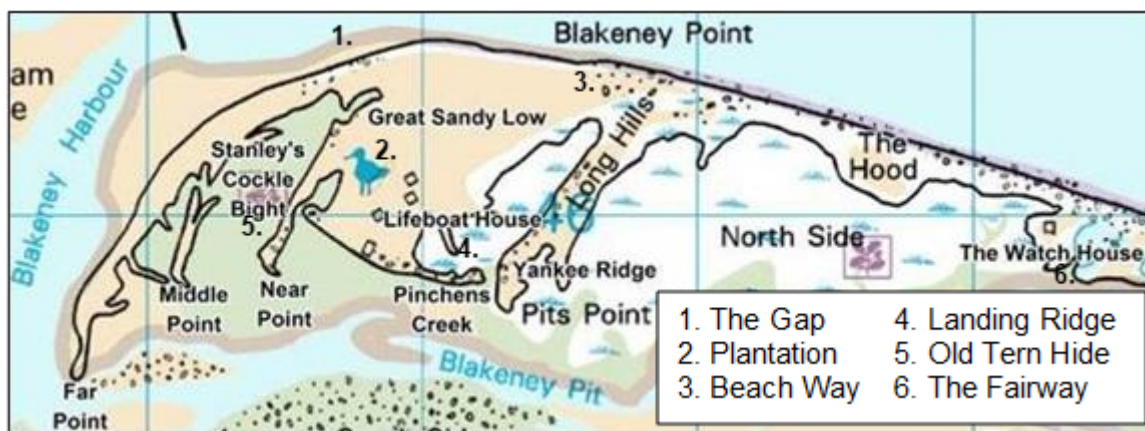


Figure 1. Blakeney Point local names

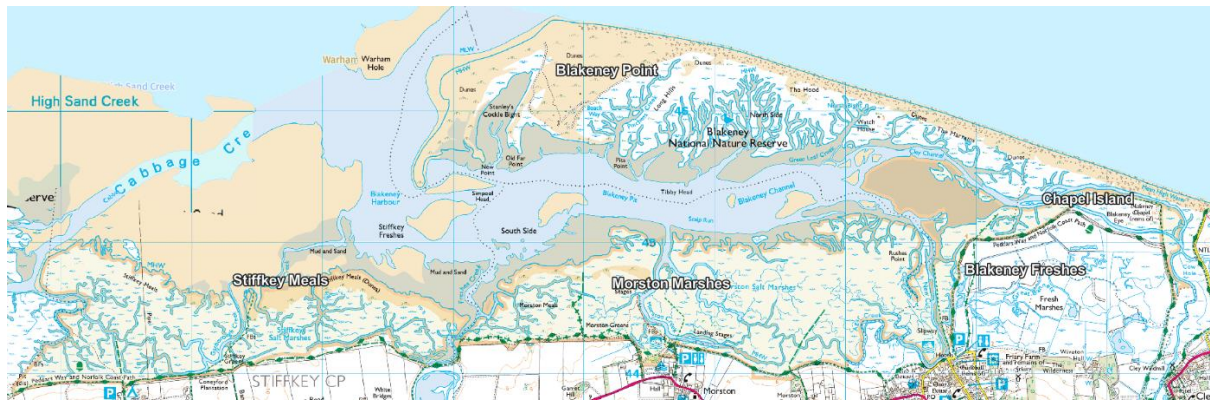


Figure 2. Map of Blakeney NNR

Methods

All species that breed on Blakeney Point are surveyed annually as part of regular Breeding Bird Surveys and specific targeted surveys. All survey work for Schedule 1 species is done under licence.

For passerines and Redshank, early morning counts of singing birds or territorial behaviour were undertaken from March to June. For Gulls, Terns, Oystercatchers, Avocets, and Ringed Plovers, nest counts were undertaken.

Summary

Another poor year on Blakeney Point owing to predation issues. No Sandwich Terns and very few (16) Common Terns nested. Although around 100 Little Terns nested, once again success was low with only 11 chicks fledging.

Ringed Plover were less successful than last year, fledging 12 chicks from 18 pairs. Oystercatcher numbers appear to have increased but productivity was very poor.

Table 1. Breeding bird data for 2023 and 2024 including 5 year mean (2019-2023)

Species	2023	2024	5 year mean
Shelduck	56	-	49
Shoveler	1	2	1
Gadwall	5	6	5
Mallard	9	9	7
Grey Partridge	0	0	5
Pheasant	5	4	5
Red-legged Partridge	1	0	0
Stock Dove	1	0	1
Woodpigeon	1	1	1
Oystercatcher	89	99	73
Avocet	7	8	11
Ringed Plover	17	18	13
Redshank	24	17	19
Black-headed Gull	52	5	291
Mediterranean Gull	0	0	1
Common Gull	7	13	3
Herring Gull	13	2	39
Lesser Black-backed Gull	4	0	8
Sandwich Tern	40 (max)	0	1278
Little Tern	96	96	125
Common Tern	39	16	157
Arctic Tern	0	0	1
Skylark	47	48	36
Sedge Warbler	1	2	0
Wren	9	12	1
Starling	0	0	10
Stonechat	5	6	0
Dunnock	6	6	3
Pied Wagtail	1	1	6
Meadow Pipit	56	67	1
Linnet	25	45	52
Reed Bunting	20	18	28

Systematic list

Where productivity figures are quoted the 5 year mean is given in brackets.

Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

Amber list

Shelduck were not surveyed this year. As usual, numerous broods – totalling 63 chicks – were seen in the harbour during the summer but true fledging numbers are unknown.

Shoveler *Spatula clypeata*

Amber list

Breeding bird surveys recorded two pairs in the vicinity of Chapel Island. No young were seen.

Gadwall *Mareca strepera*

Amber list

Six pairs were recorded. No young were seen.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Amber list

Nine pairs were recorded. No young were seen.

Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*

Red list

Once again, no breeding was recorded this year.

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Not Assessed

A minimum of four pairs were recorded. Two along the shingle ridge and two in the dunes. Two broods were seen around the western end in August.

Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*

Not Assessed

None bred.

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*

Amber list

None nested.

Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*

Amber list

One pair attempted to nest in the Lifeboat house garden.

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Amber list

Ninety-nine pairs nested – eighty-four around the headland and fifteen between the Long Hills and Cley. Productivity was very poor but not formally assessed.

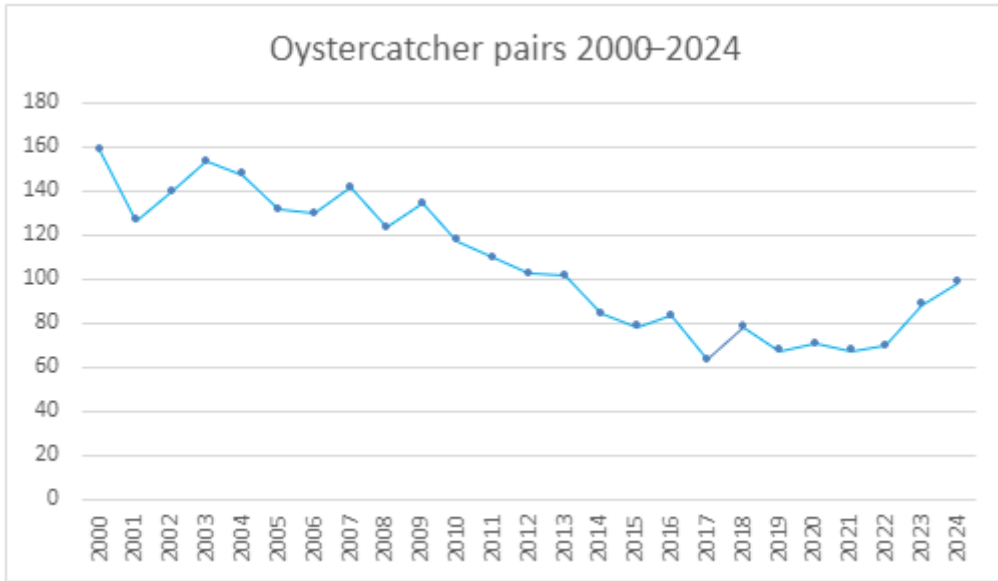


Figure 3. Oystercatcher pairs 2000-2024

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

Amber list

Schedule 1

Eight pairs nested along the shingle between the fishing boats and the watch house. No chicks were seen.

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

Red list

Eighteen pairs nested and fledged 12 chicks. Cages were deployed on most nests and contributed to good hatching success. Although this was another reasonable year, numbers are still well short of the productivity required to maintain the population.

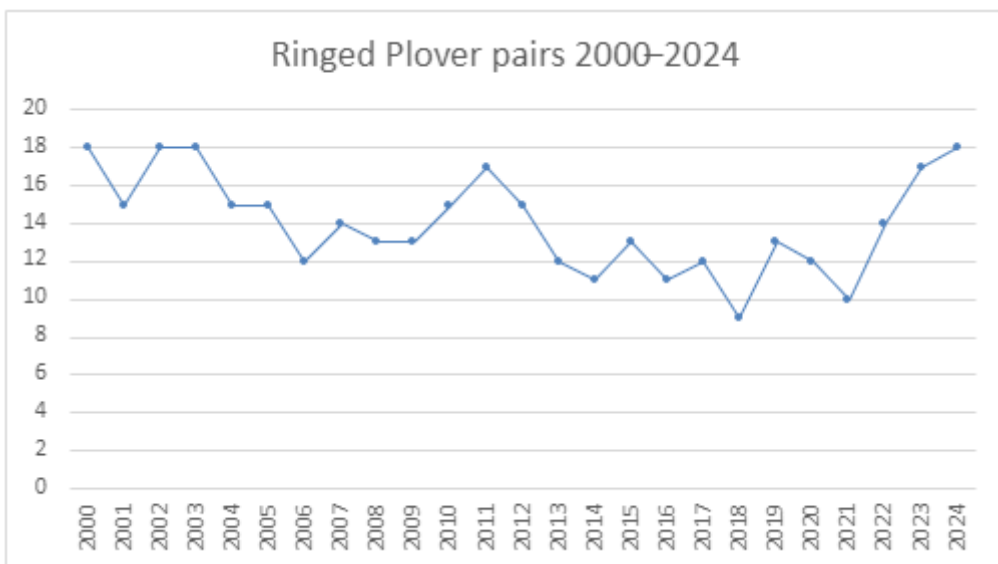


Figure 4. Ringed Plover pairs 1999-2024

Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Amber list

Surveys recorded 17 pairs of Redshank across the point. Productivity was not assessed but thought to be low.

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Amber list

Five pairs attempted to nest west of Gap. All were unsuccessful.

Mediterranean Gull *Ichthyaetus melanocephalus*

Amber list

Schedule 1

Individual birds were recorded throughout summer but there was, once again, no evidence of breeding this year.

Common Gull *Larus canus*

Red list

Thirteen pairs nested on the shingle west of Gap.

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

Red list

Two pairs nested. No young fledged.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Amber list

None nested.

Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis*

Amber list

Foxes were present on the point throughout the season. Unsurprisingly, no Sandwich Terns nested.

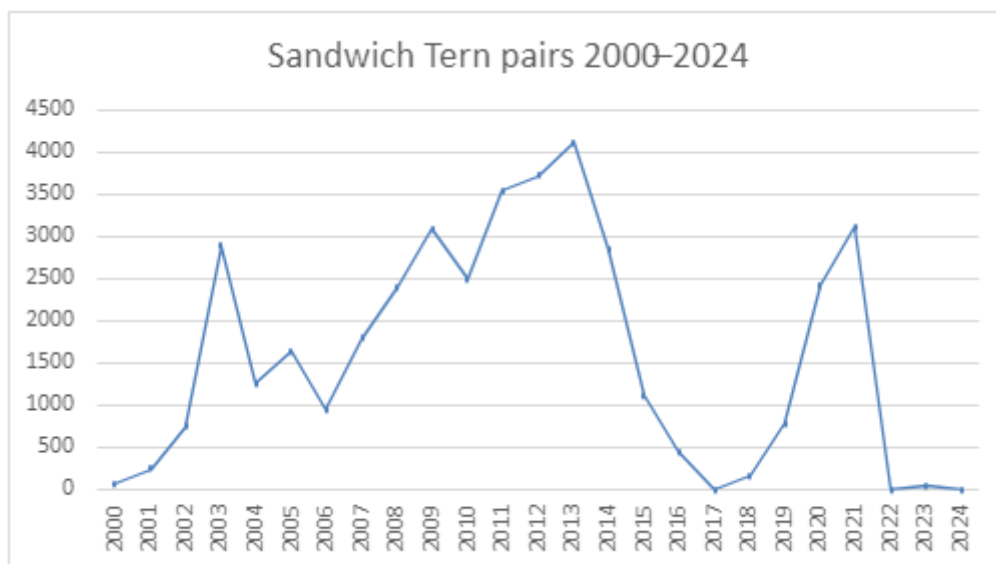


Figure 5. Sandwich Tern pairs 2000-2024

Ninety-six pairs nested this year and raised a minimum of 11 chicks giving a productivity figure of 0.11 (0.64).

Most pairs – 93 – formed a colony west of Gap and only three pairs nested at the Watch House. No chicks fledged from the Watch House.

No colour-ringed birds were recorded this year, nor were any ringed.

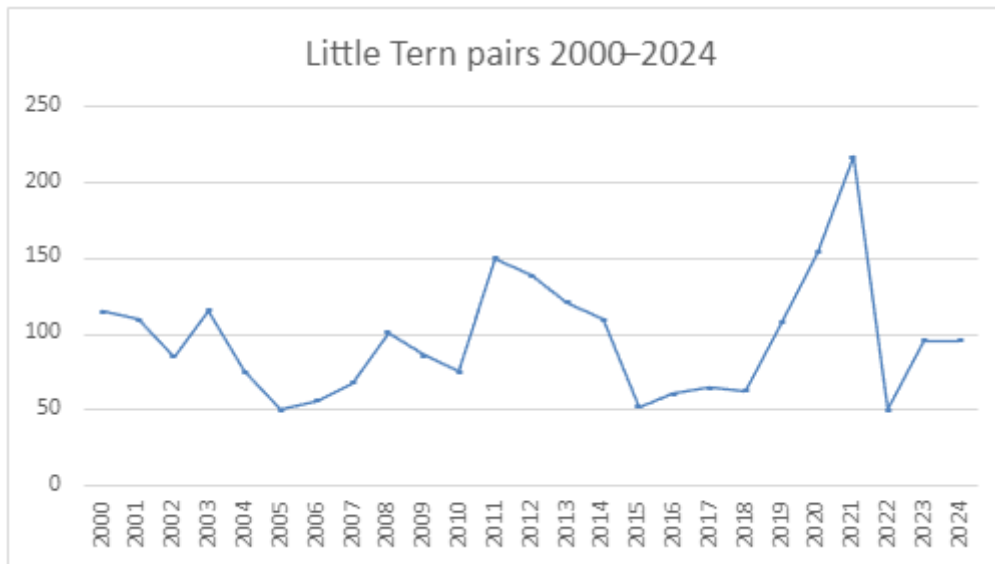


Figure 6. Little Tern pairs 2000-2024



Figure 7. Little Tern productivity 2000-2024

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

Amber list

Sixteen pairs were recorded. One chick fledged.

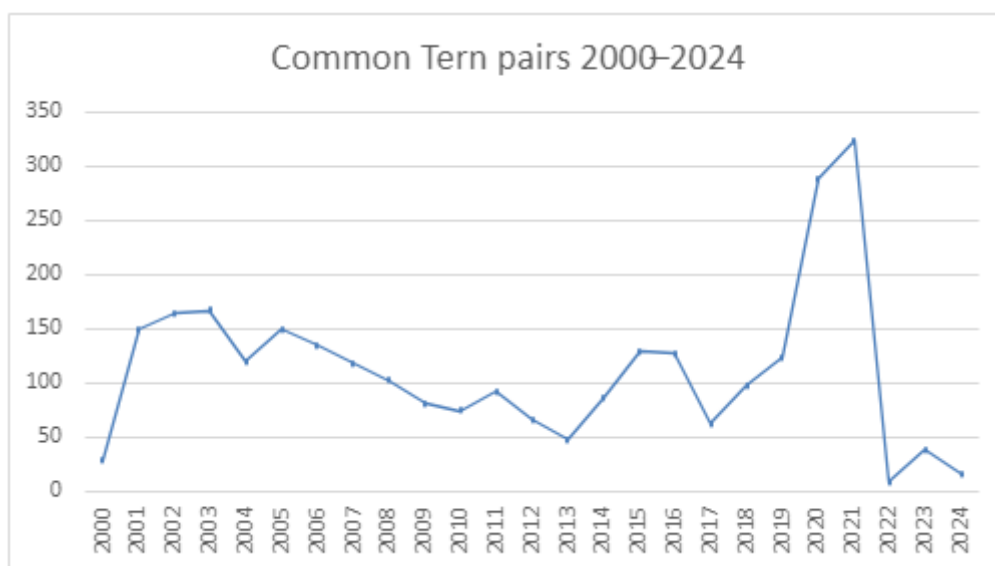


Figure 8. Common Tern pairs 2000-2024

Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*

Red list

None nested.

Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

Red list

Surveys throughout the season recorded 48 territories in total.

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

Amber list

Two birds held territory between the wreck of the silver dawn and the Watch House during June and July but there was no confirmed breeding attempt.

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Amber list

Twelve territories were recorded.

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Red list

None nested.

Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*

Green list

Six pairs nested. Second broods were noted.

Dunnock *Prunella modularis*

Amber list

As last year, six territories were recorded.

Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba yarrellii*

Green list

Once again, a single pair nested under the tin roof of the Lifeboat House and successfully raised one brood.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

Amber list

Surveys recorded a total of 67 territories throughout the season.

Linnet *Linaria cannabina*

Red list

Linnet numbers were estimated from breeding bird survey data at 45 pairs.

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Amber list

Surveys recorded 18 pairs throughout the season.

Comments and observations

Little Tern summary

Written by Callum Peel

The little terns had a relatively poor breeding season on Blakeney Point in 2024. The total number of breeding pairs across Blakeney Point remained the same as in 2023. The numbers of breeding pairs remained below the five-year average on Blakeney Point. The number of chicks that fledged was very low this season. A minimum total of 11 chicks were raised from 96 breeding pairs on Blakeney Point resulting in a productivity of 0.11 chicks per pair.

Gap

The first returning little terns on Blakeney Point were noted on the 26th April. Approximately 15 birds were seen flying over the sea west of Gap. The little tern nesting colony in 2024 was located on the same stretch of shingle beach located west of Gap as in 2023. The first little terns landing down in the electric fences and inspecting the beach were recorded on the 9th May. The first nest scraping was then recorded on the 15th May. Approximately 15 apparently occupied nests and 46 adults were recorded at the Gap colony site during the coordinated count on the 24th May. The numbers of adults continued to build to approximately 100 recorded on the 29th May. The number of apparently occupied nests peaked at a minimum of 93 on the 12th June. However, the peak may have been over 100 breeding pairs when birds were flushed on the 13th June. Pair numbers dropped after this date. The first eggs were recorded hatching on 2nd July. A good proportion of nests were thought to have hatched. Small numbers of fledglings were recorded from the 19th July onwards. Only four chicks from the last two pairs were confirmed to have fledged from the Point on the 14th August. However, a peak of 7 fledglings were counted on the 1st August. These fledglings were in the post-breeding season tern flock. These were also counted as fledglings from nests on Blakeney Point, however, it was not proven. It is estimated that a minimum of 11 chicks were raised from 93 pairs.

Watch House

The first apparently occupied nest was found on the shingle ridge near the Watch House by a volunteer (Malcolm Davis) on the 21st May. The little terns at the Watch House site were mobile and nesting occurred in different locations on the shingle ridge. On the 21st June, there were three pairs nesting and two other pairs inspecting or just beginning nesting. However, only three pairs were ever confirmed to nest. Numbers of breeding pairs were very low, three lower than 2023. Two chicks were seen at one nest on the 7th July. However, these were not seen after the 12th July. No chicks were raised from the three pairs of little terns. As with the 2023 season, the 2024 little tern breeding season at the Watch House was disappointing.

Predator Issues

There was significant predation of little terns at the Gap colony this season. Predators included short-eared owl, kestrel and fox. A short-eared owl was recorded in the colony at night from the 13th to the 20th June, then it disappeared. The short-eared owl appeared to be attempting to hunt adult little terns. One was subsequently sighted near the Watch House. The little tern colony then caught the attention of a male kestrel in June and July. A kestrel plucking station was discovered nearby and a camera trap revealed the kestrel was killing several chicks. Regular diversionary feeding was undertaken at two sites at first and only one site after the 12th July. The remaining diversionary feeding site was located over half a mile away from the colony site. Diversionary feeding was successful at curbing predation by the kestrel from the 5th July. Possible predation of two tern chicks was recorded again on the 13th and 14th July when we temporarily ran out of food for the kestrel. However, no kestrel predation was recorded again following commencing regular diversionary feeding. Fox evidence was recorded on Blakeney Point throughout the nesting season beginning from March when a fox was sighted on the Hood. Foxes were recorded at the colony at night from 11th July onwards. Up to two were patrolling around the electric fences and were destroying nests outside the fences. The numbers of nesting pairs rapidly dropped off after fox presence at the colony. Birds of prey and foxes had a big impact on the

success of the little terns this year. Rats were not confirmed to have had any substantial impact on the little tern colony this year.

No little tern ringing took place this season, as there were very few chicks surviving long enough to ring. There was no evidence of HPAI in little terns on Blakeney Point this year.

Acknowledgements

Breeding bird surveys were carried out by Callum Peel and Thomas Lloyd with assistance from Richard Porter and Malcolm Davies. Special thanks go to the volunteers who protect the Watch House Little Tern colony through the summer.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Historical breeding bird data

Table 2. Breeding bird species on Blakeney Point 2012-2022

Species	Number of breeding pairs										
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Shelduck	65	68	59	61	62	40	38	37	54	61	56
Shoveler	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	1
Gadwall	4	5	5	5	3	5	8	4	3	6	5
Mallard	5	4	6	7	3	7	8	4	4	8	9
Grey Partridge	9	7	5	7	11	7	10	7	4	2	0
Pheasant	1	1	3	5	3	2	5	4	4	5	5
Red-legged Partridge	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Stock Dove	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Woodpigeon	2	1	1	2	6	1	1	2	0	0	1
Oystercatcher	102	85	79	84	64	79	68	71	68	70	89
Avocet	12	13	16	17	15	10	15	11	9	15	7
Ringed Plover	12	11	13	11	12	9	13	12	10	14	17
Redshank	15	16	17	19	19	18	14	19	17	19	24
Black-headed Gull	2200	2419	2104	875	505	301	319	224	722	138	52
Mediterranean Gull	15	8	4	5	4	0	1	0	2	0	0
Common Gull	2	3	2	2		3	3	3	3	0	7
Herring Gull	12	3	6	19	118	39	42	39	64	39	13
Lesser Black-backed Gull	1	1	1	4	48	3	3	10	14	11	4
Sandwich Tern	4120	2859	1113	451	3	165	788	2425	3134	1	40 (max)
Little Tern	121	110	52	61	65	63	108	154	217	50	96
Common Tern	48	87	130	128	60	99	124	289	324	10	39
Arctic Tern	5	4	4	3	4	7	2	1	3	0	0
Skylark	33	39	49	48	28	25	25	40	42	41	47
Swallow	3	2	1	2	2	1	1	0	0	0	0
Sedge Warbler	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1
Wren	8	4	9	6	6	7	15	12	5	9	9
Starling	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Stonechat	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	6	5
Dunnock	10	11	14	7	8	7	4	6	4	8	6
Pied Wagtail	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1
Meadow Pipit	100	102	128	151	84	51	45	51	52	58	56
Linnet	40	45	59	54	32	20	20	35	28	30	25
Reed Bunting	16	27	38	27	29	16	18	19	18	20	20

Appendix 2: Maps of breeding species

The approximate location and composition of colonies on Blakeney Point.

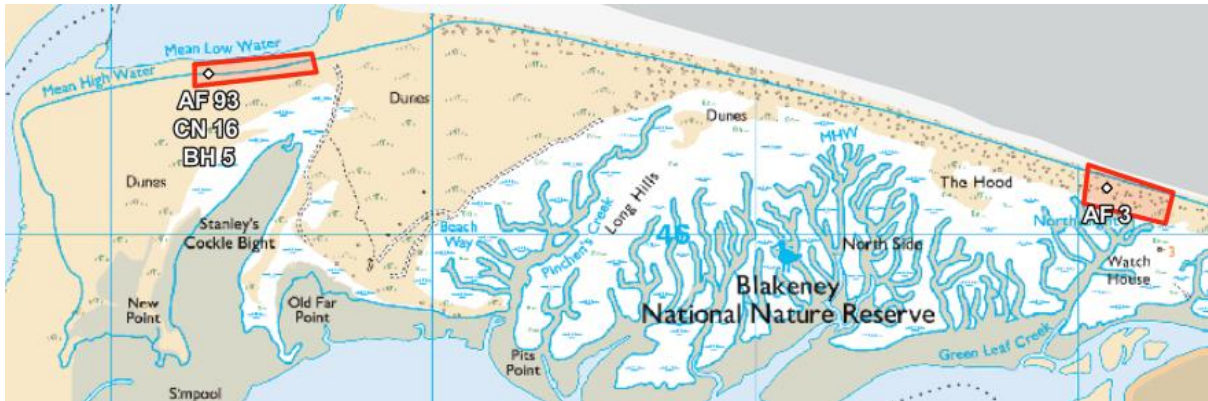


Figure 9. Colony locations 2023. Map ©Crown Copyright and database right 2023 Ordnance Survey 100023974

BG: Black-headed Gull, TE: Sandwich Tern, AF: Little Tern, CN: Common Tern