

Common Tern

Sterna hirundo

Bird · Summer migrant · Apr-Sep



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A slender, elegant, silver-grey and white seabird with a black cap, red bill tipped black, short red legs and long forked tail streamers. Common terns arrive on the Solway in April and nest on shingle, islands and man-made rafts, fishing the estuary and lower Nith through the summer. They are noisy, agile and much lighter in flight than any gull.

BEHAVIOUR

Terns fish by quartering into the wind a few metres up, hovering with the bill angled straight down, then plunge-diving to seize small fish just below the surface. Colonies are defended fiercely — terns will dive at and strike the head of anything that approaches, including people. Courting males present fish to females, and the size of the offering matters.

WHEN TO SEE IT

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QUICK FACTS

FAMILY	Gulls and terns (Laridae)
SIZE	31-35 cm
UK STATUS	Amber-listed

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