

Buoyed by tern successes

Common Tern colony on one of the pontoons installed by the Dublin Port Company in Dublin Port. **Photograph:** Richard Nairn

Breeding successes at east coast tern colonies and, opposite, Roseate Tern colonies, are justifying our efforts.

Kilcoole, Co Wicklow

In 2016, the Little Tern colony at Kilcoole, Co Wicklow, experienced a poor year despite high numbers of pairs laying eggs: we ended up besieged by foxes that were probably attracted to the shingle-beach tern colony by a burgeoning rabbit warren that has recently become established beside the adjacent railway line.

With this fresh in our minds we were not prepared to let the same scenario develop in 2017. Three newcomers – **Chris Johnson** and **Irene Sullivan** as day wardens and **Angus Lee** helping at night – joined the three ‘survivors’ from the 2016 wardening team – **Andrew Butler**, **Cole Macey** and myself, **Steve Newton**. We recorded the earliest ever season, with pairs laying from May 14th as we were still wiring up the electric fences.

Some of the early eggs were taken by Hooded Crows, but overall, foxes and crows were kept at bay and 141 pairs are thought to have fledged 269 young this year – a productivity of 1.81 young fledged per pair – a very good result!

We spent a lot of time ringing chicks, fitting some with field-readable colour rings. These have three white characters that can be read using a telescope. This is the fourth year we have colour-ringed terns and we were delighted to find a few breeding adults we had ringed as chicks in 2014 and one that had been colour-ringed on the Tagus estuary, near Lisbon in Portugal, in August 2013.

Our chicks started fledging on the record early date of June 23rd, and soon after we were receiving reports from Louth Nature Trust warden **Jen Lynch**, at Baltray, Co Louth, of both adults and Kilcoole-fledged colour-ringed offspring. A similar story unfolded at Gronant on the North Wales coast where seventeen of ‘our’ fledglings were reported.

These post-breeding wanderings around the Irish Sea are similar to those performed by some of the Lady’s Island Lake (Co Wexford) Roseate

Terns, which call in at Rockabill (see opposite); the adults seem to be showing their offspring around potential nesting colonies in order to familiarise them with the options available when they start to breed, usually at three years of age.

Regular, southward migration probably starts around mid-August, and this autumn some of our colour-ringed birds were reported from Dawlish Warren and Hayling Island in the Solent, Hampshire, both in southern England. Some were also sighted on the north-west coast of Brittany and one was re-trapped on the Tagus estuary in Portugal, for good luck!

Exciting times for us, and we look forward to welcoming them back to our shores next spring.

Steve Newton, Chris Johnson & Irene Sullivan

Dublin Port, Co Dublin

As part of the **Dublin Bay Birds Project** we continued the monitoring of breeding terns on three accessible structures in the River Liffey and in the Tolka estuary this summer. Two structures are floating pontoons installed by the **Dublin Port Company** and one an occasionally-used ship-mooring dolphin known by the name ‘CDL’. A fourth structure, the core of the Dublin Port tern colony, the ‘ESB dolphin,’ had been demolished the previous autumn as it was partly collapsing and considered a danger to shipping. The ESB kindly rebuilt a platform for the terns on the solid foundations of the previous structure, but their ecological advisors suggested that it be left undisturbed in its first season, so no monitoring was undertaken there.

The other three structures

collectively held 416 pairs of terns, mostly **Common Terns**, though a small colony of **Arctic Terns** did occupy the CDL along with some Common Terns. The nest counts were 404 for Common Terns and 12 for Arctic Terns, with an unknown number using the restored ESB structure. And all in Dublin Port!

Common Tern chicks were metal-ringed and 105 were also colour-ringed with blue or yellow bands inscribed with three white and black letters, respectively. Some Arctic Terns survived to fledging and were fitted with black rings with two numbers in white.

No significant depredation of chicks was recorded (in previous years eggs have been lost to large gulls and chicks have been eaten by rats), but the nest productivity was only moderate at 0.40 young presumed fledged per pair for Common Terns and 0.42 for Arctic Terns.

Steve Newton & Ricky Whelan



MAP BY COLIUN MACLOCHLAINN