

Pomarine Skua

Stercorarius pomarinus

Category A

Scarce passage migrant, mainly in spring.

Breeds from northern Russia eastwards across northernmost Siberia and North America, and in western Greenland. Winters in the Atlantic Ocean mainly north of the Equator (Snow & Perrins, 1998).

In Kent it is a regular but usually scarce passage migrant and sometimes overwinters in small numbers (KOS, 2020).



Pomarine Skuas at Mill Point (Brian Harper)

The species was not included in Knight and Tolputt’s “List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood” (1871) but Ticehurst (1909) was able to provide a historical record of “one picked up on the beach at Hythe in early November 1882 and taken to Mr. W. Marsden, of that town, who kept it alive in his garden for some time”.

Taylor *et al* (1981) described as an “interesting development” during their review period (1952-1976) the “discovery of an almost annual spring passage at Dungeness, involving small flocks of adults”. This was considered to be “probably more indicative of an increase in sea-watching than a change in status”. Spring passage was first observed at Dungeness in May 1959, with the first local spring sighting the following year, when Dave Musson saw a party of seven passing east off Folkestone on the 9th May 1960, before logging an autumn record later that year of two off Hythe on the 16th September.

There were no further sightings until six were seen flying east past Copt Point on the 29th April 1987 which was likely to be attributable to a lack of coverage as it has been recorded regularly on spring passage since 1990, as figure 1 demonstrates.

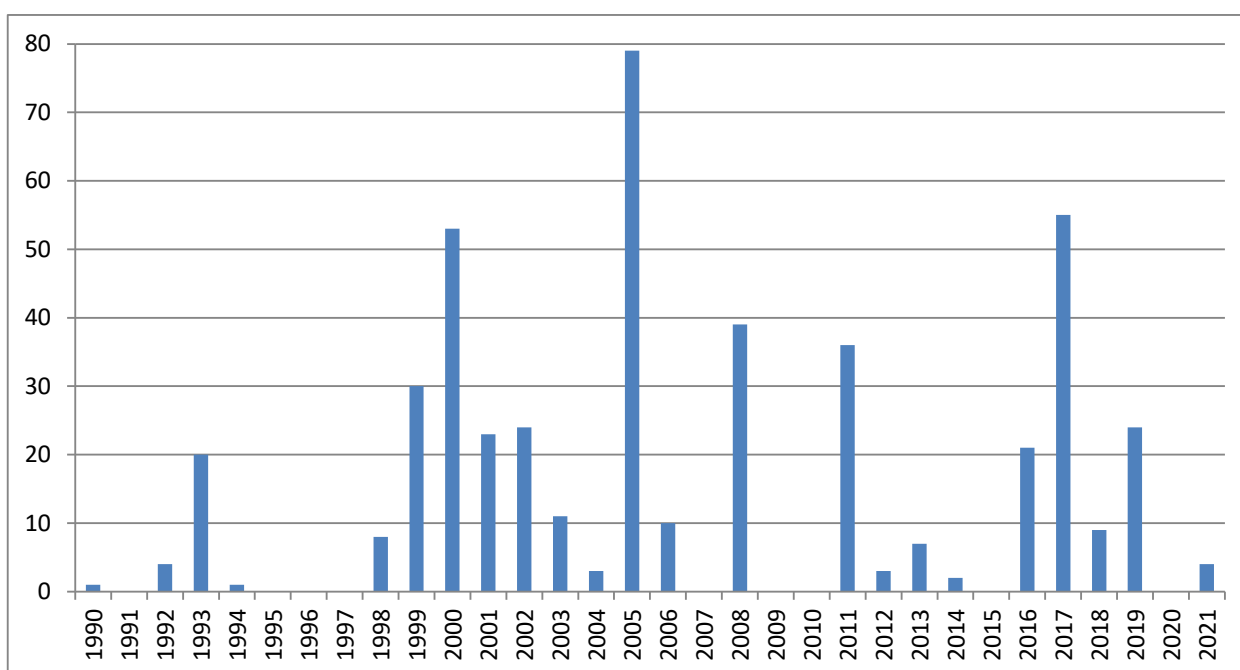


Figure 1: Spring passage totals of Pomarine Skua at Folkestone and Hythe

Annual variability has been high, with nine ‘blank’ springs and a peak of 79 in 2005, as passage is affected by the meteorological conditions that are prevalent during the peak passage period. Spring migration has been noted between the 21st April (2003) to 22nd May (2005) but is often concentrated in weeks 18 and 19 (30th April to 13th May) which have accounted for over 85% of spring records. The highest counts locally have occurred during periods of south-easterly or easterly winds.

Double-figure movements have occurred on 14 occasions:

- 14 east past Copt Point on the 17th May 1993
- 14 east past Copt Point on the 3rd May 1999
- 13 east past Copt Point on the 2nd May 2000
- 30 east past Copt Point on the 12th May 2000 (including a flock of 25)
- 11 east past Copt Point on the 6th May 2002
- 12 east past Copt Point on the 13th May 2002
- 46 east past Samphire Hoe on the 1st May 2005
- 32 east past Mill Point/Samphire Hoe on the 12th May 2005
- 15 east past Samphire Hoe on the 27th April 2008
- 24 east past Copt Point on the 3rd May 2011
- 13 east past Samphire Hoe on the 6th May 2016
- 37 east past Mill Point on the 30th April 2017
- 10 east past Mill Point on the 25th April 2019
- 10 east past Mill Point on the 17th May 2019



Pomarine Skuas at Copt Point (Ian Roberts)



Pomarine Skuas at Copt Point (Ian Roberts)

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of Pomarine Skua by tetrad, with records in 5 tetrads (16%).



Figure 2: Distribution of all Pomarine Skua records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Aside from the two records detailed above, there have been just six further records in autumn: one flying west past Hythe Ranges on the 29th September 1990, one flying west past Copt Point on the 4th November 1997, one flying west there on the 22nd October 1999, two flying east past Mill Point on the 24th October 2005, three flying east there on the 8th November 2010 and one off Samphire Hoe on the 8th October 2019.

Winter records are even rarer, with just two sightings: two juveniles flying west past Copt Point on the 29th January 2000 and one reported off Samphire Hoe on the 6th March 2000.

References

Kent Bird Reports. Kent Ornithological Society

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Ticehurst, N. F. 1909. *A History of the Birds of Kent*. Witherby, London.

Acknowledgements

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Pomarine Skuas at Mill Point (Ian Roberts)