

# Birds you are very likely to see on or around the pier



## Bird ID resource sheet

There is really no such thing as a 'seagull'. Gulls are a type of bird and there are many different species of these.

Some can be seen all year round, however a few are migrants, meaning they only visit during the summer or winter months.

**Gulls** are small to large seabirds, many of which also live inland for at least part of the year; some are strictly marine birds. Most are grey, black, and white when fully mature, but extensively marked with various shades of brown during from one to four years of immaturity.

## All year round:



Great black-backed gull (Andreas Trepte, Wikimedia)

### Great blacked-backed gull

- These are the largest Gulls in the world. They have very few predators but have been known to be taken by sharks or eagles at sea.
- Being scavengers, they eat most things including shellfish, other smaller birds, and small mammals if they can catch them.
- They are easily identified by their size, pink legs and dark grey/ black backs. They can be seen all year round.

### Herring gull

- Adults have light grey backs, black wingtips with white spots, white heads, and underparts.
- The herring gull has a powerful hooked yellow bill with a distinctive red spot near the point, and pink legs. In winter, their heads have grey-brown streaks and a duller bill.
- They typically breed along rocky coastlines but are a common sight outside of the breeding season in winter on fields, reservoirs and agricultural land.



Herring gull (Wikimedia Commons)



(Black-headed gull - Wikipedia)

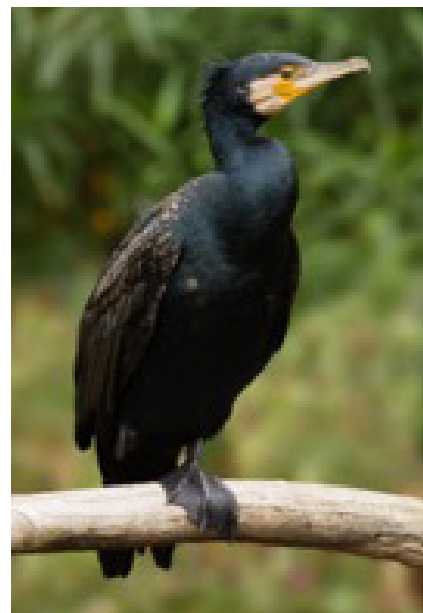
## Black-headed gull

- Compared to other gulls, the black-headed gull is smaller in size, with a smaller head, longer neck and shorter tail.
- Adults have red bill and legs. Most of the upper wings and back are pale grey, with the rest of their feathers being white.
- When on water, Black-headed gulls have a slender and elegant profile and in winter, the distinctive 'black' hood becomes white, leaving just dark spots behind each eye.

## Other birds to see year-round:

### Cormorant

- The cormorant is a large, shiny black bird, with a white patch on the thigh during the summer breeding season.
- Young birds are dark brown above and white below.
- Found around the coast and on lakes, reservoirs and rivers inland.
- Cormorants can be found either on the coast or at inland waters, where there are some large breeding colonies.



Cormorant (JJ Harrison,Wikimedia)



Shag (wikimedia Commons)

### Shag

- The European shag or common shag is a species of cormorant.
- It breeds around the rocky coasts of western and southern Europe, Asia and Africa, mainly wintering in its breeding range.
- Although similar to the cormorant, shags are smaller, slimmer, with a steep forehead and narrower bill. In breeding plumage, adult shags display a very distinctive crest on the forehead with a bright yellow gape and a green sheen to their feathers

## Razorbill

- The razorbill is a medium-sized auk that nests on ledges and among rocks at the bottom of cliffs. It feeds on fish which it catches by diving from the surface and swimming underwater, only coming to shore to breed.
- The razorbill is black above and white below, with a short, thick bill that has distinguishing white lines across the end. In winter, razorbills have white faces.



Razorbill (Charles J. Sharp, Wikimedia)



Guillemot (Wikimedia Commons)

## Guillemot

- The guillemot will only come on land to breed in the summer. They tend to spend their winters at sea, though some birds are seen year-round at inshore waters close to colonies.
- Guillemots are slightly larger than razorbills with brown heads and upper bodies but a white lower body and a longer and thinner bill than the razor bill.
- The tail is shorter too, with the feet protruding when in flight. The guillemot has a distinctive dark line behind the eye and breeding adults also display streaked flanks under the wing.

## Pied wagtail

- Often seen in towns and cities, dashing around while wagging its long tail up and down.
- Pied wagtails eat insects but will feed on seeds and even rubbish in winter. They flock together at warm roost sites like reedbeds, and sewage works or trees and bushes in city centres.
- The pied wagtail is a black-and-white bird, with a white face, white belly, and white bars on the wings.
- The other two breeding species of wagtail in the UK both have yellow underparts.



Pied wagtail (Wikimedia Commons)



Wood pigeon (Wikimedia Commons)

## Wood pigeon

- A familiar bird of gardens, parks, woodlands and farmlands right across the country. Our largest and most common pigeon.
- It feeds on seeds, leaves, grains, fruit, peas and root crops
- The woodpigeon makes flimsy nests in trees, and the female lays two eggs. Both sexes incubate and raise the young, feeding them on 'pigeon milk' - a regurgitated, milky substance from a food-storage organ called a 'crop'.
- Easily distinguished from the stock dove and feral pigeon by its pink breast, white neck patch and the white patches visible on its wings during flight.

## Summer visitors:

Terns are small to medium seabirds, often smaller and slimmer than most of the gulls. They have a worldwide distribution and are normally found near the sea, rivers, or wetlands. All are migratory, often seen outside their breeding areas in spring and autumn but absent from Europe in winter.

### Common tern

- The common tern is a medium-sized tern and the one you are most likely to see inland, and also at the coast.
- Common terns breed on shingle beaches, rocky islands and inland on the gravelly shores of lakes and rivers.
- They are noisy in their colonies and, like most terns, will attack intruders threatening their nests.
- They hover over the water before plunge-diving to catch their fish prey.
- Common terns and arctic terns can be very difficult to tell apart. The common tern is whiter below, has shorter tail streamers, and has a longer bill, which is orangey-red with a black tip. It is silvery-grey above, with a black cap and short, red legs.



Common tern (Wikimedia Commons)



Sandwich tern (Wikimedia Commons)

## Sandwich tern

- The sandwich tern is a relatively large tern, breeding in colonies on sand and shingle beaches, islands, and spits.
- Sandwich terns feed on fish, such as sand eels, sprats, and whiting, which they catch by diving into the water.
- The sandwich tern is whitish grey above and white below, with a large black cap and a shaggy, black crest. It has short, black legs, and a black bill with a yellow tip. It has a short tail without 'streamers' (long feathers extending past the main tail).

## Little tern

- The little tern is the UK's smallest tern and can be seen nesting on gravelly beaches in small colonies. It offshore, hovering above the water before diving in to catch its prey of small fish.
- A summer visitor to Europe, the little tern leaves in August to spend the winter in Africa.
- Silvery-grey above and white below, the little tern has a black cap, a black eye stripe, and a white forehead. It has a short tail, tiny, yellowy-orange legs, and yellow bill with a black tip.



Little tern (Wikimedia Commons)



Arctic tern (Wikimedia Commons)

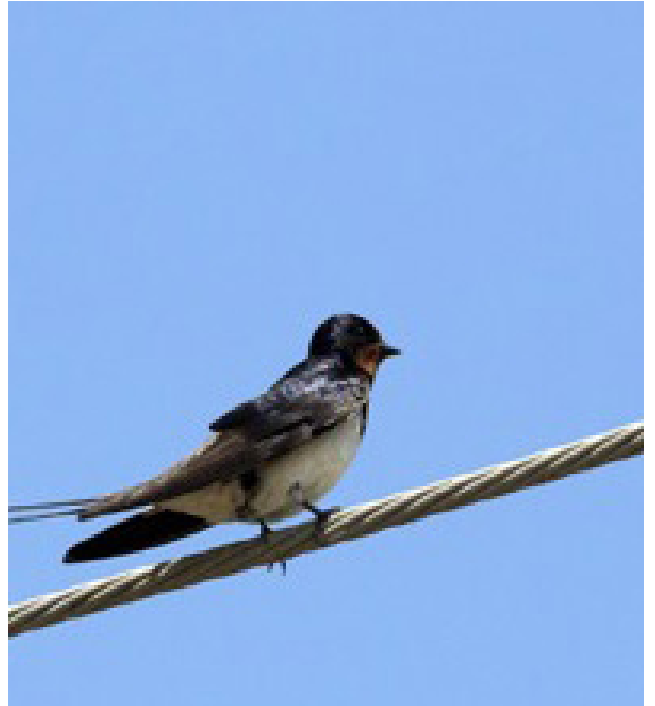
## Arctic tern

- The arctic tern is a medium-sized tern, which nests in colonies on sand and shingle beaches along the coast.
- Arctic terns, will attack intruders threatening their young, often dive-bombing them with their bills at the ready.
- They have very long migrations arriving in this country in April and leaving again in September.
- Arctic terns and Common Terns can be very difficult to tell apart. The arctic tern is greyer below, has longer tail streamers, and a shorter bill, which is blood-red with no black tip. It is silvery-grey above, with a black cap and tiny, red legs.

# Other summer visitors:

## Swallow

- The swallow arrives in April and leaves in October. It builds mud and straw nests on ledges, often in farm buildings and outhouses, or under the eaves of houses.
- They are common birds of farmland and open pasture near water.
- Swallows are agile fliers, feeding on flying insects while on the wing.
- They migrate to Africa at the end of the summer.
- The swallow is a glossy, dark blue-black above and white below, with a dark red forehead and throat, and a black band across its chest.
- They have very long, forked tail and are often seen perching on wires in small numbers.



Swallow (Wikimedia Commons)



Swift (Wikimedia Commons)

## Swift

- Swifts spend most of their lives in flight only ever landing to nest. They are easy to spot as they look like an arrow whirling through the sky, and often fly in groups. They nest in gaps in roofs of old buildings such as churches.
- Swifts spend the winter in Africa but travel to Britain every year in April and May.
- They eat flying insects by catching them in flight.
- The swift is black all over, with a small, pale patch on its throat. They are sociable and can often be spotted in groups wheeling over roofs and calling to each other with high-pitched screams.
- They are larger than swallows and martins (which have white undersides) and, unlike them, do not perch on wires, buildings or trees.



## Lesser black-backed gull

- The lesser black-backed gull is a large gull that breeds on the Atlantic coasts of Europe. It is migratory, wintering from the British Isles south to West Africa.
- It is a large, elegant gull, just a little smaller than the herring gull. The entire world's population of this gull is found in Europe. About one third of the UK's population can be found at Walney Island in Cumbria.
- Adult lesser-black backed gulls are dark grey above and white below, with a white head (streaky during the winter) and black wingtips with white spots. They have yellowy-orange legs.



Lesser black-backed gull (Mick Lobb, Wikimedia)