

# Bar-tailed Godwit

*Limosa lapponica*

Category A

Passage migrant, mainly in spring.

*World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):*

Breeds mainly on the coastal belt of low-lying tundra across the low Arctic in Fenno-Scandia and Russia, eastwards across northernmost Siberia and in western Alaska. West Palearctic birds winter mostly along the North Sea and Atlantic coasts of Europe and Africa.

*Kent status (KOS 2021):*

In Kent it is a locally common passage migrant and winter visitor, with non-breeding birds occasionally summering. It is scarce inland.



Bar-tailed Godwits at Princes Parade (Nigel Webster)

The Bar-tailed Godwit was not included in Knight and Tolputt's "List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood" (1871) and the first documented local records date from 1957 when Roger Norman noted a small up-channel passage past Hythe Ranges, with a total of 60 flying east between the 25<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> April (Norman 2006). On the latter date two were seen on the "airfield" at Nickolls Quarry and 13 flew north-east over the site. Later the same year a flock of 13 flew south-west over Nickolls Quarry on the 4<sup>th</sup> September, whilst a single bird was seen there the following spring, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1968 (Norman 2007).

On the 25<sup>th</sup> April 1960 David Musson saw 200 flying east past Folkestone, whilst Kent Bird Reports note that 409 flew east past Sandgate in one hour on the 26<sup>th</sup> April 1972 (which is still the record count to date) and 26 flew east past Copt Point on the 27<sup>th</sup> April 1983.

Regular coverage from 1988 has revealed it to be annual in occurrence on up-channel migration but numbers have fluctuated considerably and are closely associated with favourable weather conditions for seawatching during its fairly narrow period of peak passage.

## Overall distribution

Figure 1 shows the distribution of all records of Bar-tailed Godwit by tetrad, with records in 14 tetrads (45%).

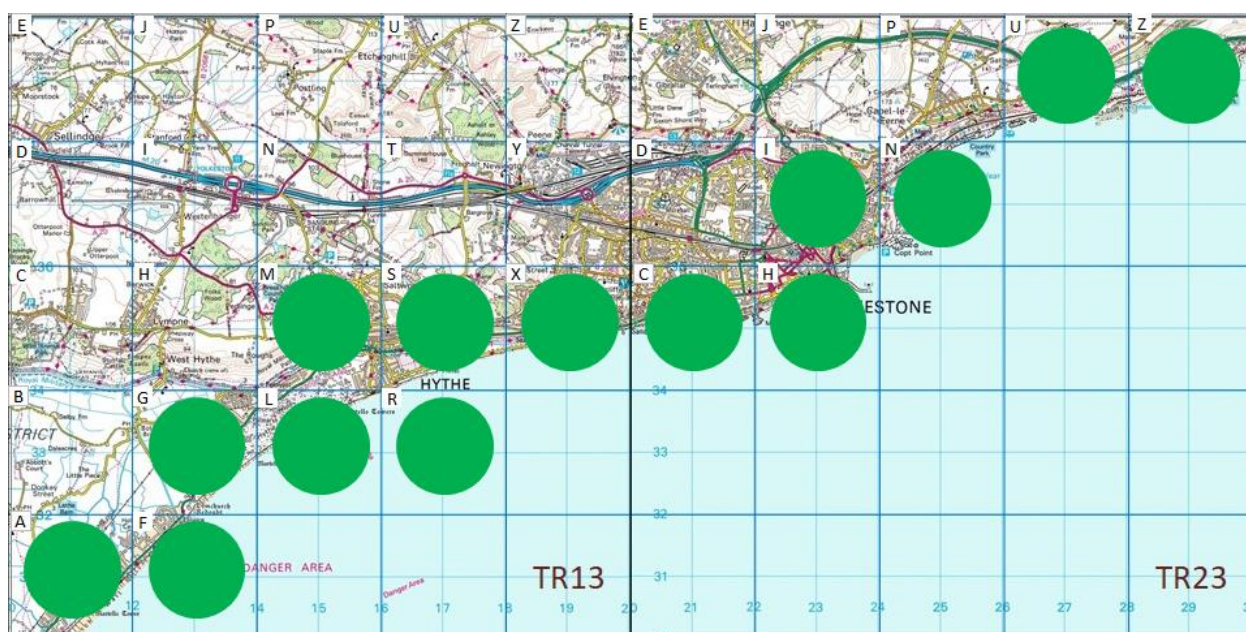


Figure 1: Distribution of all Bar-tailed Godwit records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Locally over 98% of spring passage occurs between mid-April and mid-May, with almost 75% in the last week of April and first week of May. The mean total over the last 20 years has been 200 per annum, with a peak of 891 in 2011.

Birds have been noted moving up-channel in small numbers from early March but these sightings have typically been associated with cold weather, rather than being true spring migrants. The only double-figure counts in March have involved 11 flying east past Princes Parade on the 1<sup>st</sup> March 2018, 23 flying east past Samphire Hoe the next day and 14 flying east there on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2013, whilst the first half of April has produced 25 flying east past Samphire Hoe on the 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2015 and 15 flying east there on the 8<sup>th</sup> April 2017.

The main passage occurs between mid-April and mid-May, when counts of 150 or more have been noted on ten occasions:

- 247 flying east past Copt Point on the 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2000
- 180 flying east past Copt Point 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2001
- 235 flying east past Copt Point 30<sup>th</sup> April 2004
- A flock of about 260 flying east past Samphire Hoe 26<sup>th</sup> Apr 2005
- 150 flying east past Samphire Hoe 23<sup>rd</sup> April 06
- 195 flying east past Copt Point 30<sup>th</sup> April 2007
- 235 flying east past Copt Point 1<sup>st</sup> May 2007
- 260 flying east past Samphire Hoe 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2008
- 265 flying east past Samphire Hoe 28<sup>th</sup> April 2011
- 228 flying east past Copt Point 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2011

The vast majority of spring sightings relate to birds seen moving east offshore but small numbers are occasionally seen on the shore or, more rarely, inland.



A mixed flock of Bar-tailed Godwits and Whimbrels heading east past Princes Parade (Nigel Webster)



At Nickolls Quarry it was noted in eight years in the 1990s/2000s, with up to four birds noted on 11 dates between the 22<sup>nd</sup> April and 25<sup>th</sup> May, whilst two were seen at the Willop Basin on the 30<sup>th</sup> April 2007, preceding an exceptional count of 60 there on the 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2007, one was seen in on pasture inland of the Hythe Redoubt on the 10<sup>th</sup> May 2010, three were on the Hythe Imperial golf course on the 11<sup>th</sup> May 2016 and one was seen on pasture near the Willop Sewage Works on the 12<sup>th</sup> April 2021. A flock of about 25 were seen flying low east over Saltwood on the 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2012.

Very few have been noted in the second half of May (with sightings in just three years and a peak of five flying east past Samphire Hoe on the 21<sup>st</sup> May 2013), in June (with just three records of ones or twos) or in July (with a single record of four flying out to sea from Copt Point on the 16<sup>th</sup> July 1993).



Bar-tailed Godwits at Folkestone Sunny Sands (Ian Roberts)



Bar-tailed Godwits at Princes Parade (Nigel Webster)

Autumn passage is very irregular with sightings in just 11 years since 1990. Records have fallen between the 14<sup>th</sup> August and 13<sup>th</sup> November and have primarily involved birds moving west at sea, with counts usually numbering up to three. Larger flocks have involved nine flying west past Samphire Hoe on the 29<sup>th</sup> August 2014, 12 flying west past Copt Point on the 25<sup>th</sup> August 2020 and about 120 flying west past Samphire Hoe on the 16<sup>th</sup> August 2008.

Winter records are also scarce and have typically been associated with cold weather, with sightings in seven years since 1990. Occurrences usually involve ones or twos at coastal sites or passing by offshore with a larger count of eight flying east past Hythe on the 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2010.

### **References**

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### **Acknowledgements**

The tetrad map images were produced from the Ordnance Survey [Get-a-map service](https://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/get-a-map) and are reproduced with kind permission of [Ordnance Survey](https://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk). I am indebted to Andrew Henderson and Tim Hodge for providing access to the Kent Ornithological Society archives.



Bar-tailed Godwits at Folkestone Sands (David Featherbe)