

[← Back to 2025](#)aA 

More observations of terns feeding young on the sea

January 2025

Phil Palmer (*Brit. Birds* 117: 400) described an adult Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* feeding a swimming juvenile on the sea at Redcar, Yorkshire, in 2022. This behaviour had apparently not been documented previously.

For the last decade, possibly longer, we have frequently observed fledged – but not totally independent – juvenile Common and Sandwich Terns *Thalasseus sandvicensis* being fed by adults on the sea at several sites along the east Lothian coast (e.g. plate 18).



18. Adult Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis* feeding a juvenile sitting on the sea, Musselburgh, Lothian, July 2024.

The adult bird typically called to alert the juvenile that it had a fish. The juvenile would then beg loudly and land on the sea. The adult bird would hover over the still-begging youngster before feeding it, then typically flew off to resume fishing, with the young bird following, often still carrying the presented fish in its bill. This entire procedure usually took only a few seconds and was sometimes repeated several times over a period of ten or so minutes. Occasionally, a second juvenile was in attendance (plate 19).



19. Adult Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* feeding a juvenile sitting on the sea, with a second juvenile attracted in by the event, Musselburgh, Lothian, July 2024.

This type of feeding has been witnessed in both calm and choppy sea conditions, and at high and low tide, even when options for the bird to perch on were available nearby. In 2024, observations of this behaviour spanned the period 29th July to 25th August.

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