

Urban Biodiversity: Successes and Challenges: Urban tern ecology: common terns in Leith Docks

Gemma Jennings, Robert Furness¹, & Derek McGlashan²

¹ Institute of Biodiversity, Animal Health and Comparative Medicine, University of Glasgow, G12 8QQ

² School of Social and Environmental Sciences, University of Dundee, DD1 4HN

E-mail: g.jennings.1@research.gla.ac.uk

The Imperial Dock Lock, a disused lock wall in Leith Docks, Edinburgh, supports the largest common tern (*Sterna hirundo*) colony in Scotland and was designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA) for the species in 2004. The SPA lies in a continually changing operational port and the port owners are keen to understand more about the terns. Analysis of long-term count data suggests that colonisation of this urban environment occurred as a result of relocation from natural islands in the Firth of Forth over the past few decades, in particular Inchmickery, which was formerly a regional stronghold for the species, but was abandoned possibly due to high numbers of gulls. Field work was performed at the colony during the breeding seasons of 2009 and 2010. Foraging studies showed that terns fed primarily in the Firth of Forth rather than within the docks, and their diet consisted mostly of clupeids, but also sandeels and small gadoids. Predation of chicks by herring gulls (*Larus argentatus*) and lesser black-backed gulls (*L. fuscus*) was observed in both seasons, despite which, high numbers of chicks fledged from the colony. Observations and preliminary experiments on the terns' sensitivity to disturbance at the colony indicated that the birds are tolerant of routine human activities in the docks and that they have become well habituated to breeding in this urban environment. The results of this study combined with continued monitoring will be useful for the conservation of this SPA.