

# Barnacle Goose

*Branta leucopsis*

Category A, C2, E

Rare passage migrant and winter visitor. Feral birds also recorded. 42 records, 178 birds

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

Breeds in eastern Greenland, Spitsbergen, and northern Russia. The Greenland population winters in western Scotland and Ireland, the Spitsbergen population winters in the Solway Firth and the British east coast, and Russian breeders winter mainly in the Netherlands. Smaller numbers nesting in Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands and Fenno-Scandia are mainly of captive origin.



Barnacle Goose at Nickolls Quarry (Ian Roberts)

*Kent status (KOS 2021):*

Scarce but increasing, mainly originating from a growing feral population in the county and on the near continent, but some winter records may be of wild birds especially in cold weather.

The Barnacle Goose was not included in Knight and Tolputt's "List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood" (1871) and Ticehurst described it Goose as a rare winter visitor to Kent but included details of one in Folkestone Museum (that was shot off Hythe sometime prior to 1900). This occurrence is certain to have related to a wild individual as feral birds were unknown in the country at this time.

Taylor *et al.* (1981) considered it to be a scarce winter visitor, with nearly 80% of records occurring on the North Kent Marshes, with few in east Kent and just one during their review period (1952-76) in south Kent (at Dungeness in November 1969).

All of the early Kent records occurred between October and April but from 1966 there were increasingly widespread reports of feral birds in all months of the year. Gibbons *et al.* in the new breeding atlas (1993) stated that "although Kear (1990) notes that this species is now breeding 'at large' in Britain, birds are probably too scattered for there to be a self-sustaining population". However, by 2005 the British Ornithologist's Union had admitted it to category C of the British List (Dudley 2005).

The latest Bird Atlas (Balmer *et al.* 2013) stated that the birds wintering on the east coast of Britain are largely from the Spitsbergen population but the naturalised population accounts for many of the inland records, and that the latter population has expanded in range by 88% since the 1988-91 atlas and was thought to number approximately 900 pairs in the mid-2000s. A more recent estimate (Woodward *et al.* 2020) gave a figure of 1,450 breeding pairs for the naturalised British population, whilst Dudley estimated that 1,100 feral pairs were nesting in the Netherlands (where it does appear to be self-sustaining) in 2000.



Barnacle Geese at Hythe (Glenn Tutton)

The first modern record was in 1989, since when it has been recorded with some regularity, though many records undoubtedly relate to feral birds. Modern records by year are shown in figure 1.

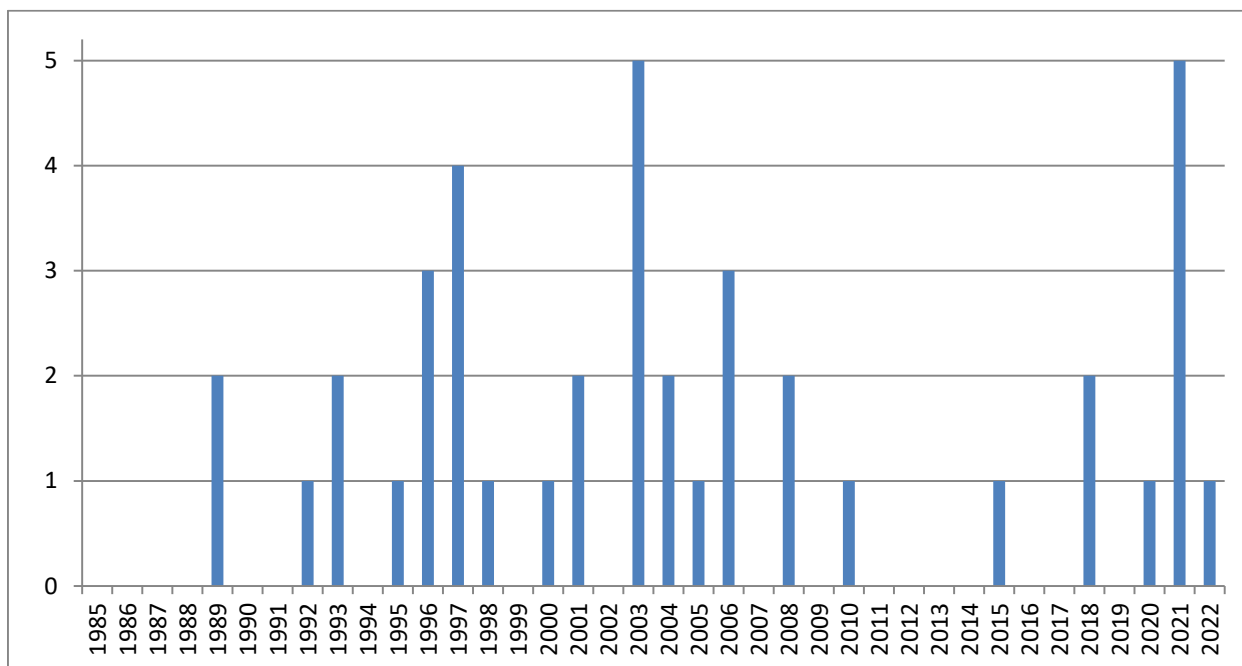


Figure 1: Barnacle Goose records at Folkestone and Hythe



Barnacle Goose at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)



Barnacle Geese at Donkey Street (Ian Roberts)



Barnacle Geese at Lympne (Phil Sharp)

The records by week are given in figure 2. Those recorded between April and August seem most likely to originate from feral stock, though some of the December to March records might not be of wild origin either.

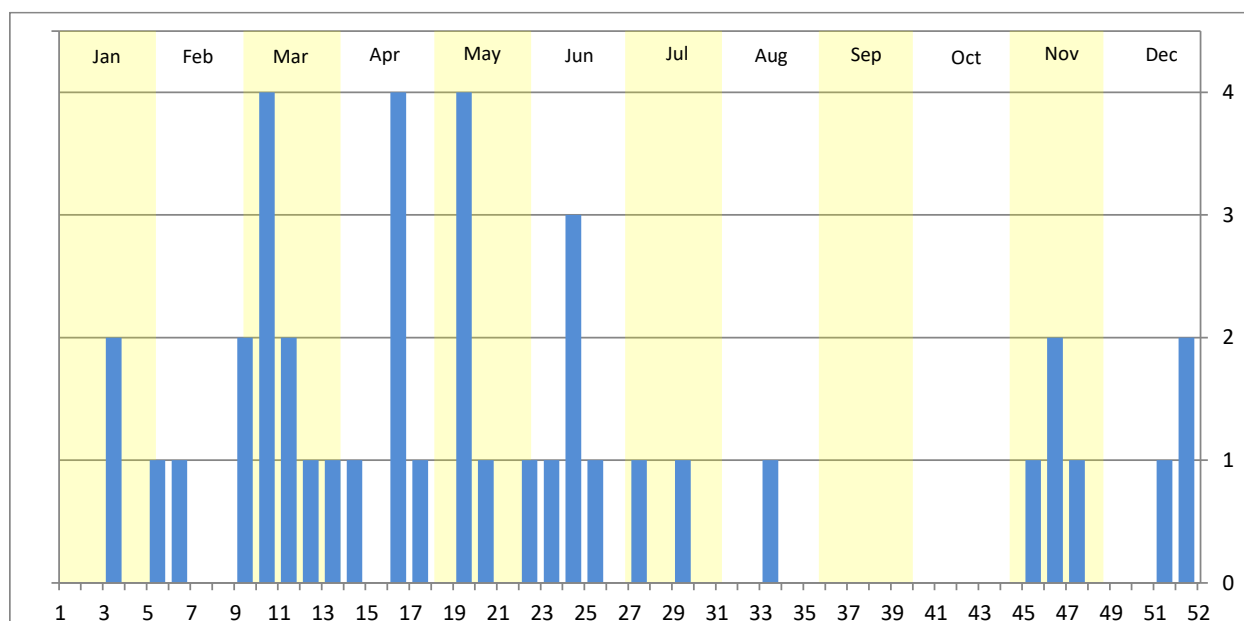


Figure 2: Barnacle Goose records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the location of records by tetrad.



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

The majority of occurrences (many of which involve multiple records) are from Nickolls Quarry (20), with others at Samphire Hoe (4), Copt Point (2), Donkey Street (2) and single sightings at nine other sites.

The birds with the best credentials for perhaps being considered as wild are as follows (although it should be noted that birds thought to originate from the near continent during cold weather could be from feral stock there):

**Pre-1900** Hythe, one in Folkestone Museum was shot off Hythe, pre-1900

- Certain to relate to a wild individual as feral birds have only been prevalent in Kent since the 1960s.

**1989** Copt Point, one on golf course, 29<sup>th</sup> December (I. A. Roberts)

**1989** Mill Point, one flew east, 30<sup>th</sup> December (J. P. Siddle)

- There was a small influx into the county in late 1989 which it was considered might have involved wild birds.



**1993** Nickolls Quarry, 35 in field near sewage works, 3<sup>rd</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> February (R. K. Norman, I. A. Roberts)

- This flock arrived during cold weather and were presumed to be wild birds.

**2000** Folkestone, four flew north-east, 16<sup>th</sup> January (D. A. Gibson)

- These were seen at a similar time to a flock in the Swale which were considered to have originated in the Low Countries.

**2006** Folkestone Racecourse (Westenhanger), three, 11<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> February (I. A. Roberts)

- These birds arrived with a flock of 14 White-fronted Geese which suggests that they originated from the Netherlands. Elsewhere in Kent a flock at Worth Marshes and an increase at Dungeness in February were also associated with arrivals of White-fronted Geese.

**2010** Donkey Street, one, 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2010 (I. A. Roberts)

- This bird arrived, during a period of very severe weather, with flock of 180 White-fronted Geese which suggests that it originated from the Netherlands.

**2021** Donkey Street, four, 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> March, with three to 7<sup>th</sup> March, photographed (I. A. Roberts, B. Harper)

**2021** Lympne, six, 5<sup>th</sup> March, photographed (P. Sharp)

**2021** Nickolls Quarry, one, 9<sup>th</sup> March (B. Harper, I. A. Roberts)

**2021** Nickolls Quarry, one, 17<sup>th</sup> March (I. A. Roberts)

- These birds were part of a widespread passage of geese through the county following a period of severe conditions in February and were thought to be cold weather migrants returning. Large numbers were also noted on passage on the near Continent. The Lympne flock arrived with White-fronted Geese.



Barnacle Goose at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)

**2022** Princes Parade, three flew west, 20<sup>th</sup> November (B. Harper, I. A. Roberts)

- These birds occurred at a time when many birds were seen to be moving out of the Continent due to the onset of cold weather there.

The list of other records is as follows:

**1992** Nickolls Quarry, two, 11<sup>th</sup> May (reported).

**1993** Capel-le-Ferne, 12 flew south, 27<sup>th</sup> March (I. A. Roberts).

**1995** Nickolls Quarry, two, 11<sup>th</sup> May (R. K. Norman).

**1996** Nickolls Quarry, 29<sup>th</sup> February (R. K. Norman).

**1996** Nickolls Quarry, two, 10<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> March (R. K. Norman).

**1996** Nickolls Quarry, two to six birds, from 10<sup>th</sup> June to 1<sup>st</sup> September (R. K. Norman, I. A. Roberts).

**1997** Nickolls Quarry, 13<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> May (I. A. Roberts).

**1997** Nickolls Quarry, 8<sup>th</sup> June (R. K. Norman).

**1997** Nickolls Quarry, 21<sup>st</sup> June (R. K. Norman).

**1997** Nickolls Quarry, 8<sup>th</sup> July (R. K. Norman).

**1997** Nickolls Quarry, two, 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> August (R. K. Norman, I. A. Roberts).

**1998** Nickolls Quarry, 22<sup>nd</sup> March (I. A. Roberts).

**2001** Nickolls Quarry, 12 flew north, 7<sup>th</sup> May (R. K. Norman).

**2001** Nickolls Quarry, ten flew south-west, 10<sup>th</sup> June (R. K. Norman).

**2003** Samphire Hoe, one, 28<sup>th</sup> February to 6<sup>th</sup> April, photographed (I. A. Roberts).

**2003** Nickolls Quarry, three, 17<sup>th</sup> April (R. K. Norman).

**2003** Copt Point, three, 18<sup>th</sup> April (I. A. Roberts), possibly same as above.

**2003** Nickolls Quarry, 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> July (I. A. Roberts).

**2003** Nickolls Quarry, four, 7<sup>th</sup> November (R. K. Norman).

**2004** Nickolls Quarry, two regularly, 17<sup>th</sup> April to 11<sup>th</sup> August (R. K. Norman, I. A. Roberts).

**2004** Nickolls Quarry, 13<sup>th</sup> November (R. K. Norman).

**2005** Nickolls Quarry, on eight dates between 19<sup>th</sup> April and 10<sup>th</sup> June, then two until 2<sup>nd</sup> August (R. K. Norman, I. A. Roberts).

**2006** Samphire Hoe, 12 flew west, 16<sup>th</sup> May (I. A. Roberts).

**2006** Nickolls Quarry, on five dates between 11<sup>th</sup> June and 18<sup>th</sup> August (R. K. Norman, I. A. Roberts).

**2008** Samphire Hoe, seven flew west, 24<sup>th</sup> April (I. A. Roberts).

**2008** Samphire Hoe, two flew west, 31<sup>st</sup> May (I. A. Roberts).

**2015** Nickolls Quarry, 5<sup>th</sup> April, photographed (B. Harper, I. A. Roberts).

**2018** Willop Basin, three, then flew west, 17<sup>th</sup> March (B. Harper).

**2018** Samphire Hoe, seven flew east, 11<sup>th</sup> June (per D. E. Smith).

**2020** Hythe, nine flew west, 11<sup>th</sup> November, photographed (G. Tutton).

**2021** Seabrook, six flew west, 21<sup>st</sup> January (P. Howe).

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### ***Acknowledgements***

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