

Shoveler

Spatula clypeata

Category A

Winter visitor and passage migrant.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

It has a patchy breeding distribution across much of Europe and Asia, eastwards to the Pacific, also breeds in north-west America, south to California. It is mostly migratory. Most British breeders move southwards to southern France, Spain and Italy, with a few to North Africa, to be replaced by wintering birds from Russia and Fenno-Scandia that migrate west and south-west mainly to Britain, the Netherlands and France.

Kent status (KOS 2021; Clements et al. 2015):

In Kent it is a widespread but thinly distributed breeding species with fewer than 100 pairs breeding in most years. Also a numerous as a passage migrant and winter visitor.



Shoveler at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)

The Shoveler was not included in Knight and Tolputt's "List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood" (1871) and seems unlikely to have occurred locally as it was nationally scarce in the nineteenth century, before protection after the 1880s led to its colonisation of much of lowland England. Ticehurst (1909) wrote that, "with regard to Romney Marsh, he was "very doubtful whether more than a single pair or so bred regularly in the whole of that area", whilst at that time it was regarded as primarily a summer visitor to the county.

Harrison (1953) recorded that by 1919 "the Shoveler has much increased during the last few years as a breeding species in the Romney Marsh, and is extending its range considerably". The earliest known local sighting however did not occur until the 31st August 1952, when Roger Norman saw one at Nickolls Quarry, with another there the following year on the 18th January 1953. It was also one of the duck species shot by a wildfowler there in the 1954/55 winter and two were seen at the same site by Brian Uden in December 1957, remaining into January 1958. A pair were seen there by Roger Norman on several dates in April 1958 and Leslie Scrivener reported three there on the 9th April 1960 (Norman 2007).

Roger Norman noted up to four at Nickolls Quarry in April 1968 but there were no further records until Neil Frampton saw a pair at West Hythe dam on the 3rd April 1981. Ian Roberts observed single drakes flying west past Mill Point on the 11th August 1988 and 6th January 1989, whilst a pair flew east there on the 1st April 1990 and it has since proved to be a regular occurrence, mainly in spring on passage but also in autumn and winter.



Shovelers at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)

Overall distribution

Figure 1 shows the distribution of all records of Shoveler by tetrad, with records from 13 tetrads (42%).

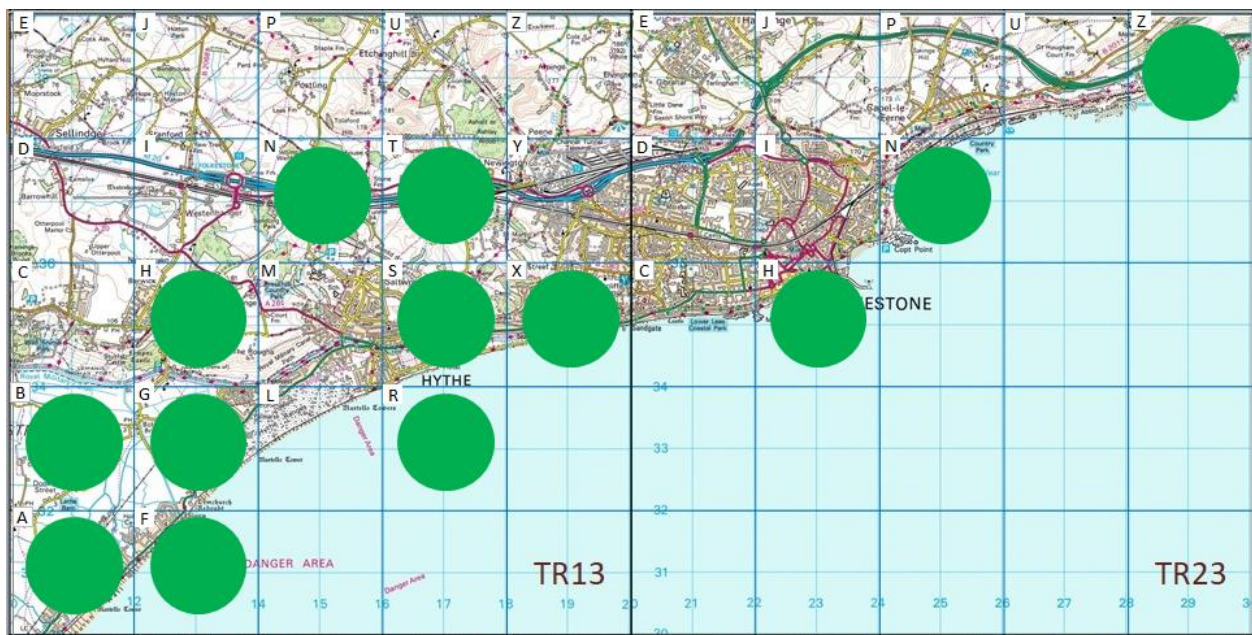


Figure 1: Distribution of all Shoveler records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Spring passage is mainly noted from coastal seawatching points and occurs between March and early May, with the mean annual total over the last decade of 40, whilst counts of over 20 have occurred on 11 occasions as follows:

- 49 east past Copt Point on the 10th March 1995
- 34 east past Mill Point on the 16th April 2004
- 28 east past Mill Point on the 20th March 2005
- 27 east past Samphire Hoe on the 17th April 2008
- 22 east past Copt Point on the 3rd May 2011
- 41 east past Samphire Hoe on the 22nd March 2013
- 21 east past Samphire Hoe on the 23rd March 2013
- 32 east past Samphire Hoe on the 30th March 2018
- 24 east past Samphire Hoe on the 15th April 2019
- 25 east past Mill Point on the 5th April 2020
- 91 east past Mill Point on the 11th April 2022



Shovelers at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)



Shovelers at Beachborough (Steve Tomlinson)

Spring migrants have also been noted at Nickolls Quarry, with a peak of eight there on the 22nd March 1996, and other inland sites, including Beachborough Lakes where there was a peak of five on the 11th April 2018.

The only summer records relate to a female seen by Roger Norman and Ian Roberts at Nickolls Quarry between the 28th June and the 2nd July 2002, one reported on the sea off Samphire Hoe on the 25th June 2006 and a female at Nickolls Quarry on the 23rd June 2021.

Autumn migrants begin to appear in August, with a peak of six at Nickolls Quarry on the 29th August 2003, but numbers are typically much lower than in spring, with only two double-figure counts: ten west past Copt Point on the 27th October 1997 and 45 east past the Hythe Redoubt on the 9th November 2001.

It is a scarce visitor in winter, often associated with periods of cold weather. Most records are from Nickolls Quarry or other sites on the Romney Marsh, with a few coastal sightings. Counts have included 18 at Nickolls Quarry on the 25th December 1994, six there on the 19th December 2010, six off the Willop Outfall on the 8th December 2012, nine flying west past Mill Point on the 1st December 2017 and up to 15 in the Hoorne's Sewer/Donkey Street area in February 2022.

References

Clements, R., Orchard, M., McCanch, N. & Wood, S. 2015. *Kent Breeding Bird Atlas 2008-13*. Kent Ornithological Society.

Harrison, J. M. 1953. *The Birds of Kent*. Witherby, London.

Kent Ornithological Society (KOS). 1953-2021. *Kent Bird Reports*. Kent Ornithological Society.

Knight, V. & Tolputt, F. 1871. List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood. *Fourth Annual Report of the Folkestone Natural History Society*. Available at: www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/46103

Norman, R. K. 2007. The Birds of Palmarsh Gravel Pit. <https://folkestonebirds.com/where-to-watch> (see "Further Information" section).

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

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

Acknowledgements

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

I am indebted to Andrew Henderson and Tim Hodge for providing access to the Kent Ornithological Society archives.