

A special place

The Western Solent is of international importance for seabirds.

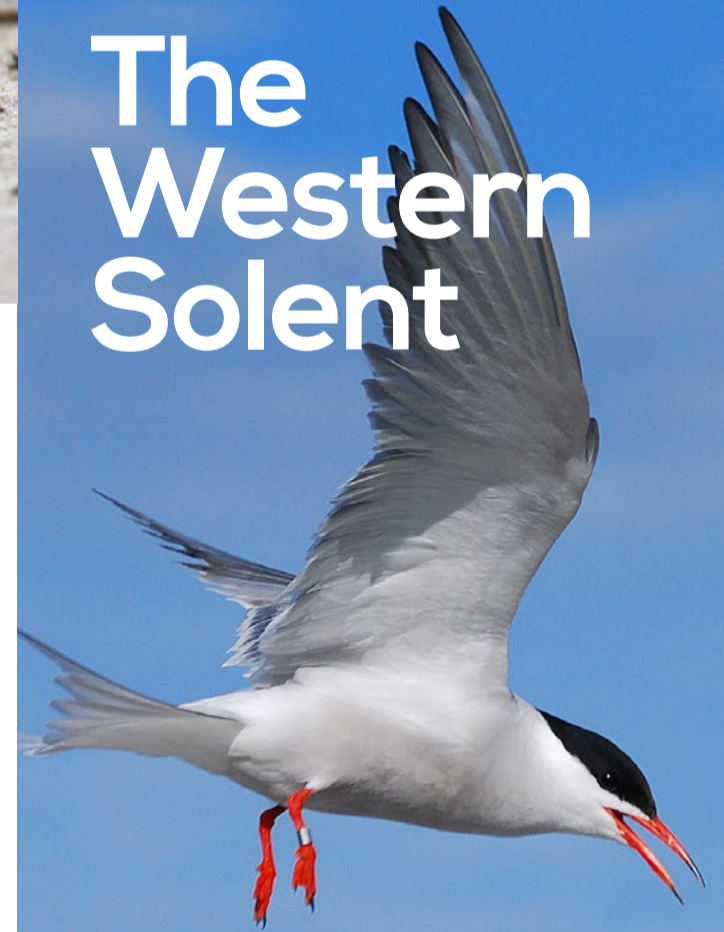
In winter, the marshes and mudflats support large flocks of wintering geese and wading birds. But in spring, the area really comes alive as thousands of ground-nesting seabirds come here to breed. The Solent hosts three species of our most elegant breeding seabirds; Sandwich, common and little terns. They nest among the cheniers (shingle ridges), which are the first line of defence for the mainland from tidal flooding. The rare roseate tern also used to breed here. Alongside terns, over 6,000 pairs of black-headed gulls nest in a busy and noisy colony. The black-headed gull colony at Needesore was once the largest in England, with an astounding 20,000 or more pairs.

Seabirds in trouble

In recent years, tern populations have declined in the Solent, and the roseate tern hasn't bred here since 2006. The Lymington-Keyhaven saltmarshes and cheniers were ideal for breeding seabirds like the roseate tern. But now increased erosion resulting from climate change means the smaller seabirds, such as the terns, are forced to compete for nesting space in areas vulnerable to flooding. Large colonies become fractured, making the birds more susceptible to predation. Another growing worry is dwindling stocks of small fish such as sandeels. The sandeels' favourite food is minute floating creatures called zooplankton, and these do not like the warming waters so they are moving away to cooler spots. Fewer and smaller sandeels cannot sustain the survival of our seabirds. Shorebirds such as oystercatchers and ringed plovers are also susceptible to habitat loss and disturbance.



The Western Solent



Taking action to protect our terns

Keep an eye out

It is hardly surprising that people want to experience the excitement of seabird colonies in the Solent. Sadly, due to the fragility of their nesting habitats, landing at nest sites is not permitted. Please keep an eye out for any nesting terns or plovers on the sand, and keep to the hard, wet sand to reduce disturbance. Dogs should be kept on leads.

In spring and summer, there's a good chance of seeing terns along the Lymington-Keyhaven nature reserve – look around the lagoons and offshore (map of area inside). You can also get a pleasant view of the marshes from the ferries to Hurst Castle or the Isle of Wight, with a chance of seeing the birds feeding.

In partnership with:



You can read all about the project on the project website and social media: www.roseatetern.org @RoseateTernLIFE

The project is funded by the LIFE Programme of the European Union.

Images: common tern by Brian Burke; Lymington scenery by Mike Read (rspb-images.com); map by Nick Skelton; common tern nest by Oleksandr Sokolenko, roseate tern by Steve Young (both alamy.com); artworks by www.powellwildlifeart.com.

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Working together to give nature a home:



Turning the tide

A major project aims to ensure a rosier future for the UK's rarest nesting seabird. The EU LIFE Roseate Tern Recovery Project is working to restore current and former roseate tern colonies around the UK and Ireland, including the Western Solent. Here, we are trialling innovative habitat creation and restoration techniques to improve the breeding success of our terns. And, we hope, this will encourage the beautiful roseate tern to nest here once more. This work is being carried out in partnership with organisations including Hampshire County Council, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, Lymington Harbour Commissioners, National Trust, Natural England and the RSPB.

Introducing the terns of the Western Solent

The roseate tern, with its graceful tail streamers and a rosy blush to its breast feathers, is the UK's rarest breeding seabird. Sadly, these birds are now rarely seen on the Solent. Roseate terns are relatively timid and prefer to nest amongst the more assertive common tern colonies, where they gain some protection from predators.

Common terns frequently breed here, and will use a wider range of breeding sites than the roseate terns. They can nest inshore, and will readily use artificial sites for nesting, including floating rafts.

The Sandwich tern is the largest breeding tern in the UK, and you can recognise it by its shaggy black crest.

The little tern, as its name suggests, is the smallest of our terns, and is the UK's second rarest breeding seabird.



Creating homes for nesting terns in the Western Solent



Common tern decoys will attract common terns to safer nesting areas and possibly roseate terns in the future

In 2017, we tested a combination of habitat creation methods to help the area's common tern colonies. We hope that in future years we'll see good results.

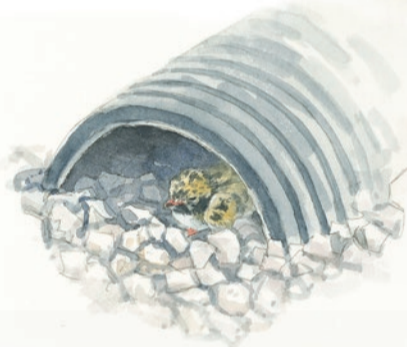
- 88 tonnes of shingle were brought in by barge to recharge the eroding cheniers (saltmarsh ridges), and were shaped into a shingle bank with the help of our volunteers. This will provide safe nesting spaces above the high-water mark.
- Safe alternative nesting sites were created, with three nesting bunds on the Lymington Harbour breakwater, and tern rafts on Butt's Lagoon (unattached to the mainland). Now the birds can nest away from flooding, human disturbance and predatory mammals.
- Decoys attract terns to safer nesting areas, while special shelters protect the chicks from the weather and predatory birds.



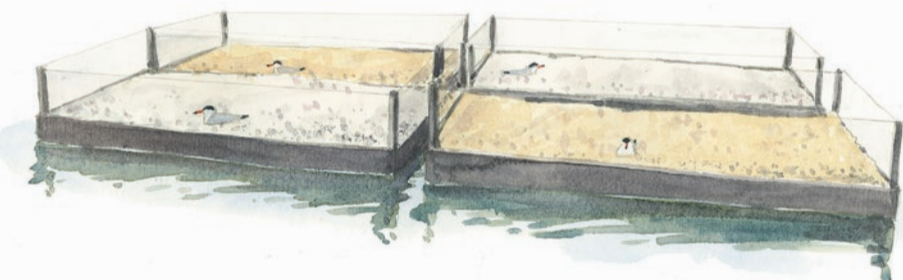
Shingle recharge on the cheniers with small tern platforms on the ridge for additional protection from flooding



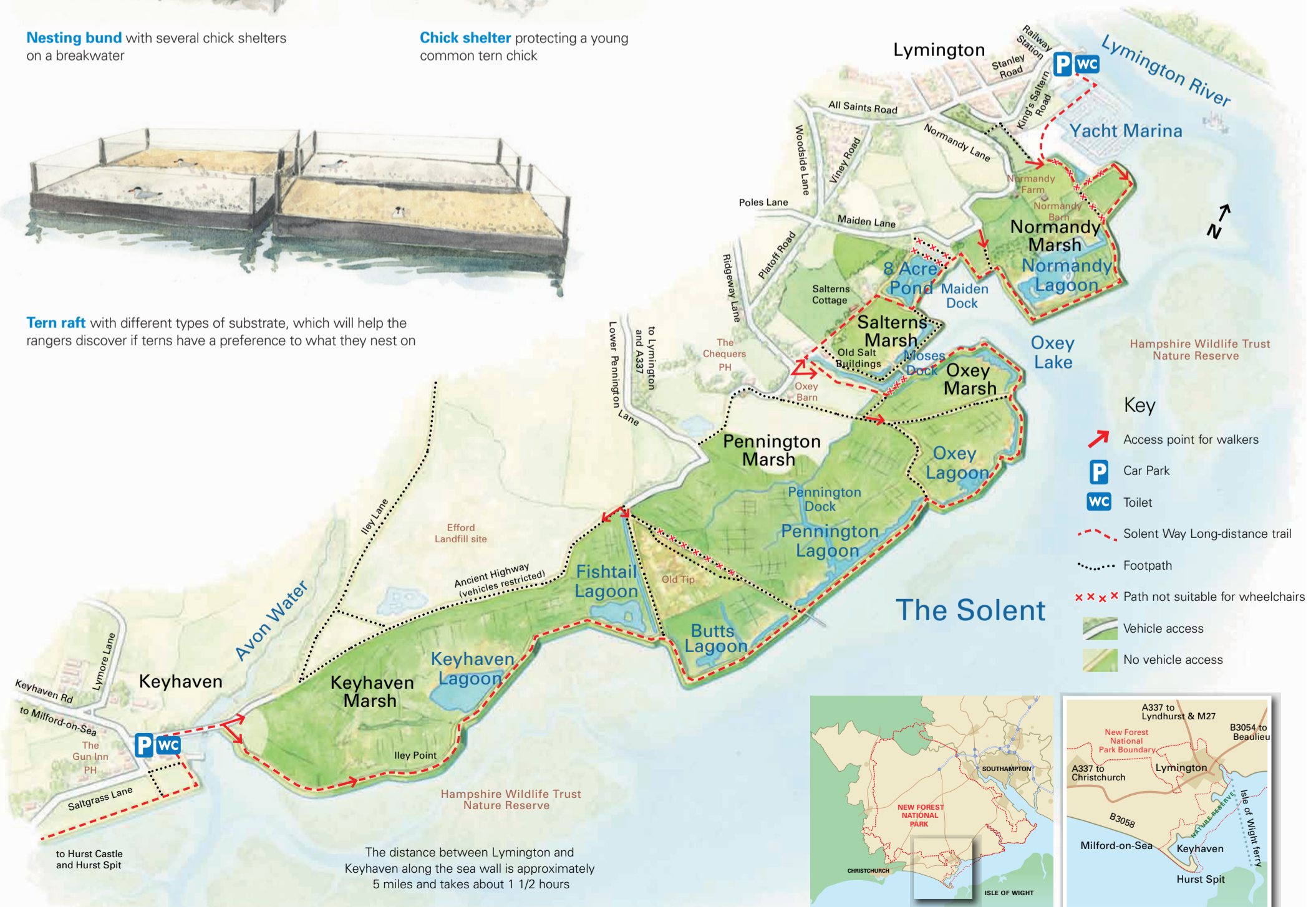
Nesting bund with several chick shelters on a breakwater



Chick shelter protecting a young common tern chick



Tern raft with different types of substrate, which will help the rangers discover if terns have a preference to what they nest on



The distance between Lymington and Keyhaven along the sea wall is approximately 5 miles and takes about 1 1/2 hours