

FORAGING AREAS FOR SANDWICH AND COMMON TERNS IN BELGIAN MARINE WATERS

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Sandwich and Common Terns were recorded by the Institute of Nature Conservation in Belgian waters since 1992 until 2004 mainly on board public ferries and the Belgian research vessels Zeeleeuw and Belgica. This study aimed to identify and determine the distribution and the main foraging areas for Sandwich and Common Terns in the Belgian Continental Shelf. The data were divided in three periods: spring migration (April and May), breeding (June and July) and autumn migration period (August).

Sandwich and Common Terns were abundant in Belgian waters between April and September. The months with peak numbers of terns were: June and July for Sandwich Terns and May and June for Common Terns.

The distribution of Sandwich and Common Terns in Belgian waters was very dispersed but the highest densities were mainly recorded in coastal waters. The Westkustbanken and the Oostkustbanken regions were the most important areas of distribution for both species of terns.

The main foraging areas for Sandwich and Common Terns in Belgian waters were the areas around the harbours of Zeebrugge and Oostende and the Thorntonbank area. Sandbank areas and near shore waters are very important as feeding grounds for both species of terns. Most of them were observed foraging in coastal waters no further than 10km from the coastline.