

Coastal birds of the North Sea



Red-throated Diver

Most common diver along North Sea coast (October to May). In the past this species was also called the 'rain goose', because people believed it could predict the weather.

Diet: predominantly fish, but also crustaceans.

Present: winter.

Distribution: winters in southern North Sea and beyond.

Threats: oil pollution, offshore wind farms, disturbance, by-catch.

Lat *GAVIA STELLATA*
UK *RED-THROATED DIVER*
NL *ROODKEELDUIKER*
DE *STERNTAUCHER*
DK *RODSTRUBET LOM*



Common Gull

Similar to Herring Gull, but smaller, with black eyes giving a more endearing impression. Often breeds in colonies.

Diet: omnivorous, earthworms, insects, aquatic and terrestrial invertebrates, crayfish, molluscs and small fish. The species often scavenges.

Present: year round.

Distribution: found regularly throughout the region.

Threats: (marine) litter, habitat loss, disturbance, overfishing, by-catch.

Lat *LARUS CANUS*
UK *COMMON GULL*
NL *STORMMEEUW*
DE *STURMÖWE*
DK *STORMMÅGE*



Lesser Black-backed Gull

Breeds in colonies along coasts and lakes. Most birds migrate to Iberia and Africa for the winter. Closely related to the Herring Gull.

Diet: wide variety of plant and animal matter. They fish for sandeels and often follow fishing vessels to feed on discards. Usually forages further out at sea than the Herring Gull.

Present: mainly summer.

Distribution: breeds in entire area, in winter small numbers along Belgian coast and Delta area.

Threats: hunted in Denmark and at wintering sites in Africa, offshore wind farms, marine litter.

Lat *LARUS FUSCUS*
UK *LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL*
NL *KLEINE MANTELMEEUW*
DE *HERINGSMÖWE*
DK *SILDEMÅGE*



Little Gull

Smallest gull in Europe, less vocal than other gull species.

Diet: mainly freshwater insects. In winter also small fish and marine invertebrates.

Present: spring and autumn.

Distribution: during migration periods common throughout the region.

Threats: marine litter, oil pollution.

Lat *LARUS MINUTUS*
UK *LITTLE GULL*
NL *DWERMMEEUW*
DE *ZWERMÖWE*
DK *DVERGMÅGE*

Great Black-backed Gull

Largest gull species in the world, with a wing span of 170 cm.

Diet: omnivorous and opportunistic, its diet consists of fish (discards), adult and young birds, eggs, small mammals (rabbits, lemmings, rats and mice), insects and marine invertebrates (crustaceans, molluscs). They also steal food from other birds (e.g. ducks and cormorants).

Present: year round.

Distribution: breeds in Schleswig Holstein and along the Danish coast and disperses in winter along other coasts.

Threats: hunted for sport in Denmark, offshore wind farms.

Lat *LARUS MARINUS*
UK *GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL*
NL *GROTE MANTELMEEUW*
DE *MANTELMÖWE*
DK *SVARTBAG*



Great Cormorant

Cormorants spend a lot of time fishing and have evolved the habit of speeding up the drying of their plumage by standing in a very characteristic posture with their wings spread out to dry.

Diet: fish.

Present: year round.

Distribution: throughout the region.

Threats: hunting.

Lat *PHALACROCORAX CARBO*
UK *GREAT CORMORANT*
NL *AALSCHOLVER*
DE *KORMORAN*
DK *SKARV*

DENMARK



Great Crested Grebe

Spends the winter in large groups at sea and more dispersed inland.

Diet: predominantly fish, also crustaceans and molluscs.

Present: winter.

Distribution: Dutch, German and Danish coasts.

Threats: oil pollution, by-catch.

Lat *PODICEPS CRISTATUS*
UK *GREAT CRESTED GREBE*
NL *FLUIT*
DE *HAUBENTAUCHER*
DK *TOPPET LAPPEDYKKER*



Common Tern

Breeds in colonies and spends the winter in Africa. In Dutch they are called 'fish thief', which refers to their fishing technique. They dive from the air and rapidly grab small fish out of the water.

Diet: small fish (e.g. sandeels).

Present: summer.

Distribution: Belgium - Texel and Schleswig Holstein - Danish Islands.

Threats: hunted on its wintering grounds, habitat loss, disturbance, climate change.

Lat *STERNA HIRUNDO*
UK *COMMON TERN*
NL *VISDIEF*
DE *FLUSSESCHWALBE*
DK *FJORDTERNE*



Common Eider

Eiders produce the world's best quality down feathers. Females use them to line their nests. The down feathers are collected as filling for duvets and pillows. Chicks are raised in crèches.

Diet: shellfish (mainly mussels), small crabs.

Present: year round.

Distribution: stays close to the coast, Wadden Sea area and tidal inlets between islands.

Threats: oil pollution, hunted at breeding grounds, marine litter, disturbance, overfishing, by-catch.

Lat *SOMATERIA MOLLISSIMA*
UK *COMMON EIDER*
NL *EIDEREND*
DE *EIDERENTE*
DK *EIDERFUGL*



Herring Gull

Probably the best known gull species. This gull has excellent flying skills, and can even be seen foraging along the coast during storms. Breeds in colonies along the coast.

Diet: highly opportunistic feeder. Fish, earthworms, crabs, marine invertebrates, adult birds and eggs. Also scavenges at refuse dumps and often seen following fishing boats. Forages relatively close to the coast.

Present: year round.

Distribution: common throughout the region

Threats: oil pollution, hunted in Denmark, (marine) litter.

Lat *LARUS ARGENTATUS*
UK *HERRING GULL*
NL *ZILVERMEEUW*
DE *SILBERMÖWE*
DK *SOLVAMÅGE*



Arctic Tern

This species has the longest known migration route. They winter in the Antarctic and fly each year to the North Sea and around the Arctic Ocean to breed. In total they make an annual round trip of up to 35,000 kilometres! The Arctic Tern breeds in colonies along the coast and is often confused with the Common Tern because the two species look very similar.

Diet: small fish (e.g. sandeels), also shrimps and small crabs.

Present: summer.

Distribution: Dutch islands until Danish coast in small numbers.

Threats: habitat loss, overfishing, climate change.

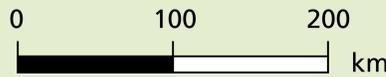
Lat *STERNA PARADISAEA*
UK *ARCTIC TERN*
NL *NOORDSE STERN*
DE *KÜSTENSESCHWALBE*
DK *HAVTERNE*



THE NETHERLANDS

GERMANY

BELGIUM



Important migration route

Razorbill

Pursuit divers that use their wings to 'fly' under water. In the air they flap their wings so fast that they can't be seen with the naked eye.

Diet: feeds on fish and crustaceans, amongst other prey, diving as deep as 120 m.

Present: winter.

Distribution: offshore along entire area. Rarely seen from the mainland.

Threats: overfishing, climate change, offshore wind farms.

Lat *ALCA TORDA*
UK *RAZORBILL*
NL *ALX*
DE *TORDALK*
DK *ALX*



Velvet Scoter

Migrates offshore along the coast, often in company with Common Scoter.

Diet: shellfish (mussels and cockles), crabs.

Present: winter.

Distribution: mainly Danish coast.

Threats: oil pollution, hunting, offshore wind farms, overfishing, by-catch.

Lat *MELANITTA FUSCA*
UK *VELVET SCOTER*
NL *GROTE ZEE-EEND*
DE *SAMTENTE*
DK *FLØJLSAND*



Common Scoter

Spends the winter in flocks at sea which may be huge. The Common Scoter male is the only completely black duck. They dive as deep as 20m to collect their food. At this depth it is too dark to see; they find their food by feeling with their sensitive bill.

Diet: shellfish (especially spicula - surf clams). They swallow the shells whole and crush them with their strong stomach muscles.

Present: winter.

Distribution: Dutch islands to the Danish coast, stays further offshore.

Threats: oil pollution, hunting, offshore wind farms, disturbance, overfishing.

Lat *MELANITTA NIGRA*
UK *COMMON SCOTER*
NL *ZWARTE ZEE-EEND*
DE *TRAUERENTE*
DK *SORTAND*

Lots of birds use the coastal zone

This poster highlights 16 species that are often found along the Belgian, Dutch, German and Danish North Sea coasts. The tern species come all the way from Africa to breed and raise their chicks on our coasts. Other species (e.g. Common Guillemot, Common Scoter and Razorbill) breed further north and spend the winter along the southern coast of the North Sea and beyond. There are also species that can be found in the area all year round.

The species on this poster only represent a small number of bird species that can be seen along the coast. Many more species use the coastal area to migrate from South to North and vice versa. For example waders (long-legged birds that forage in the intertidal areas) migrate along the coast in large numbers and species such as the Sanderling are regularly seen along the beaches.

Threats

- Oil pollution: oil spills make the feathers of seabirds stick together and destroys their waterproofing. Birds usually swallow oil in their efforts to clean themselves, and die as a result.
- Hunting: hunting can seriously reduce populations. Eggs are also collected.
- Marine litter: fishing debris and other rubbish affects over 44% of seabird species worldwide through entanglement and ingestion. Plastic items at sea are mistaken for food and accidentally eaten. Birds also become entangled in discarded fishing nets, ropes and packing materials, causing a risk of drowning.
- Offshore wind farms: there is a risk of collision with turbine blades and birds avoid areas with wind farms resulting in the loss of foraging areas.
- Habitat loss: land reclamation, coastal development and vegetation succession reduce the available suitable habitat for birds.
- Disturbance: human activities (recreational and economic) can scare birds off. Resulting in avoidance of otherwise suitable areas and failure of nests.

- Overfishing: unsustainable harvest of fish and shellfish causes food shortages for birds.
- By-catch: many birds are accidentally caught in fishing nets, where they drown.
- Climate change: rising water levels cause flooding of nests and breeding failure.

Legal protection

All birds in the North Sea are protected by law through a number of international legal instruments and national legislation in the coastal states.

Key international instruments are:

- The EU Birds Directive that protects all species of birds naturally occurring in marine areas falling within the jurisdiction of the coastal states that are EU members.
- The EU Habitats Directive that establishes the ecological network of protected areas known as Natura 2000, which includes all sites designated for birds under the Birds Directive. Many important Bird Areas in this part of the North Sea have been designated as protected areas, but some have yet to be designated.
- The EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive that requires the adoption of dedicated measures for the conservation of seabirds. It also requires mitigation of threats posed to seabirds as part of the broader programme of measures to achieve improvements in the environmental status of the marine environment.
- The EU Common Fisheries Policy that plays a crucial role in the reduction of negative impacts of fishing activities on seabirds, including seabird bycatch. An Action Plan has been developed to reduce incidental catches of seabirds in fishing gear and minimize seabird bycatch to levels which are as low as practically possible.

<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature>
www.birdlife.org/worldwide/programmes/seabirds-and-marine
www.birdlife.org/datazone/species

Common Guillemot

Excellent diver that easily reaches depths of 180 meters.

Diet: fish, including sandeels and small species of cod and herring. Mainly forages during daylight.

Present: winter.

Distribution: winters offshore along entire area, mostly seen during or after storms.

Threats: oil pollution, by-catch, climate change, offshore wind farms.

Lat *URIA AALGE*
UK *COMMON GUILLEMOT*
NL *ZEEKOT*
DE *TROTTULLUMME*
DK *LOMVI*



Disclaimer

Information on this poster is based on the best available data. Not all areas in the North Sea, especially offshore areas, are equally well surveyed for the presence of the selected birds. The poster gives a simple representation of the most important areas for the selected birds in the North Sea, but it is important to bear in mind that these birds can be found over the entire North Sea, using different areas at different times of year. The poster should not be used as evidence in licensing and permitting procedures. A reference to national and international legislation is required.



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