

Little Tern

Sterna albifrons

Sterne naine – Zwergseeschwalbe – Dwergstern - Smatarna

Common summer visitor and passage migrant, bred annually, but not in 2000, 09 or 10.



The first few normally return during mid April. Good numbers are normally present from late April until July or early August, with small numbers sometimes noted until about mid September. Breeding numbers during the early/mid 1970s were usually in single figures and dropped as low as two pairs in 1972, but a steady increase occurred from 1977, reaching a peak in 1985 when 76 pairs nested. A decline since then reached 18 pairs in 1999 and no nesting attempts in 2000 (when 11 pairs nested 5km. away at the Midrips), 2008 or 2009. The Little Tern is a notoriously unsuccessful breeder, and the colony at Rye Harbour is no exception. In only 14 out of the 40 years 1970-2009 have the number of fledged young per pair exceeded 0.5 – the number considered necessary for a population to sustain itself. Predation by Fox, Badger, Little Owl and Kestrel are the primary causes of failure. The only count to match the breeding figures of the mid 1980s was of 150 roosting at Ternery Pool on 16 May 1993.

Early Dates

4 Apr 1981
10 Apr 1970, 1985 & 1996
11 Apr 1988 & 1991

Late Dates

2 Oct 1999 (three)
22 Sep 1986 (two)
20 Sep 1970 (two)



Nest



Adult settling on nest

Breeding Little Tern at Rye Harbour

