

Roseate Tern

Sterna dougallii

Category A

Very rare vagrant.

4 records,
6 birds

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

In Europe it breeds mainly in Britain, Ireland and north-west France, with occasional pairs nesting in tern colonies in other coastal western European countries. The majority of the western Palearctic population breed in the Azores. Elsewhere it is found in the west Pacific south to Australia, in the Indian Ocean and on the east coast of the Americas from Nova Scotia south to Venezuela. The European population winters exclusively in West Africa.

Kent status (KOS 2022):

It is a rare summer visitor and passage migrant to the county, that formerly bred at Dungeness.

Ticehurst (1909) was unable to locate any definite county records but Henderson (2022) thought it was likely that birds were passing through the county at that time undetected. Harrison (1953) was able to document the first Kent record at Dungeness in 1924 and gave summer records there in several subsequent years, including a pair that apparently summered in the ternery between 1934 and 1937, although no proof of breeding was established. Taylor *et al.* (1981) noted records at Dungeness from almost every year during their review period (1952-76), with one pair breeding amongst the Common Terns in 1976.

It was during this period that the first local records occurred. The first was seen off Folkestone by Dave Musson on the unusually early date of the 20th April 1960 (the earliest arrival date during the review period of Taylor *et al.*), before T. Grant found one in Folkestone Harbour on the 15th July 1966 and saw another three seen flying south-west past Folkestone on the 17th August 1968.

Taylor *et al.* noted that due to improvements in the knowledge of tern identification, larger numbers claimed at Dungeness in the 1960s had since been withdrawn by the observers concerned, so perhaps the local records for the same period need to be considered with some caution.

The only other local record involved one seen by Rob Lee at Copt Point on the 27th September 1984, which is shown in figure 1.



Figure 1: Roseate Tern records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1980

There have been single records in April, July, August and September, as demonstrated by figure 2.

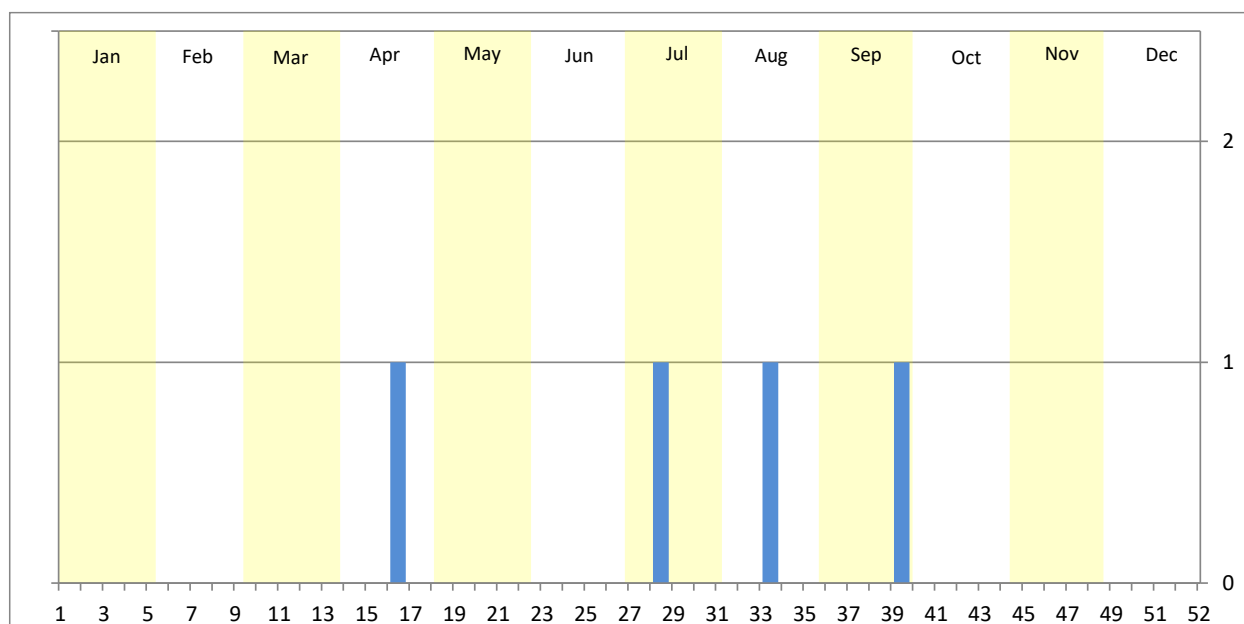


Figure 2: Roseate Tern records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Two records have the location given only as “Folkestone” but figure 3 shows the distribution of the other two records by tetrad.



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

Henderson & Hodge (1998) noted that Roseate Terns continued to nest in the Common Tern colony at Dungeness annually from 1976 to 1984, with a peak of four pairs in 1981, but only subsequently bred in 1990. Henderson (2022) confirmed that, although a few birds summer at Dungeness in most years, it has not nested in the county since.

Balmer *et al.* (2013) noted that the population in Britain and Ireland is small and highly localised, having undergone a decline of 50% over 25 years. Hunting in its wintering grounds is thought to be the key driver of its long-term decline, although at a local scale habitat loss, predation, disturbance and competition for nest sites with gulls are cited as causes of colony contraction and loss. At the time of the most recent atlas, 97% of the British and Irish population bred at just three colonies, one in Northumberland and two in the east of Ireland, following a 33% contraction between the first (1968-1972) and second (1988-1991) national atlases, and a further 50% by the time of the third (2008-2011).

Henderson noted how this decline had been reflected in the numbers of Kent records, which have been steadily falling since the early 2000s, and dropped below five in 2017 for the first time since the late 1960s, with 2019 and 2020 also only producing four records in the county.

Regular seawatching since the last 1980s has failed to produce any local records and hopes of another occurrence continue to dwindle.

The full list of records is as follows:

1960 Folkestone, one, 20th April (D. F. Musson)

1966 Folkestone Harbour, one, 15th July (T. Grant)

1968 Folkestone, three flew south-west, 17th August (T. Grant)

1984 Copt Point, one, 27th September (R. Lee)

References

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Acknowledgements

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