

Pallid Swift

Apus pallidus

Category A

Very rare vagrant.

1 record, 2 birds

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds mainly in coastal areas around the Mediterranean basin as far north as southern France. Appears to winter principally in the northern Afrotropics. It differs from other European swifts in being double-brooded, so it remains later into autumn in the breeding areas, which results in the tendency for late autumn occurrences in Britain and northern Europe. Winter records from the breeding range are not rare.

Kent status (KOS 2021):

Rare vagrant.

British (BBRC) records to end 2020: 132

Kent (KOS) records to end 2020: 19

Since the first Kent and British record that lingered at Stodmarsh between the 13th and 24th May 1978, the Pallid Swift has occurred in the country with increasing regularity, having been noted in all but three years since 1996. It is prone to marked influxes, typically in late autumn, with totals of 12 in 1999 and 2001, 16 in 2004 and 23 in 2018 (BBRC no date; Holt *et al.* 2021). The 19 occurrences in Kent included six records in 2013 and four in 2018, with most recent sightings having occurred on the Isle of Thanet (KOS no date).

The only local record involved two birds seen by Dale Gibson over Folkestone during one of the national influx years on the 2nd November 1999.

The record by year is shown in figure 1.

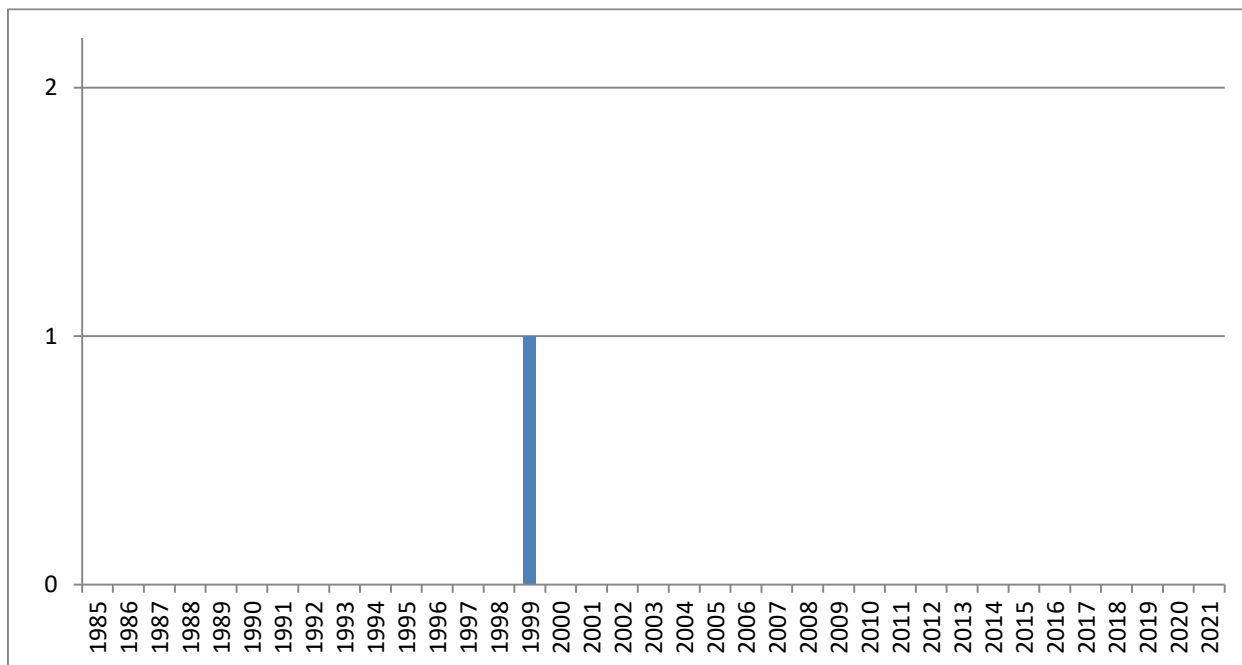


Figure 1: Pallid Swift records at Folkestone and Hythe

The record by week is shown in figure 2.

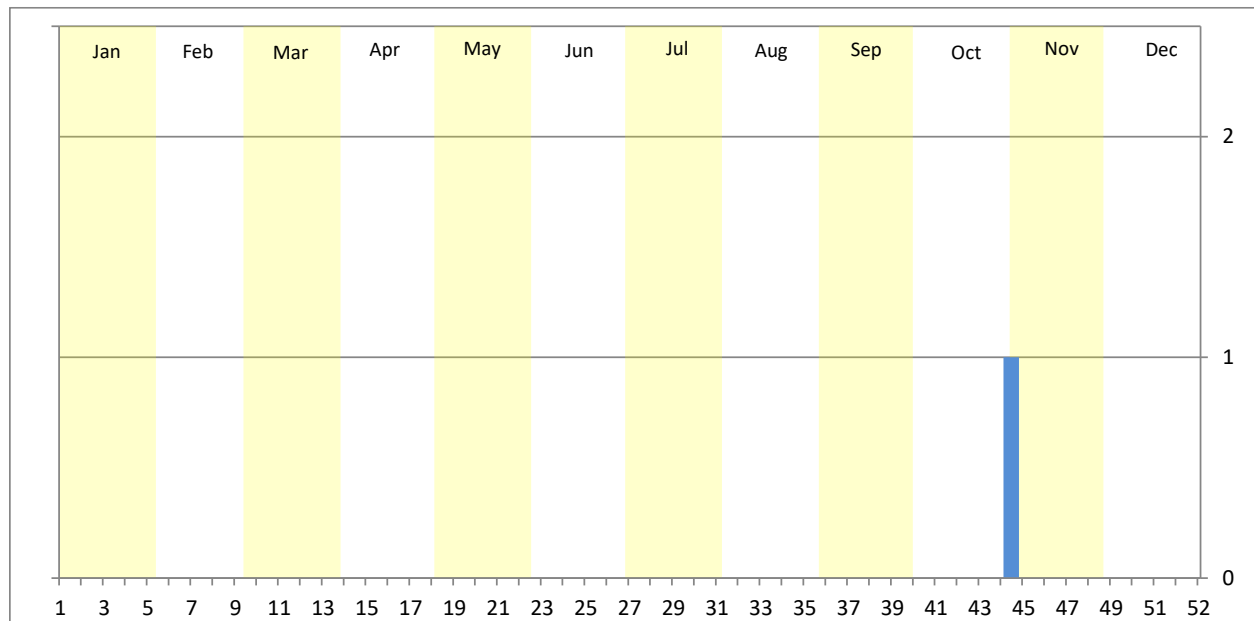


Figure 2: Pallid Swift records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the location of the record by tetrad.



Figure 3: Distribution of all Pallid Swift records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Confirmation of the only area record is as follows:

1999 Folkestone, two, 2nd November (D. A. Gibson).

An account of the first area record are given below.

Pallid Swifts at Folkestone

2nd November 1999

By Dale Gibson

Circumstances of the find:

Lucy, my daughter, was born on the 29th October 1999 and as a result I had found myself walking around like a zombie lately. The 2nd November was no different. My mother decided to sit out in the garden for a ciggie and as I needed some fresh air I joined her outside. When I wandered out I noticed two swifts feeding a short distance away to the west over the town. As it was a very late date for Common Swift I ran indoors to find my telescope, and dusted it down on the way out.

A few minutes later I was watching one of the swifts but the light was bad, as the sun was very low in the sky to the west. I searched for the second bird and located it further around to the east feeding over houses a couple of hundred yards up my road. The light was much better on this bird and it quickly became apparent that this was a very pale bird indeed. This is probably the point at which I began shaking with excitement recalling that this was the best autumn ever for Pallid Swift in Britain.

I continued to note the features on this bird and took a description which is given below. The two birds fed together for about 30 minutes but mostly in the sun, and the structure was identical so I assume that the second bird was a Pallid. They then drifted further over Folkestone and were not seen again. I phoned Ian Roberts at work and let Birdline know.

Description of the bird:

Head and upperparts: The facial pattern was distinctive with an obvious dark 'patch' around the eye on an otherwise sandy-coloured head. The throat was pale whitish and blended in gradually with the underparts, the throat patch being much larger and never as clear-cut as in Common Swift.

The upperwings were similar to the underwings, with paler centres and darker leading edges and primaries. The bird had a darker saddle and paler rump. The bird came as close as approximately 50-100 yards and, as I've previous experience of Pallid Swift, I looked for the 'blunter' wing-tips and although on occasion they did look to be less sharp than Common this was very difficult to see without direct comparison

Underparts: The under-wings and especially the central part were very pale sandy coloured and contrasted with a much darker leading edge and darker primary "patch". The underbody had a slightly darker tone.

Comments on the record:

1999 saw an unprecedented influx of Pallid Swifts into Britain with 13 seen between the 23rd October and 5th November, which equalled the total previous records for the country. This was the fourth county record.

References

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Holt, C., French, P. & the Rarities Committee 2021. Report on rare birds in Great Britain in 2020. *British Birds* 114: 570-628.

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Kent Ornithological Society (KOS). The Kent List. <https://kentos.org.uk/index.php/recording/the-kent-list> (accessed 2021).

Snow, D. & Perrins, C.M. 1998. *The Birds of the Western Palearctic*. Oxford University Press.

Acknowledgements

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