

Grey Plover

Pluvialis squatarola

Category A

Passage migrant and occasional winter visitor.

Breeds from north-eastern Russia eastwards along the northern coasts of Asia and North America. Some winter in Europe, but the total winter range extends to the coasts of South America, Africa, southern Asia, and Australia (Snow & Perrins, 1998).

It is a common passage migrant and winter visitor in Kent, which occasionally over-summers and is rare inland (KOS, 2020).



Grey Plover at the Willop Outfall (Ian Roberts)

The Grey Plover was not included in Knight and Tolputt's "List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood" (1871) and the first documented records date from 1958, when Roger Norman heard it overhead at Hythe Ranges in the early hours of the 28th March 1958 and during the night of the 17th/18th April.

There were no further sightings until the 1st February 1987, when Ian Roberts saw two at Copt Point, but regular seawatching since 1988 (when four were seen flying east past Mill Point on the 15th May) has produced records annually, predominately involving birds moving up-channel in spring. Since 2000 spring passage has comprised an average total of 79 birds per annum, with particularly high totals in 2001 (174), 2002 (132) and 2017 (179). Movements can be observed from around mid-March but the majority have been noted in the last ten days of April and first three weeks of May, when counts of 25 or more have been noted on nine occasions:

- 30 east past Mill Point on the 1st May 1990
- 26 east past Copt Point on the 1st May 2000
- 98 east past Copt Point on the 9th May 2001
- 35 east past Copt Point on the 12th May 2002
- 35 east past Samphire Hoe on the 12th May 2005
- 35 east past Samphire Hoe on the 28th Apr 2011
- 29 east past Copt Point on the 30th April 2011
- 59 east past Mill Point on the 30th Apr 2017
- 109 east past Mill Point on the 5th May 2017

Passage can continue into late May and there has been one record in early June, when a single bird was seen flying east past Copt Point on the 2nd (in 1997).

The only July records involve singles that flew east at Samphire Hoe on the 1st July 2020 and west at Mill Point on the 25th July 2005, but small numbers may occur from August on autumn passage in some years, with peak counts of seven flying west past Mill Point on the 21st August 1991 and ten at Hythe Ranges on the 31st October 2016.

It is scarce in winter and typically associated with cold weather movements, when ones and twos have been seen at a variety of coastal locations and larger counts are rare, having comprised up to nine at Copt Point in late December 1996/early January 1997, 14 at the Willop Outfall on the 5th February 2006 and five there from the 23rd to 25th February 2012.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of all records of Grey Plover by tetrad, with records in 11 tetrads (35%). Sightings have been predominately coastal but Roger Norman recorded it at Nickolls Quarry on 16 occasions between 1991 and 2001, with records between late December and late May.



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

References

Kent Bird Reports. Kent Ornithological Society

Knight, V. and Tolputt, F., 1871. List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood, *Folkestone Natural History Society Annual Report*, 1871

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

Acknowledgements

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Grey Plovers at the Willop Outfall (Ian Roberts)



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