The best place to see breeding shorebirds on the Northumberland coast

Long Nanny - Beadnell Bay

When to visit: Tern colonies active from May - end of July.

What to see: Little terns, ringed plovers and one of the largest colonies of Arctic terns on the UK mainland.

During your visit: Walk to the ranger’s hut for all the latest information. It’s not possible to cross over the Long Nanny Burn during these months and a diversion is in place over the dunes.

Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve

When to visit: Shorebirds are visible all year round. The breeding shorebird protection scheme operates from late April - early August while birds nest.

What to see: 3500 hectares of dunes, rocky shore, saltmarsh, mudflats and sandflats of the Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve are home to a fascinating array of wildlife. In the summer look out for breeding terns, ringed plover and oystercatcher.

During your visit: Make a trip to Holy Islands Window on Wild Lindisfarne to find out all about the Island and the surrounding areas. Keep an eye out for access restrictions on the beach during April - August.

Did you know that there are laws protecting our birds?

All wild birds nests and eggs are protected by law and little terns are afforded special protection due to their vulnerability. This means it is illegal to intentionally or recklessly disturb them (including for photography) at any stage of breeding.
What is a shorebird?
Shorebirds are birds that rely on beach and dunes to nest, rest or feed.

Why do we need to protect them?
Our shorebirds are declining. Birds like ringed plover and little terns are jostling for position with humans on our already over-crowded beaches. Climate change is further impacting on where they can call home. If we don’t help them there may not be any room left for them at all.

What is a scrape?
Birds lay their eggs in shallow bowls scraped from the sand. Once laid, the eggs are so camouflaged it can be impossible to see and can be easily trampled on by unsuspecting beach goers.

What to look out for...
If you are close to a nest the adult may try and drive you away by calling out loudly, dive bombing you or running quickly in front of you to distract. If this happens please move away carefully.

Migration
Some of our shorebirds travel large distances in the spring to nest on our beaches. Little terns travel all the way from Africa to take advantage of the abundant food source a few flaps away in the North Sea.

Birds on the beach
The young birds will congregate on the beach to gain some strength and hone their flying skills before the journey south for the winter. Disturbance by beachgoers walking through flocks can really harm their chances.

A few hints for enjoying your visit:

Only walk on wet or hard sand
Birds tend to nest on the dry warm sand. Only walking on wet or hard sand means you won’t tread on nests or disturb birds.

Look out for fenced or roped off areas on the beach
You may find protective fencing from May to August to help birds breed undisturbed. Please do not go in these refuge areas.

Keep an eye out for signs
They will tell you the best ways to avoid disturbing wildlife and where you can and cannot go.

Keep dogs on a lead or at heel
Even well behaved dogs can frighten shorebirds causing them to move away from protecting their youngsters.

If in doubt find out
Some areas of the beach might not be accessible during the summer. If you aren’t sure about what restrictions may be in place find out before you go (Contact details for the Lindisfarne NNR and the National Trust are on the back of the leaflet).

Little terns are our second rarest seabird with less than two thousand left breeding in the UK. They are no bigger than a tennis ball and nest in colonies where their chattering call can be heard over head.

Ringed plovers are small, brown, black and white birds. They run along the beach at the first sign of danger making a distinct call to distract predators away from their young.

Oystercatchers are black and white, they have long orange beaks used to probe the sand for food. They nest in small numbers during the summer but can be found in large flocks during the winter.

Arctic and common terns also nest in colonies and are extremely fierce in defending their young. Larger than little terns, arctic terns have striking red bills and long tail streamers while common terns have an orange bill with a black tip.

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