

Terns in the harbour of Zeebrugge (Belgium)

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The outer harbour of Zeebrugge, located at the east coast of Belgium, is presently the major breeding site of Sandwich *Sterna sandvicensis*, Common *S. hirundo* and Little Tern *S. albifrons* in Belgium.

Several sand suppletions in the early eighties created a vast area (150ha) of flat, suitable land for breeding terns and gulls. As a result of major changes during the process of development of the outer harbour breeding sites changed almost every year and breeding numbers fluctuated a lot.

The breeding population of the three tern species in Zeebrugge is or has been of international importance (1-2% of the total population). Nowadays more than 95% of the Belgian breeding population of Common Tern is situated in Zeebrugge. For Sandwich and Little Tern, Zeebrugge is the only breeding site in Belgium.

The future for nesting terns in Belgium is unsure due to plans for the development of the harbour of Zeebrugge and uncertainties in other newly created or planned areas along the Belgian coast.

Research activities carried out by the Institute of Nature Conservation in the outer harbour of Zeebrugge are described.