



National
Trust

Blakeney Point Breeding Bird Report

2022



Compiled by

Duncan Halpin



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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.

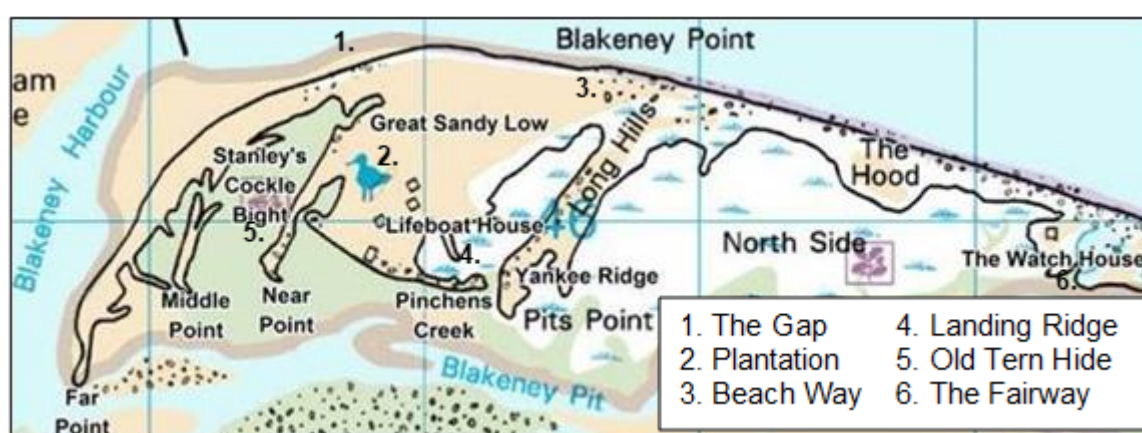


Figure 1. Blakeney Point local names

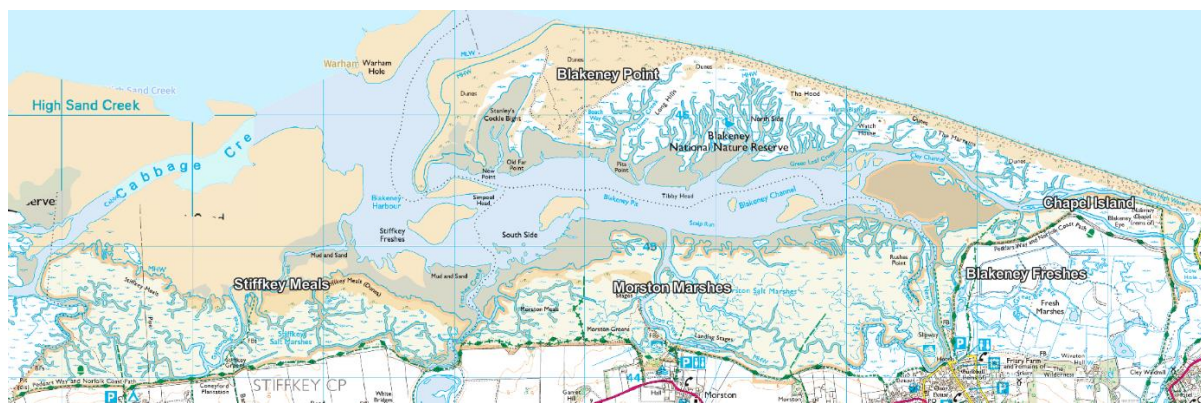


Figure 2. Map of Blakeney NNR

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 waders, early morning counts of singing birds were undertaken in April and May. Black-headed Gulls, Sandwich Terns, Common Terns and Little Terns on Blakeney Point, nest counts were undertaken, marking each individual nest to gain an accurate figure.

Summary

This year was a very disappointing year for Sandwich and Common Terns following last year's successes. Very few of either species nested – one pair of Sandwich Terns and 10 pairs of Common Tern. The primary cause is likely to be the high rat numbers throughout the breeding season. Numbers were high at the beginning of the season and remained so throughout despite efforts to control them.

In contrast, Little Terns had a far more successful year. Although reduced numbers nested, 50 pairs versus 217 in 2021, success was good and 34 chicks went on to fledge from the Watch House colony.

Once again, Avocets nested at the eastern end of the shingle ridge and a minimum of 15 pairs nested. Ringed Plover were more successful than recent years, fledging a minimum of eight chicks from fourteen pairs. This is, however, a much lower success rate than that required to maintain the population. Oystercatchers remain stable although with limited success for the second year running.

After first nesting in 2020, Stonechat numbers increased this year to six pairs, a welcome addition to the breeding bird population of the Point.

Table 1. Breeding bird data for 2021 and 2022 including 5 year mean (2017-2021)

Species	2021	2022	5 year mean
Shelduck	54	61	46
Shoveler	1	2	0
Gadwall	3	6	5
Mallard	4	8	5
Grey Partridge	4	2	8
Pheasant	4	5	4
Red-legged Partridge	0	1	0
Stock Dove	1	1	1
Woodpigeon	0	0	2
Oystercatcher	68	70	70
Avocet	9	15	12
Ringed Plover	10	14	11
Redshank	17	19	17
Black-headed Gull	722	138	414
Mediterranean Gull	2	0	1
Common Gull	3	0	3
Herring Gull	64	39	60
Lesser Black-backed Gull	14	11	16
Sandwich Tern	3134	1	1303
Little Tern	217	50	121
Common Tern	324	10	179
Arctic Tern	3	0	3
Skylark	32	41	32
Sedge Warbler	0	1	0
Wren	5	9	9
Starling	0	1	0
Stonechat	3	6	1
Dunnock	4	8	6
Pied Wagtail	1	1	1
Meadow Pipit	44	58	57
Linnet	28	30	27
Reed Bunting	18	20	20

Systematic list

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

Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

Amber list

Shelduck numbers increased again, from 54 pairs last year to 61 this year. Numerous broods were seen in the harbour during June and July 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 on Blakeney Point and three nests were found. No young were seen

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Amber list

Eight pairs were recorded. The first nest, containing 11 eggs, was found west of Gap on the 1st of April and a second near the plantation on the 17th but no young were seen.

Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*

Red list

Numbers were once again low and only two territories were recorded. One along the shingle ridge and one amongst the dunes in the vicinity of the lab. No coveys were seen.

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Not Assessed

A minimum of five pairs were recorded. Two along the shingle ridge and two in the dunes. Two broods were seen near the plantation.

Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*

Not Assessed

One pair were present in the dunes throughout the summer.

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*

Amber list

Once again, one pair nested in the box on the lifeboat house but the attempt failed.

Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*

Amber list

No woodpigeons were recorded nesting this year.

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Amber list

Seventy pairs nested – fifty around the headland and twenty between the Long Hills and Cley. No nests were monitored in detail but productivity was generally low. Pairs on the Landing Ridge were heavily predated by Stoats.

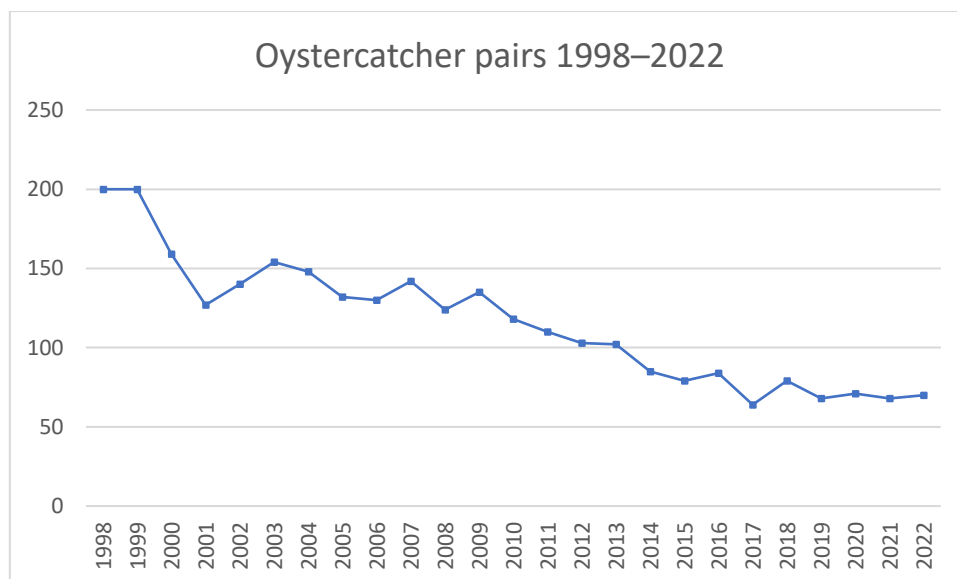


Figure 3. Oystercatcher pairs 1998-2002

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

Amber list

Schedule 1

A minimum of 15 pairs nested this year. All were on the shingle between the fishing boats and the wreck of the silver dawn. Disturbance was once again an issue but several broods of chicks were seen, although their fate is unknown.

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

Red list

Fourteen pairs nested and fledged a minimum of eight chicks. Cages were deployed on most nests and contributed to good hatching success. Once chicks hatched fledging was good. Although this was one of the most successful of recent years, numbers are still well short of the productivity required to maintain the population.

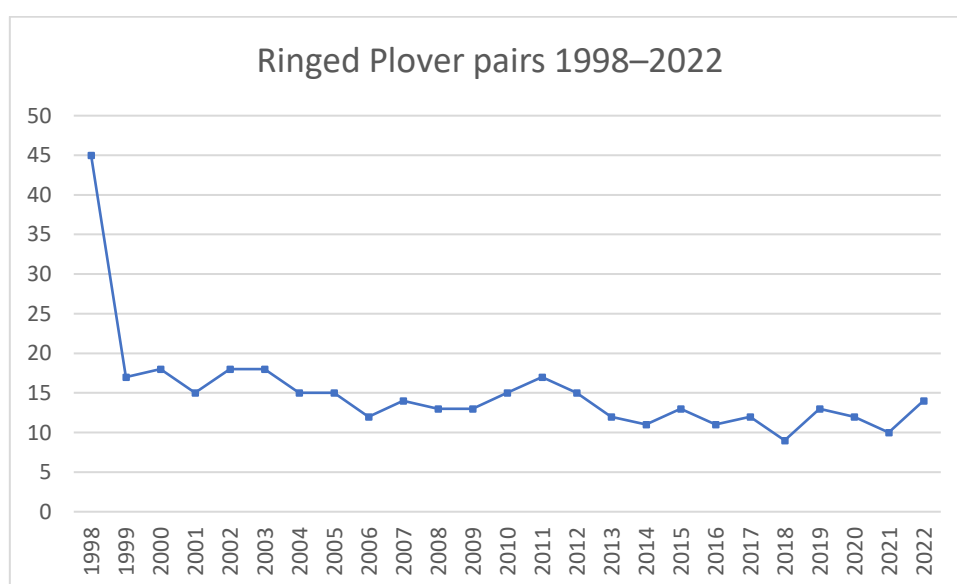


Figure 4. Ringed Plover pairs 1998-2002

Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Amber list

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

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Amber list

Black-headed Gulls were slow to settle. In late April and early May a colony of around 100 pairs formed on the saltmarsh of Stanley's Cockle Bight but high tides in the middle of the month washed all nests out. Birds then began to settle on the dune northeast of Far Point. 138 nests were counted on the 2nd of June but all nests failed due to predation by rats.

Mediterranean Gull *Ichthyaeetus melanocephalus*

Amber list

Schedule 1

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

Common Gull *Larus canus*

Amber list

Birds were present in the area of young dunes west of Gap but none nested.

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

Red list

Thirty-nine pairs nested. No young fledged.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Amber list

Eleven pairs nested. No young fledged.

Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis*

Amber list

A very disappointing year following the success of 2021. The first birds were recorded over Far Point on the 8th of April. Evening roost numbers then built up through April, with high counts of 2200 on the 29th and 1800 on the 26th. Despite 200 birds prospecting the beach at the beginning of May no birds settled to breed. A single bird was seen to be incubating amongst the Black-headed Gulls on the 17th May but there was no further sign of any breeding attempts.

Owing to the lack of a large breeding population there were no mass mortalities from avian influenza. Small numbers of dead birds were found through the summer, all of which were presumed to have been affected by avian influenza but no testing was carried out. Assuming these were birds from the flock of around 200 birds that stayed in the area through summer then this represents a ~10% mortality rate.

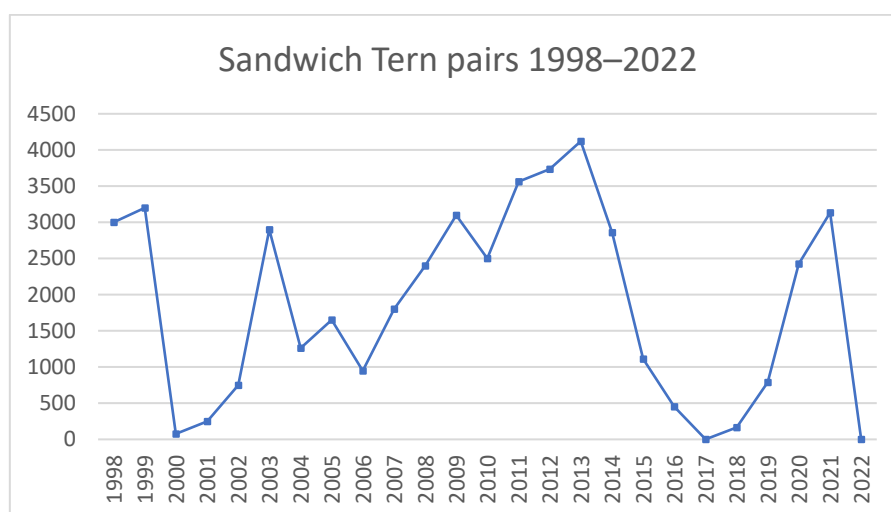


Figure 5. Sandwich Tern pairs 1998-2022

Numbers of pairs reduced to 50 this year but 2022 was a much more successful year overall and a total of 34 chicks fledged giving a productivity figure of 0.68 (0.58).

In contrast to last year, most pairs – 43 – favoured the watch house colony and only seven pairs nested west of Gap. All pairs west of Gap failed, being predated by Herring Gulls in late June.

A single colour-ringed bird was recorded this year – YN(PPC) was recorded nesting having been ringed as a chick in 2019 at the Gronant colony in North Wales.

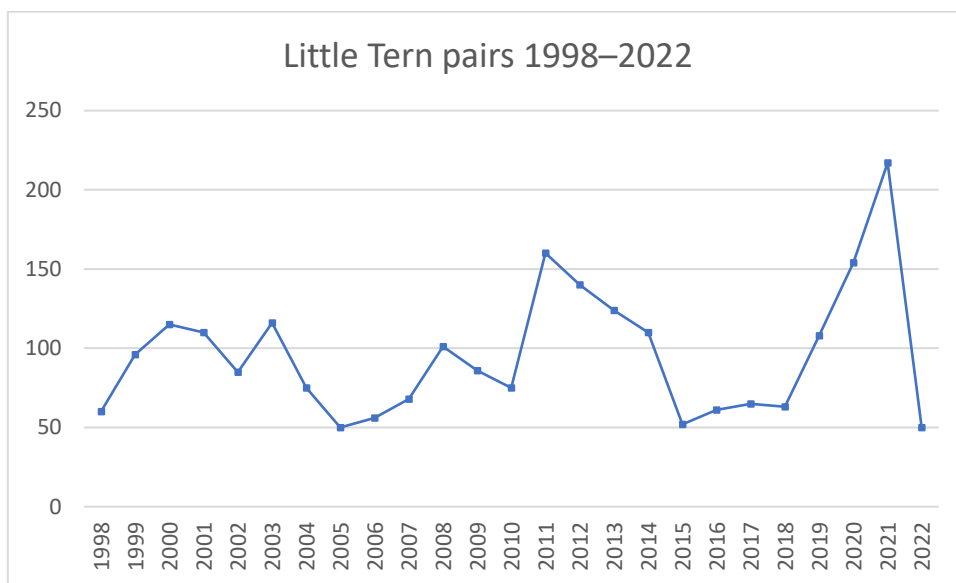


Figure 6. Little Tern pairs 1998-2022

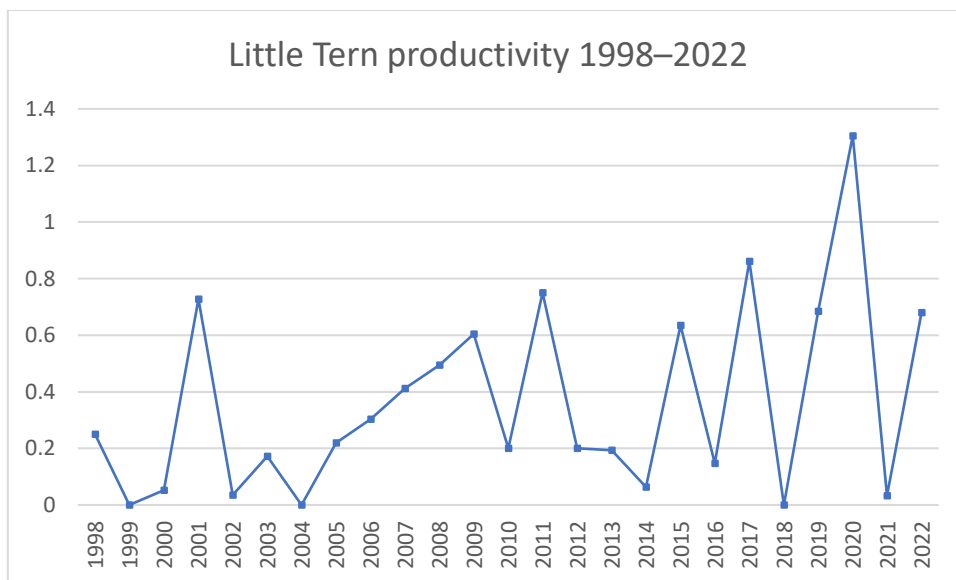


Figure 7. Little Tern productivity 1998-2022

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

Amber list

Common Tern numbers initially seemed promising. On the 20th of April around 200 birds looked to be settling to breed on Far Point, but by the 24th of April all birds had abandoned. These birds likely nested on nearby Stiffkey Binks. Following high tides in mid-June that washed out some nests on Stiffkey Binks 10 pairs returned to Far Point to breed and successfully raised 2 chicks.

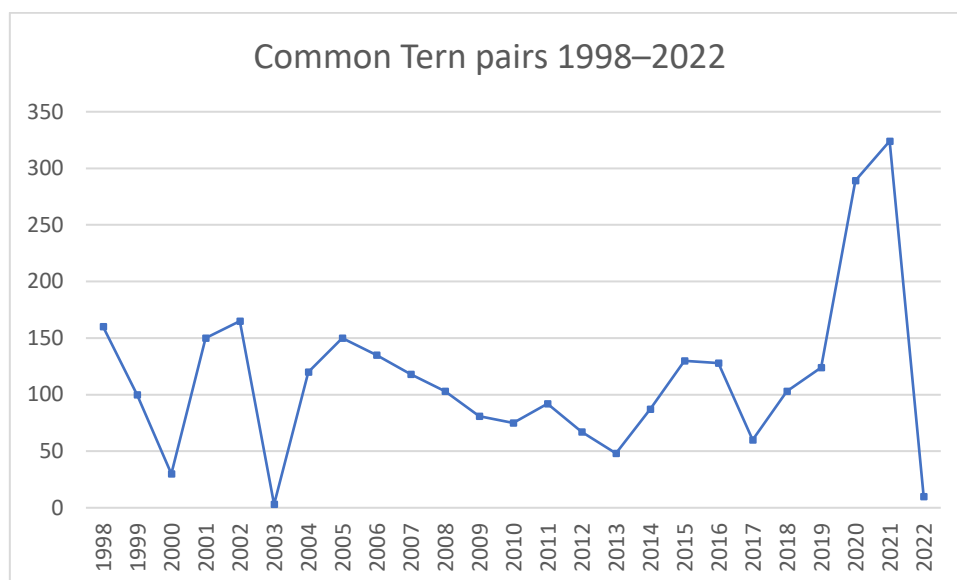


Figure 8. Common Tern pairs 1998-2022

Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*

Amber list

None nested.

Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

Red list

Surveys throughout the season recorded 41 territories in total.

Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Green list

Although pairs were noted prospecting around the Lifeboat House this was the third blank year in a row following the removal of the old tern hide.

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

Amber list

One bird held territory around the wreck of the silver dawn during June and July but there was no confirmed breeding attempt.

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Amber list

Nine territories were recorded and numerous broods were seen.

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Red list

One pair successfully raised a single brood in one of the old Swift boxes on the Lifeboat House. This is the first time since 2015 Starlings have nested on the point.

Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*

Green list

The inexorable rise of the Stonechat as a breeding species continued this year. A total of 6 pairs were recorded, where?. Second broods were noted.

Dunnock *Prunella modularis*

Amber list

Eight territories were recorded.

Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba yarrellii*

Green list

One pair nested under the tin roof of the Lifeboat House and successfully raised one brood. Observations of another brood around the edge of the harbour indicate another pair may have nested on one of the boats in the harbour.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

Amber list

Surveys recorded a total of 58 territories throughout the season.

Linnet *Linaria cannabina*

Red list

Linnet numbers were once again estimated from the size of post-breeding flocks. Numbers indicate around 30 pairs nested on the point this year.

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Amber list

Surveys recorded 20 pairs throughout the season.

Comments and observations

Little Tern summary

This was a successful year for Little Terns on Blakeney point. A total of 50 pairs nested this year and fledged 34 chicks, a marked difference from last year when record numbers of pairs (217) raised very few chicks (7). The overwhelming majority of birds nested at the Watch House, after two years with few pairs, and only a handful of pairs nested west of Gap, where most pairs nested last year.

The first birds were seen on the 30th of April, following this numbers increased steadily until 70 were seen at Gap and 50 at the Watch House on the 20th of May. Unlike last year there were no large evening roosts.

The first nest was found and marked on the 28th. Numbers built steadily and by the end of the season 43 nests had been marked at the Watch House and seven west of Gap.

During incubation a GoPro was successfully deployed to read colour rings of birds at the nest. It was deployed on twelve nests and 2 ringed birds were found. One, YN(PPC), had been ringed as a chick at Gronant in 2019. Unfortunately, the other was only metal ringed and the sequence was unreadable from the footage.

Chicks began hatching in the middle of June, the first was seen on the 14th, and 34 birds went on to fledge, all from the Watch House colony.

There was very little Kestrel activity around the colonies this year so no diversionary feeding was carried out. Although Herring Gulls predated all seven nests at Gap over a few days, predation was generally low with only a little stoat activity noted at the Watch house colony. This low level no doubt contributed to the success of the season.

Acknowledgements

Breeding bird surveys were carried out by Duncan Halpin, 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 2011-2021

Species	Number of breeding pairs										
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Shelduck	44	50	65	68	59	61	62	40	38	37	54
Shoveler	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Gadwall	2	3	4	5	5	5	3	5	8	4	3
Mallard	0	5	5	4	6	7	3	7	8	4	4
Grey Partridge	3	5	9	7	5	7	11	7	10	7	4
Pheasant	0	1	1	1	3	5	3	2	5	4	4
Red-legged Partridge	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stock Dove	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1
Woodpigeon	1	1	2	1	1	2	6	1	1	2	0
Oystercatcher	110	103	102	85	79	84	64	79	68	71	68
Avocet	0	9	12	13	16	17	15	10	15	11	9
Ringed Plover	17	14	12	11	13	11	12	9	13	12	10
Redshank	14	15	15	16	17	19	19	18	14	19	17
Black-headed Gull	1807	2000	2200	2419	2104	875	505	301	319	224	722
Mediterranean Gull	10	12	15	8	4	5	4	0	1	0	2
Common Gull	0	0	2	3	2	2		3	3	3	3
Herring Gull	0	3	12	3	6	19	118	39	42	39	64
Lesser Black-backed Gull	0	0	1	1	1	4	48	3	3	10	14
Sandwich Tern	3562	3575	4120	2859	1113	451	3	165	788	2425	3134
Little Tern	150	139	121	110	52	61	65	63	108	154	217
Common Tern	92	67	48	87	130	128	60	99	124	289	324
Arctic Tern	7	7	5	4	4	3	4	7	2	1	3
Skylark	32	35	33	39	49	48	28	25	25	40	42
Swallow	7	5	3	2	1	2	2	1	1	0	0
Sedge Warbler	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Wren	15	9	8	4	9	6	6	7	15	12	5
Starling	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stonechat	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	3
Dunnock	6	11	10	11	14	7	8	7	4	6	4
Pied Wagtail	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1
Meadow Pipit	102	110	100	102	128	151	84	51	45	51	52
Linnet	20	30	40	45	59	54	32	20	20	35	28
Reed Bunting	16	22	16	27	38	27	29	16	18	19	18

Appendix 2: Maps of breeding species

The approximate location and composition of colonies on Blakeney Point.



Figure 9. Colony locations 2022

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