

Bearded Tit

Panurus biarmicus

Category A

Rare passage migrant and winter visitor. 23 records, 59 birds

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998, Eaton et al. 2022):

It has a scattered distribution across mid-latitude Europe and central Asia to north-east China, being restricted to areas of suitable wetland. European populations are basically fairly sedentary, but subject to eruptive (diurnal) movements, the extent of which vary greatly and result in considerable fluctuation of range. Breeding areas are much reduced after severe winters. In Britain it is mainly found in southern and eastern areas, with around 700 breeding pairs across nearly 100 sites.

Kent status (KOS 2022):

It is a local breeder in Kent, also a passage migrant and winter visitor to the county.



Bearded Tit at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)

Ticehurst (1909) noted that Bearded Tits were common in the north Kent marshes until about 1865 when they were lost due to destruction of reed-beds, whilst Harrison (1953) reported that it became re-established for a few years in east Kent until extirpated by the severe winter of 1947. Clements *et al.* (2015) wrote that how, since the end of 1940s, when only a handful of pairs bred in East Anglia, numbers have increased markedly at a national level. The major increase in reed-bed habitat, allied to milder winters and a growing population in the Dutch polders has allowed the species to spread throughout suitable habitat in Britain. The Kent population was thought to be in excess of 100 pairs in the most recent atlas and occupying almost all available habitat within the county.

Taylor *et al.* (1981) noted that there is usually some irruptive behaviour and emigration from breeding sites in October to November, when there are widespread reports along river valleys, in gravel pits and at small, isolated reed beds throughout the county, whilst small numbers are also recorded regularly from coastal sites in autumn, suggesting arrival from the Continent, whilst a few have actually been seen coming in off the sea.

It was first recorded locally on the 3rd November 1983, when a pair were seen in reeds between West Hythe and the West Hythe Dam by Neil Frampton, then almost ten years later two were reported in the same area on the 14th September 1993.



Bearded Tit at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)



Bearded Tit at Nickolls Quarry (Ian Roberts)

One was seen briefly in the reeds at the south end of the 'main bay' at Nickolls Quarry by Roger Norman on the 12th November 1998 before it flew off to the south-west. This site then saw a notable influx in autumn in 2001, when up to eight were present in reeds near the sewage works between the 28th October and 1st November, with two (thought probably to be a mobile part of same flock, although it is possible there may have been some 'turnover' of birds) in the "long bay" there on the 29th October (Norman 2007). This record was part of a wider influx along the south coast of England, which also included the first area record away from the Marsh: two which flew west past Abbotscliffe on the 1st November.



Bearded Tit at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)



Bearded Tit at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)

Nickolls Quarry then hosted an over-wintering pair in 2006/07, with an additional bird present for at least a week in December, two in January 2012 and one in December 2013. There were at least five there in December 2014, with at least four remaining into early April 2015 raising hopes that they might breed, but there were no further sightings.

Five were again present at the same site from January 2016 with a pair remaining until early April, with the male even heard singing but it departed soon after. There were four at this site again from November 2016 and a record count of 12 in October 2017, remaining until at least December, with two there in January 2018.



Bearded Tit at Beachborough Lakes (Steve Tomlinson)



Bearded Tit at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)

Nickolls Quarry has also hosted spring records of singles on the 16th March 2009 and 27th May 2012, and a pair on the 21st April 2018. There had been no sightings at Nickolls Quarry between April 2018 and November 2022, when a single was seen along the eastern side of the lake. The main reed-bed has largely been destroyed due to housing development work at the site, so occurrences at this site are likely to be less frequent.

Elsewhere Samphire Hoe recorded its first in October 2010, Abbotscliffe attracted another in the same month and singles were seen at Beachborough Lakes in October and November 2017, and April 2019. The records by year are shown in figure 1.

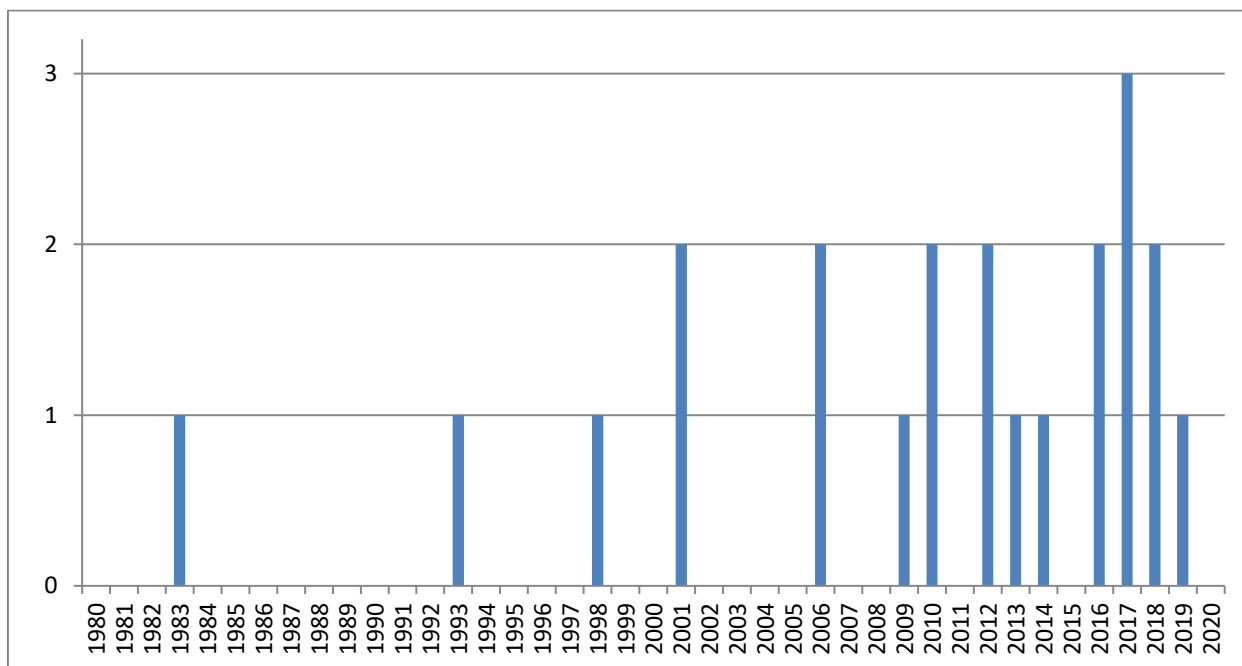


Figure 1: Bearded Tit records at Folkestone and Hythe

Most sightings have been in autumn, between mid-September (week 37) and mid-November (week 47), with others in December, January, March, April, and May, as demonstrated by figure 2.

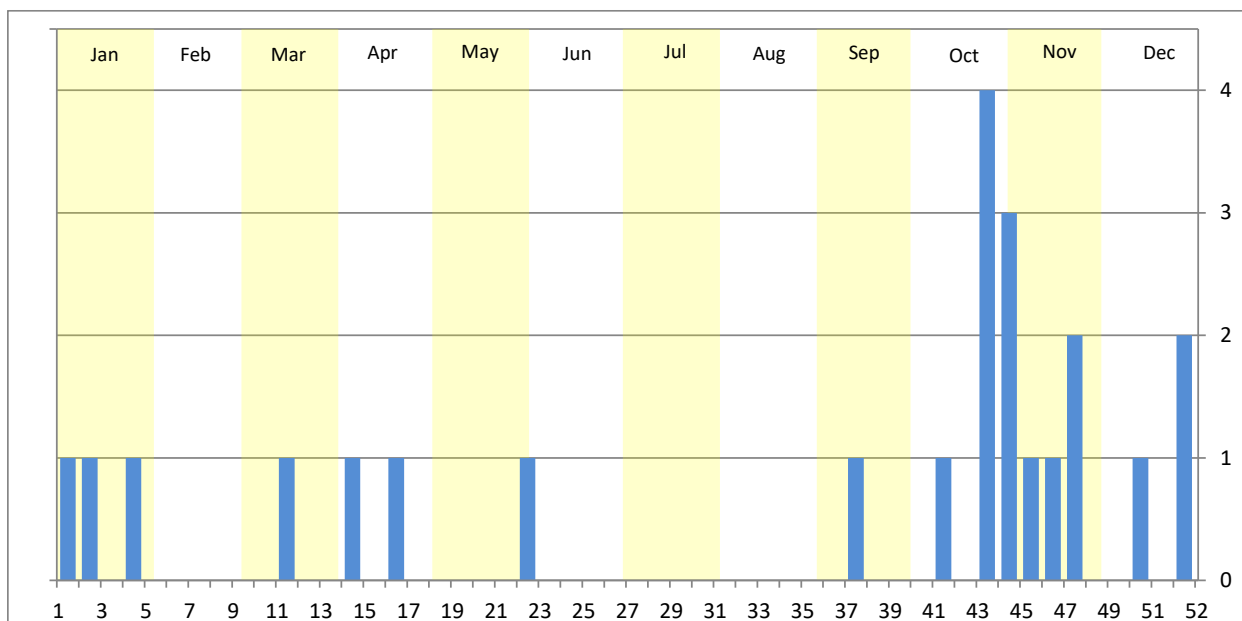


Figure 2: Bearded Tit records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the location of records by tetrad.



Figure 3: Distribution of all Bearded Tit records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1983** Botolph's Bridge, pair between West Hythe and West Hythe Dam, 3rd November (N. C. Frampton)
- 1993** Botolph's Bridge, two along the canal cutting towards West Hythe Dam, 14th September (per R. K. Norman)
- 1998** Nickolls Quarry, one, seen briefly then flew south-west, 12th November (R. K. Norman)
- 2001** Nickolls Quarry, up to eight, 28th October to 1st November (R. K. Norman, D. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)
- 2001** Abbotscliffe, two flew west, 1st November (I. A. Roberts)
- 2006** Nickolls Quarry, pair, 21st November to 2nd March 2007, photographed (R. K. Norman, I. A. Roberts), with additional female or immature from 10th to 17th December
- 2009** Nickolls Quarry, male, 16th March, photographed (I. A. Roberts)
- 2010** Samphire Hoe, one, 13th October (P. Holt, T. Prentice)
- 2010** Abbotscliffe, one in bushes then flew west, 24th October (I. A. Roberts)
- 2012** Nickolls Quarry, two immature/females, 10th January, photographed (I. A. Roberts)
- 2012** Nickolls Quarry, one, 27th May (M. Harper)
- 2013** Nickolls Quarry, male, 26th December to at least 5th January 2014 (B. Harper, R. K. Norman, I. A. Roberts)
- 2014** Nickolls Quarry, at least five, 28th December, with at least four remaining until 5th April 2015, photographed (B. Harper, I. A. Roberts, R. K. Norman)
- 2016** Nickolls Quarry, five (three males), 3rd January to at least 24th February, with a pair remaining until at least 2nd April, and the male to the 8th April, photographed (B. Harper, I. A. Roberts)
- 2016** Nickolls Quarry, two, 6th to 13th November, increasing to four (two males) on the 18th November and remaining until at least early January, photographed (B. Harper, I. A. Roberts)
- 2017** Beachborough Lakes, one flew west, 26th October, photographed (S. Tomlinson)
- 2017** Nickolls Quarry, 12, 28th October to at least 6th December, photographed (B. Harper, I. A. Roberts)
- 2017** Beachborough Lakes, one, 1st November (S. Tomlinson)
- 2018** Nickolls Quarry, two, 26th January (M. Varley), possibly involving some birds from 2017
- 2018** Nickolls Quarry, pair, 21st April, photographed (B. Harper)
- 2019** Beachborough Lakes, one flew west, 9th April (S. Tomlinson)
- 2022** Nickolls Quarry, one, 22nd to 25th November, photographed (I. A. Roberts, B. Harper)

References

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Acknowledgements

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

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Bearded Tit at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)