



National  
Trust

**Blakeney Point  
Breeding Bird Report  
2021**



Little Tern chick (L. Newman)

compiled by  
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**Introduction**

## Location and context

The 1097 hectare Blakeney National Nature Reserve, on the north Norfolk coast, comprises of vegetated shingle, sand dunes, saltmarsh and freshwater grazing marsh. The National Nature Reserve supports up to seven Schedule 1 breeding bird species as well as part of Britain's largest Sandwich Tern colony. Blakeney National Nature Reserve comprises Blakeney Point, Blakeney Freshes, Chapel Island, Stiffkey Meals and Morston Marshes.

Map 1: Blakeney National Nature Reserve:

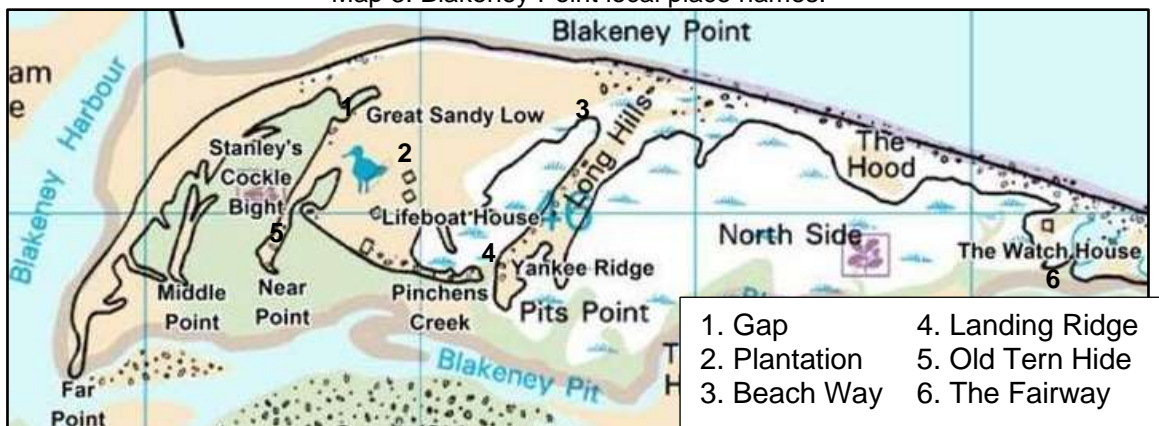


Blakeney Point is a four-mile shingle spit with an expanse of sand dunes at the western end. The spit encloses Blakeney Harbour, to the south of which lie Morston Marshes, an expanse of saltmarsh. Stiffkey Meals are located to the west, a ridge of sand on the northern edge of the saltmarsh. To the east 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 (see map 4).

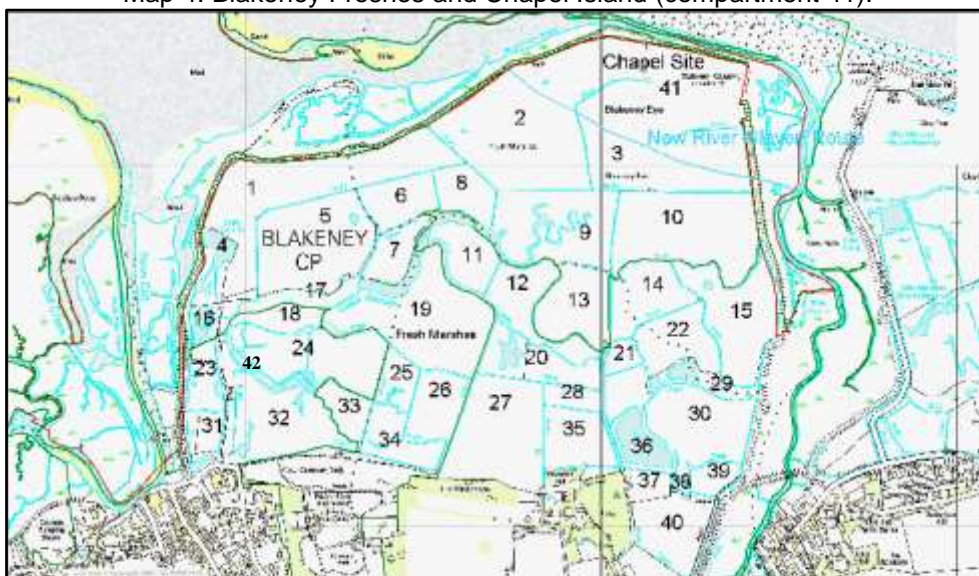
Map 2: Blakeney Point, Blakeney Freshes and Morston Marshes:



Map 3: Blakeney Point local place names:



Map 4: Blakeney Freshes and Chapel Island (compartment 41):



## **Methodology**

Breeding bird surveys were undertaken Blakeney Point from April to June. In order to undertake survey work for Schedule 1 species, the appropriate licenses are held by the team.

For wildfowl and waders, early morning visits were made in May and June counting adults from a discrete distance. Maximum counts were divided by two to establish the number of pairs. Weekly visits were made in June and July to monitor young.

For passerines, early morning counts of singing birds were undertaken in April and May and territories were mapped. For Black-headed Gulls, Sandwich Terns, Common Terns on Blakeney Point, walk-through nest counts were undertaken. Little terns were counted from a distance, identifying 'Apparently Incubating Adults'.

The methodology used to assess breeding Linnets was changed to better account for under recording in previous years. This year, post breeding flocks were counted and an estimate for the number of adult pairs in these flocks was calculated.

## Summary

It was a mixed year for breeding terns on Blakeney Point. Sandwich Terns nested in the highest numbers since 2013 with 3134 pairs recorded and raised a minimum of 998 chicks. Common Terns also did well with 324 pairs, the highest since 1980, raising a minimum of 190 chicks. Little Terns fared less well with a record number (217) of pairs only fledging seven chicks.

Avocet numbers on Blakeney Point reduced again to the levels seen in 2012. There were 10 Ringed Plover on Blakeney Point. Redshank appears to have had another good year across the reserve with 17 pairs nesting on Blakeney Point, where success appeared to be high. The Oystercatcher population on Blakeney Point remained stable.

Following the first records of breeding last year, three pairs of Stonechat once again bred on Blakeney Point.

## Table of breeding birds

Species	Methodology	Site		Total
		Blakeney Point	Chapel Island	
Shelduck	Minimum pairs	54	-	
Gadwall	Minimum pairs	3	-	
Shoveler	Minimum pairs	1	-	
Mallard	Minimum pairs	4	-	
Red-legged Partridge	Territories	0	-	
Grey Partridge	Territories	4	-	
Pheasant	Territories	4	-	
Avocet	Nesting pairs	9	-	
Oystercatcher	Territories	68	-	
Lapwing	Minimum pairs	0	-	
Ringed Plover	Territories	10	-	
Redshank	Territories	17	-	
Black-headed Gull	Nesting pairs	722	-	
Mediterranean Gull	Nesting pairs	2	-	
Lesser Black-backed Gull	Nesting pairs	14	-	
Herring Gull	Nesting pairs	64	-	
Little Tern	Nesting pairs	217	-	
Sandwich Tern	Nesting pairs	3134	-	
Common Tern	Nesting pairs	324	-	
Arctic Tern	Nesting pairs	3	-	
Stock Dove	Nesting pairs	1	-	
Wood Pigeon	Nesting pairs	0	-	
Skylark	Singing males	32	-	
Swallow	Nesting pairs	0	-	
Meadow Pipit	Singing males	44	-	
Pied Wagtail	Singing males	1	-	
Wren	Singing males	5	-	
Dunnock	Singing males	4	-	
Stonechat	Nesting pairs	3	-	
Linnet	Minimum pairs	28	-	
Reed Bunting	Singing males	18	-	

### Systematic List

**Shelduck** *Tadorna tadorna* (Amber List)

Minimum pairs: 54

Fledged young: ?

Shelduck numbers on Blakeney Point increased this year to 54 pairs.

There were multiple sightings of young Shelduck creches in the Harbour from June to July but true fledging numbers are not known.

**Gadwall** *Anas strepera* (Amber List)

Minimum pairs: 3

Fledged young: ?

Breeding bird surveys recorded three pairs on Blakeney Point. No young were observed on the reserve.

**Shoveler** *Anas clypeata* (Amber List)

Minimum pairs: 1

Fledged young: ?

Breeding bird surveys recorded one pair in the vicinity of Chapel Island. No young were seen.

**Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos* (Amber List)

Minimum pairs: 4

Fledged young: ?

Breeding bird surveys recorded four nests on Blakeney Point but no ducklings were seen.

**Grey Partridge** *Perdix perdix* (Red List)

Territories: 4

Fledged young: ?

Four territories were recorded during the breeding season. One territory was alongside the Old Glaven Channel, the rest being in the dunes. No coveys were seen.



Grey Partridge (R. Porter)

**Pheasant** *Phasianus colchicus* (Naturalised)

Territories: 4 minimum

Fledged young: ?



A minimum of four pairs were recorded on Blakeney Point throughout the season. Two pairs on the ridge and two amongst the dunes. Three broods were seen but fledging numbers are unknown.

**Avocet** *Recurvirostra avocetta* (Amber List) (Schedule 1)

Nesting pairs: 9

Fledged young: 0

Only nine pairs bred across the reserve, all on Blakeney Point. Most pairs nested between Cley Beach and the Silver Dawn wreck, the area known as the Marrams, but two pairs settled further up the ridge than seen in previous years, between the Watch House and the Hood. Birds seemed to be heavily disturbed and nest predation was noted, a muntjac around the colony in June was thought to be a contributing factor to the lack of success.

**Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus* (Amber List)

Territories: 68

Fledged young: ?

Breeding bird surveys recorded 68 pairs on Blakeney Point. Success was low with only a few broods noted on the western end of Blakeney Point.



Oystercatcher nest with one dwarf egg (L. Wilkinson)

**Lapwing** *Vanellus vanellus* (Red List)

Territories: 0

Fledged young: 0

After their first ever nesting attempt in 2019, once again no birds bred on Blakeney Point this year.

**Ringed Plover** *Charadrius hiaticula* (Red List)

Territories: 10

Fledged young: ?

On Blakeney Point, 10 territories were recorded. Productivity was thought to be poor with only a small number of broods noted.

**Redshank** *Tringa totanus* (Amber List)

Territories: 17

Fledged young: ?

Seventeen territories were recorded, hatching success was thought to be good with multiple pairs showing defensive behaviour, fledging success is unknown.

**Black-headed Gull** *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* (Amber List)

Nesting pairs: 722

Fledged young: ?

A total of 722 pairs nested. Most birds settled west of Gap with a smaller colony of 99 pairs settling on Far Point. Productivity seemed good with young fledging from the both colonies. Birds were encouraged to settle using plastic decoys, the tape lure broke over the winter so was not used this year.

**Mediterranean Gull** *Larus melanocephalus* (Amber List) (Schedule 1)

Nesting pairs: 2

Fledged young: 2 minimum

Two pairs nested amongst the Black-Headed Gulls west of Gap, a minimum of two fledglings were seen.

**Common Gull** *Larus canus* (Amber List)

Nesting pairs: 3

Fledged young: 2

Three pairs nested. Two young were seen.

**Lesser Black-backed Gull** *Larus fuscus* (Amber List)

Nesting pairs: 14

Fledged young: 2

Fourteen pairs nested. Two young fledged.

**Herring Gull** *Larus argentatus* (Red List)

Nesting pairs: 64

Fledged young: 6

A total of 64 pairs nested. Six young fledged.

**Little Tern** *Sternula albifrons* (Amber List) (Schedule 1)

Nests: 217

Fledged young: 7

The first Little Tern was seen on 23<sup>rd</sup> April. Little Tern numbers started building in May, with a maximum count of 350 birds on the shore near Gap on the 11<sup>th</sup> and 250 birds roosting on the 18<sup>th</sup>. Birds favoured the colony west of Gap with a maximum count of 197 on the 17<sup>th</sup> of June. Two smaller colonies also formed, one at the traditional Watch House site, holding 4 pairs on 17<sup>th</sup> June, and one on the shingle east of Gap, holding 16 pairs on the 17<sup>th</sup> of June. The first chicks were seen on 16<sup>th</sup> June in the colony west of Gap. Birds rapidly abandoned the Gap colony in late June and early July probably due to the presence of a Short-Eared Owl and roosting Common Gulls. Some birds relaid at the Watch House with nest numbers peaking at nine on 4<sup>th</sup> July. In total 7 chicks went on to fledge.

**Sandwich Tern** *Sterna sandvicensis* (Amber List)

Nesting pairs: 3134

Fledged young: 996 (minimum)

The first Sandwich Terns were noted on 4<sup>th</sup> April with 10 on Far Point. Sandwich Tern numbers began built up through April, with 1000 roosting on the 27<sup>th</sup>. In total, 3134 pairs nested in two waves. The first nest count on 9<sup>th</sup> June recorded 1812 nests and the second, after birds had arrived through June, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July recorded a further 1322 nests. Chick counts in July recorded a minimum of 998 chicks.

**Common Tern** *Sterna hirundo* (Amber List)

Nesting pairs: 324

Fledged young: 190

299 pairs nested on Far Point with a further 25 nests amongst the Sandwich Terns west of Gap. Fledging success was thought to be very good and a minimum of 190 large chicks were counted in multiple visits, however, due to the difficulty in accessing and viewing the colony, the total number fledged is thought to be higher than this. This is the largest number of Common Terns recorded breeding on Blakeney Point since 1980 and the most chicks fledged since 1999.



Common Tern display (R. Porter)

**Arctic Tern** *Sterna paradisaea* (Amber List)

Nesting pairs: 3

Fledged young: 0

Three pairs nested on Blakeney Point, located within the Common Tern colony west of Gap. No young were seen to fledge.

**Wood Pigeon** *Columba palumbus* (Green List)

Nesting pairs: 0

Fledged young: 0

None nested on Blakeney Point this year.

**Stock Dove** *Columba oenas* (Amber List)

Nesting pairs: 1

Fledged young: ?

One pair bred successfully in the old swift box on the tower of the Lifeboat House and successfully fledged two broods.

**Skylark** *Alauda arvensis* (Red List)

Territories: 32

Fledged young: Unknown

Breeding bird surveys recorded 32 pairs.

**Swallow** *Hirundo rustica* (Amber List)

Nesting pairs: 0

Once again no swallows bred on Blakeney Point this year.

**Meadow Pipit** *Anthus pratensis* (Amber List)

Territories: 44

Fledged young: ?  
Breeding bird surveys recorded 44 territories.

**Pied Wagtail** *Motacilla alba yarrellii* (Amber List)

Nesting pairs: 1  
Fledged young: 8

One pair used the nestbox on the end of the old lifeboat house and the wood store to raise two broods.



Pied Wagtail chicks (L. Wilkinson)

**Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes* (Green List)

Territories: 5  
Fledged young: ?

Singing males were recorded through early morning Breeding Bird Surveys from early April onwards. In total only five territories were recorded on Blakeney Point, a big reduction from 12 in 2020.

**Dunnock** *Prunella modularis* (Amber List)

Territories: 4  
Fledged young: ?

Only four territories were found through Breeding Bird Surveys and casual observations on Blakeney Point.

**Stonechat** *Saxicola rubicola* (Green List)

Breeding pairs: 3  
Fledged young: ?

Following the first breeding record last year, three pairs once again bred on Blakeney Point, two in the vicinity of the Hood and one in the Boardwalk Bramble. Success was good and at least two pairs had second broods



Male Stonechat (A. Stoddart)

**Linnet** *Carduelis cannabina* (Red List)

Territories: 28

Fledged young: ?

Estimates were once again made from counts of post breeding flocks adjusting for adult and juvenile numbers within the flocks. This resulted in an estimate of 28 pairs. Productivity was thought to be good, with large flocks of mixed ages present in the Garden from late summer onwards.

**Reed Bunting** *Emberiza schoeniclus* (Amber List)

Territories: 18

Fledged young: ?

Breeding bird surveys recorded 18 territories on Blakeney Point a light decrease from the 19 territories recorded in 2020.



Singing male Reed Bunting (R. Porter)

## Comments and observations

### Little Tern breeding behaviour

Little Terns nested in three colonies on Blakeney Point in 2021. Initial nesting attempts were split between three historical colonies, one at the Watch House, one west of Gap and one east of Gap. By the beginning of July all nests west of Gap had been lost, probably due to the combined pressures of a Short-eared Owl and a large roost of Common Gulls. Some birds appeared to relay at the Watch House and others are thought to have moved to nearby Scott Head.

Colony build up was as follows. Table refers to individuals unless otherwise stated.

Date	Watch House	Gap	Notes
23 <sup>rd</sup> April			First of the year past Cley
6 <sup>th</sup> May		32	
11 <sup>th</sup> May		350	
26 <sup>th</sup> May		70-100 pairs	
1 <sup>st</sup> June	2 nests		
7 <sup>th</sup> June		105 nests	
9 <sup>th</sup> June	4 nests		
17 <sup>th</sup> June		213 nests	
30 <sup>th</sup> June			Short-eared owl present in dunes
2 <sup>nd</sup> July		0	
8 <sup>th</sup> July	9 nests		

Kestrel predation was noted after the first chicks were seen on the 16<sup>th</sup> of June. Diversionary feeding was started in two places, on the telegraph pole from last year and an additional table on the dunes north of the Lifeboat House. The results were immediate with birds taking mice from both tables throughout the nesting period.

The productivity for Little Terns in 2021 was 0.03, a disappointing result after record numbers of pairs nested.

Year	Watch House		Hood		Gap		Beach		Tip of Far Point		Stiffkey Meals		Total		
	Pr.	Fl.	Pr.	Fl.	Pr.	Fl.	Pr.	Fl.	Pr.	Fl.	Pr.	Fl.	Pr.	Fl.	Prod.
2010	2	0	20	0	0	0	69	15	0	0	6	0	97	15	0.15
2011	5	10	10	18	1	0	119	80	15	12	10	0	160	120	0.75
2012	7	16	17	6	3	0	97	6	15	0	1	0	140	28	0.20
2013	15	7	11	1	3	0	78	12	13	4	3	0	123	24	0.20
2014	21	4	6	1	2	2	67	0	14	0	0	0	110	7	0.06
2015	19	21	0	0	10	12	7	0	16	0	2	0	54	33	0.61



2016	13	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	48	0	0	0	61	9	0.15
2017	53	55	0	0	2	1	3	0	7	0	0	0	65	56	0.86
2018	60	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	63	0	0.00
2019	50	20	0	0	0	0	53	54	5	0	0	0	108	74	0.69
2020	0	0	0	0	0	0	154	201	0	0	0	0	154	201	1.31
2021	4	5	0	0	16	2	197	0	0	0	0	0	217	7	0.03

Volunteering returned as normal and the small number of nests at the Watch House were protected by a hardcore of dedicated volunteers following a reduction in volunteer numbers post-pandemic.

## Acknowledgements

Breeding bird surveys were conducted by Duncan Halpin, Luke Wilkinson and Ryan Daggart with assistance from Richard Porter, Malcolm Davies, James McCallum and Andy Stoddart. Special thanks go to the team of Little Tern volunteers for their ongoing commitment. Finally, thank you also to the wider National Trust team for support and to all who contributed photographs.

## Appendix 1: Historical breeding bird data

Breeding bird species on Blakeney Point 2010-20:

Species	Number of breeding pairs										
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Shelduck	35	44	50	65	68	59	61	62	40	38	37
Gadwall	1	2	3	4	5	5	5	3	5	8	4
Mallard	3	0	5	5	4	6	7	3	7	8	4
Grey Partridge	3	3	5	9	7	5	7	11	7	10	7
Pheasant	0	0	1	1	1	3	5	3	2	5	4
Oystercatcher	118	110	103	102	85	79	84	64	79	68	71
Avocet	0	0	9	12	13	16	17	15	10	15	11
Ringed Plover	15	17	14	12	11	13	11	12	9	13	12
Redshank	13	14	15	15	16	17	19	19	18	14	19
Black-headed Gull	1800	1807	2000	2200	2419	2104	875	505	301	319	224
Mediterranean Gull	5	10	12	15	8	4	5	4	0	1	0
Herring Gull	0	0	3	12	3	6	19	118	39	42	39
Lesser Black-backed Gull	0	0	0	1	1	1	4	48	3	3	10
Little Tern	70	150	139	121	110	52	61	65	63	108	154
Sandwich Tern	2500	3562	3575	4120	2859	1113	451	3	165	788	2425
Common Tern	75	92	67	48	87	130	128	60	99	124	289
Arctic Tern	9	7	7	5	4	4	3	4	7	2	1
Stock Dove	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Wood Pigeon	2	1	1	2	1	1	2	6	1	1	2
Skylark	43	32	35	33	39	49	48	28	25	25	40
Swallow	4	7	5	3	2	1	2	2	1	1	0
Meadow Pipit	111	102	110	100	102	128	151	84	51	45	51
Pied Wagtail	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1
Wren	15	15	9	8	4	9	6	6	7	15	12
Dunnock	10	6	11	10	11	14	7	8	7	4	6
Sedge Warbler	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Linnet	30	20	30	40	45	59	54	32	20	20	35
Reed Bunting	21	16	22	16	27	38	27	29	16	18	19

Breeding bird species on Chapel Island 2010-20:

Species	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Shoveler	NC	NC	NC	NC	1	1	2	2	3	NC	2
Shelduck	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	3	3	3	2	NC	7
Oystercatcher	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	1	1	1	1	NC	2
Avocet	10	7	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	NC	0
Redshank	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	3	3	3	3	NC	2
Skylark	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	4	3	3	3	NC	2
Meadow Pipit	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	2	2	2	2	NC	1
Sedge Warbler	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	1	1	1	1	NC	0
Linnet	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	3	2	2	2	NC	3
Reed Bunting	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	2	1	1	1	NC	2

NC = not counted

## Appendix 2: Additional maps

### Tern and gull colonies on Blakeney Point

The approximate location and proximity of colonies. Numbers shown are peak pair counts

Map 9: Tern and gull colonies on Far Point:



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

