

## **WILDLIFE FACT FILE: Common tern**

Scientific name: *Sterna hirundo*

Length: 31-35 cm

Wingspan: 77-98cm

Weight: 90-150g

Average lifespan: 12 years

The common tern is a silver-grey and white medium-sized tern with a long tail, and they are the species of tern that you are most likely to spot both inland and on the coast. These birds breed in colonies on shingle beaches, rocky islands and the gravelly shores of lakes and rivers. When in colonies, they are noisy and will attack any intruders that threaten their nests. Terns eat fish and can be seen hovering over water before plunging to catch their prey. It can be quite difficult to distinguish between common and arctic terns. The common tern is whiter below, has shorter tail streamers (feathers that extend past the main tail), and a longer bill.

Common terns are summer visitors to the UK and can be seen from April to September in freshwater, coastal and wetland habitats, as well as in towns and gardens. During the summer months they can be seen feeding along rivers and over freshwater, and migrating birds can be seen offshore as we enter autumn.

Their UK conservation status is Amber and they are protected by The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Although these birds are not in immediate danger, we can still do our bit to protect their habitats and conserve tern populations by conserving and managing wetland and coastal habitats.

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

The common tern's long tail has resulted in it having the nickname 'sea-swallow'.

