



> This was one of the nests on the Guildhall, while another (right) was perched on a lamp-post  
Lophophanes



# Surging Tyne kittiwakes buck the national trend

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**T**HE internationally important Tyne kittiwake breeding colony totalled almost 2,000 nests in 2021.

Now voting is under way for which nest was the best at what is the world's most inland breeding location. Go to @kittiwakestyne or www.tynekittiwakes.org.uk to take part.

The birds have favourite, established nesting sites on the Tyne Bridge, Baltic Gallery, Gateshead Satmeadows nesting tower and Akzo Nobel paints factory at Felling.

At a number of other sites, building owners have installed anti-nesting measures, leading the birds to explore other often novel sites to raise a family.

Some have continued to nest on deterrents such as netting and spikes, which brings the danger of birds becoming trapped. Up to 18 birds died in this way in 2018,

The pictures of the kittiwake finalists in the best nest competition include birds on the Tyne Bridge, a

street light, the Gateshead nesting tower, Baltic, Akzo Nobel, and on Newcastle Quayside the Guildhall, Phoenix House, and Queen Street.

Another nesting image is from Ferry Mews, a residential building at North Shields ferry landing where netting was installed amid local controversy.

The contest is being organised by the voluntary independent group Kittiwakes upon the Tyne, which is run by ornithologist Paul Buskin.

The kittiwakes are due to return to the Tyne around the beginning of April, after spending the winter in the Atlantic.

Globally, kittiwakes are thought to have declined by around 40% since the 1970s and were added to the Birds of Conservation Concern Red List in 2015.

In the UK, kittiwake numbers have plummeted, particularly in Orkney and Shetland where breeding birds have declined by 87% since 2000.

But the Tyne colony is growing and Paul Buskin says: "This makes the Tyne a precious colony."

The Natural History Society of Northumbria says: "Contrary to

declines elsewhere in the UK, the Tyne kittiwakes are thriving with increasing numbers observed each year.

"This is incredible, not just because of the special place these birds have chosen to nest, but in light of the significant reductions in kittiwake populations elsewhere."

North Shields ornithologist Dan Turner has monitored the nesting sites since 1994, and his data from 2021 shows that there were 1,895 nests in the Tyne colony, rising to 2,252 when natural nesting sites on Tynemouth cliffs are included. A total of 402 nests failed.

The nests in 2021 were divided between: Tynemouth cliffs 357; North Shields ferry landing 20; Akzo Nobel 252; Saltmeadows nesting tower 122; Baltic Arts Centre 191; Newcastle Quayside/Dean Street railway bridge 118; Phoenix House/Queen Street/Sandgate 53; Guildhall 46; various Quayside sites 62; Tyne Bridge north abutment and girders 603; Tyne Bridge south abutment and girders 402; High Level Bridge 13.

When Dan Turner began collect-

ing his data in 1994, he recorded five main nesting sites along the river and 227 successful nests.

On the north abutment of the Tyne Bridge at Newcastle, the first attempts at nesting were made in 1996 with three pairs of birds but each nest failed to fledge young.

But by 2019 the Tyne Bridge as a whole held 54.3% of the Tyne nesting population.

Dan says: "The Baltic Arts Centre has embraced their nesting kittiwakes and now regards them as an asset to be nurtured, discussed, protected, celebrated and included in education.

"It seems our Tyne birds are attracting others from further afield, perhaps from failed colonies elsewhere.

"It is always rewarding to speak with people from many countries about the kittiwakes, for example when asked what I am doing while going about the surveys.

"Visitors come to Tyneside to see our kittiwake spectacle nowadays. They are concerned for the birds' welfare in our changing environment and wish to observe and learn."

Paul Buskin launched the picture competition to raise the profile of the kittiwakes and dispel misunderstandings about the birds.

"Kittiwakes are only with us in the summer and they do not scavenge like their larger cousins, the herring gull and lesser black-backed gull.

"While the kittiwakes are with us they travel long distances to feed, at time as far as the Farne Islands. They are part of our natural heritage.

"Our view is that we need to celebrate and protect the birds' main nesting sites.

"On other buildings we need cooperation with owners and councils so that if nesting deterrents are used, they are done so in a way which is not harmful to the birds."



> A nest was created at Ferry Mews, North Shields - despite netting being placed there  
Paul Buskin

## Two North drive centres comfortably pass the test

TWO test centres in the North East have been listed among the ten easiest places to take your driving test in the UK.

Blyth has one of the highest pass-rates in the country, according to new research from A-Plan insurance.

The study from the UK insurance brokers showed the town has an impressive pass rate of 64.7 per cent, putting it fifth overall in the country.

Durham also made the top ten, coming in just behind Blyth with a pass rate of 63.2 per cent.

A spokesperson for A-Plan Insurance said: "Taking a driving test is a landmark moment in anyone's life and can often feel very daunting.

"It's fascinating to see the considerable difference in success rates between major test centres."

Top of the list was Yeovil, which has a pass rate of 67.4 per cent.

A-Plan's findings were derived by examining the pass rate percentage of major driving test centres across the UK, using only those that had conducted at least 1,000 tests since April 2020.

The Yeovil test centre proved triumphant when analysis from the study found out of 1,578 tests taken between April 2020 and June 2021 1,051 were passed.

This result was closely followed by Dorchester in Dorset, which lost to Yeovil by a mere one per cent, scoring a pass rate of 66 per cent.

The Dorset centre passed 1,024 fortunate candidates out of the 1,559, since April 2020, with Aberdeen South (Cover) coming in at third place, with a pass rate of 65.8 per cent.

London, home to many test centres, ranked towards the bottom of the pile.

The Goodmayes Centre held 6,668 tests but with only 2,533 of these resulted in passes.

## Missing man's body found

THE body of a man from Cumbria who had been reported missing has been found in the North East.

Northumbria Police officers confirmed that the body of Frederick Cox, from Carlisle, had been found in Cramlington.

Mr Cox had been reported missing on December 17.

A spokesperson for the force confirmed: "We have sadly found the body of a man in the Cramlington area believed to be that of Frederick Cox who was reported missing from the Carlisle area of Cumbria on Friday, December 17."

They added that the family of the man have been informed and that the death is being treated as non-suspicious.

"The family have been informed and our thoughts are with them at this difficult time."