

WATERBIRD COUNTS AT RHOS POINT 2013-23

Julian Hughes

Summary and recommendations

There is good evidence that the beach at Rhos Point is locally important for a number of waterbird species that feed or roost on the beach between high tide cycles.

For **Purple Sandpiper**, it is among the most important sites in Wales between November and March.

Rhos Point may be of particular importance as one of a network of roosting sites around Liverpool Bay for **Sandwich Tern** between July and September.

For several other species, including **Oystercatcher**, **Turnstone** and **Redshank**, it is probably the most important location for birds between the Little Orme and Kinmel Bay.

Waders wintering at Rhos Point nest in a wide arc, from western Greenland through Iceland, The Faeroes and Scandinavia, to northeast Europe and Siberia. Those that use Rhos Point to refuel during migration will travel on to Iberia and West Africa. Sites such as Rhos Point may be critical as part of a network along the East Atlantic Flyway.

Numbers of gulls and terns increase to a peak in August/September, prior to the departure of the terns to Africa, when large numbers of waders arrive. The winter period is the most important for wading birds and gulls, with a notable increase in numbers in late winter as birds congregate before departing north to their breeding areas.

The overall numbers of birds using the beach does not appear to have changed significantly over the last 10 years, although peak counts of Oystercatcher do appear to be lower than previously. However, it is not possible - from this data - to make any judgements about trends.

Consideration should be given to increase the resilience of waterbird populations along the Conwy coastline, including Rhos Point. Under the authority's Section 6 duty of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, the most immediate action that could be taken would be to prohibit dogs from this 500m section of beach (between Rhos Point and St Trillo's chapel) throughout the year. For context, this is within a coastline of 20km between the Little Orme and Kinmel Bay (2.5%), much of which is open to users with dogs in the winter.

Information for beach users, to highlight the importance of the site for birds, could increase local recognition of the importance of the site.

Background

Anecdotal reports and observations by birdwatchers who monitor birds at Rhos Point indicated that disturbance of the beach was resulting in birds being regularly flushed from their feeding and roost areas. In that context, I undertook to review data on the use of the beach extending seaward from the promenade between Rhos Point and St Trillo's chapel.

This paper used the best data available to assess the use of the beach by birds at all times of the year, and considers the importance of Rhos Point in the context of the coastline between the Little Orme and Kinmel Bay. It does not attempt to measure disturbance from different sources or the impact of disturbance on birds, but provides an evidence base for decisions in relation to the future management of this section of coast. There is a wealth of studies on the impacts of different forms of disturbance on birds (see Taylor *et al.* 2005, for example), although the biological and ecological effects differ according to factors such as the size, location and topography of the site, and the type, frequency, timing and length of the disturbance. It can also differ between seasons and the activity that birds are prevented from undertaking. This makes it difficult to 'prove' the impact of disturbance without bespoke and expensive studies, but land managers of important sites for wildlife seek to limit the risks through access restrictions, such as those deployed by Denbighshire County Council at Gronant in the breeding season and by Conwy County Borough Council at Glan-y-Môr Elias throughout the year.

This paper uses birdwatchers' records collected via an online platform, [BirdTrack](#), managed by the British Trust for Ornithology on behalf of a partnership comprising the BTO, RSPB, Birdwatch Ireland, the Welsh Ornithological Society and Scottish Ornithologists' Club. Although data are unstructured, these were preferred to data from the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) because they cover a greater number of days each year and are specific to this (relatively short) section of beach. Throughout the paper, species names are coloured according to their status in *Birds of Conservation Concern Wales 2022* (Johnstone *et al.* 2022; see Table 1).

Relevant legislation

The beach currently has no conservation designation above Mean Low Water, but is immediately adjacent to Liverpool Bay/Bae Lerpwl Special Protection Area "classified for the protection of red-throated diver (*Gavia stellata*), common scoter (*Melanitta nigra*), and little gull (*Hydrocoloeus minutus*) in the non-breeding season; common tern (*Sterna hirundo*) and little tern (*Sterna albifrons*) in the breeding season, and an internationally important waterbird assemblage" (JNCC 2020).

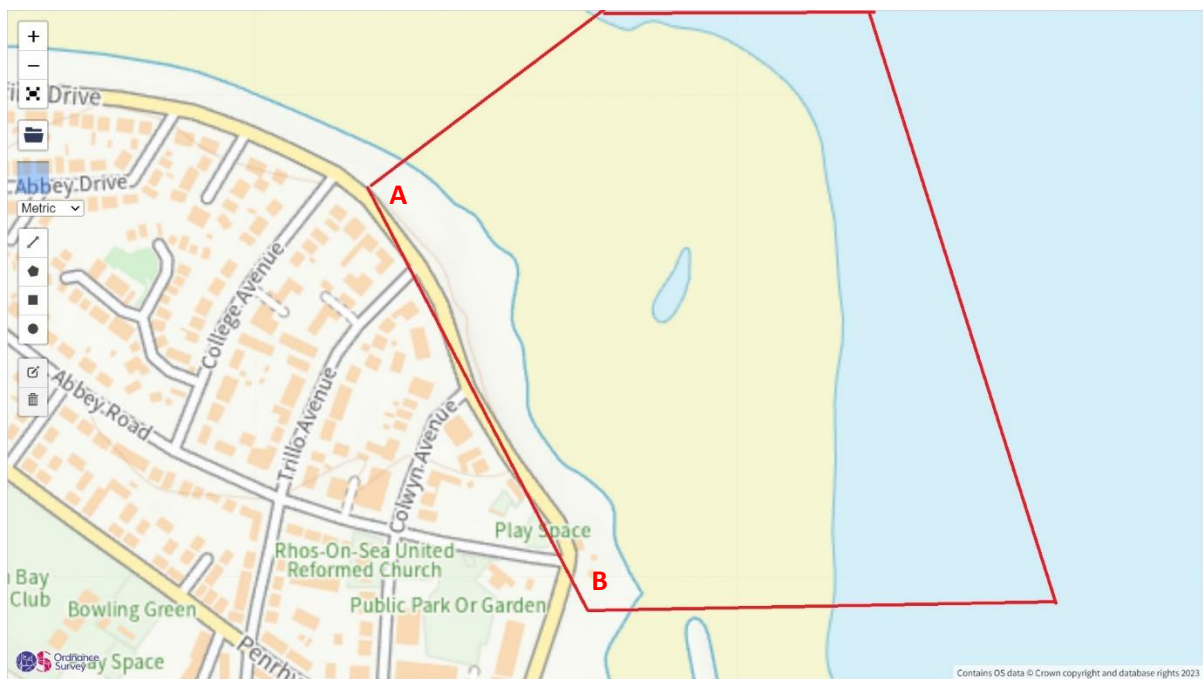
The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 introduced an enhanced biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty (the section 6 or s6 duty) for public authorities in the exercise of functions in relation to Wales. The s6 duty requires that public authorities 'must seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity so far as consistent with the proper exercise of their functions and in so doing promote the resilience of ecosystems'. To comply with the S6 duty, public authorities should embed the consideration of biodiversity and ecosystems into their early thinking and business planning, including any policies, plans, programmes and projects, as well as their day to day activities.

Methods

Bird records were extracted from BirdTrack on 9 August 2023 based on the approximate search area shown in Figure 1. The landward points (shown as A and B) are based on the area most frequently monitored by birdwatchers, and on which human/dog disturbance is most frequently noted. Recording of birds is generally made from the raised promenade or the pavement adjacent to the roadway, using binoculars or a spotting scope. The area below high water mark is approximately 3.3 ha (8.23 acres), calculated on mapdevelopers.com.

Records were extracted for the period 1 January 2013 to 8 August 2023.

Fig. 1. Search area for BirdTrack records. On the promenade, these were between grid references (A) SH 84129 81166 (the steps to the north of St Trillo's Chapel) and (B) SH 84314 80810 (the rocks below the former Rhos Point café).



The dataset contained 11,700 records of 142 species. This resulted from 744 visits in which a complete list of birds was entered into BirdTrack, supplemented by *ad hoc* records made during other visits.

Based on experience of habitat use and behaviours, 109 species were excluded from further analysis based on the likelihood that they were:

- i. Only flying over the area – examples include Swift *Apus apus* and Swallow *Hirundo rustica*;
- ii. Only at sea – examples include Gannet *Morus bassanus*, Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* and Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps auritus*;
- iii. Passerines (songbirds) that were primarily using other habitats, even though some do feed below mean high water, such as Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* and Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba*.

Following those exclusions, the analysis is based on 5,944 records of 33 species, listed in Table 1, submitted by 83 observers. Of these, 2,740 (46%) were made by eight local observers, including the author, and all of whom are known to the author as experienced ornithologists.

It is important to note that these records are not the result of systematic monitoring but by visits, of differing lengths and at different points in the tidal cycle, by birdwatchers of differing abilities. This inevitably introduces biases, which are discussed below.

Results and discussion

The beach at Rhos Point is used by 14 species that are **Red-listed** birds of conservation concern (of 60 such species in Wales, 23%), 13 **Amber-listed** birds (of 91 species, 14%) and six **Green-listed** birds (of 69 species, 9%). See Table 1 for the conservation status of each species. Listing is based on several criteria (see Johnstone *et al.* 2022), but broadly the breeding or non-breeding populations of Red-listed birds have declined by 50% or more since 1995 or 1970 respectively.

There are nine species that have occurred in numbers greater than 100 at a time, although turnover of migrating birds means the numbers of individuals of each species using the site will be far greater during the year. Tables 2 and 3 show the maximum counts of each waterbird species presented by month and by year. The species to have occurred in greatest numbers are: **Herring Gull** (max. 2000), **Sandwich Tern** (2000), **Oystercatcher** (700), **Common Gull** (600), **Black-headed Gull** (300), **Dunlin** (200), **Turnstone** (190), **Redshank** (150) and **Curlew** (117).

Figure 1a is indicative of the months in which the greatest numbers of birds are present, although as these are based on the maximum monthly counts over 10.5 years, the aggregated number of birds in any given month may be lower than those shown. Birds use the beach throughout the year, but its importance varies seasonally between species or groups of species. The winter period is the most important for wading birds and gulls, with a notable increase in numbers in late winter as birds congregate before departing north to their breeding areas.

Smaller numbers of wading birds are present through the summer, presumably either immature birds below breeding age and/or failed breeders that have returned early. Numbers of gulls and terns increase to a peak in August/September, prior to the departure of the terns to Africa, when large numbers of waders arrive.

Aside from 2014/15 and 2017/18, when there were large counts of Common Gull, and Herring Gull and Sandwich Tern respectively, the overall numbers of birds using the beach does not appear to have changed significantly over the last 10 years, but as discussed below (see fig. 7b), it is unwise to make any judgements about trends.

Gull species

Six species use the beach (see figure 2). Most species roost on the shingle/rocks, with some individuals using rock pools to bathe and preen as the tide recedes. Some, particularly **Herring Gulls**, will feed among the rocks, on shellfish and carrion washed up by the sea or discarded on the beach by visitors. The key months are March and August. In March, flocks of **Herring Gulls** and **Common Gulls** roost, preen and sometimes feed on the shoreline prior to departing for their breeding areas farther north. Smaller numbers of **Herring Gull** remain here through the summer, both local rooftop breeders and immature birds (that will not breed until they are at least four years old).

Ringling shows that the **Common Gulls** gather at a number of coastal sites in North Wales before crossing northern England and the North Sea to breed in Norway. When they return in autumn, smaller numbers are present at Rhos but the majority disperse inland and farther to the south.

Fig. 1a. Cumulative maximum counts of all species (n=33) using the beach at Rhos Point to feed or roost, by month. Note that in all charts the number of birds in any month will not equal the total shown in the x-axis, as the maximum counts will not necessarily have occurred in the same year.

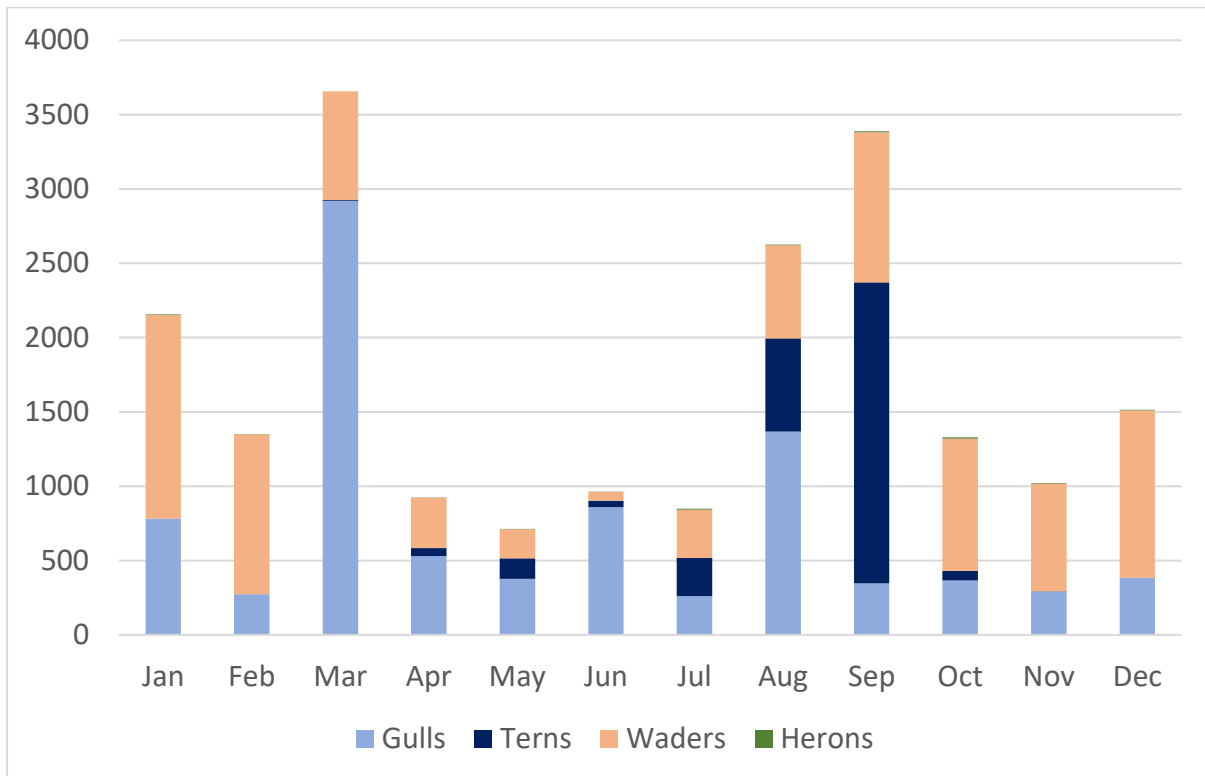


Fig. 1b. Cumulative maximum counts of all species (n=33) using the beach at Rhos Point to feed or roost, by year. The year covers the period from July to June, aligned with that used by the WeBS.

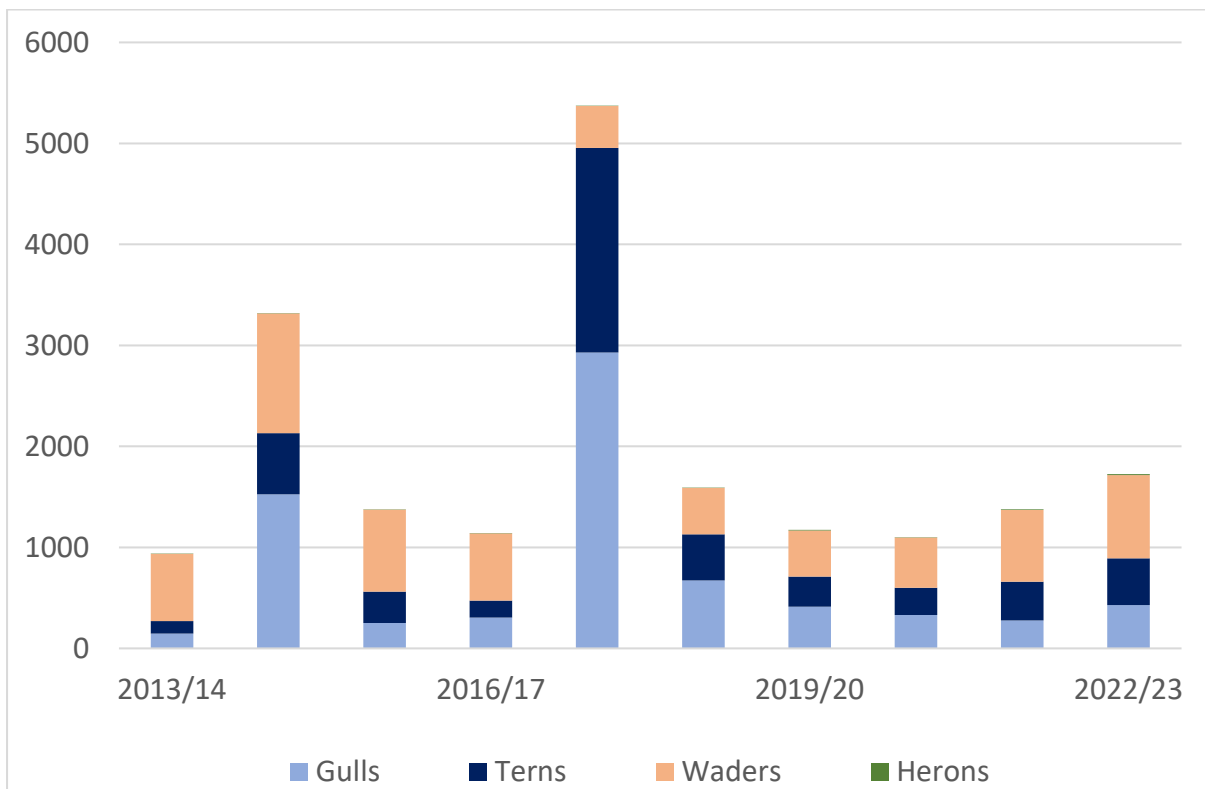


Fig. 2. Cumulative maximum counts of gull species (n=6) using the beach at Rhos Point to feed or roost.

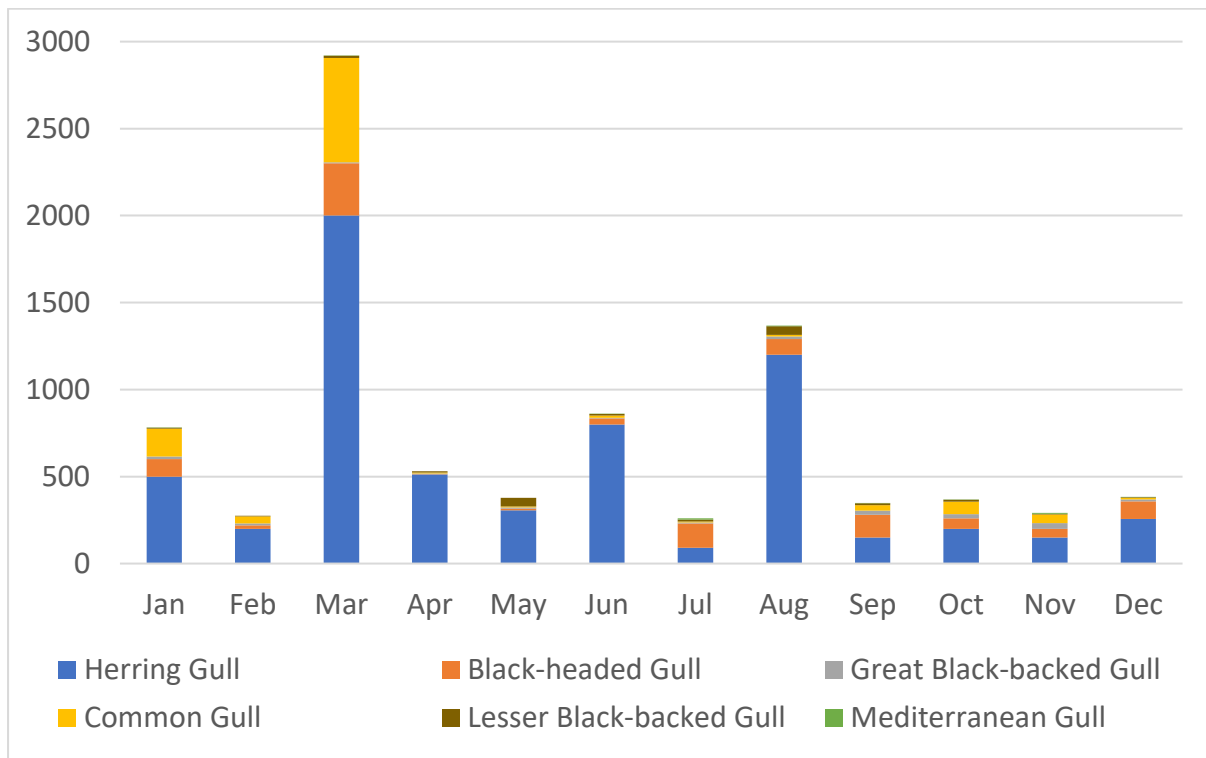
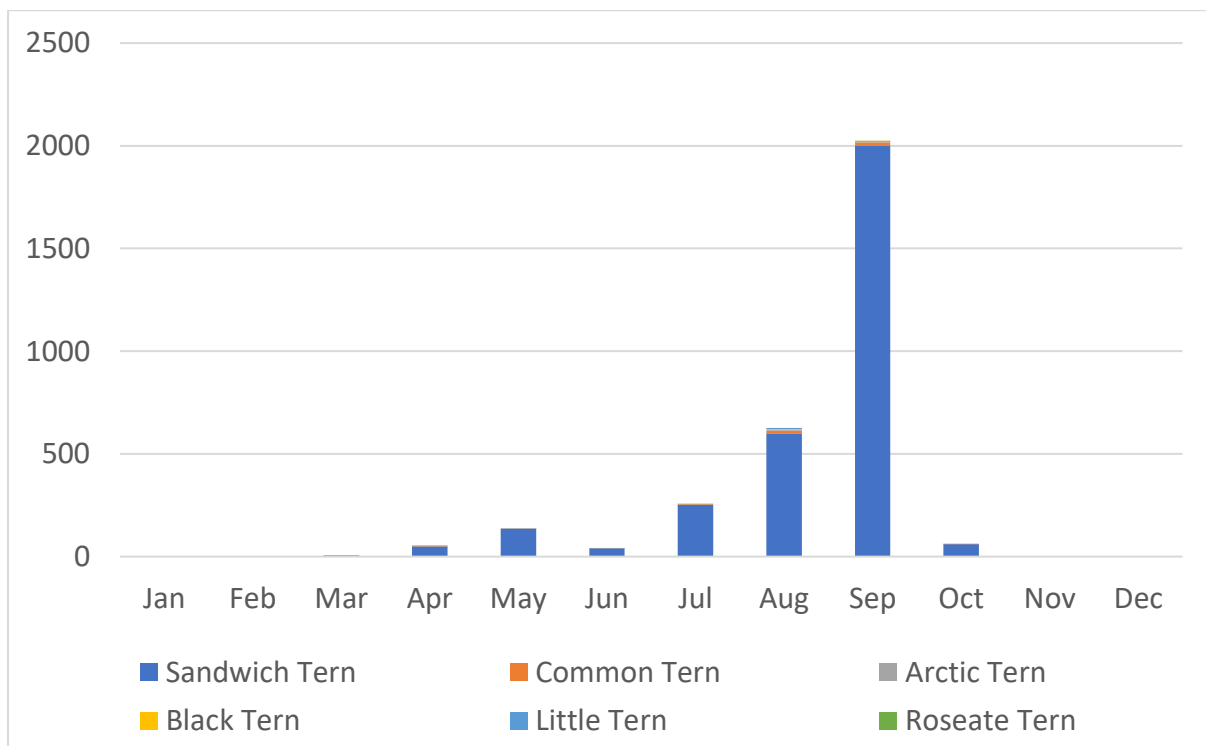


Fig. 3. Cumulative maximum counts of tern species (n=6) using the beach at Rhos Point to roost.



Small numbers of **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** occur through the summer and are likely to breed locally before moving to Iberia for the winter. From late June, numbers of **Black-headed Gulls** increase as birds arrive from breeding colonies in central England and, as illustrated by resightings of ringed birds, from elsewhere in northern Europe, as far east as Poland. This is also the probable source of the occasional **Mediterranean Gull**.

It is not known from how wide an area gulls gather to roost at Rhos Point, but along with Llanddulas, it is likely to be one of the most important roost sites between Llandudno and Rhyl.

Tern species

Terns are summer visitors to Britain, generally arriving from southern and western Africa in April, and passing the Conwy coast as they fly directly to their breeding colonies. All the Welsh colonies are in Anglesey, Denbighshire and Flintshire. Although small numbers of all tern species have been recorded at Rhos Point, it is **Sandwich Tern** that is the most abundant. Numbers typically increase during July as adults and juveniles disperse from colonies around the Irish Sea, including the only Welsh colony at Cemlyn, north Anglesey. Birds feed in the bay and along the Conwy coast, but do not land on the water and so must rest at a suitable location on the coast where they feel safe from predation.

Observations indicate that Rhos Point is one of a small handful of sites around Liverpool Bay that are used for roosting, the others being the Alt estuary (Lancashire), Clwyd estuary (Conwy/Denbighshire) and Glan-y-Môr Elias (Conwy). As summer progresses, numbers at all these sites increase (fig. 3) and resightings of colour rings shows there are movements between sites within Liverpool Bay between tidal cycles. Terns require a choice of undisturbed sites. Co-ordinated resighting effort by local birdwatchers shows that **Sandwich Terns** at Rhos Point originate from colonies around the Irish Sea, and beyond. Many hundreds of resightings have been collected since 2017, and although these have yet to be analysed, a summary in the *Welsh Bird Report* solely for 2021 (reproduced here as Table 4) illustrates that these roost sites are used by birds from every part of the UK, as well as the Republic of Ireland, the Netherlands and Denmark.

Heron species

Small numbers of **Grey Heron** and **Little Egret** feed in the shallow waters during the rising and falling tide. Both are generalist predators and it is probable that their use of the beach is incidental to other nearby sites, such as Rhos-on-Sea Golf Course, the Afon Ganol and RSPB Conwy. Beach use could be of greater importance during freezing winter conditions, although this has been infrequent in recent years. The increase in numbers in autumn (figure 4) might suggest an arrival of young birds that are dispersing away from nesting colonies.

Wader species

Numbers of waders, long-legged shorebirds that are highly migratory, are highest at Rhos Point outside the breeding season (September to March) – see figure 5. Some species remain along the local coastline for the whole season, and numbers increase in early autumn when southbound waders ‘stage’ locally between their Arctic breeding grounds and wintering areas to the south. Numerically, the most abundant species are **Oystercatcher**, **Turnstone**, **Redshank**, **Curlew** and **Dunlin**,

although **Purple Sandpiper** is also notable because the coast from Rhos Point to Penrhyn Bay is among the most important wintering sites in Wales (see figure 6).

All waders need to conserve energy as, unlike the gulls, terns and herons, they can only feed while the tide is out and are physically incapable of landing on the water. Thus, it is critical to their survival that they are able to maximise the time foraging and, when the beach is not available to them, to sleep (roost) and preen at an undisturbed location.

Oystercatchers are active feeders at Rhos Point, using their strong bills to smash or prise open shellfish among the rocks and pools. There are usually 200-300 birds present, although numbers appear to have fallen during the last 10 years. Ringing shows that birds wintering or staging on this section of coast originate from several different breeding populations, in Iceland, The Faeroes, Shetland/Orkney and Norway. The increased numbers in September/October relative to November is indicative that some stop here to refuel and then continue their journeys to wintering areas in South Wales (especially the Burry Inlet), southwest England and Brittany.

Turnstones also feed actively at Rhos Point, where the habitat is ideal for them. As their name suggests, they turn over pebbles and stones in order to find vegetable matter, shellfish and other invertebrates brought in by the previous tidal cycle. They also feed on flies and other invertebrates among seaweed. They have the longest migration of any wintering bird at Rhos Point, shown by ringing to fly here from the west coast of Greenland via Iceland (and one bird ringed farther east in Liverpool Bay flew to Canada to breed). A small number of, presumably, immature birds remain here throughout their second summer, joined by the first failed breeders in July, so that by late summer/early autumn there are usually more than 100 Turnstones on this short stretch of beach. At least this number remains through the winter, and a colour-flag study has recently been started by SCAN Ringing Group to understand more about Turnstone movements between Rhos Point and other sites.

Redshank numbers peak in December-January. Most are probably from the Icelandic and Faeroese breeding population, although ringing shows that some birds from Scotland and northern England breed in Wales (Pritchard *et al.* 2021), suggested by movements of ringed birds between Traeth Lafan/Rhos Point and Lancashire's Ribble estuary. Although larger numbers are found on estuaries with soft sediments, there is evidently sufficient food-rich mud exposed on the falling tide to merit the use of Rhos Point by around 100 birds each winter. Studies show that, like many wader species, Redshanks are faithful to the same sites each winter.

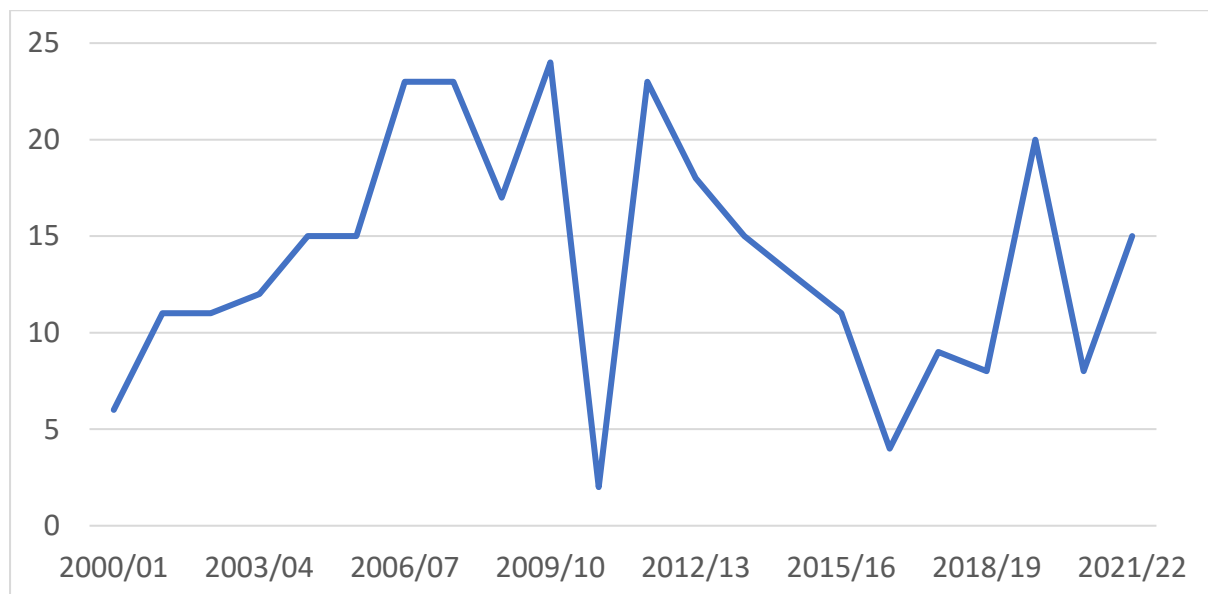
The plight of the breeding **Curlew** population is well-documented, and it is widely accepted as the most urgent and significant bird conservation priority in the UK (e.g. Brown *et al.*, 2015). Numbers at Rhos Point increase during July as birds return from their breeding areas, which based on ringed birds are in northern England, Finland and, to a lesser extent, the plains of northwest Germany. Around 50-100 feed among rocks and on exposed mud at Rhos Point through the winter. The extent of turnover at the site during the winter is not known as few are marked individually, but it is quite possible/likely that birds feeding at Rhos Point and on the Conwy estuary also use fields at Dinerth Hall Farm and Bodafon Fields to roost during high tides.

Dunlins, the smallest of the regular shorebirds at Rhos Point, can number 100 birds through the winter, with counts increasing during cold weather to the east. Ringing shows most Dunlin movements from North Wales are to the Baltic Sea (Poland and Sweden), or closer staging points such as northern Holland and The Wash, so the breeding sites are likely to be farther east in Fennoscandia and northern Russia. Unlike some of the larger waders, Dunlins also roost on the rocks around Rhos Point, the breakwater and the sea defences that run east to Penrhyn Bay.

Ringed Plovers occur in smaller numbers, typically a few dozen, feeding among Dunlins and Turnstones, and also roosting on the rocks. Ringing shows that these originate from breeding grounds in Scandinavia and northern Russia, arriving via northern Norway and the Baltic Sea. Some of those arriving via Norway may be staging at Rhos Point to feed before continuing migration to southwest Europe or western Africa.

Most of the other waders recorded at Rhos Point occur occasionally and in small numbers, on passage between Iceland (e.g. Whimbrel) or Russia (e.g. Curlew Sandpiper) and West Africa. One other wader that does winter locally in small numbers is **Purple Sandpiper**, a species that has declined so dramatically in Wales that it was one of the few species that was moved from Green to Red status for conservation concern at the most recent assessment (Johnstone *et al.* 2022). A review to be published in the *Welsh Bird Report 2022* identifies 15 sites in Wales that have held 10 or more Purple Sandpipers since 2000, among which is the coast between Penrhyn Bay and Rhos Point, where they roost on the boulder sea defences. Based on the average peak counts for 2019/20 to 2021/22, this coast is the joint seventh most important site in Wales, averaging 14 birds per winter. Figure 6 shows that although the numbers can vary between winters, there appears to be no obvious trend since the turn of the century. Purple Sandpipers are generally recorded at their roost site and rarely foraging, but it must be assumed that they feed among the seaweed and boulders between Rhos Point and Penrhyn Bay, all of which appears to be suitable.

Fig. 6. Maximum count of Purple Sandpipers between Rhos Point and Penrhyn Bay, 2000/01-2021/22 (from *Welsh Bird Report 2022*, in prep.)



Breeding birds

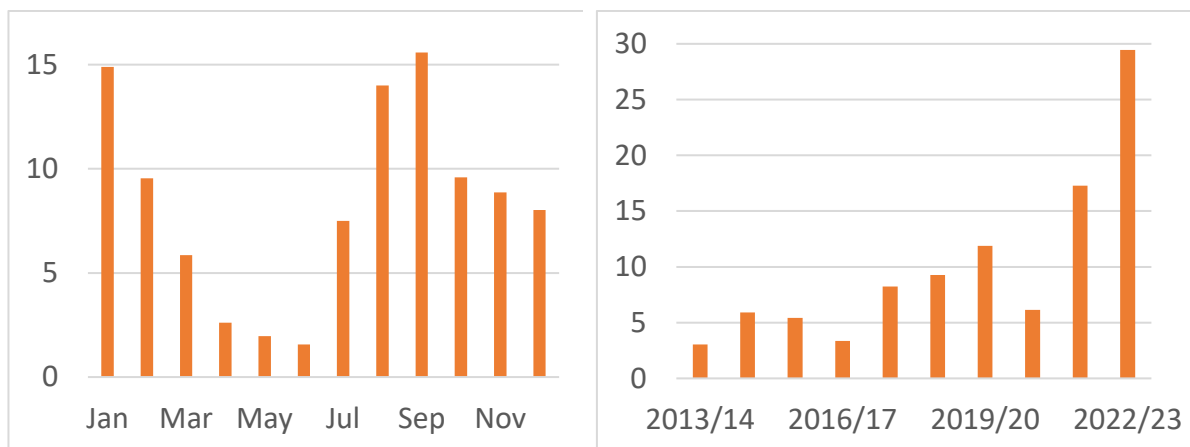
This review considers only non-breeding populations of birds on the beach. The tidal range prohibits nesting attempts by any birds along this stretch of beach, since high water generally extends across the shingle to the promenade. However, a pair of **Oystercatchers** nested on the nearby breakwater in 2022 and 2023, and brought their chicks onto the beach after hatching. It is thought that just one survived to fledging in 2022, and one may also have succeeded in 2023.

Bird recording effort at Rhos Point

Because the only data available were from unstructured recording, effort varied across and between years. Were recording effort to be consistent, we would expect 8.3% of records to be submitted in each month. Figure 7a shows that the period from August to February is over-represented and March to July are under-represented. This reflects that birdwatchers generally visit when there are species of particular interest (such as **Purple Sandpiper** in winter) and are less likely to do so when they expect there to be lower numbers and diversity of species present. However, the author's experience is that this does not mean that the results above are not representative, and as explained, the findings conform to expectations for the site compared to other places along the north coast of Wales.

The increased effort over time (figure 7b) is far more striking, in particular the number of records in 2022/23, which was more than one quarter of the total available. This variable effort means that it is unwise to conclude anything about changes in numbers over time. The numbers of birds using the site will be influenced by several factors, including trends in the wider population, weather conditions, food abundance and availability both here and at other sites, as well as disturbance on site.

Fig. 7. (a) Proportion of records from Rhos Point submitted to BirdTrack each month, 2013-23. (b) Proportion of records from Rhos Point submitted to BirdTrack each year, 2013/14-2022/23.



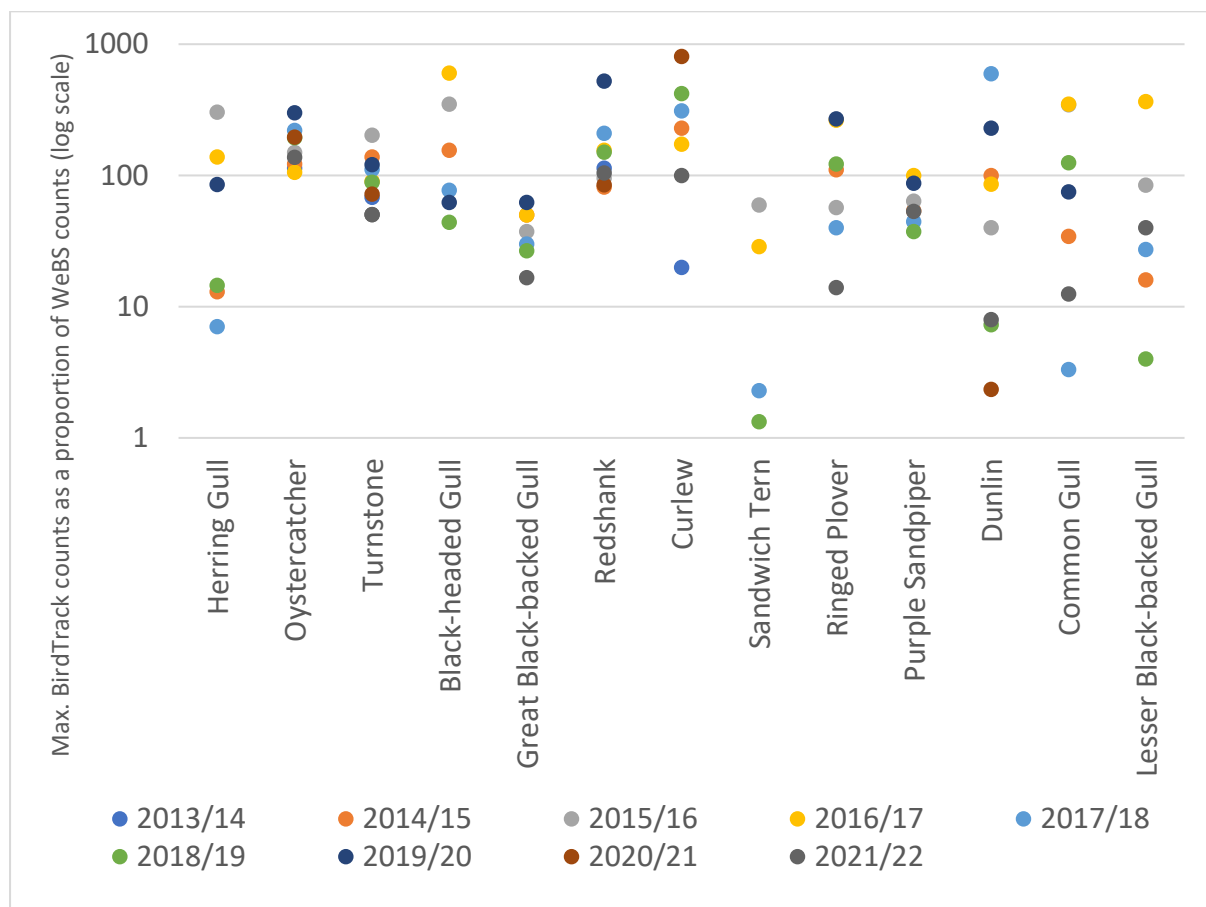
Rhos Point in context

Waterbirds vary in their energy use and their capability and flexibility to move between sites. On migration, for example, they depend on a network of sites with suitable foraging opportunities within a maximum flying distance. Sites on the north coast of Wales are used by migrants that fly directly across the Irish Sea, some (e.g. **Turnstone**) probably stage in western Scotland and then again at Rhos, having arrived from Iceland. Others (e.g. **Sandwich Tern**) make shorter coastal hops, although may fly directly here from Ireland or Cumbria.

Rhos Point seems particularly suited to feeding birds because of its relatively large tidal range, the mixed substrates (rockpools, aerobic sand, rocks, seaweed and pebbles) and the geomorphology that has created a relatively stable rocky spit. This means that it is the first place to be exposed on a falling tide, and so birds focus feeding effort here before dispersing to other nearby feeding areas at low tide. The same is probably true for roosting gulls and terns, although at the height of the tidal cycle, they are forced to move elsewhere to roost.

Comparing data from Rhos Point in BirdTrack to similar data from other sites is beyond the means of this paper, but a broader assessment of the site's place in the wider coastline can be made by comparing the peak counts each year to that of the 'Colwyn Bay and North Clwyd' Wetland Bird Survey counts that have been collected since 1986/87 (Austin *et al.* 2023). Rhos Point lies at the western end of this count area, which runs from the Little Orme to Kinmel Bay (excluding Horton's Nose). For the most numerous 13 species at Rhos Point, figure 8 presents the maximum site count from BirdTrack as a proportion of the total in the same period (July to June) across the whole count unit.

Fig. 8. Max counts each year from BirdTrack at Rhos Point expressed as a percentage of max. Wetland Bird Survey count for Colwyn Bay and North Clwyd coast in the same year. Note the use of log scale. WeBS data from 2022/23 was not available at the time of preparation of this report.



There are important caveats in making this comparison, including (a) WeBS counts may not have been conducted along the whole coastline in every month (and so the potential for a larger count may be missed); (b) WeBS counts are undertaken at high tide, so birds that roost outside the count area (or out of view, such as on the seaward side of a breakwater) can be missed; (c) counts of gulls are optional in WeBS and appear not to have been undertaken in 2013/14 and since 2020/21; (d) WeBS counts are co-ordinated to take place on a single day each month, and so are even more of a snapshot than unstructured data submitted to BirdTrack.

In figure 8, counts >100% relate mostly to species that will roost on pasture fields a short distance inland, which suggests that WeBS under-represents their totals along the Colwyn Bay and North Clwyd

coast. Species that generally roost on the coast (e.g. **Purple Sandpiper**, **Ringed Plover**, **Sandwich Tern**) are typically <100% of the total, and so likely to be more accurate – notwithstanding the possibility of birds roosting on the seaward side of breakwaters.

There is some good evidence that Rhos Point is the most important site between the Little Orme and Clwyd estuary for a number of waterbird species, and local observations would tend to support that. It is likely to be the case, in particular, for **Purple Sandpiper**, **Oystercatcher**, **Turnstone** and **Redshank**, and in some years for **Ringed Plover**. It is also true in late winter for **Common Gull** in some years, and in late summer for **Sandwich Tern** annually. For context, the linear coast at Rhos Point is approximately 500m in a coastline of 20km between the Little Orme and Kinmel Bay (2.5%).

Conclusion

There is good evidence that the beach at Rhos Point is locally important for a number of waterbird species that feed or roost on the beach between high tide cycles. For **Purple Sandpiper**, it is among the most important sites in Wales and may be of particular importance as one of a network of roosting sites around Liverpool Bay for **Sandwich Tern** between their departure from breeding colonies and their migration to West Africa. For several other species, including **Oystercatcher**, **Turnstone** and **Redshank**, it is probably the most important location for birds between the Little Orme and Kinmel Bay.

Two of the species – **Sandwich Tern** and **Black-headed Gull** – have been badly affected (potentially at a population level) by Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza at breeding colonies across western Europe in 2022 and 2023, and so increasing the resilience of their populations is a priority. [Welsh Government committed](#) to produce a Wales Seabird Conservation Strategy by mid-2022, but a draft has yet to be published.

For the reasons outlined in the introduction, proving the biological impact of disturbance on wildlife is challenging and expensive, so a precautionary approach is adopted at sites acknowledged as of importance. This report provides evidence of the local importance of Rhos Point for waterbirds, and recommends actions that Conwy County Borough Council could consider under its Section 6 biodiversity duty. The data illustrates the need for such measures to apply throughout the year.

The importance of this site to birds should also influence the design and timing of any future coastal management to protect the shoreline from sea level rise, or construction work on the adjacent promenade.

Information for beach users, to highlight the importance of the site for birds, could increase local recognition of the importance of the site. Local birdwatchers' experience is that promenade users, especially walkers (both with and without dogs) are interested to see and learn about the birds here.

One final observation is that the recent beach improvement works between Colwyn Bay and Rhos-on-Sea have altered the beach substrate and may have reduced its value for feeding waterbirds. Unless pre- and post-work monitoring has been undertaken it will be impossible to ascertain this. However, in the absence of such data, the possibility should be considered that Rhos Point (and the stretch of beach east to Penrhyn Bay) may now be of greater importance if birds have reduced area in which to forage or roost, especially given the expected increased recreational use of the new beach.

References

- Austin, G.E., Calbrade, N.A., Birtles, G.A., Peck, K., Shaw, J.M. Wotton, S.R., Balmer, D.E. and Frost, T.M. 2023. *Waterbirds in the UK 2021/22: The Wetland Bird Survey and Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme*. BTO/RSPB/JNCC/NatureScot. Thetford. Contains Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) data from Waterbirds in the UK 2021/22 © copyright and database right 2023. WeBS is a partnership jointly funded by the BTO, RSPB and JNCC, with fieldwork conducted by volunteers and previous support from WWT.
- Brown, D., *et al.* 2015. The Eurasian Curlew – the most pressing bird conservation priority in the UK? *British Birds* 108: 660-668.
- Johnstone, I.G., Hughes, J., Balmer, D.E., Brenchley, A., Facey, R.J., Lindley, P.L., Noble, D.G., and Taylor, R.C. 2022. Birds of Conservation Concern Wales 4: the population status of birds in Wales. *Milvus* 2: 1. https://birdsin.wales/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/MJWOS_202212_BoCCW4.pdf
- JNCC 2020. Liverpool Bay/Bae Lerpwl SPA. <https://jncc.gov.uk/our-work/liverpool-bay-spa/>
- Spina, F., Baillie, S.R., Bairlein, F., Fiedler, W. and Thorup, K. (Eds) 2022. The Eurasian African Bird Migration Atlas. <https://migrationatlas.org> EURING/CMS.
- Taylor, K., Anderson, P., Taylor, R., Longden, K. and Fisher, P. 2005. Dogs, access and nature conservation. English Nature Research Report 649. ISSN 0967-876X. <https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/70026>
- Welsh Ornithological Society 2022. *Welsh Bird Report 2021*.

Table 1. Number of records in BirdTrack from the Rhos Point area, 2013-23, showing the most recent level of conservation concern in Wales (BOCCW4) from Johnstone *et al.* (2022). An indication of birds' use of the beach is based on the author's own observations.

NB. The number of records does not equate to the number of birds present. See Tables 2 and 3.

English Name	Scientific Name	BoCCW4	Feeding/ Roosting	Records
Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	Red	F/R	740
Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	Amber	F/R	688
Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	Amber	F/R	570
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	Red	R	538
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	Amber	R	498
Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	Red	F/R	445
Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	Red	F/R	371
Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>	Amber	R	362
Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	Red	F/R	314
Purple Sandpiper	<i>Calidris maritima</i>	Red	(F?) / R	283
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	Red	F/R	248
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	Amber	R	239
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	Red	R	163
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Amber	F	123
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	Green	F	91
Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i>	Amber	R	55
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	Amber	R	41
Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	Amber	F/R	34
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	Red	F/R	27
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	Red	F/R	21
Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	Red	R	17
Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>	Amber	F/R	15
Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>	Green	R	13
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	Green	R	9
Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>	Red	R	7
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	Amber	F/R	6
Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	Red	R	5
Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	Green	R	2
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	Green	F/R	2
Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	Green	R	2
Roseate Tern	<i>Sterna dougallii</i>	Red	R	2
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	Amber	R	1
Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	Amber	R	1

Table 2. Maximum count of each species each month during 2013-23 (order shown is the same as Tables 1 and 3 for ease of comparison).

Species	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Herring Gull	500	200	2000	513	306	800	90	1200	150	200	150	257
Oystercatcher	700	530	352	200	100	25	140	275	540	520	360	600
Turnstone	194	100	179	110	50	19	84	140	190	120	80	107
Black-headed Gull	100	20	300	1	10	35	140	90	130	60	50	100
Great Black-backed Gull	15	11	6	4	7	2	6	16	24	24	32	12
Redshank	150	63	56	13	2	1	3	40	79	70	51	120
Curlew	116	117	30	2	3	10	67	75	95	101	54	60
Sandwich Tern	0	0	6	50	136	40	253	600	2000	60	2	0
Ringed Plover	36	45	11	3	25	2	11	59	67	55	33	59
Purple Sandpiper	14	15	11	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	10
Dunlin	150	200	85	0	4	0	9	8	23	19	130	160
Common Gull	160	40	600	6	5	13	5	8	32	72	50	8
Lesser Black-backed Gull	6	3	13	7	50	9	11	50	11	10	3	5
Grey Heron	3	1	0	1	0	2	1	3	3	5	2	4
Little Egret	1	1	0	1	1	1	5	2	2	5	4	1
Mediterranean Gull	1	0	1	0	0	1	8	4	1	1	6	1
Common Tern	0	0	0	4	1	1	2	14	16	2	0	0
Whimbrel	0	0	0	5	4	1	3	21	1	0	0	0
Bar-tailed Godwit	0	0	0	1	7	0	0	2	2	1	1	0
Grey Plover	9	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	2	5
Arctic Tern	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	6	0	0	0
Knot	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	7	1	1	3
Black Tern	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	0	0
Sanderling	0	1	0	0	0	0	5	2	1	0	0	0
Little Tern	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	6	0	0	0	0
Common Sandpiper	0	0	3	1	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0
Lapwing	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2

Greenshank	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Little Ringed Plover	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
Little Stint	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
Roseate Tern	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
Black-tailed Godwit	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Curlew Sandpiper	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0

Greenshank									1	
Little Ringed Plover									1	
Little Stint								1		1
Roseate Tern					1					1
Black-tailed Godwit					1					
Curlew Sandpiper								2		

Table 4. Origin of Sandwich Terns resighted in North Wales in 2021 (reproduced by kind permission of the Welsh Ornithological Society).

<i>Country of ringing (total individuals)</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Individuals</i>
WALES (50)	Cemlyn, ANGLESEY	20
	Ynyslas, CEREDIGION	30
ENGLAND (58)	Coquet Island, Northumberland	6
	Hodbarrow, Cumbria	39
	Inner Farne, Northumberland	3
SCOTLAND (13)	Blackness Castle, Stirling	1
	Hunterston, Clyde	1
	Isle of May, Fife	1
	Ythan estuary, Aberdeenshire	10
NORTHERN IRELAND (21)	Larne Lough, Co.Antrim	10
	Belfast Lough, Antrim	1
	Strangford Lough, Co.Down	10
REPUBLIC OF IRELAND (50)	Lady's Island Lake, Co.Wexford	50
NETHERLANDS (13)	Lancasterdijk, Texel	1
	Scheelhoek eilanden, Zuid Holland	7
	Slijkplaat, Zuid Holland	3
	Utopia, Texel	2
DENMARK (2)	Agger Tange, Nordjylland	1
	Sprogø, Sjælland	1

Most birds had been ringed as chicks, 45 (22%) in summer 2021, at 17 colonies around the Irish Sea and North Sea coasts, while those at Ynyslas, CEREDIGION, and Hunterston, Scotland, had been ringed as adults. Of those that have been traced, the oldest colour-ring resighting was White N5H, ringed at Scheelhoek eilanden, Haringvliet, Netherlands in 2013, and seen at Rhos Point on 1 September 2021 (2995 days), although five other 2013-ringed birds were also recorded.

Map 1. Boundary of Liverpool Bay / Bae Lerpwl SPA shown by the green line. The blue area of the map is the Special Protection Area.



Map copied from https://datamap.gov.wales/maps/new?layer=inspire-nrw:NRW_SPA#/ on 10 August 2023.