

SHOALHAVEN THREATENED SPECIES



Little Tern

Scientific name: *Sternula albifrons*

Conservation status in NSW: Endangered

National conservation status: Not Listed

What does it look like?

The Little Tern is a small, slender, migratory or partly migratory seabird. At less than 25 cm long it is two-thirds to half the size of any other south-eastern tern. Pale grey upperparts contrast with the white chest, underbelly and the moderately long, deeply forked tail (80 - 110 mm). The Little Tern has a black cap and black outer wing-edges. During breeding the bill and legs change from black to yellow, and a black wedge appears from the bill to the eye. During non-breeding, the Little Tern's black cap shrinks to a black nape and its bill becomes black.

Where does it live?

On the beach. They nest in small, scattered groups in low dunes or on sandy beaches just above high tide mark near river mouths or adjacent to coastal lakes and islands. The nest is a scrape in the sand, which may be lined with shell grit, seaweed or small pebbles.

Both parents incubate (sit on) up to three well-camouflaged eggs for up to 22 days, aggressively defending the nest against intruders until the young fledge at 17 - 19 days.

What do they eat?

They are often seen feeding in flocks, hunting for small fish, crustaceans, insects, annelids and molluscs by plunging in the shallow water of channels and estuaries, and in the surf on beaches, or skipping over the water surface with a swallow-like flight.

What threatens its survival?

- Nesting at flood-prone locations.
- Foxes, cats, black rats, silver gulls, ravens and raptors that eat eggs or chicks
- Disturbance to coastal feeding, nesting and roosting areas through beach-combing, fishing, dog-walking, horse-riding and 4WD vehicles; parents often leave the nest when approached, resulting in exposure of chicks or eggs.
- Land clearing for residential, agricultural and tourism developments, by sand mining, and by waste disposal dumps.