

Common Tern

Scientific Name: *Sterna hirundo*

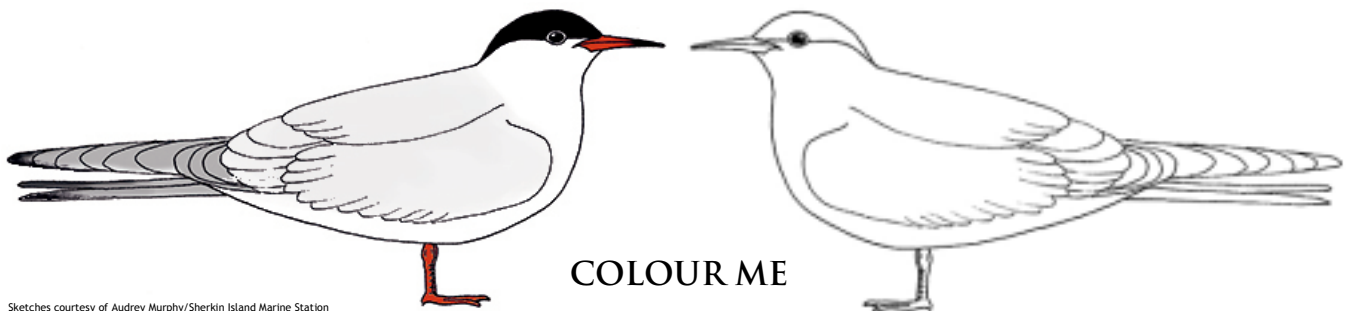
Irish Name: Geabhróg

The Common Tern is a migratory sea bird that arrives in Ireland to breed around April. It leaves again for western or southern Africa around October. The Common Tern has a number of breeding sites in Ireland, including Dublin Port, where it nests on manmade floating rafts, known as pontoons. As Common Terns nest on shingle beaches of small stones and pebbles, the pontoon have shingles placed on them to replicate the tern's natural nesting environment. The birds lay their eggs in a small shallow scrape, which protects them from the wind and stops the eggs from rolling away. Their camouflaged mottled eggs are very hard to see, keeping them safe from predators. The Common Tern is a very graceful bird with its slender beak, streamline body, long narrow wings and pointed forked tail. These characteristics make it ideal for fast flying, flying strong winds and diving for small fish - its staple food. It has grey upperparts and white underparts, a black cap on its head and on its wing tips, an orange-red bill with a black tip and long red legs.



Image courtesy of Robbie Murphy

When the Common Tern feeds it hovers over the water and dives on seeing a fish.



Sketches courtesy of Audrey Murphy/Sherkin Island Marine Station

FACT FILE:

Colour: Grey upperparts with black crown, white underparts, red legs and bill.

Length: 34-37 cm

Diet: Fish, mostly sand eels and sprats.

Habitat: Along the coast, and sometimes inland by rivers and lakes.

No. of eggs: 2-3

Terns Species in Ireland

Five species of tern breed in Ireland: the Common Tern, Sandwich Tern, Roseate Tern, Little Tern and Arctic Tern. The Arctic Tern looks very similar to the Common Tern - little details telling them apart. The Arctic Tern is outstanding in that it makes the longest migration of any animal on earth. Most Arctic Terns breed in the Arctic, though some breed as far south as Ireland and Britain. Arctic Terns will fly from these breeding grounds to the edges of Antarctic and back again each year.

