

# Pochard

*Aythya ferina*

Category A

Winter visitor and passage migrant.

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

A widespread breeding species across temperate Europe and Asia east to Lake Baikal and south to Iran. Northern populations migrate west and south-west to winter mainly in western Europe, whereas populations breeding in milder areas are resident or partially migratory.

*Kent status (KOS 2021):*

It is a regular but uncommon breeding species in Kent, also a passage migrant and winter visitor in large numbers.



Pochard at Seabrook (Brian Harper)

The Pochard was not included in Knight and Tolputt's "List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood" (1871), whilst Ticehurst (1909) wrote that it was "almost entirely a cold winter visitor to the seas and estuaries round the Kent coast, but coming inshore to a less extent than the surface-feeding ducks, it falls less frequently under observation". He continued to note that "formerly it was a common bird in Romney Marsh and off the adjacent coast, but of late years the numbers appear to have fallen off considerably, and it is only in really hard winters that any quantity is seen". There is therefore no definite evidence of its early presence locally. Interestingly, and in marked contrast to the situation today, Ticehurst wrote that they only "occasionally wander inland" and breeding was first noted in the county on the Thames marshes in 1907 and on Romney Marsh the following year.

As Clements *et al.* (2015) noted, breeding birds continued to expand into southern England and in Kent "the principal area of colonisation was the north Kent marshes and this area remains the species' stronghold today, with smaller numbers in the Stour Valley (first bred 1934) and Romney Marsh".

The first documented local record involved one seen at Nickolls Quarry by Brian Uden on the 13<sup>th</sup> September 1952, whilst Roger Norman noted up to two females there between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> January 1958, a drake on the 8<sup>th</sup> April 1958, a pair on the 15<sup>th</sup> February 1959, a pair on the 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1959 and three on the 16<sup>th</sup> March 1960 (Norman 2007).

Presumably as a result of fairly scant coverage in the 1960s and 1970s there were no further sightings until Dave Weaver saw five at Nickolls Quarry on the 11<sup>th</sup> January 1978, increasing to nine by the 24<sup>th</sup> January 1978, with three there in January 1979 and one in December 1979. More regular coverage during the 1980s produced fairly regular records at Nickolls Quarry, with a peak of 21 on the 20<sup>th</sup> January 1985. The first record away from the quarry involved a pair seen by Ian Roberts on the pond at Copt Point on the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1989.



Pochard at Folkestone Racecourse (Ian Roberts)



Pochard at Cock Ash Lake (Ian Roberts)

## Overall distribution

Figure 1 shows the distribution of all records of Pochard by tetrad, with records in 13 tetrads (42%).



Figure 1: Distribution of all Pochard records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

It continued to be recorded with some frequency at Nickolls Quarry between 1990 and 2013, as figure 2 demonstrates by showing the annual maximum counts. The cold weather influxes in January/February 1996 and December 2010 are clearly demonstrated, with a peak count in the first event of 76 on the 8<sup>th</sup> February 1996 and in the second event of 104 on the 25<sup>th</sup> December 2010. The site has become less attractive to wildfowl in general in recent years due to backfilling of the pit, housing development and increased disturbance, and there were blank years in 2014 and 2017, with the species now irregular or even rare, although a cold weather event could lead to another influx and a peak of 21 were recorded in January 2021.

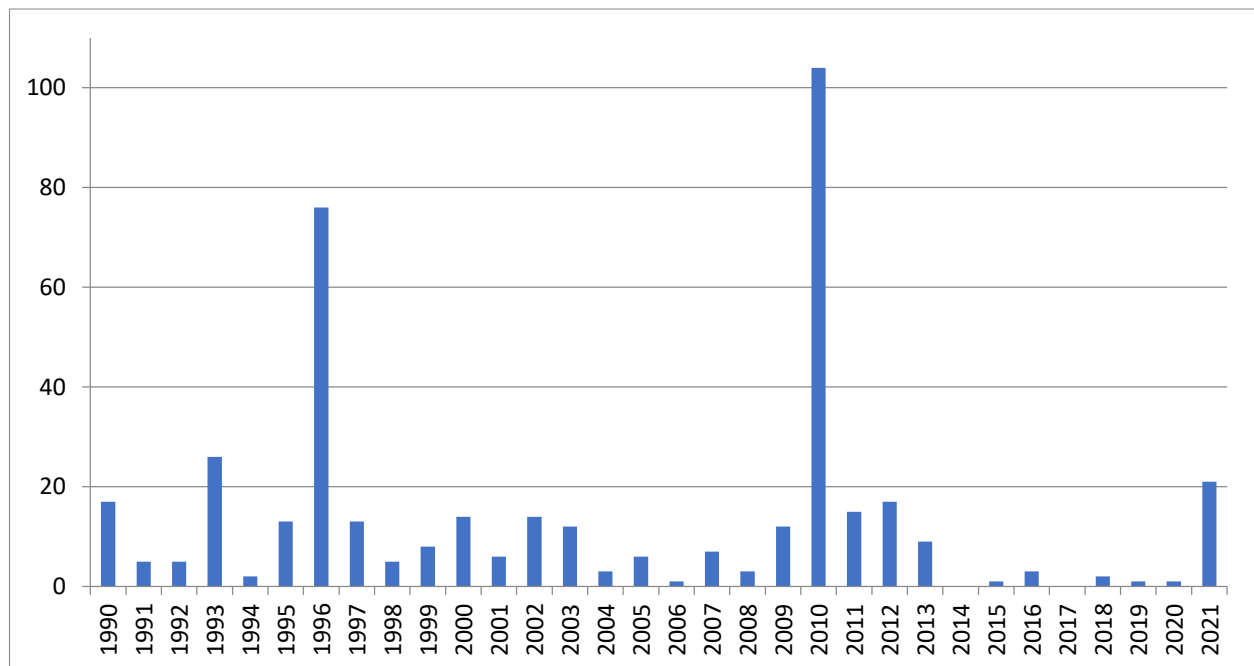


Figure 2: Annual maximum counts of Pochard at Nickolls Quarry since 1990

Away from Nickolls Quarry it has only been regularly recorded at two other sites. One of these is the lake at the former Folkestone Racecourse, near Westenhanger (TR13 I), where there were peaks of 15 in February 2006 and 17 in January 2007, but only single figure counts since. The other is Cock Ash Lake, near Sellindge (TR13 E), where up to four have been noted in recent winters, with a larger count of 12 in February 2021.



However, the canal cutting south of Botolph's Bridge is occasionally visited by birds from Nickolls Quarry and also hosted a female that lingered between late March and mid-August 1998, the only local record of over-summering.

It is genuinely rare elsewhere, with just 43 records over the 31 years since 1990. Coastal records have usually been associated with cold weather and have included counts of 20 flying west past Copt Point on the 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1997, 30 flying west past Hythe on the 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2010 and 12 flying east there the next day.



Pochard & Tufted Ducks at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)



Pochard on the canal at Seabrook (Nigel Webster)



Pochard on the Royal Military Canal at Seabrook (Brian 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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