# RSPB warns dog walkers as disturbances force rare little terns to abandon East Norfolk nests



RSPB Strumpshaw Fen has issued a crucial alert to pet owners following a series of disturbances involving dog walkers at Winterton and North Denes, where sensitive bird populations are at significant risk. The charity's statement highlights the ongoing nesting season for various species, including the nearly extinct little tern, prompting an urgent call for increased awareness and caution around these breeding grounds.

According to the RSPB, this year’s first ringed plover chicks have hatched, and little terns are beginning to settle for nesting in East Norfolk. However, reports of serious disturbance incidents at Winterton and North Denes indicate a troubling pattern. The charity noted that the majority of little terns have abandoned their nesting sites at Winterton, attributing this to human interference. This species is already among the UK's rarest seabirds, with fewer than 2,000 breeding pairs remaining nationwide, a figure further threatened by increased disturbances. Speaking on this matter, RSPB Strumpshaw Fen emphasised, “Any significant or sustained activity that causes the birds to be unsettled could be enough for them to abandon a site.”

The little tern, identifiable by its distinctive yellow bill and black tip, is classified as an Amber List species and is protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, which highlights the legal ramifications of disturbing these avian residents. With nesting sites often fragile and vulnerable, disturbances can lead to the abandonment of nests, leaving eggs and chicks exposed to predation and adverse weather conditions. Pet owners are advised to maintain their dogs on short leads and to steer clear of areas where these birds nest.

The broader context of the little tern population paints a stark picture of their precarious status. Historical data indicates that colonies in different regions, such as Northumberland, have faced significant challenges; successful breeding years often hinge on the presence of dedicated volunteers for monitoring and protecting these vulnerable sites. For instance, in 2014, colonies in Northumberland were reported to have their most successful breeding year in two decades, largely due to the efforts of rangers and volunteers who monitored the beaches and shielded the birds from disturbance and predators.

Volunteers play a critical role in safeguarding little terns along the East Anglian coast, as their presence can significantly mitigate human interference, increasing the chances of successful breeding outcomes. Recent initiatives from the RSPB illustrate the ongoing need for community involvement, which has proven essential during the breeding season. More local individuals stepping forward as volunteer wardens could effectively bolster the protective measures for these endangered seabirds, thereby enhancing conservation efforts.

The worrisome decline in little tern numbers across breeding sites in Norfolk further underscores the urgency of these conservation initiatives. In 2016, for example, nesting numbers in Norfolk decreased sharply, with the RSPB urging immediate action to ensure the survival of the species. As concerns mount regarding the impact of human activities on these delicate populations, the message remains clear: responsible behaviour during the nesting season is critical not just for the welfare of the little tern, but for wider conservation efforts aimed at preserving the biodiversity of the coast.

This poignant reminder serves as a call for all beach-goers, particularly pet owners, to act thoughtfully and with respect for the natural world, recognising that the delicate ecosystems we enjoy often hinge on our willingness to coexist harmoniously with the wildlife that inhabits them.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/25192781.disturbances-see-red-listed-bird-leave-winterton-beach/?ref=rss), [[3]](https://www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/b/east/posts/volunteers-needed-to-help-save-rare-seabird)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/25192781.disturbances-see-red-listed-bird-leave-winterton-beach/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/little-tern/), [[5]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-north-east-wales-29078456)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-tyne-29029688), [[6]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-norfolk-36916446)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/b/east/posts/volunteers-needed-to-help-save-rare-seabird), [[7]](https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife-explorer/birds/seabirds/little-tern)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/25192781.disturbances-see-red-listed-bird-leave-winterton-beach/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/little-tern/> - The RSPB provides detailed information on the little tern, the UK's smallest tern species. These birds are known for their distinctive yellow bill with a black tip and their elaborate aerial displays during courtship. They are classified as an Amber List species due to their vulnerable nesting sites and declining numbers in Europe. Little terns are also listed under Schedule 1 of The Wildlife and Countryside Act, offering them legal protection in the UK.
3. <https://www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/b/east/posts/volunteers-needed-to-help-save-rare-seabird> - The RSPB is seeking volunteers to assist in protecting the little tern population along the East Anglian coast. These birds face threats from human disturbance, predators, and severe weather events. Volunteers play a crucial role in monitoring the birds, educating beach visitors, and ensuring the safety of nesting sites during the breeding season.
4. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-tyne-29029688> - In 2014, little tern colonies in Northumberland experienced their most successful breeding year in two decades, with over 180 chicks fledging across three sites. This success was attributed to favourable weather conditions and the efforts of rangers and volunteers who patrolled the beaches to protect the birds from predators and human disturbance.
5. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-north-east-wales-29078456> - The little tern colony at Gronant on the Dee Estuary in North Wales saw its highest number of chicks fledging in four years, with 77 fledglings from 128 pairs. Increased volunteer warden patrols helped reduce human disturbance and protect the birds from predators, contributing to the colony's success.
6. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-norfolk-36916446> - In 2016, the number of little terns nesting in Norfolk's largest breeding colony dropped by almost half compared to the previous year. The RSPB expressed concern over the decline, highlighting the species' vulnerability and the need for continued conservation efforts to protect these birds during their breeding season.
7. <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife-explorer/birds/seabirds/little-tern> - The Wildlife Trusts provide information on the little tern, a diminutive seabird found around UK coasts during the breeding season. These birds are known for their remarkable aerial courtship displays and are classified as Amber under the Birds of Conservation Concern 5: the Red List for Birds (2021). They are protected in the UK under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981.