

## SPECIES INFORMATION SHEET

## *Sterna sandvicensis*

English name: <b>Sandwich tern</b>	Scientific name: <b><i>Sterna sandvicensis</i></b>	
Taxonomical group: Class: Aves Order: Charadriiformes Family: Laridae	Species authority: Latham, 1787	
Subspecies, Variations, Synonyms: –	Generation length: 8 years	
Past and current threats (Habitats Directive article 17 codes): –	Future threats (Habitats Directive article 17 codes): –	
IUCN Criteria: –	<b>HELCOM Red List Category:</b>	<b>LC Least Concern</b>
Global / European IUCN Red List Category LC / LC	Annex I EU Birds Directive yes	Annex II EU Birds Directive: no
Protection and Red List status in HELCOM countries: <i>Subject of special conservation measures in the EU Member states (Birds Directive, Annex I)</i>  Denmark: LC, Estonia: LC, Finland: –, Germany: 2 (Endangered), Latvia: –, Lithuania: –, Poland: CR, Russia: –, Sweden: EN		

### Range description and general trends

The European and West-Asian subspecies of the sandwich tern *Sterna sandvicensis sandvicensis* colonises the coasts of the Atlantic Ocean (including North and Baltic Sea), the Mediterranean and Black Sea, and Caspian Sea. In the Baltic Sea (central Sweden/Estonia), the species reaches its actual northern range limit. As a typical shore bird, the breeding sites of the sandwich tern are restricted to the coast.

The Atlantic population of the sandwich tern amounts about 55 260–57 035 breeding pairs (bp) (Wetlands International 2006, BirdLife International 2004). The range centre is the North Sea, where the species colonises the coasts of Great Britain (12 500 bp), the Netherlands (14 500), Belgium (1 550), Germany (8 000–10 000), and Denmark (3 700–6 100) (Hälterlein et al. 2000, BirdLife International 2004, Gregersen 2006). France (6 800) as well as Ireland (1 800) are also hosting considerable breeding populations. The Spanish breeding population, however, belongs to the Mediterranean Sea. In southern Norway, the sandwich tern breeds only sporadically (Herrmann et al. 2008).

During the 1990ies, the North Sea population has been stable in the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark, but was declining in Great Britain (BirdLife International 2004, Gregersen 2006). In most recent times, however, the German North Sea population underwent a decline to only 5 681 bp in 2005, which was the lowest number since 1975 (Garthe & Flore 2007). At the same time, the Danish population was increasing, reaching about 6 100 bp in 2006.

The population of the Mediterranean and Black Sea is estimated at 20 270–65 670 bp and about 6 500 – 10 000 bp in the Caspian Sea (Wetlands International 2006, BirdLife International 2004).

### Distribution and status in the Baltic Sea region

During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the sandwich tern was obviously not a very common breeding bird at the Baltic coasts of Denmark (central Kattegat, the Belt Sea and the Sound). The species was missing in the Central Baltic. The coasts of the south-western and central Baltic Sea were colonised

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gradually, starting in the 1930s on the Swedish east coast: the sandwich tern appeared first on Öland (1934) and short time after on Gotland (1938). Blekinge was colonised in 1960, Småland, after first attempts in 1947 and 1960, starting from 1970. In 1975, the so far most northern breeding place was recorded in the Stockholm archipelago.

At the south-western and southern Baltic coast, during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the sandwich tern was a very sporadic breeding bird in Schleswig-Holstein (Oehe-Schleimünde, 1919–1921, 1930–1936, 1939, with maximum of 92 bp) and at the Bold Vistula mouth (Śmiała Wisła) in Gdansk (1929 and 1932–1936, up to 3 bp). The permanent colonisation and development of a larger, stable population in the south-western Baltic, however, did not happen before the end of the 1950s, starting with the establishment of a colony on the island Heuwiese near Rügen (Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania) in 1957 (Herrmann et al. 2008).

At the beginning of the 1960s, the sandwich tern started to expand its range to the southern and eastern coasts of the Baltic Proper (Poland and Estonia). In Estonia, the first breeding dates from 1962. From then on, the population increased steadily. At the beginning of the 1970ies, the first larger and stable colonies were formed on small islands at the west coast of Saaremaa. In Poland, the sandwich tern was breeding from 1977–1991 in the nature reserve Mewia Łacha (Gull Shoal) at the Vistula Cut mouth (Przekop Wisły) near Swibno/Mikoszewo with a maximum of 290–300 bp. After 1991, the sandwich tern disappeared for several years as a breeding bird. In 2006, however, a new colony with 140 bp was formed on a jetty in the port area of Gdynia. Due to repair works on this jetty, in 2007 the birds returned to their traditional breeding place at the Vistula Cut mouth (nature reserve Mewia Łacha). The number of breeding pairs was fluctuating between 100 and 400 bp from 2007 to 2012 (Herrmann et al. 2012).

The Baltic population of the sandwich tern continued to grow until the 1970s. Since Danish population numbers of that time do not permit separation between North Sea and Baltic Sea breeding sites it is difficult to give exact numbers for the Baltic Sea area. However, in 1975 the numbers reported for Sweden, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and Estonia give a total of about 2 000 bp. The Danish numbers given for the 1970s and 1980s vary between 2 500 and 5 000, about the same level as during the period 1994–2012 (Herrmann et al. 2008, Figure 1).

Continuous time series are available now for the period 1994–2012, except for Estonia, where the population is estimated to be about stable at a level of 600–900 bp (Elts et al. 2009). Some recent Estonian data concerning the distribution and numbers of sandwich terns have been gathered within the framework of an inventory of breeding birds on small maritime islands in 2008–2011. According to the results of this inventory the breeding population in Estonia was estimated to 700–900 bp in 2010 (Herrmann et al. 2012).

The total Baltic numbers give a breeding population in the range of 2 200–5 000 bp (Fig. 1). This suggests that, despite some fluctuations, the population was more or less stable from the mid-1970s until now. One reason for the fluctuations is the common shift of sandwich terns between Danish North Sea and Baltic Sea breeding sites.

Currently, the Danish areas of the Baltic Sea, especially the Northern Kattegat (Hirsholmene, 1 975 bp in 2012) and the Central Kattegat and Storebaelt (1 635 bp in 2012), host the largest colonies and the highest number of breeding pairs. However, the colony sites are characterised by strong fluctuations. In previous years, several colonies have been abandoned due to intrusion of foxes (e.g., Siø 2010), but also new colonies have been formed (e.g. Glaenø Østerfed in 2010). The general situation is characterized by a declining trend in the southern part of Denmark and an increasing trend in the southwestern Kattegat and Storebelt (especially Sprogø and Hiarnø with a total of 1457 bp in 2011).

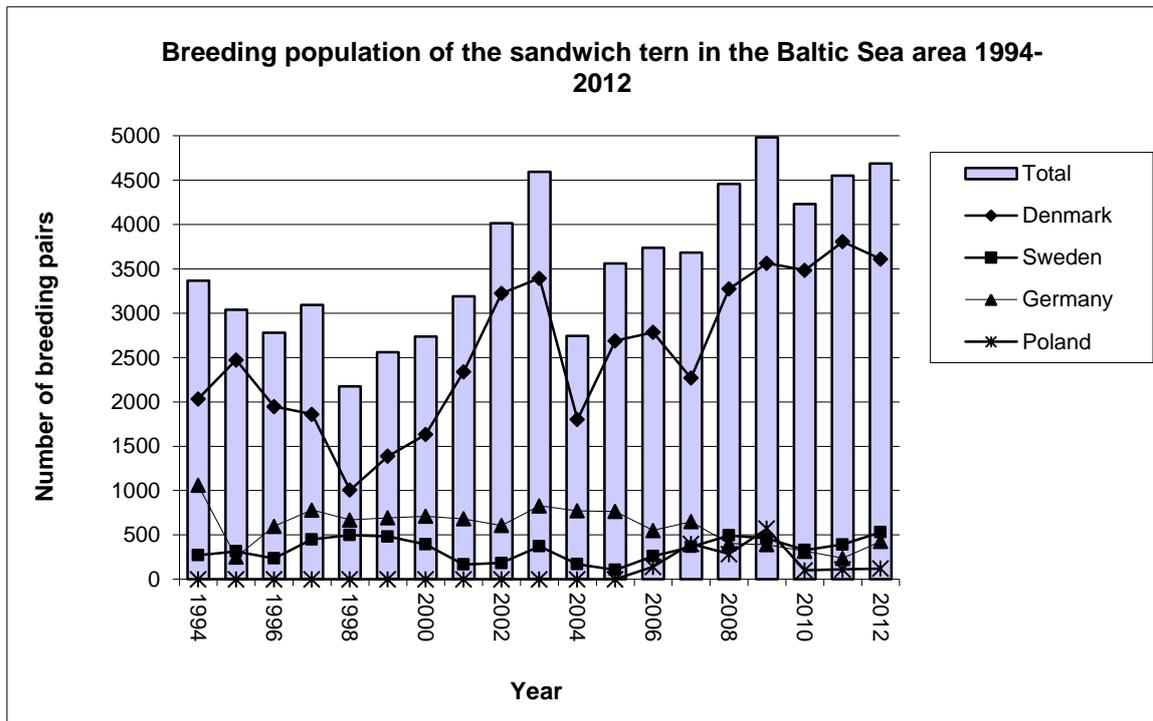


Figure 1: The breeding population of the sandwich tern in the Baltic Sea area 1994–2012. Detailed data from Estonia are not available and hence cannot be shown in the graph. About 600–900 bp from this country have to be added to the total.

Table 1: Population numbers of the sandwich tern in the Baltic Sea area. For population trends 0=stable, -=decreasing, +=increasing, f=fluctuating.

Country	Population size		Short-term population trend (10 years)	Long-term population trend (50 years)
	Breeding pairs	Year		
Sweden	531	2012	f	f
Estonia	700–900	2010	0	+
Poland	120	2012	+	f
Germany SH	0	2012	-	f
Germany MV	426	2012	-	f
Denmark	3 610	2012	f	f
<b>Baltic Sea</b>	<b>5 400–5 600</b>			

### Distribution map

Not included

### Habitat and ecology

The sandwich tern breeds on seabird islands on grassland, occasionally also on dunes or gravel areas, in association with black-headed gulls (*Larus ridibundus*). Usually they prefer large Black-headed Gull colonies of several hundred to thousand breeding pairs, but occasionally they also may breed in association with a small number of Black-headed Gulls. The fluctuation of gull colonies is one reason for



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the frequent changes of breeding sites. Even very large tern colonies may disappear from one year to another, if the Black-headed Gulls abandon the site.

### Description of major threats

The main threat to the species is the occurrence of predatory mammals on the breeding sites. Human disturbances, especially recreational activities, represent another threat factor. In the West-African wintering areas, hunting causes losses of individuals, probably in significant numbers.

### Assessment justification

The population is > 2 000 mature individuals and obviously stable. Hence, none of the criteria A–D is met, the species classifies as Least Concern (LC).

### Recommendations for actions to conserve the species

The main conservation measure for the sandwich tern is the protection of suitable breeding sites. These are small islands covered by low grass vegetation, without human disturbances and predatory mammals. The exclusion of human disturbances as well as predatory mammals (especially foxes, but also feral mink *Mustela vison*) from those islands is the main conservation measure required. The impact of the newly immigrated racoon dog (*Nyctereutes procyonoides*) on coastal bird colonies is not yet well investigated. However, the diet of this species and its recent appearance on coastal bird islands should give reason to focus attention on its influence on coastal birds.

### Common names

Denmark: Splitterne, Estonia: Tutt-tiir, Finland: Riuttatiira, Germany: Brandseeschwalbe, Latvia: Cekulzīriņš, Lithuania: Margasnape žuvedra, Margasnapė žuvedra, Margasparnė žuvedra, Poland: Rybitwa czubata, Russia: Пестроногая крачка, Sweden: Kentsk tärna

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