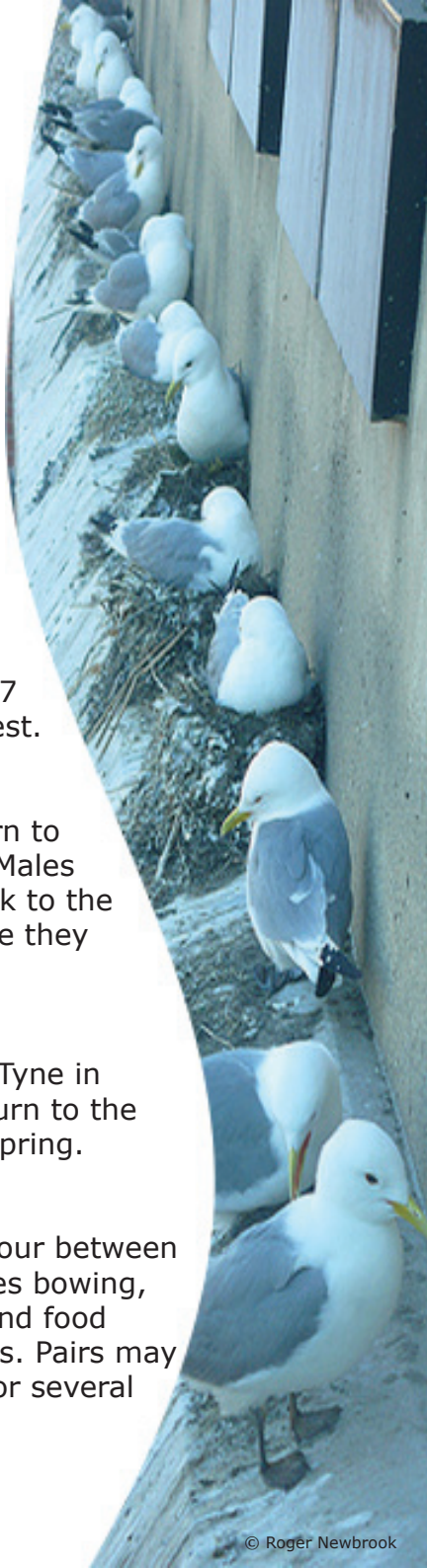


Fact File

- Kittiwakes can live up to 28 years.
- They can start to breed when they are 3 years old.
- They lay 2-3 eggs.
- Young spend 5-7 weeks in the nest.
- Kittiwakes return to nest in March. Males often come back to the same site where they were born.
- They leave the Tyne in August and return to the sea until next spring.
- Bonding behaviour between partners includes bowing, head bobbing and food begging displays. Pairs may stay together for several years.



© Roger Newbrook

The River Tyne is home to an important breeding population of around 800 pairs of Kittiwakes. This includes around 600 pairs at Newcastle-Gateshead Quayside. The Kittiwakes that breed along the Tyne nest on man-made structures, including old buildings. When these are redeveloped or knocked down the nest sites are often destroyed. In 1998 a "Kittiwake Tower" was built to provide a home for birds displaced by the redevelopment of the Baltic. This is now a nature reserve, just downriver from the art gallery.

The **Tyne Kittiwakes Partnership** has formed to ensure that the Kittiwake population along the Tyne is safeguarded and to work together to improve our understanding of the birds and their conservation needs. The Partnership includes the Natural History Society of Northumbria, RSPB, Northumberland and Durham Wildlife Trusts, Newcastle, Gateshead and North Tyneside Councils, Newcastle University and individual researchers and ornithologists.

For more information: www.nhsn.ncl.ac.uk/news/cms/tynekittiwakes/



Kittiwakes

on the Tyne



© Ian Cook

In the summer Newcastle-Gateshead quayside is home to 600 pairs of breeding Kittiwakes. These seabirds create a spectacular show with their loud calls, graceful flight and chick-rearing dramas.

Normally found on coastal cliffs, the Tyne Kittiwakes seem to prefer urban life. This colony is the furthest inland anywhere and makes Newcastle one of the few cities in the world to have a seabird colony in its centre.



Kittiwakes

Kittiwakes are a species of gull. You might hear them before you see them! They get their name from their loud "Kitti-wake" call.

Adults are mainly white birds. Their back and upper wings are pearl grey, and the wing tips are black. The bill is greenish yellow, and the feet and legs are usually black.



Juvenile birds are similar to their parents but they have black marks on their wings, the back of their neck and on their head and their beaks are also black.

The Tyne Kittiwakes create an amazing wildlife spectacle in the heart of the city. You can get excellent views of the birds and their nests from the viewing platform on the 4th floor of the Baltic art gallery, from the paths on the Tyne Bridge or at the Kittiwake Tower at Saltmeadows Riverside.

During the breeding season Kittiwakes feed on small fish which they catch near the surface of the sea. Although the Kittiwakes have set up home in the middle of the city they still catch their food at the coast.

Results from satellite tracking devices show that the Kittiwakes fly far out to sea off the Northumberland Coast to fish, which means they make a 100 mile round trip!

Nesting

Kittiwakes spend most of the year out at sea, travelling as far as Canada, but every March they return to the Tyne to breed.

Kittiwakes nest in large colonies, usually on narrow ledges on sea cliffs around the coast. However they will also nest on man-made structures that provide a similar type of habitat, such as buildings, bridges and offshore oil platforms.

Nobody quite knows why the first Kittiwakes wandered so far up the Tyne in the 1960s but they clearly like it here.



The nests are around 30-60cm apart on narrow ledges, and the birds defend their nest and its immediate surroundings against intruders.

The Kittiwake's nest is a platform made up of mud and vegetation, with a cup on the top to contain the eggs. Both sexes build the nest, often on top of an old one. Look out for birds collecting mud and weed from the river at low tide.

The 2-3 eggs are laid between mid-May and late June. The incubation takes around 4 weeks, and the chicks hatch covered in white and grey downy feathers.

Both parents look after the chicks, which are fed regurgitated fish.



The parent birds do not recognise their chicks as individuals until they are 4 weeks old, which is why sometimes they will accept and nurture foster chicks.

The young kittiwakes normally fly when they are 42 days old, and they usually leave the nest a week later. They often return to roost at the nest for 1 week after fledging, and are fed there by the adults.

Population

Kittiwakes breed around the northern seas of Europe, North America and Asia and there are thought to be 360,000 pairs in the UK. In some places, such as Scotland, colonies have declined in recent years because of a shortage of their preferred prey of Sandeels.

