

## Green Heron

*Butorides virescens*

Category A

Very rare vagrant.

1 record

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

Breeds in eastern North America from New Brunswick, Quebec and Ontario south to Gulf of Mexico and south-west USA, Mexico, West Indies and parts of Central America. Eastern North American birds migrate south to the Gulf of Mexico and northern South America, with the main passage through the USA in September to October. Its southern counterpart, Green-backed Heron, breeds in South America, Africa, Asia and Australasia has recently been recognised as a separate species.



Green Heron at West Hythe (Tim Corke)

*Kent status (KOS 2021):*

Rare vagrant.

British (BBRC) records to end 2020: 8

Kent (KOS) records to end 2020: 1

The first British record was shot in Cornwall in 1889 and after a wait of almost a century until the next, there have been seven sightings since 1982; four on the east coast (in Yorkshire in 1982, Lothian in 1987, Lincolnshire in 2001 and the local and only Kent record in 2008) and three on the west coast (in Anglesey in 2005, Cornwall again in 2010 and Pembrokeshire in 2018). All had been found in autumn (between the 24<sup>th</sup> September and 27<sup>th</sup> November) until the most recent appeared in late April (BBRC no date; RBA no date).

The only local record involved a first-winter bird that frequented the West Hythe dam area between the 25<sup>th</sup> October (although possibly since the 19<sup>th</sup> October) to the 10<sup>th</sup> November 2008.

The record by year is shown in figure 1.

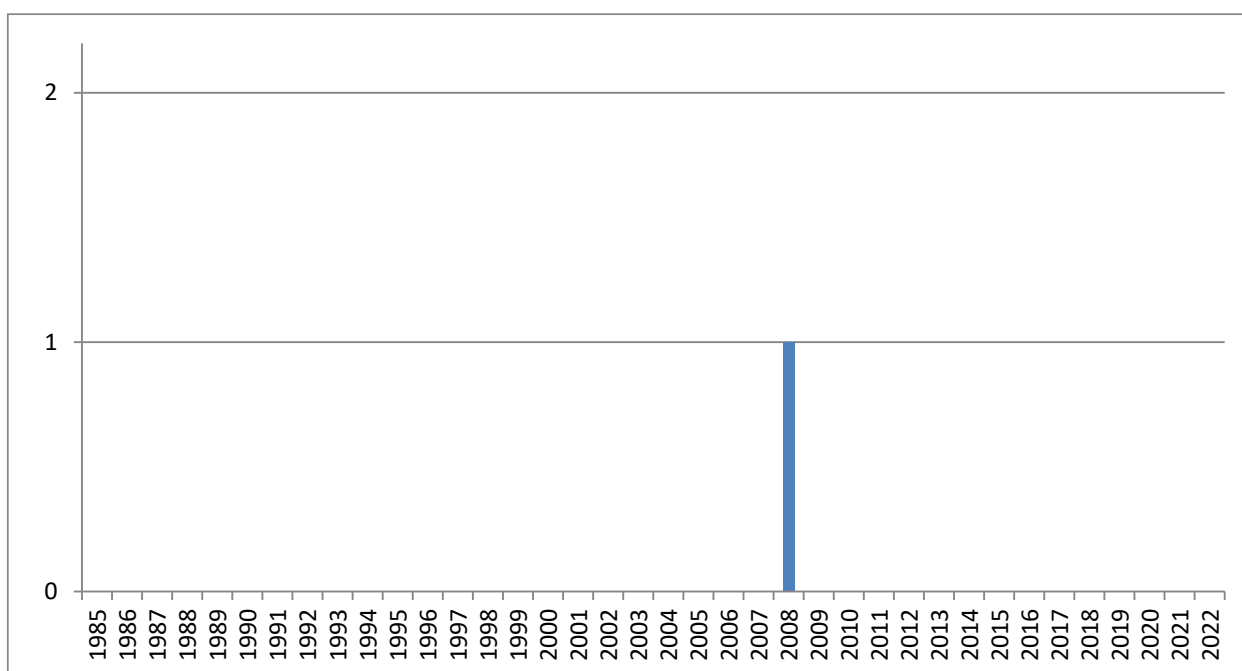


Figure 1: Green Heron records at Folkestone and Hythe

The record by week is given in figure 2.

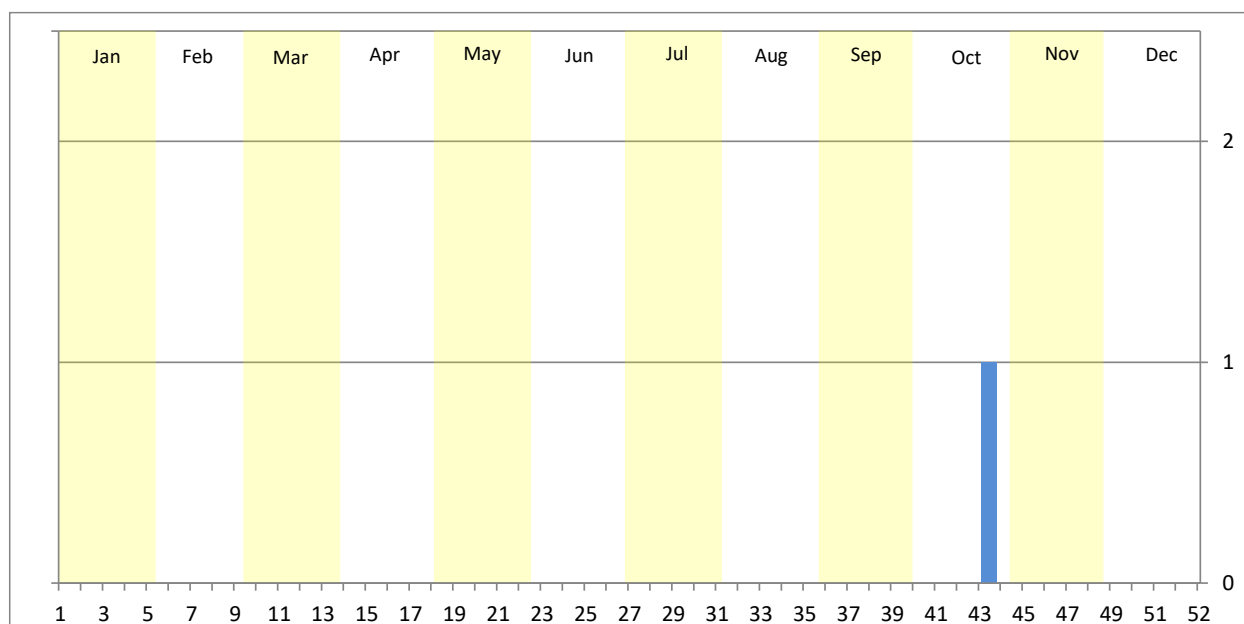


Figure 2: Green Heron records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the location of the record by tetrad. The single occurrence was seen in the adjacent tetrads TR13 C and TR13 H.

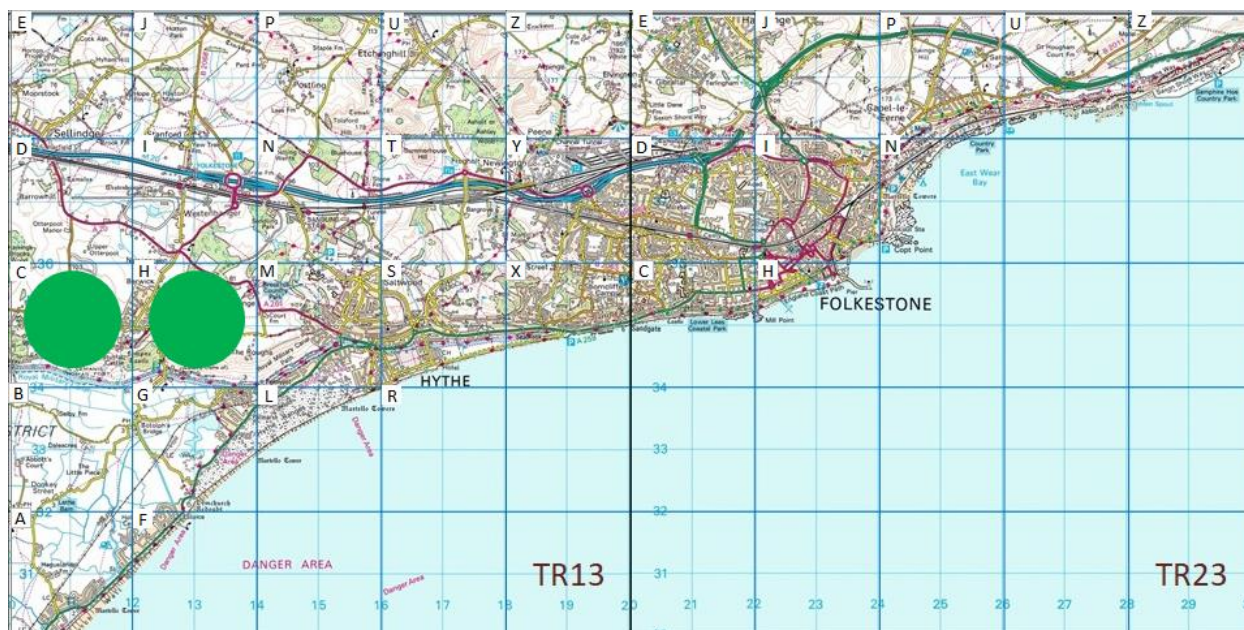


Figure 3: Distribution of all Green Heron records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Confirmation of the only area record is as follows:

**2008** West Hythe dam, first-winter, 25<sup>th</sup> October (but probably since 19<sup>th</sup> October) to 10<sup>th</sup> November, photographed (M. & P. Young, I. A. Roberts, P. Trodd *et al.*).

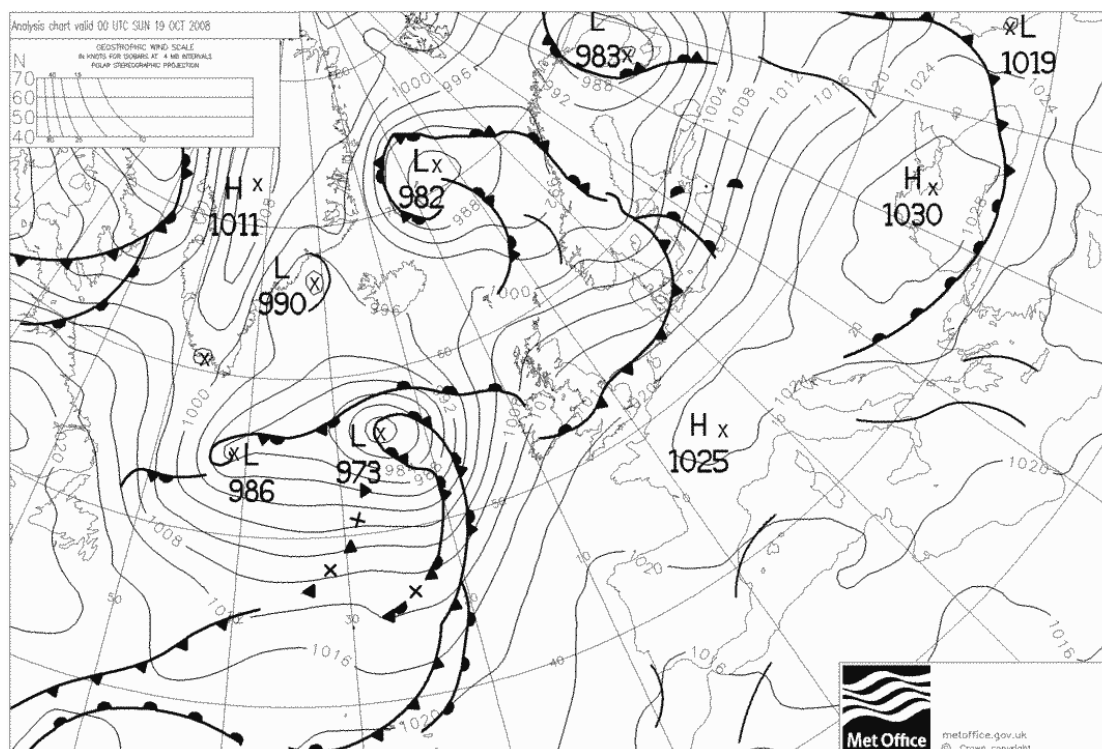
An account of the first area record is given below.

## Green Heron at West Hythe 25<sup>th</sup> October (but probably since 19<sup>th</sup> October) to 10<sup>th</sup> November 2008

By Ian Roberts

### Weather conditions:

It is difficult to be certain when the Green Heron arrived but the earliest reported sighting was on the 19<sup>th</sup> October 2008. The chart below shows the synoptic position on that date, and shows just one of the complex, deep low pressure systems which steamed across the Atlantic during the month, bringing a number of Nearctic birds to these shores.



### Circumstances of the find:

The first report goes back to Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> October, when Maureen & Peter Young rang the RSPB to report a small, dark heron at West Hythe, which they were informed was most likely to be a Bittern. They returned on Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> to see a crowd of people watching their "Bittern" and were told that it was a Green Heron - the same bird they were certain.

Then various dog-walkers began to see it from the 21<sup>st</sup>, but it wasn't until an angler saw it the 25<sup>th</sup> and rang a couple of his friends with an interest in birds that the news got out. These two birdwatchers saw the bird late on the Saturday afternoon, and rang Birdline South-east but by the time the news broke it was too late for anyone else to get there that day.

Ian Roberts and many others were on site before first light on the following day. After an anxious wait of an hour or so the bird showed very well, and continued to do so throughout the remainder of its stay, delighting many hundreds of grateful admirers.

It was last reported on Monday 10<sup>th</sup> November, which was a day of particularly foul weather. It was quite readily seen when it was present so it is presumed to have departed or died on the night of the 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> November.

**Description of the bird:**

Size, shape, jizz: A very small, compact and dark-looking heron.

Head and upperparts: Dark grey crown and mantle. Grey coverts with fresh white spots, and some chestnut fringing to the lesser coverts. Dark tertials and remiges. Dark grey rump and tail.

Underparts: Chestnut ear-coverts and neck. Chestnut chin and breast, streaked with white. Underwings and flanks ash-grey. Belly whitish.

Bare parts: Upper mandible dark, lower mandible mostly yellow, legs yellow. The yellow eye (black pupil) was joined to the bill by a yellow streak.

Age/sex: The very fresh white spotted coverts and streaked neck confirm it as a first-winter.

**Comments on the record:**

This record was accepted by the BBRC and appears in their report for 2008 (Hudson *et al.* 2009). It was only the second trans-Atlantic vagrant species to be confirmed locally (with the other being Ring-billed Gull, of which there are two records).

There had been just five previous British records and this was the first Kent record.



Green Heron at West Hythe dam (Brian Harper)



Green Heron at West Hythe (Nigel Jarman)



Green Heron at West Hythe (Chris Upson)



Green Heron at West Hythe (Steve Ashton)



Green Heron at West Hythe (Brian Harper)

### **References**

- British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC). Statistics. [www.bbrc.org.uk/main-information/statistics](http://www.bbrc.org.uk/main-information/statistics) (accessed 2022).
- Clements, R., Orchard, M., McCanch, N. & Wood, S. 2015. *Kent Breeding Bird Atlas 2008-13*. Kent Ornithological Society.
- Hudson & the Rarities Committee 2009. Report on rare birds in Great Britain in 2008. *British Birds* 102: 528-601.
- Kent Ornithological Society (KOS). 1953-2021. *Kent Bird Reports*. Kent Ornithological Society.
- Kent Ornithological Society (KOS). The Kent List. <https://kentos.org.uk/index.php/recording/the-kent-list> (accessed 2022).
- Rare Bird Alert Previous Records. [www.rarebirdalert.co.uk/RealData/rarityrecords.asp?id=1070](http://www.rarebirdalert.co.uk/RealData/rarityrecords.asp?id=1070) (accessed 2021).

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

### ***Acknowledgements***

The tetrad map images were produced from the Ordnance Survey [Get-a-map service](#) and are reproduced with kind permission of [Ordnance Survey](#).

The meteorological chart has been reproduced from [www.wetterzentrale.de](http://www.wetterzentrale.de) and is based on information provided by the National Meteorological Library and Archive (Met Office, UK: [metoffice.gov.uk](http://metoffice.gov.uk)) under Open Government Licence.



Green Heron at West Hythe (Brian Harper)