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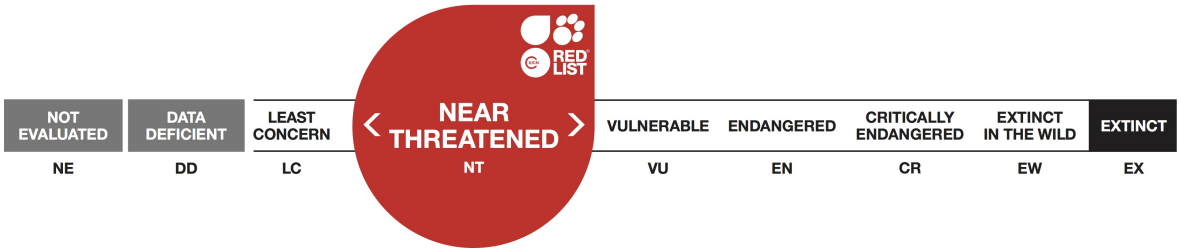
Sternula balaenarum, Damara Tern

Assessment by: BirdLife International



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Taxonomy

Kingdom	Phylum	Class	Order	Family
Animalia	Chordata	Aves	Charadriiformes	Laridae

Taxon Name: *Sternula balaenarum* Strickland, 1852

Synonym(s):

- *Sterna balaenarum* (Strickland, 1852)

Common Name(s):

- English: Damara Tern
- French: Sterne des baleiniers

Taxonomic Source(s):

del Hoyo, J., Collar, N.J., Christie, D.A., Elliott, A. and Fishpool, L.D.C. 2014. *HBW and BirdLife International Illustrated Checklist of the Birds of the World*. Lynx Edicions BirdLife International.

Taxonomic Notes:

Sternula balaenarum (del Hoyo and Collar 2014) was previously placed in the genus *Sterna*.

Identification Information:

23 cm. Small, very pale tern. Adult has black cap extending onto nape and very pale grey back. In flight, black triangular wing tip runs from the carpal to primary tip. Non-breeding adult shows white forehead and crown, with black mask extending and joining on nape. Immature has buff barring on mantle. **Similar spp.** Breeding Little Tern *Sterna albifrons* has white forehead and mainly yellow bill. In non-breeding, has less white on head, darker mantle and more slight proportions. **Voice** Sharp, high-pitched *tsit tsit* and harsh, rapid *kid-ick*.

Assessment Information

Red List Category & Criteria: Near Threatened ver 3.1

Year Published: 2012

Date Assessed: May 1, 2012

Justification:

This species is listed as Near Threatened owing to its moderately small population. If this is found to be undergoing a decline, the species may qualify for uplisting to a higher threat category.

Previously Published Red List Assessments

2010 – Near Threatened (NT)

2008 – Near Threatened (NT)

2006 – Near Threatened (NT)

2004 – Near Threatened (NT)

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2000 – Lower Risk/near threatened (LR/nt)

1994 – Lower Risk/near threatened (LR/nt)

1988 – Threatened (T)

Geographic Range

Range Description:

Sternula balaenarum is recorded in the breeding season along the coast of **Namibia** (98% of the population nest between the Orange and Cunene rivers [Braby *et al.* 2001]), south to the Cape provinces in **South Africa** (fewer than 125 pairs [Braby *et al.* 2001]) and north to Cabinda in **Angola** (Gochfeld and Burger 1996), where there are fewer than 190 pairs (Simmons 2010). A recent survey between Tombua and the Cunene River mouth (197 km) recorded 573 individuals, with a breeding colony (6 pairs) located 30 km north of the Cunene River (Simmons 2010). It disperses north after the breeding season and is recorded regularly from the coastal waters of **Democratic Republic of Congo**, **Congo**, **Gabon**, **Cameroon**, **Nigeria**, **Benin**, **Togo**, **Ghana** and **Côte d'Ivoire** (Urban *et al.* 1986, Demey and Fishpool 1991, Gochfeld and Burger 1996). During 2002, the total population was estimated at 14,000 birds (Simmons *et al.* 1998b, du Toit *et al*. 2002), with peak density in the central area of its range (around 23°S) - apparently the main spawning ground of many fish species - and decreasing density north and south along Namibia's 1,470 km coast (Simmons *et al.* 1998b).

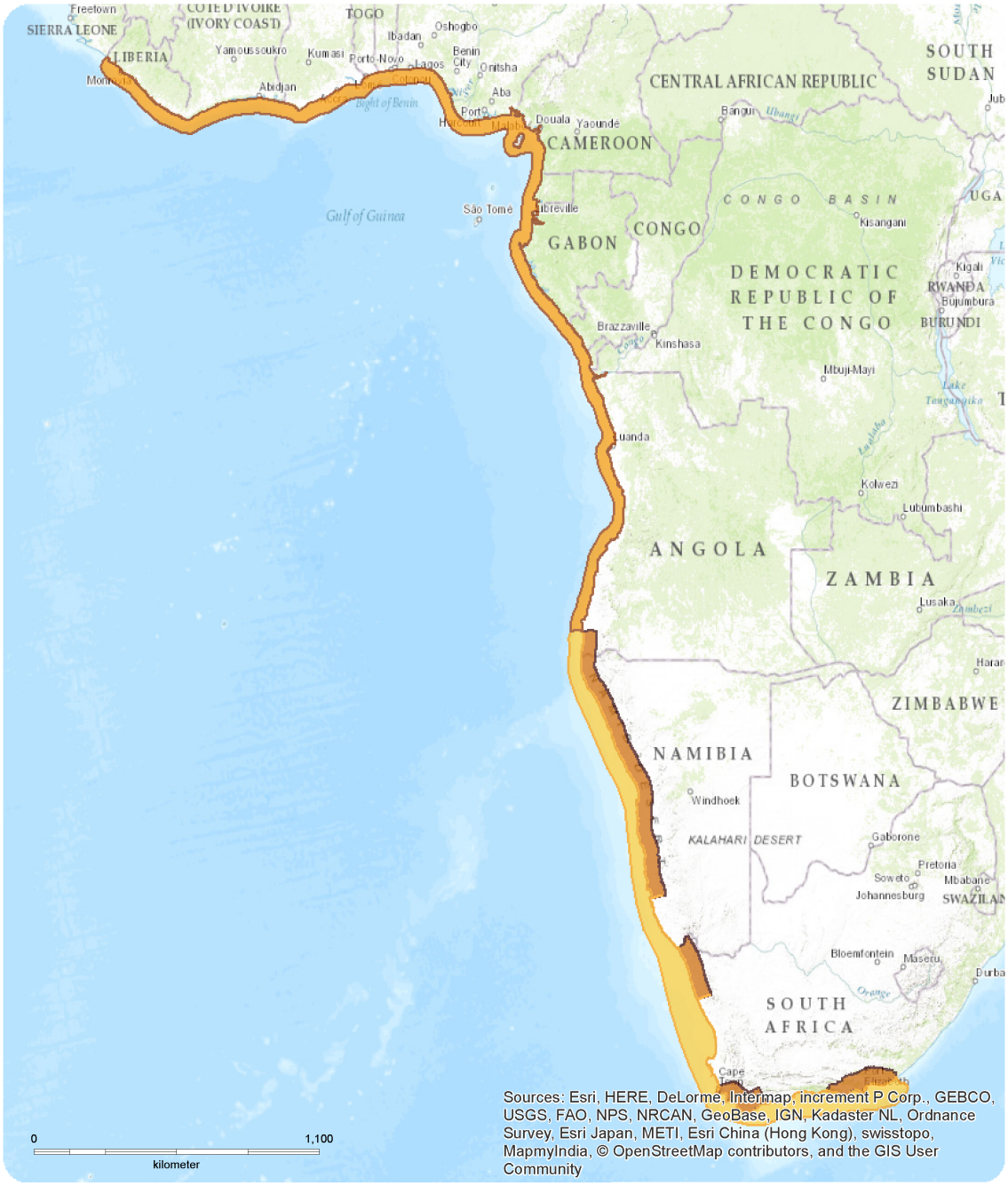
Country Occurrence:

Native: Angola (Angola); Benin; Cameroon; Congo; Congo, The Democratic Republic of the; Côte d'Ivoire; Gabon; Ghana; Namibia; Nigeria; South Africa; Togo

Vagrant: Liberia

Present - origin uncertain: Equatorial Guinea

Distribution Map



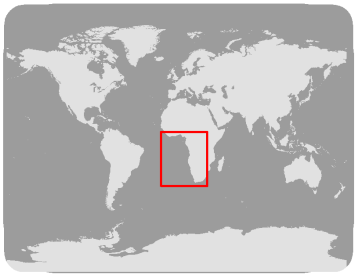
Sternula balaenarum

NE DD LC **NT** NEAR THREATENED VU EN CR EW EX

Range

- Extant (breeding)
- Extant (non breeding)
- Extant (resident)

Compiled by:
BirdLife International and NatureServe (2014) Bird Species Distribution Maps of the World.



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply any official endorsement, acceptance or opinion by IUCN.

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Population

The population is estimated at 14,000 individuals, roughly equivalent to 9,300 mature individuals.

Trend Justification

The population is suspected to be stable in the absence of evidence for any declines or substantial threats.

Current Population Trend: Stable

Habitat and Ecology (see Appendix for additional information)

Behaviour This species is a partial migrant (Urban *et al.* 1986). It breeds between late October and mid-November (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996) in small groups usually consisting of 4-10 pairs, although occasionally of up to 60 (Urban *et al.* 1986, del Hoyo *et al.* 1996). Pre-migratory flocks of tens, hundreds or occasionally thousands of birds gather at the Namibian coast in April (Hockey *et al.* 2005), and then move northwards as far as Nigeria and Ghana (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996, Hockey *et al.* 2005). The species is most numerous here between July and October (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996), coinciding with the arrival of strong upwellings off the Ghanaian coast which bring spawning fish inshore (Hockey *et al.* 2005). About 100 individuals remain in the breeding grounds year-round. Outside the breeding season it roosts colonially (Urban *et al.* 1986) but usually feeds solitarily, with individuals spaced 10-50m apart (Urban *et al.* 1986). It returns to its breeding grounds in September and October (Hockey *et al.* 2005). **Habitat** This species is predominantly coastal (Hockey *et al.* 2005). *Breeding* On gravel and stony plains, salt pans and dunes (Urban *et al.* 1986, del Hoyo *et al.* 1996, Hockey *et al.* 2005), sometimes in sheltered bays and shallow reefs (Hockey *et al.* 2005), but often several kilometres inland (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996). Recently breeding has been observed up to 11.5 km from the coast in southern Namibia (Braby *et al.* 2001). It will also breed on rocky ledges and at rehabilitated diamond mines, favouring breeding localities that provide good visibility (Harrison *et al.* 1997a). It shuns outer beach areas that are frequented by predators (Gochfeld and Burger 1996, del Hoyo *et al.* 1996). There are very few records of breeding on islands (Hockey *et al.* 2005). *Non-breeding* During the non-breeding season it is found on more exposed, high-energy coasts (Hockey *et al.* 2005). The species usually feeds in the shallow, inshore waters of bays, estuaries, lagoons and salt-pans and in the surf zone (Urban *et al.* 1986, Gochfeld and Burger 1996, del Hoyo *et al.* 1996), but occasionally forages in the open ocean, as far as 5km from land (Hockey *et al.* 2005). **Diet** It feeds mainly on small fish (usually less than 50mm in length [Hockey *et al.* 2005]), including mullet *Mugil richardsonii* and anchovy *Engraulis japonica*, as well as small squid (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996). **Breeding site** Eggs are laid in a nondescript scrape (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996), sometimes lined with shell chips or small stones (Hockey *et al.* 2005). The clutch-size is usually one, rarely two, and the incubation period is 18-22 days, followed by a fledging period of 20 days and 2.5 months of dependency (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996).

Systems: Terrestrial, Marine

Threats (see Appendix for additional information)

Land claim, dredging and hotel construction threaten some feeding areas; off-road vehicles may destroy nests (but are not a threat to whole breeding colonies as this species does not desert colonies like other terns [Demey and Fishpool 1991]) particularly as the breeding season coincides with peak human activity on beaches in summer (Gochfeld and Burger 1996). The largest breeding colony known

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(minimum of 120 pairs [Braby *et al.* 2001]), Caution Reef, south of Swakopmund, is on town land and suffers considerable human disturbance (Cheke and Walsh 1996). Large-scale mining operations have caused disturbance both to offshore feeding and onshore breeding areas (Simmons *et al.* 1998b), resulting in a drop from 20 breeding pairs to 2-7 pairs at Elizabeth Bay between 1996 and 2002 (Hockey *et al.* 2005). However, diamond mining is due to end in the next five years and tern populations may then increase again (R. E. Simmons *in litt.* 1999, Braby *et al.* 2001). Some roosting birds are caught in snares by children on the wintering grounds (Cheke and Walsh 1996).

Conservation Actions (see Appendix for additional information)

Conservation Actions Underway

CMS Appendix II. In November 2000, information boards and barriers were used to successfully prevent off-road vehicles entering the breeding site at Caution Reef. This resulted in a slightly increased nesting density and enabled hatching success to increase from 56% to 80% (Braby *et al.* 2001). **Conservation Actions Proposed**

Monitor population trends. Designate disturbance-free areas on nesting beaches. Protect important breeding sites.

Credits

Assessor(s): BirdLife International

Reviewer(s): Butchart, S. & Symes, A.

Contributor(s): Simmons, R.

Facilitators(s) and Compiler(s): Anderson, O., Butchart, S., O'Brien, A., Pilgrim, J., Shutes, S. & Taylor, J.

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External Resources

For Images and External Links to Additional Information, please see the Red List website.

Appendix

Habitats

(http://www.iucnredlist.org/technical-documents/classification-schemes)

Habitat	Season	Suitability	Major Importance?
8. Desert -> 8.1. Desert - Hot	Breeding	Suitable	Yes
9. Marine Neritic -> 9.1. Marine Neritic - Pelagic	Breeding	Suitable	No
9. Marine Neritic -> 9.1. Marine Neritic - Pelagic	Non-breeding	Suitable	No
9. Marine Neritic -> 9.2. Marine Neritic - Subtidal Rock and Rocky Reefs	Breeding	Suitable	Yes
9. Marine Neritic -> 9.2. Marine Neritic - Subtidal Rock and Rocky Reefs	Non-breeding	Suitable	Yes
9. Marine Neritic -> 9.3. Marine Neritic - Subtidal Loose Rock/pebble/gravel	Breeding	Suitable	Yes
9. Marine Neritic -> 9.3. Marine Neritic - Subtidal Loose Rock/pebble/gravel	Non-breeding	Suitable	Yes
9. Marine Neritic -> 9.4. Marine Neritic - Subtidal Sandy	Breeding	Suitable	Yes
9. Marine Neritic -> 9.4. Marine Neritic - Subtidal Sandy	Non-breeding	Suitable	Yes
9. Marine Neritic -> 9.5. Marine Neritic - Subtidal Sandy-Mud	Breeding	Suitable	Yes
9. Marine Neritic -> 9.5. Marine Neritic - Subtidal Sandy-Mud	Non-breeding	Suitable	Yes
9. Marine Neritic -> 9.7. Marine Neritic - Macroalgal/Kelp	Breeding	Suitable	Yes
9. Marine Neritic -> 9.7. Marine Neritic - Macroalgal/Kelp	Non-breeding	Suitable	Yes
9. Marine Neritic -> 9.9. Marine Neritic - Seagrass (Submerged)	Breeding	Suitable	Yes
9. Marine Neritic -> 9.9. Marine Neritic - Seagrass (Submerged)	Non-breeding	Suitable	Yes
9. Marine Neritic -> 9.10. Marine Neritic - Estuaries	Breeding	Suitable	Yes
9. Marine Neritic -> 9.10. Marine Neritic - Estuaries	Non-breeding	Suitable	Yes
12. Marine Intertidal -> 12.1. Marine Intertidal - Rocky Shoreline	Breeding	Suitable	No
12. Marine Intertidal -> 12.1. Marine Intertidal - Rocky Shoreline	Non-breeding	Suitable	No
12. Marine Intertidal -> 12.2. Marine Intertidal - Sandy Shoreline and/or Beaches, Sand Bars, Spits, Etc	Breeding	Suitable	No
12. Marine Intertidal -> 12.2. Marine Intertidal - Sandy Shoreline and/or Beaches, Sand Bars, Spits, Etc	Non-breeding	Suitable	No
12. Marine Intertidal -> 12.3. Marine Intertidal - Shingle and/or Pebble Shoreline and/or Beaches	Breeding	Suitable	No

Habitat	Season	Suitability	Major Importance?
12. Marine Intertidal -> 12.3. Marine Intertidal - Shingle and/or Pebble Shoreline and/or Beaches	Non-breeding	Suitable	No
12. Marine Intertidal -> 12.4. Marine Intertidal - Mud Flats and Salt Flats	Breeding	Suitable	No
12. Marine Intertidal -> 12.4. Marine Intertidal - Mud Flats and Salt Flats	Non-breeding	Suitable	No
13. Marine Coastal/Supratidal -> 13.1. Marine Coastal/Supratidal - Sea Cliffs and Rocky Offshore Islands	Breeding	Suitable	No
13. Marine Coastal/Supratidal -> 13.1. Marine Coastal/Supratidal - Sea Cliffs and Rocky Offshore Islands	Non-breeding	Suitable	No
13. Marine Coastal/Supratidal -> 13.3. Marine Coastal/Supratidal - Coastal Sand Dunes	Breeding	Suitable	No
13. Marine Coastal/Supratidal -> 13.3. Marine Coastal/Supratidal - Coastal Sand Dunes	Non-breeding	Suitable	No
13. Marine Coastal/Supratidal -> 13.4. Marine Coastal/Supratidal - Coastal Brackish/Saline Lagoons/Marine Lakes	Breeding	Suitable	Yes
13. Marine Coastal/Supratidal -> 13.4. Marine Coastal/Supratidal - Coastal Brackish/Saline Lagoons/Marine Lakes	Non-breeding	Suitable	Yes
13. Marine Coastal/Supratidal -> 13.5. Marine Coastal/Supratidal - Coastal Freshwater Lakes	Breeding	Suitable	Yes
13. Marine Coastal/Supratidal -> 13.5. Marine Coastal/Supratidal - Coastal Freshwater Lakes	Non-breeding	Suitable	Yes
15. Artificial/Aquatic & Marine -> 15.4. Artificial/Aquatic - Salt Exploitation Sites	Breeding	Suitable	No
15. Artificial/Aquatic & Marine -> 15.4. Artificial/Aquatic - Salt Exploitation Sites	Non-breeding	Suitable	No

Threats

(http://www.iucnredlist.org/technical-documents/classification-schemes)

Threat	Timing	Scope	Severity	Impact Score
1. Residential & commercial development -> 1.3. Tourism & recreation areas	Ongoing	Majority (50-90%)	Slow, significant declines	-
	Stresses:	1. Ecosystem stresses -> 1.1. Ecosystem conversion 1. Ecosystem stresses -> 1.2. Ecosystem degradation		
3. Energy production & mining -> 3.2. Mining & quarrying	Ongoing	Majority (50-90%)	Slow, significant declines	-
	Stresses:	1. Ecosystem stresses -> 1.1. Ecosystem conversion 1. Ecosystem stresses -> 1.2. Ecosystem degradation 2. Species Stresses -> 2.2. Species disturbance		

5. Biological resource use -> 5.1. Hunting & trapping terrestrial animals -> 5.1.1. Intentional use (species is the target)	Ongoing	Minority (50%)	Negligible declines	-
	Stresses:	2. Species Stresses -> 2.1. Species mortality		
6. Human intrusions & disturbance -> 6.1. Recreational activities	Ongoing	Majority (50-90%)	Slow, significant declines	-
	Stresses:	2. Species Stresses -> 2.2. Species disturbance 2. Species Stresses -> 2.3. Indirect species effects -> 2.3.7. Reduced reproductive success		
6. Human intrusions & disturbance -> 6.3. Work & other activities	Ongoing	Minority (50%)	Slow, significant declines	-
	Stresses:	2. Species Stresses -> 2.2. Species disturbance		

Conservation Actions in Place

(http://www.iucnredlist.org/technical-documents/classification-schemes)

Conservation Actions in Place
In-Place Research, Monitoring and Planning
Action Recovery plan: No
Systematic monitoring scheme: Yes
In-Place Land/Water Protection and Management
Conservation sites identified: Yes, over entire range
Occur in at least one PA: Yes
Invasive species control or prevention: No
In-Place Species Management
Successfully reintroduced or introduced beningly: No
Subject to ex-situ conservation: No
In-Place Education
Subject to recent education and awareness programmes: No
Included in international legislation: Yes
Subject to any international management/trade controls: No

Conservation Actions Needed

(http://www.iucnredlist.org/technical-documents/classification-schemes)

Conservation Actions Needed
1. Land/water protection -> 1.1. Site/area protection
2. Land/water management -> 2.1. Site/area management

Research Needed

(http://www.iucnredlist.org/technical-documents/classification-schemes)

Research Needed
3. Monitoring -> 3.1. Population trends

Additional Data Fields

Distribution
Continuing decline in area of occupancy (AOO): Unknown
Extreme fluctuations in area of occupancy (AOO): No
Estimated extent of occurrence (EOO) (km^2): 228000
Continuing decline in extent of occurrence (EOO): Unknown
Extreme fluctuations in extent of occurrence (EOO): No
Continuing decline in number of locations: Unknown
Extreme fluctuations in the number of locations: No
Population
Number of mature individuals: 9300
Continuing decline of mature individuals: Unknown
Extreme fluctuations: No
Population severely fragmented: No
Continuing decline in subpopulations: Unknown
Extreme fluctuations in subpopulations: No
All individuals in one subpopulation: No
Habitats and Ecology
Continuing decline in area, extent and/or quality of habitat: Unknown
Generation Length (years): 9
Movement patterns: Full Migrant
Congregatory: Congregatory (and dispersive)

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