

Ring-billed Gull

Larus delawarensis

Category A

Very rare vagrant.

2 records

Breeds widely in southern Canada east of the Rocky Mountains, and in the USA mostly from Washington and Oregon east to the Dakotas. It underwent a marked eastward expansion to its range and an increase in numbers in the second half of the twentieth century. The largest numbers winter in coastal states, southwards from Oregon and New England to Mexico and the West Indies. It is a vagrant to Europe, mostly between December and April, but with British records in all months due to long-staying individuals (Snow & Perrins, 1998).

It was not recorded in Britain in 1973 but rapidly became a regular feature, with a total of 84 recorded in 1983, just a decade after the first. This increase was thought to have been driven by the increase and spread in North America, coupled with a growing awareness of its scope for its occurrence and the field identification characteristics. However, approximately at the turn of the century, Ring-billed Gull numbers have gradually dwindled in Britain and elsewhere in western Europe. The reasons for this decline are unclear but may be linked to localised population declines in North America, particularly within the Great Lakes population (Jones, 2019).

The British Birds Rarities Committee removed it from the list of species which they considered to be a national rarity at the end of 1987, by which time a total of 611 had been logged (Lansdown *et al*, 1987, Rogers *et al*, 1989).

The subsequent decline has been documented by White & Kehoe (2019), who reported a decrease from an annual mean of 77 records in the 1990s to 54 in the 2000s and just 16 in the most recent decade.

It was first recorded in Kent at Sandwich Bay in 1986, with a further ten records in the 1990s, two in 2001 and singles in 2009, 2011, 2013 and 2016. All have occurred between the 18th October and 24th April.

The first area record related to a first-winter bird seen by Chris Bradshaw on the rocks at Copt Point for ten minutes on the 12th March before it flew off to the west and the second was seen flying east past the same site by Dale Gibson and Ian Roberts on the 4th April 2001. These records are shown in figure 1.

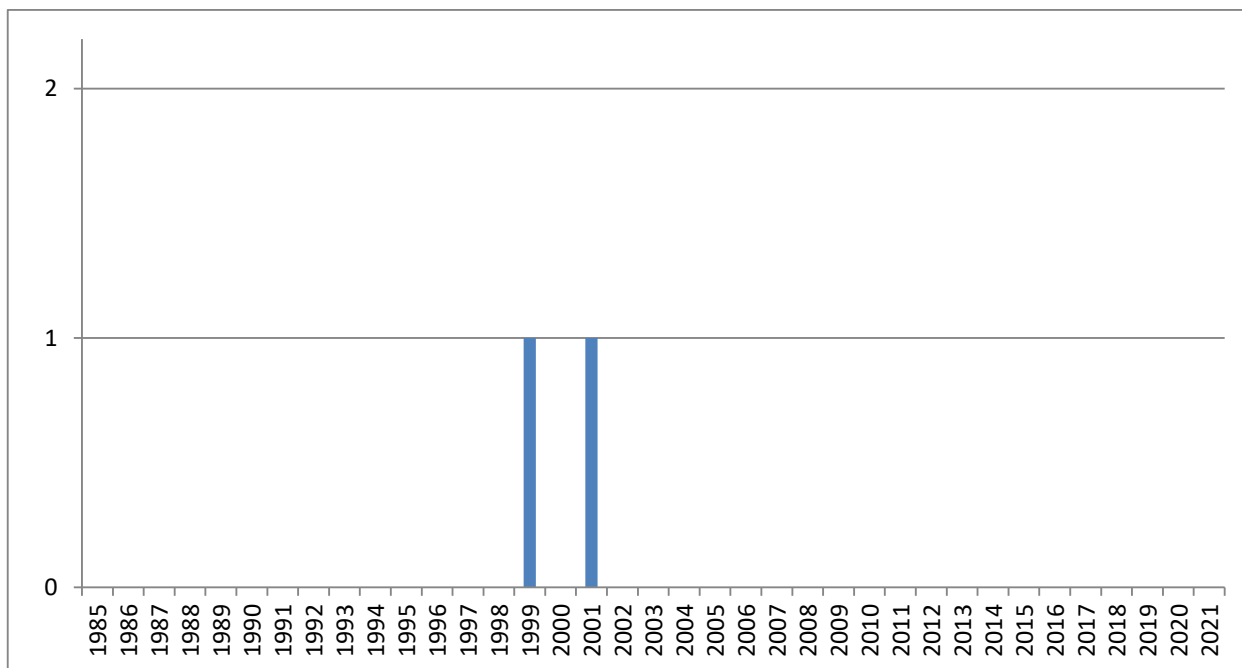


Figure 1: Ring-billed Gull records at Folkestone and Hythe

Both records have occurred in spring, with one on the 12th March (week 11) and one on the 4th April (week 14), as demonstrated by figure 2.

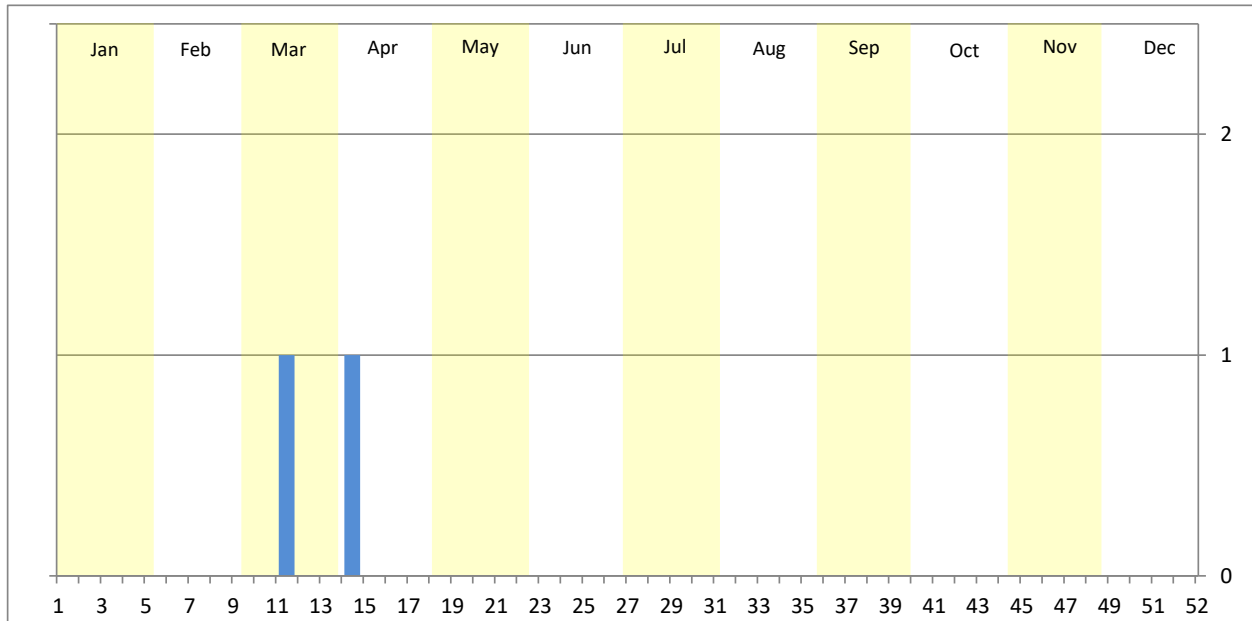


Figure 2: Ring-billed Gull records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the distribution of records by tetrad.



Figure 3: Distribution of all Ring-billed Gull records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1999** Copt Point, first-winter on rocks for ten minutes then flew west, 12th March (C. G. Bradshaw)
- 2001** Copt Point, first-winter flew east, 4th April (D. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)

References

Jones, J., 2019. The rise and fall of Ring-billed Gull. www.birdguides.com/articles/britain-ireland/the-rise-and-fall-of-ring-billed-gull (accessed 2021)

Lansdown, P. G. & the Rarities Committee, 1987. Rarities Committee news and announcements. *British Birds*, 80: 421–423

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Rogers, M. J. & the Rarities Committee, 1989. Report on rare birds in Great Britain in 1988. *British Birds*, 82: 505-563.

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

White, S. & Kehoe, C., 2019. Report on scarce migrant birds in Britain in 2017. *British Birds*, 112: 444-468.

Acknowledgements

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