

Avocet

Recurvirostra avosetta

Category A

Scarce passage migrant.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

It is a well-scattered and localised breeding species across much of Europe. Having declined in the north-west of the continent in the nineteenth century, it recovered in the twentieth, with quite a rapid increase in the latter part of that century, particularly in Britain and the Netherlands.

It is migratory in the northern part of the breeding range, grading to dispersive in the south. British-bred birds generally remain within the country in winter, although there is a movement mainly of East Anglian birds to the south-west of England.

Kent status (KOS 2021):

In Kent it is a rapidly increasing summer visitor, passage migrant and winter visitor. It is scarce inland.



Avocets at the Willop Basin (Brian Harper)

The Avocet was not included in Knight and Tolputt's "List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood" (1871). Ticehurst (1909) lamented the loss of the species as a breeding bird, with the last confirmed nesting in the county and the country occurring in 1842. It had formerly bred in Romney Marsh where "it was probably quite numerous up until the end of the eighteenth or beginning of the nineteenth centuries".

The cause of its demise was attributed to a combination of drainage of marshes and excessive shooting. Ticehurst stated that it could still be met with on passage noting that "in Romney Marsh and along the neighbouring coastline it is almost, if not quite, an annual spring visitor", although there are no specific references to the local area.

The next recorded breeding in Britain took place almost a century later in Suffolk, during the Second World War when disturbance was at a minimum due to wartime precautions. It slowly became re-established in Britain and returned to Kent as a regular winter visitor from 1954. A pair successfully bred in north Kent in 1958 however it was not until 1983 that the present colonisation began, becoming an annual breeder by 1986 (Clements *et al.* 2015).

Holling *et al.* (2019) described how in the first "Rare breeding birds in the UK" report (covering 1973) there were 149 breeding pairs, with 145 of those at two RSPB reserves in Suffolk, whereas in 2017 there was a record count of over 2,250 pairs at 139 sites across the country, including 337 pairs at 14 sites in Kent.

The first area record occurred on the 20th April 1958, when Roger Norman, George Shannon and C. J. Booth saw one flying in from the south and circling the "new pit" at the site that is now known as Nickolls Quarry, but it did not alight and continued on (Norman 2007).

There was then a thirty-year gap until Ian Roberts saw a flock of 13 flying east past Mill Point on the 8th May 1988, with another heading east there on the 24th April 1990. Roger Norman then saw two flying west past Hythe Ranges on the 14th April 1992 and an exceptional flock of 30 (which is still the record count to date) flying west there on the 9th November 1992 (Norman 2006).

Since then, however it has occurred almost annually, in line with the national increase, with records in all but four of the last 31 years, as figure 1 demonstrates. 2001 was the best year so far with eight records. There had been a total of 77 area records (involving a total of 303 birds) as at March 2023.

The records by year are shown in figure 1.

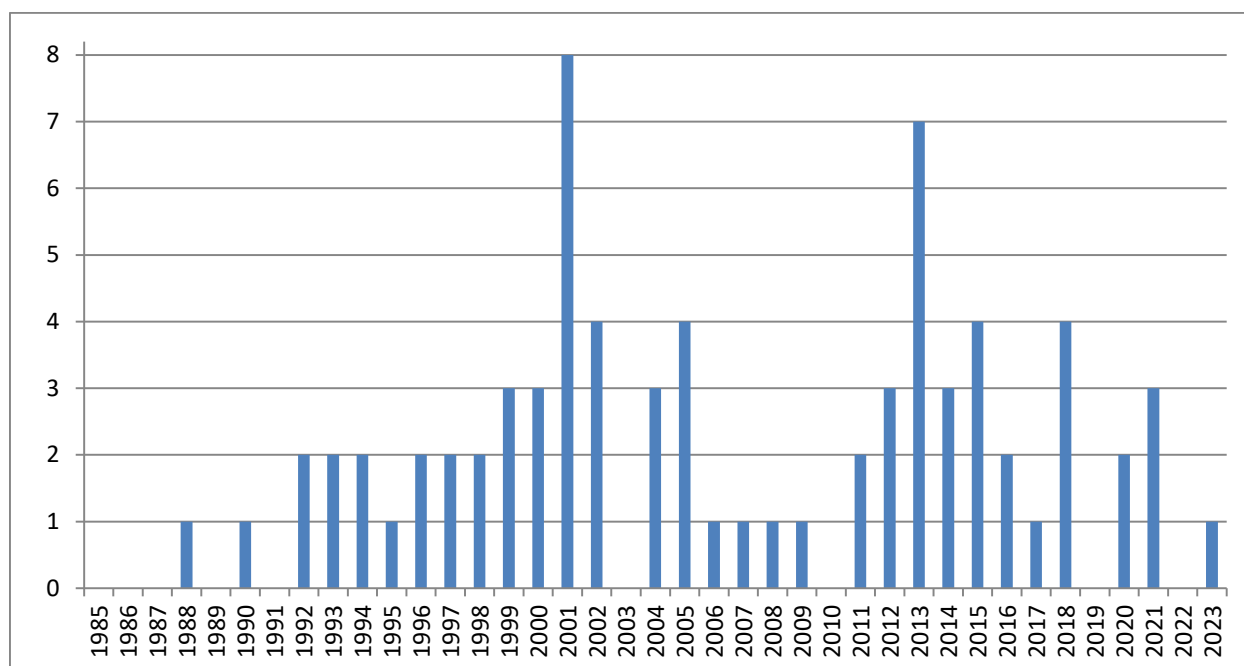


Figure 1: Avocet records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

Figure 2 shows the arrival dates by week. 76% have occurred in the first half of the year, with extreme dates of 8th February and 17th June, and a peak between mid-March and mid-May. Records in the latter half of the year are more scattered, with three in each of August and September, one in October, seven in November and two in December.

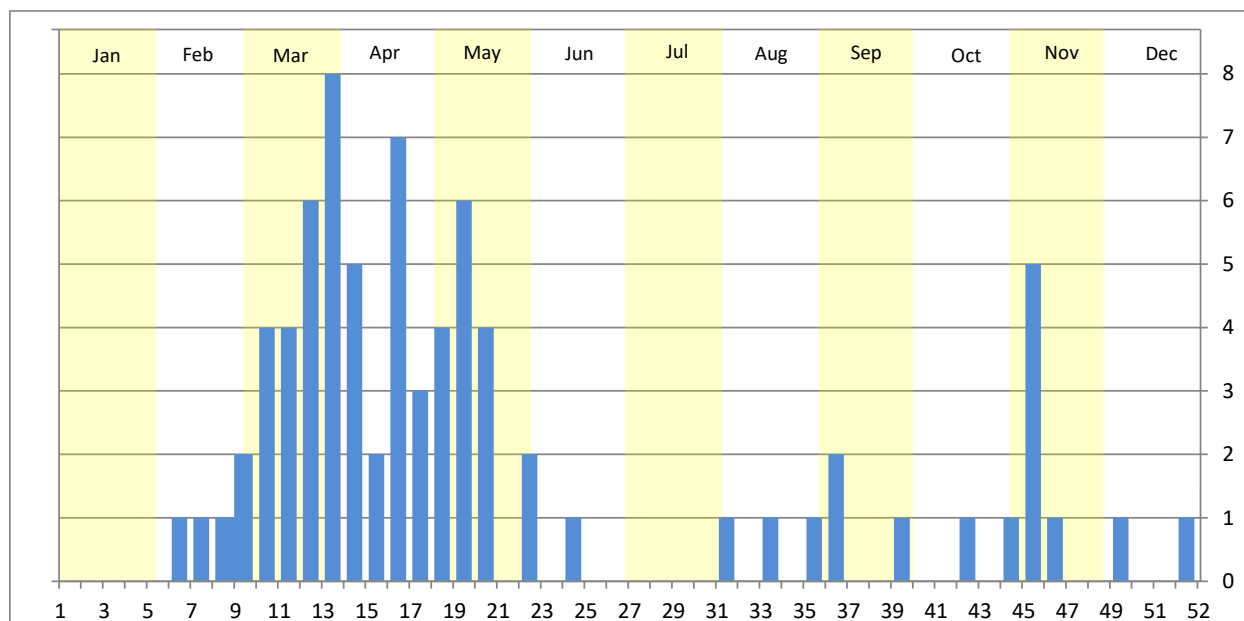


Figure 2: Avocet records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Overall distribution

Figure 3 shows the distribution of records by tetrad, with sightings in 11 (35%) of tetrads. Nickolls Quarry is still the site that has produced the most records (with 21) but only one of those has occurred since 2006 (when the habitat became less attractive to waders). Almost all the other records are coastal, with 14 at Copt Point, 14 at Samphire Hoe, 11 at Mill Point/Folkestone Beach and 15 between Sandgate and the Willop Outfall. There have also been two records from the flooded fields at the Willop Basin.

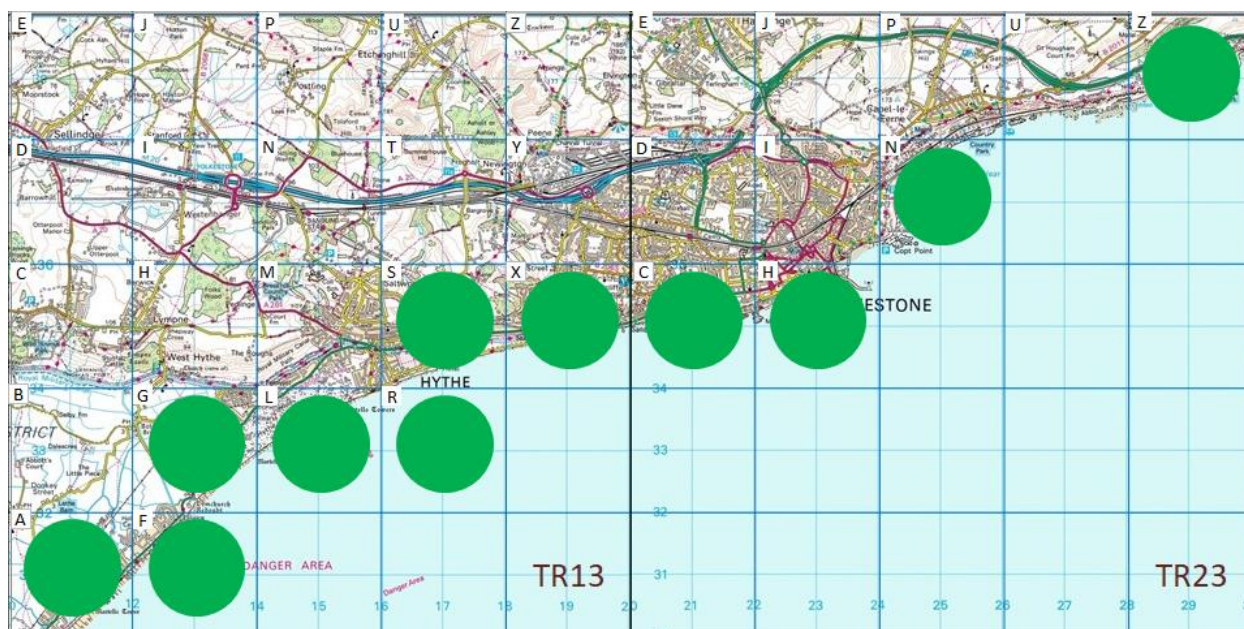


Figure 3: Distribution of all Avocet records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad



Avocets at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)



Avocets at the Willop Basin (Brian Harper)

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1958** Nickolls Quarry, one flew in from the south and circled the new pit but did not land, 20th April (R. K. Norman, G. R. Shannon, C. J. Booth)
- 1988** Mill Point, 13 flew east, 8th May (I. A. Roberts)
- 1990** Mill Point, one flew east, 24th April (I. A. Roberts)
- 1992** Hythe Ranges, two flew west, 14th April (R. K. Norman)
- 1992** Hythe Ranges, 30 flew west, 9th November (R. K. Norman)
- 1993** Copt Point, four flew east, 10th May (D. A. Gibson)
- 1993** Copt Point, four flew east, 17th May (D. A. Gibson)
- 1994** Copt Point, four flew east, 3rd May (D. A. Gibson)
- 1994** Nickolls Quarry, one, 19th October (R. K. Norman)
- 1995** Copt Point, five flew east, 2nd November (D. A. Gibson)
- 1996** Copt Point, one flew east, 18th April (I. A. Roberts)
- 1996** Copt Point, one flew east, 11th May (I. A. Roberts)

1997 Nickolls Quarry, four, 18th March (R. K. Norman)
1997 Nickolls Quarry, one, 30th March (R. K. Norman)
1998 Mill Point, one flew east, 24th March (D. A. Gibson)
1998 Copt Point, seven flew east, 30th April (I. A. Roberts)
1999 Nickolls Quarry, one, 4th April (R. K. Norman)
1999 Nickolls Quarry, one, 23rd April (I. A. Roberts)
1999 Nickolls Quarry, one, 12th November (R. K. Norman)
2000 Nickolls Quarry, one, 3rd April (R. K. Norman)
2000 Copt Point, eight flew east, 6th May (D. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)
2000 Nickolls Quarry, one, 6th September (I. A. Roberts)
2001 Copt Point, four flew east, 25th March (D. A. Gibson)
2001 Hythe Ranges, one on the beach, 30th March (P. Haines)
2001 Nickolls Quarry, three, 22nd April (R. K. Norman)
2001 Copt Point, 15 flew east, 13th May (I. A. Roberts)
2001 Nickolls Quarry, three, 17th June (I. A. Roberts)
2001 Hythe Redoubt, four on the sea then flew west, 9th November (R. K. Norman)
2001 Copt Point, one on the sea, 9th November (I. A. Roberts)
2001 Samphire Hoe, one flew east, 9th November (I. A. Roberts)
2002 Nickolls Quarry, one, 29th March (R. K. Norman)
2002 Nickolls Quarry, three, 18th April (I. A. Roberts)
2002 Nickolls Quarry, juvenile, 2nd to 8th August (R.K. Norman, I. A. Roberts)
2002 Nickolls Quarry, adult, 15th August (R. K. Norman, I. A. Roberts)
2004 Nickolls Quarry, one, 29th March (R. K. Norman)
2004 Nickolls Quarry, one, 1st April (R. K. Norman)
2004 Nickolls Quarry, two, 28th May (R. K. Norman)
2005 Mill Point, two flew east, 29th March (I. A. Roberts)
2005 Samphire Hoe, three flew east, 2nd April (I. A. Roberts)
2005 Samphire Hoe, seven flew east, 17th April (I. A. Roberts)
2005 Nickolls Quarry, two, 16th May (R. K. Norman, I. A. Roberts)
2006 Nickolls Quarry, two flew over, 2nd June (Reported)
2007 Sandgate, seven flew east, 27th September (P. Howe)
2008 Samphire Hoe, one flew east, 28th March (I. A. Roberts)
2009 Copt Point, 11 flew east, 24th April (D. A. Gibson)
2011 Samphire Hoe, 12 flew east, 21st March (I. A. Roberts)
2011 Samphire Hoe, two flew east, 30th April (I. A. Roberts)
2012 Hythe Ranges, one flew in from west and landed on beach, 10th March (B. Harper, M. Harper)
2012 Copt Point, 15 (13 flew east, 2 flew west), 25th March (D. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)
2012 Willop Outfall, 14 (flocks of 6 and 8) flew west, 8th December (B. Harper, M. Harper)
2013 Samphire Hoe, one flew east, 20th February (I. A. Roberts)
2013 Willop Basin, six, 9th March, photographed (B. Harper)
2013 Samphire Hoe, eight flew east, 9th March (I. A. Roberts)
2013 Samphire Hoe, nine flew east, 22nd March (I. A. Roberts)
2013 Samphire Hoe, six flew east, 24th March (I. A. Roberts)
2013 Princes Parade, one flew east, 8th April (B. Harper)
2013 Samphire Hoe, one flew west, 11th November (I. A. Roberts)
2014 Willop Basin, three flew west, 12th April (B. Harper)
2014 Hythe Redoubt, three flew west, 28th August (B. Harper)
2014 Hythe Beach, one flew west, 27th December (I. A. Roberts)
2015 Willop Basin, one, 17th March (B. Harper, I. A. Roberts)
2015 Mill Point, two flew east, 14th May (I. A. Roberts)
2015 Mill Point, five flew east, 15th May (B. Harper)
2015 Mill Point, four flew east, 9th September (B. Harper)
2016 Copt Point, two flew west, 5th May (D. A. Gibson)
2016 Mill Point, two flew east, 12th May (B. Harper)
2017 Hythe Redoubt, one, 18th February (I. A. Roberts)
2018 Samphire Hoe, four flew east, 14th March (I. A. Roberts)
2018 Nickolls Quarry, two, 17th March (B. Harper)

2018 Samphire Hoe, nine (in groups of 3 and 6) flew east, 24th March (I. A. Roberts)
2018 Samphire Hoe, one flew east, 21st April (I. A. Roberts)
2020 Mill Point, four flew east, 25th March (I. A. Roberts)
2020 Hythe, one flew east, 18th April (S. McMinn)
2021 Princes Parade, one flew east then landed on the sea, 8th February (I. A. Roberts)
2021 Folkestone Beach, six flew east, 1st March (I. A. Roberts)
2021 Folkestone Beach, two flew east, 2nd March (I. A. Roberts)
2023 Princes Parade, three flew east, 8th March (I. A. Roberts, B. Harper)

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Acknowledgements

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