





Fact Box

-  Kittiwakes are believed to be the reincarnation of children's souls
-  Distributed throughout the northern hemisphere
-  Kittiwakes have different names in parts of Britain, e.g. Kittick, Keltie, Craa Maa.
-  Immature birds are called Tarrocks
-  Large colonies, often of several thousand pairs.
-  Bonding behaviour includes Moan-and-bow, Head-bobbing, and Food-begging displays.
-  Red gape attracts mate, and encourages young to take regurgitated food

The Fight for Survival

The kittiwake was once hunted in large numbers for white plumes to adorn women's hats. This practice has stopped but now there is a new and potentially more deadly threat. In recent years, sandeels, the



main food for many seabirds have declined. This is undoubtedly caused by humans through over-fishing or climate change. Kittiwake numbers have fallen as they have struggled to find enough food to feed their young. Now, more than ever, they need a friendly place they can call home. So let us make sure we do all we can to welcome these special birds into the heart of Tyne-side.



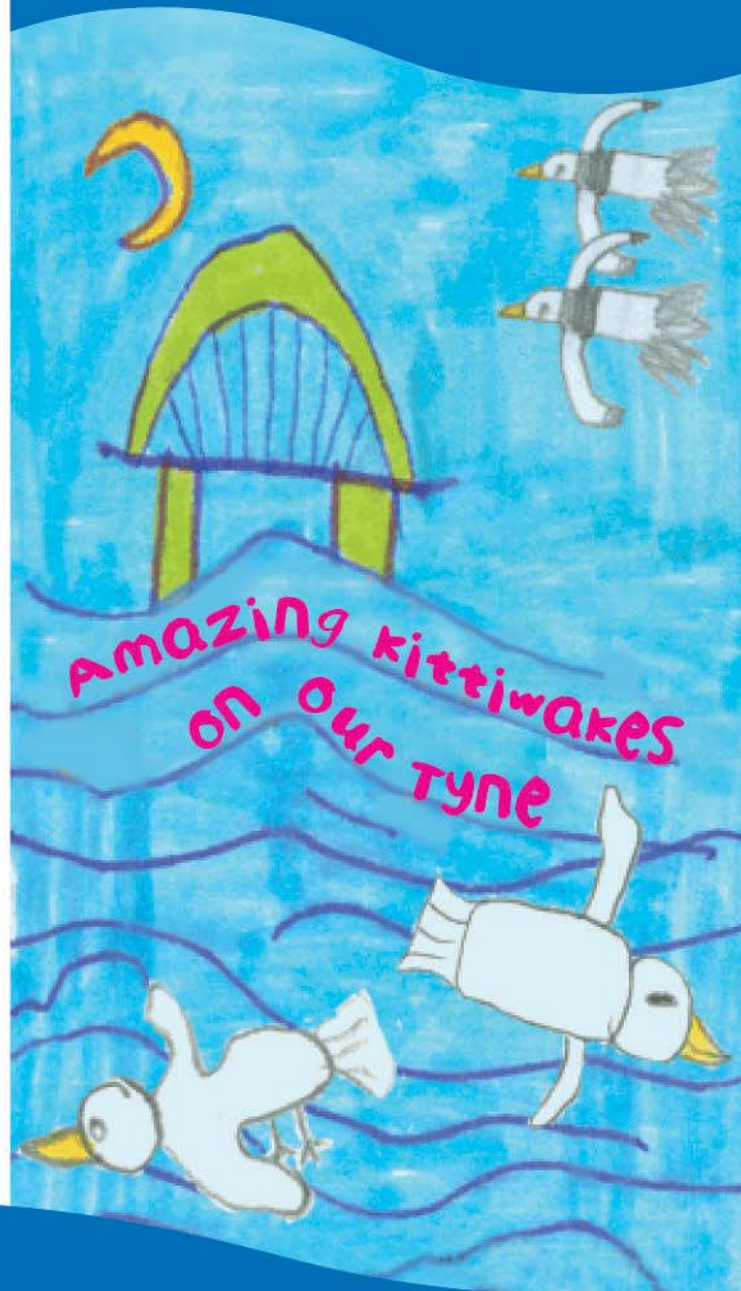
Children from Year 4 Lindisfarne Community Primary School with their teacher, Mr. John Innerdale

This leaflet was prepared as part of a joint 'Citizenship' collaboration between Akzo Nobel (International Paints, Gateshead), Newcastle University and Year 4 school children from Lindisfarne Community Primary School (Gateshead). The children provided artwork, poetry and ideas for 'The Kittiwake Story', which was written by Malcolm Green. Illustrations by Rachel Edwards, design and additional text by Joanna Stockill. The leaflet has been funded under Akzo Nobel's Corporate Social Responsibility initiative, with additional support from the Esmée Fairburn Foundation and the RSPB.



the environment

OUR JOINT RESPONSIBILITY

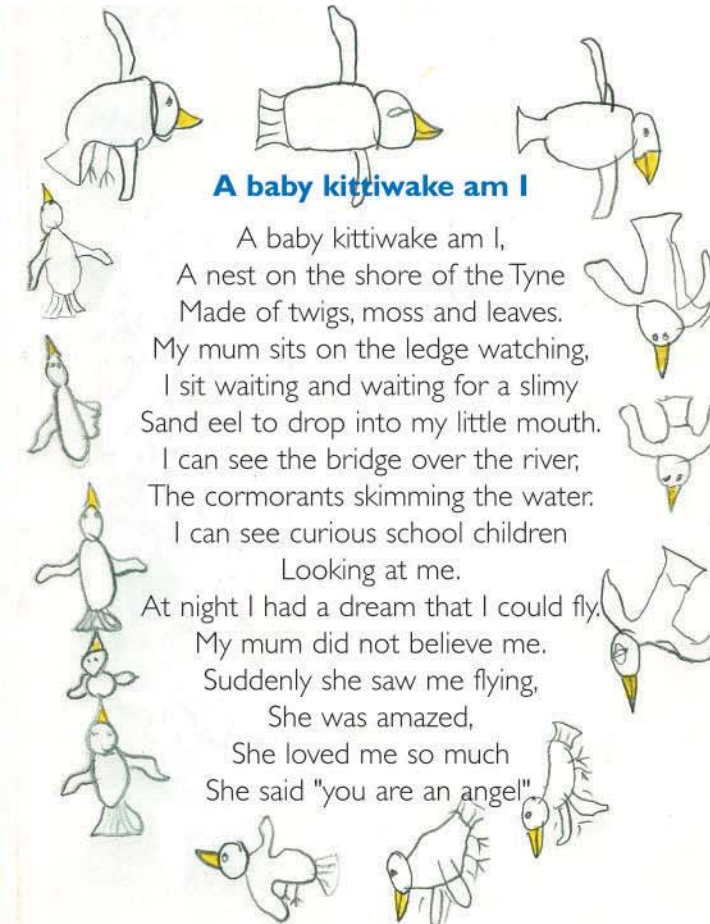
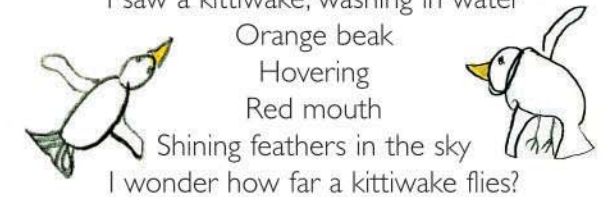


This is the remarkable story of how a colony of seabirds flew up the Tyne to nest in the heart of the city

Poems by children of Lindisfarne School

I wonder how far a kittiwake flies?

The view of the glorious Tyne
White shining foam on the rushing waves
I saw a kittiwake, washing in water



A baby kittiwake am I

A baby kittiwake am I,
A nest on the shore of the Tyne
Made of twigs, moss and leaves.
My mum sits on the ledge watching,
I sit waiting and waiting for a slimy
Sand eel to drop into my little mouth.
I can see the bridge over the river,
The cormorants skimming the water.
I can see curious school children
Looking at me.

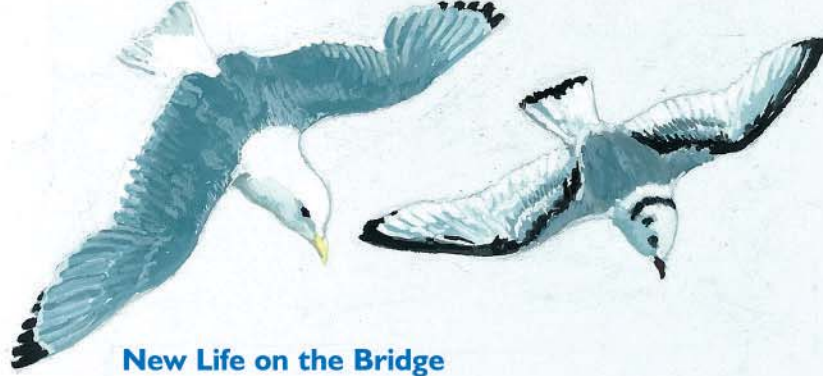
At night I had a dream that I could fly.
My mum did not believe me.
Suddenly she saw me flying,
She was amazed,
She loved me so much
She said "you are an angel!"

The Kittiwake Story

This is the story of a very special gull, the kittiwake. Look out for her flying down the Tyne, with her soft white feathers, dark eyes, lemon yellow bill and wingtips 'dipped in ink'.

The First Inland Venturers

Nobody quite knows why the first kittiwakes wandered down the Tyne in the 1950s, further inland than any other birds of their species before. Perhaps the nesting colonies at Marsden and North Shields were full. Perhaps the ledges of the old factory buildings reminded them of their familiar coastal cliffs. Whatever drew them, they came, but each building they chose was soon demolished. The largest, most vibrant colony of 300 pairs was established on the Baltic flourmill in the 1970s, but when that became an art gallery they were forced off there too. Some birds started nesting on a specially made tower, whilst others moved to the Tyne Bridge, where they delighted many people but upset others with their exuberant cries and messy nesting habits.



New Life on the Bridge

We will follow one bird in a nest high up on the pillars of the Tyne Bridge. She started life inside a pale, blotched egg on a nest made of seaweed and grass stuck together with mud and droppings. When she hatched her parents dived to find sandeels and other small creatures to feed her, which they offered with the bright red gape of their beaks. She grew and grew until her soft, grey down became strong, white feathers. One day she opened her wings and launched herself over the grey waters of the Tyne.

Fact Box

-  Kittiwakes live up to 28 years and typically pair for life
-  Kittiwake pairs return to nest in March, usually coming back to the same site where they were born
-  They breed after 3-4 years of age
-  They lay 2-3 eggs each season
-  The eggs hatch after about 28 days
-  The young spend 5-6 weeks in the nest
-  Parents bring food from the Tyne and sea



Back Under the Arches

In the early spring of her third year, when her plumage had become that of an adult, she turned back and using the sun, the moon and stars to navigate, she flew the many miles back to her river, in through the entrance of the Tyne and past the familiar sights.

Our kittiwake found herself back at the pillars of the bridge. This first year back was not a year to breed, but one to hang out with other youngsters, all the time watching, working out how to be an adult and of course flirting with the males. She chose the most handsome with the brightest red gape. When autumn came, she went back to the sea with the other birds. But this time she did not wander so far, flying south rather than to the wild north. She returned the following spring and called her 'kitti-waaark' cry in delight as she met up with her mate. The older kittiwakes already had the best-protected nests in the centre of the colony, so she and her mate nested on a nearby windowsill. But in later years as they became more experienced, they too edged nearer the heart of the colony.

The Wandering Youngster

For seven days she stayed around the nest until she felt the urge to fly off down the Tyne to the open sea. She was on her first big adventure, fighting with other seabirds for scraps from the back of fishing boats and watching out for the wandering skuas, which attacked out of the sky like warplanes. For two years she flew the oceans, dancing on the white caps... wandering as far as Canada and Greenland. Sometimes in terrible storms she was blown inland but always she went back out to sea, where other hazards faced her such as oil spills and floating plastic rubbish.

