

Review of bird sightings 2023



January

The first half of the month was dominated by a series of deep Atlantic depressions and transient ridges of high pressure with winds mostly from a south-westerly direction, which led to mild but rather unsettled conditions. It became cooler and drier from mid-month as winds turned northerly and remained so as high pressure became established during the last week.

The year began with several rarities lingering from 2022. A **Great White Egret** seen at Donkey Street on the 1st and West Hythe on the 3rd was presumed to be the same bird that was seen Botolph's Bridge in late December, whilst a **Cattle Egret** seen at Botolph's Bridge on the 2nd and 6th, and then with European Bison at the Port Lympne Reserve on the 13th and 23rd, seems likely to have been the bird that was seen with the Bison there in late November. The **Ring-necked Parakeet** first seen in late September continued to be seen in the Seabrook/Sandgate area on several dates from the 3rd, and presumably the same bird had wandered as far east as The Bayle in Folkestone on the 28th. Finally, an **Egyptian Goose** at Cock Ash Lake on the 4th may have been the individual seen at Stone Farm near Postling Wents in late December.



Ring-necked Parakeet at Spring Lane Cemetery
(Ian Roberts)



Ring-necked Parakeet at Spring Lane Cemetery
(Brian Harper)

Red-legged Partridges were noted in good numbers, including flocks of 15 at Pent Farm and 19 at Kick Hill early in the month (there had only been two other double-figure counts locally since 2000), whilst two Grey Partridges were seen at Abbotscliffe on the 23rd.

There were some indications of an early up-channel passage of Brent Geese, with a peak of 340 flying east past Princes Parade on the 7th, whilst a count of 18 Shelduck flying west past Battery Point on the 3rd was noteworthy. Mandarin Ducks were located at Chesterfield Wood (1) and Folks' Wood (8), whilst two Shoveler were at Botolph's Bridge on the 1st and 14 Wigeon flew east past Princes Parade on the 2nd, with 20 (4 west, 16 east) passing there the following day. Counts of Mallard indicated a wintering population of over 380 birds, whilst there was a peak of 70 Teal at the Willop Basin on the 1st, with smaller numbers at the Port Lympne Reserve (5) and Chesterfield Wood (6). A drake Pochard at Woodside Farm Pond was likely to have been the same seen there late last year and small numbers of Tufted Ducks were noted at Cock Ash Lake and Hayton Lake.

A 'redhead' Goosander on the Oak Arm sewer (north of Nickolls Quarry) on the 1st seemed likely to have the same bird present in the area since November, whereas a flock of three 'redheads' on the canal at Seabrook the next day were new arrivals and may have been the same as two seen on the canal between Hythe and Palmarsh later the same day, three at Hythe on the 7th, three at Nickolls Quarry on the 11th, singles at Hythe and Nickolls Quarry on the 18th and two at Seabrook on the 20th. There was a peak of 24 Coot at Nickolls Quarry with smaller numbers at several other sites.

An Oystercatcher was seen on Dymchurch Beach on the 24th. Lapwings were only noted in small numbers, with peak counts of 21 at Capel-le-Ferne on the 16th, 30 at the Willop Basin on the 8th, 33 at Haguelands on the 21st, 45 at Donkey Street on the 19th and 87 at Botolph's Bridge on the 21st, whilst the only Golden Plovers were a single at Botolph's Bridge on the 6th and two Donkey Street on the 19th. At least 15 Ringed Plovers were present in the regular roost at Folkestone Beach. The only Curlew sighting of the month involved a single at Haguelands on the 21st.

Turnstone counts included 16 at the Dymchurch Redoubt and 24 at the Willop Outfall, whilst up to three Sanderling were seen at the latter site on several dates. Woodcock were found at Kiln Wood (1), Abbotscliffe (1), Paraker Wood (2) and Pond Hill Road (2), whilst a Jack Snipe remained at the Willop Basin, but numbers of Snipe were very low, with a peak of just six there on the 1st. Up to two Green Sandpipers remained in the Botolph's Bridge area and wintering Redshank involved up to six at both the Willop Basin and Folkestone Harbour.

There were some notable movements of Kittiwake, with 220 flying west past Samphire Hoe on the 1st, 240 flying west past Princes Parade on the 3rd and 70 flying west there on the 10th. Three adult Little Gulls were lingering off Battery Point on the 3rd, when a further two flew west past Princes Parade. A count of 700 Common Gulls at Horton Park on the 4th was notable, as was a Sandwich Tern flying west past Hythe on the 1st.

Auks were generally present in only small numbers, although 70 Guillemots flew west past Samphire Hoe on the 1st and a total of 425 Guillemots/Razorbills flew west past Princes Parade on the 3rd, whilst counts of Red-throated Diver included 16 flying west past Samphire Hoe on the 1st, 18 flying west past Princes Parade on the 3rd and 68 flying west there on the 8th. At least four Fulmars had returned to Samphire Hoe by the 1st, whilst two were seen off Princes Parade on the 7th, and 80 Gannets were also noted at Samphire Hoe on the 1st, where a single Shag was seen on a few dates. Several thousand Cormorants continued to be noted in Hythe Bay.

Five Little Egrets were roosting at the Port Lympne Reserve and noted at various sites on the marsh during the day, whilst singles were noted at Casebourne Farm, Pond Hill Road and Folkestone Harbour. Single Barn Owls continued to roost at the West Hythe dam and in the Hougham Valley, whilst Kingfishers were seen regularly along the canal but the wintering bird at Folkestone Harbour was sadly found moribund on the 26th. A Merlin was at Botolph's Bridge on the 13th. A flock of 8 Ravens flying west over Castle Hill on the 13th was worthy of note, as was a count of 680 Jackdaws at Lympne Park Wood on the 28th. Marsh Tits were noted at Chesterfield Wood and Round Hill.



Goosanders at Hythe (Peter Holliday)



Kingfisher at Folkestone Harbour (Steve Wood)

At least ten Chiffchaffs were wintering across the area, with three at the Willop Sewage Works, three along the canal between the Aldergate Bridge and Seabrook, and singles at Haguelands, Donkey Street, Botolph's Bridge and Nickolls Quarry, as were at least 11 Blackcaps, with four in gardens in Hythe, two in a garden in Seabrook, singles in gardens in Cheriton and Folkestone, two along the canal (near Palmarsh and Seabrook) and one near Folkestone Harbour, and Firecrests comprised two at Paraker Wood, Shorncliffe Military Cemetery and Enbrook Park and singles at Nickolls Quarry and Pond Hill Road.

Winter thrushes however were only noted in small numbers, with the only notable counts being 60 Fieldfares at Cock Ash Lake, 50 Redwings at Horton Park and 55 Redwings in the Bluehouse Wood area. Two Tree Sparrows were seen at Abbotscliffe on the 9th and there were also counts of five Reed Buntings, 21 Corn Buntings, 42 Chaffinches and 43 Yellowhammers there. There were also up to ten Corn Buntings and 30 Yellowhammers at Botolph's Bridge and 60 Chaffinches and 70 Linnets at Kick Hill, but the only wintering Siskins were five at Cock Ash Lake.

February

February was notably dry, with high pressure influencing the weather for much of the time. It was unsettled initially, and again for a time from mid-month, but overall was provisionally the driest February nationally since 1993. Temperatures were close to the average, with a milder spell around mid-month.

The clear highlight of February was the discovery of the area's first **Hume's Warbler** at Enbrook Park on the 11th and it was still delighting locals and visitors there at the end of the month.



Hume's Warbler at Enbrook Park (Mike Fitch)



Hume's Warbler at Enbrook Park (Brian Harper)

There were some signs of Brent Goose passage towards the end of the month, with 50 flying east past Seabrook on the 21st and eight flying east there on the 23rd. Two **Egyptian Geese** flew over Botolph's Bridge on the 3rd and two Shelduck flew east at Samphire Hoe on the 8th. Mandarin Ducks were noted at Chesterfield Wood (3) and Folks' Wood (13). A pair of Wigeon were seen at Nickolls Quarry on the 8th, whilst Tufted Ducks were present at Woodside Farm Pond (a drake) and Cock Ash Lake (up to eight).

Up to 20 Stock Doves and 1,400 Woodpigeons were noted at Abbotscliffe and up to 25 Coot were at Nickolls Quarry. Numbers of Great Crested Grebes began to increase at the end of the month, with 47 counted on the sea off Seabrook on the 28th. An Oystercatcher was seen at Nickolls Quarry on the 4th, whilst a Curlew was at the Willop Basin the following day. Single Woodcock were noted at Folks' Wood, Pent Farm and Oak Banks and a Jack Snipe was flushed at Donkey Street on the 18th. A Green Sandpiper remained in the Botolph's Bridge area, as did six Redshank at Folkestone Harbour.

A Shag was seen at Samphire Hoe on the 4th and 66 Gannets flew east there on the 26th. Up to seven Little Egrets were noted in the West Hythe area, with another at Samphire Hoe on several dates. A Red Kite flew west at Sellindge on the 5th. A Barn Owl was seen near Stanford on the 2nd, whilst Selby Farm produced a Little Owl on the 25th and a **Long-eared Owl** on the 27th.

The **Ring-necked Parakeet** remained from January until at least the 11th, mostly being seen in the Sandgate/Seabrook area but also ranging east to Mill Point and Folkestone Beach. A total of 81 Carrion Crows were seen on the rocks at Samphire Hoe on the 8th, whilst 1,100 Jackdaws were noted at Lympe Park Wood on the 3rd.

Marsh Tits were seen at Brockhill Country Park (2) and Casebourne Wood (2). Skylark counts included 18 at Donkey Street and 42 at Abbotscliffe.

Chiffchaffs were noted at West Hythe dam, Mill Leese, Enbrook Park, Aldergate Bridge (2), Seabrook (2) and the Willop Sewage Works (4), whilst Blackcaps were seen at Scanlon's Bridge (Hythe), in a garden in Cheriton and at Mill Point, and Firecrests were at Brockhill Country Park, Twiss Road (Hythe), Mill Point, Sandgate Hill (2), Enbrook Park (4) and Port Lymgne (7). Winter thrush numbers remained low, with a peak of just 20 Redwings at Pent Farm.



Blackcap at Hythe (Shaun Ranger)



Firecrest at Port Lymgne (Barry Wright)

A Black Redstart was seen on rocks at the Dymchurch Redoubt on the 5th, whilst 54 Pied Wagtails were counted at the Willop Sewage Works on the 3rd. A Siskin flew east at Abbotscliffe on the 25th, whilst five were seen at Woodside Farm Pond on the 18th. Stubble fields at Abbotscliffe held up to two Tree Sparrows, 14 Reed Buntings, 30 Corn Buntings, 40 Chaffinches and 62 Yellowhammers, whilst 23 Yellowhammers were noted at Botolph's Bridge.



Yellowhammer at Aldington Road (Brian Harper)



Siskin at Woodside Farm (Brian Harper)