

Whooper Swan

Cygnus cygnus

Category A

Very rare vagrant.

10 records,
23 birds

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

There are two discrete breeding populations in the western Palearctic, one in Iceland and the other in Fenno-Scandia and Russia. The former winters in Britain and Ireland, and the latter in north Germany, Denmark and Sweden, continuing to the Low Countries in cold weather. It is uncertain whether any of this second population reaches Britain regularly.



Whooper Swan at Botolph's Bridge (Ian Roberts)

Kent status (KOS 2022):

It is a scarce passage migrant and winter visitor to the county. Taylor *et al.* (1981) noted that the status of the Whooper Swan had remained unchanged in Kent during a period which had seen the Bewick's Swan increase from a great rarity to a regular winter visitor.

Ticehurst (1909) wrote that it "has never been more than an irregular visitor to the Kentish coasts and marshes, to which it is only driven by the onset of severe weather", and noted one in the Folkestone Museum that had been "shot by Mr. Turner at Hythe" (Mr. Benjamin Turner was the gamekeeper of Major H. W. Deedes of the Saltwood Castle estate). No date was given but it was presumably prior to 1871 as the species was included in Knight and Tolputt's "List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood" published in that year.

The first dated local record occurred in 1959, when David Musson saw one at Folkestone on the 2nd November and the same observer noted another there on the 13th October of the following year.

There were no further sightings until 1985, when eight were reported flying south-west over Folkestone on the 8th January, whilst in 1990 three that were "present in the Dymchurch area" between 12th January and 4th February were reportedly seen at Nickolls Quarry on occasion. There have been five subsequent records, two from Abbotscliffe, two from Nickolls Quarry and one from Botolph's Bridge (the only bird to have lingered in recent times).

The records by year are shown in figure 1.

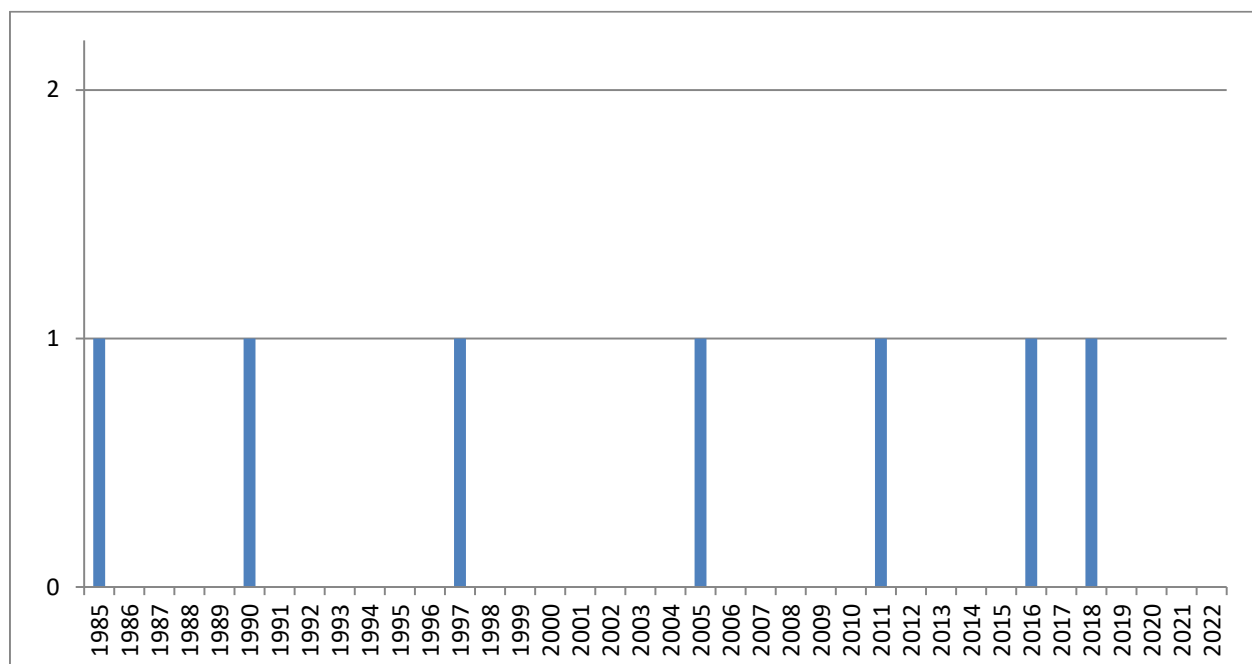


Figure 1: Whooper Swan records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

All dated records fall between 13th October (week 41) and 8th January (week 2). The records by week are given in figure 2 and there are two additional undated records (one from January/February).

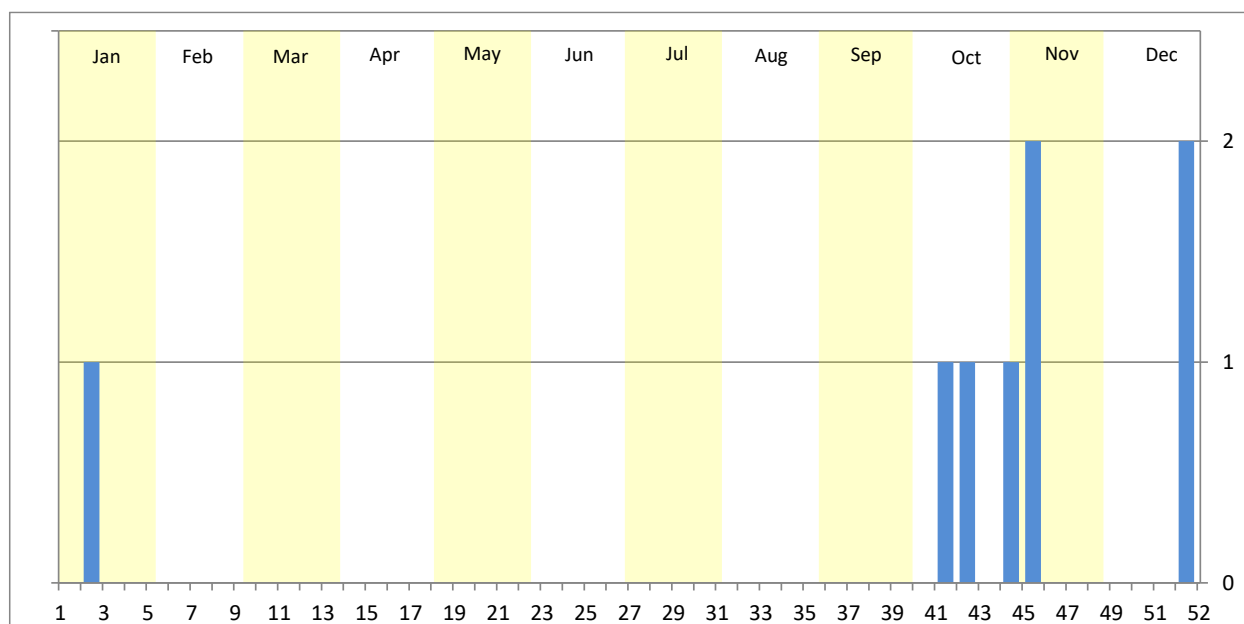


Figure 2: Whooper Swan records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the location of records by tetrad. The first four records have not been included on the map as the location provided was not specific to a tetrad. Four of the six most recent sightings have been from Botolph's Bridge or Nickolls Quarry, with the other two at Abbotscliffe.

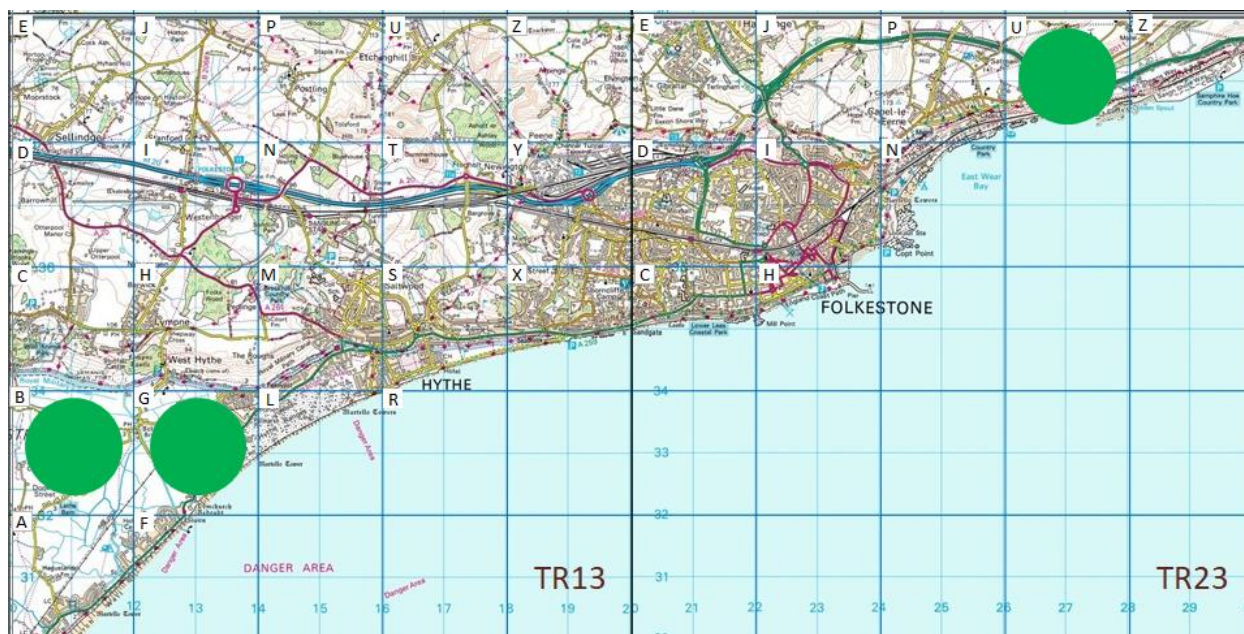


Figure 3: Distribution of all Whooper Swan records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The full list of records is as follows:

- Prior to 1871** Hythe, one shot, undated (B. Turner)
- 1959** Folkestone, one, 2nd November (D. F. Musson)
- 1960** Folkestone, one, 13th October (D. F. Musson)
- 1985** Folkestone, eight flew south-west, 8th January (reported)
- 1990** Nickolls Quarry, three that were present in the Dymchurch area between 12th January and 4th February were reportedly seen at Nickolls Quarry on occasion (reported)
- 1997** Abbotscliffe, two flew south, 20th October (I. A. Roberts)
- 2005** Nickolls Quarry, three flew east, 28th December (I. A. Roberts)

2011 Nickolls Quarry, two flew west, 9th November (M. Casemore)

2016 Botolph's Bridge, adult, 6th to 16th November, photographed and video-recorded (B. Harper, I. A. Roberts, N. Webster *et al*)

2018 Abbotscliffe, one flew east, 26th December (M. Kennett)

Click [here](#) to watch a local short video recording of one at Botolph's Bridge in November 2016 (Mike Linklater).

References

Kent Ornithological Society (KOS) 1953-2022. *Kent Bird Reports*. Kent Ornithological Society.

Knight, V. & Tolputt, F. 1871. List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood. *Fourth Annual Report of the Folkestone Natural History Society*. Available at: www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/46103

Taylor, D., Davenport, D. & Flegg, J. 1981. *Birds of Kent*. Kent Ornithological Society.

Ticehurst, N. F. 1909. *A History of the Birds of Kent*. Witherby, London.

Acknowledgements

The tetrad map images were produced from the Ordnance Survey [Get-a-map service](#) and are reproduced with kind permission of [Ordnance Survey](#).

I am indebted to Andrew Henderson and Tim Hodge for providing access to the Kent Ornithological Society archives.



Whooper Swan at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)