



MarLIN

Marine Information Network

Information on the species and habitats around the coasts and sea of the British Isles

Black-legged kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*)

MarLIN – Marine Life Information Network
Marine Evidence-based Sensitivity Assessment (MarESA) Review

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2008-09-23

A report from:

The Marine Life Information Network, Marine Biological Association of the United Kingdom.

Please note. This MarESA report is a dated version of the online review. Please refer to the website for the most up-to-date version [<https://www.marlin.ac.uk/species/detail/2218>]. All terms and the MarESA methodology are outlined on the website (<https://www.marlin.ac.uk>)

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The black-legged kittiwake, *Rissa tridactyla*.

Photographer: Dr Russel Wynn

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See online review for
distribution map

Distribution data supplied by the Ocean
Biogeographic Information System (OBIS). To
interrogate UK data visit the NBN Atlas.

Researched by	Natalie Sweet	Refereed by	Admin
Authority	(Linnaeus, 1758)		
Other common names	-	Synonyms	-

Summary

Description

Rissa tridactyla is a medium sized gull reaching lengths of up to 42 cm, with a wing span of up to 1.05 m. Adults have grey upperparts which fade to white before a wholly black wing tip without mirrors (white patches). In summer the head and neck are white and in winter a dusky black ear spot and grey collar on the hindneck are evident. Underparts and tail are white. The bill is yellow and the legs are dark brown or black. In juveniles the tip of the tail is black and a conspicuous dark 'M' shape is clearly visible across the upper wings, along with a black collar on the hindneck.

Recorded distribution in Britain and Ireland

All around Britain and Ireland, with the largest colonies found along North Sea coasts in Orkney, Shetland, northwest Scotland and northern England.

Global distribution

-

Habitat

The black-legged kittiwake is an entirely marine gull that breeds colonially on rocky coasts but remains oceanic outside of breeding season. Breeding colonies may vary in size from a few pairs to tens of thousands but the location of these breeding sites tends to be traditional over many years.

Sheer rocky cliffs are favoured but occasionally man made structures are also used.

↓ Depth range

-

Q Identifying features

- Grey upperparts fade to white before a wholly black wing tip.
- White head in summer, with dusky ear spot and grey collar on hindneck in winter.
- Yellow bill.
- Dark brown or black legs.
- In juveniles a conspicuous dark 'M' shaped pattern is evident across the upper wings and back.

🏛️ Additional information

The Kittiwake takes food by diving, either plunge-diving from flight or from the surface of the water. The diet consists chiefly of small fish such as sandeels, sprat, young herring, molluscs and amphipods but may also include offal and discards from fishing boats. Please note that distribution maps are compiled using records for both breeding and wintering populations. For more specific distribution and abundance records please refer to maps compiled by The British Trust for Ornithology, available at <http://www.bto.org/birdatlas/previous/index.htm>

✓ Listed by



🔗 Further information sources

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- none -

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