

# White-fronted Goose

*Anser albifrons*

Category 41

Rare migrant and winter visitor.

41 records,  
1,200 birds

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

The nominate form breeds in northern Russia, with its winter range extending south-eastwards across Europe from England and the Low Countries to Turkey, and around the Black and Caspian seas. The form *flavirostris* breeds in west Greenland and winters in Ireland and west Scotland.

*Kent status (KOS 2022):*

In Kent it is an annual winter visitor in small numbers, with occasional larger flocks, and a scarce passage migrant.



White-fronted Goose at Hythe Imperial golf course  
(Ian Roberts)

Knight and Tolputt (1871) did not mention the White-fronted Goose within their “List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood”, whilst Ticehurst (1909) considered it to be a moderately common and regular winter visitor to Kent (but less numerous than the Bean or Pink-footed Goose) and provided the first area record, recounting that one had been shot at Hythe in the winter of 1891 by Mr. H. Stredwick, of St. Leonards, “where I have seen it”. Ticehurst also stated that the Folkestone Museum contains one, “shot on the Warren near that town”, although was unable to provide a date for this event. He further noted that the Tournay collection at Hythe also contained a specimen but had no details at all.

Harrison (1953) oversaw the beginnings of a marked change in status in the county, with a considerable increase in the numbers wintering, particularly on the north Kent marshes from the 1940s. This continued during the review period of Taylor *et al.* (1981) by which time Kent supported a nationally important wintering population, with numbers increasing still further when there was “severe weather on the continent”. Whilst passage birds are often recorded from October, the main arrival of winter flocks in the county often coincides with periods of cold weather in December, or occasionally in early January. White-fronted Geese wintering in Kent are of the nominate form *albifrons*, sometimes referred to as “Russian White-fronted Goose”.

The first documented records in the twentieth century were noted in 1958, when Roger Norman saw a total of 47 (in flocks of 18 and 29) flying north-west over Hythe Ranges on the 9<sup>th</sup> February and one at Pennypot Farm, Palmarsh (which is now Pennypot Estate), on the 11<sup>th</sup> March (Norman 2006, pers. comm.). Two further sightings followed in the 1960s, when William Nevin saw 100 flying over Hythe on the 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1963 (with the Kent Bird Report for that year noting that “large numbers [were] seen either passing over or at unusual localities during the early part of January” (KOS, 1964)) and Roger Norman saw ten at Nickolls Quarry on the 13<sup>th</sup> January 1969 (Norman 2007).



White-fronted Geese at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



White-fronted Goose at Hythe Imperial (Phil Smith)

There were no further records until 1980, when Dave Weaver saw 15 flying west over Hythe Roughs on the 27<sup>th</sup> January, but it has been noted with some regularity since 1993, having been seen in 18 of the 30 years. Whilst there has been a total of 34 records across this period, occurrence varies considerably, with up to seven records in some years and several gaps of two or three years without any, as figure 1 demonstrates.

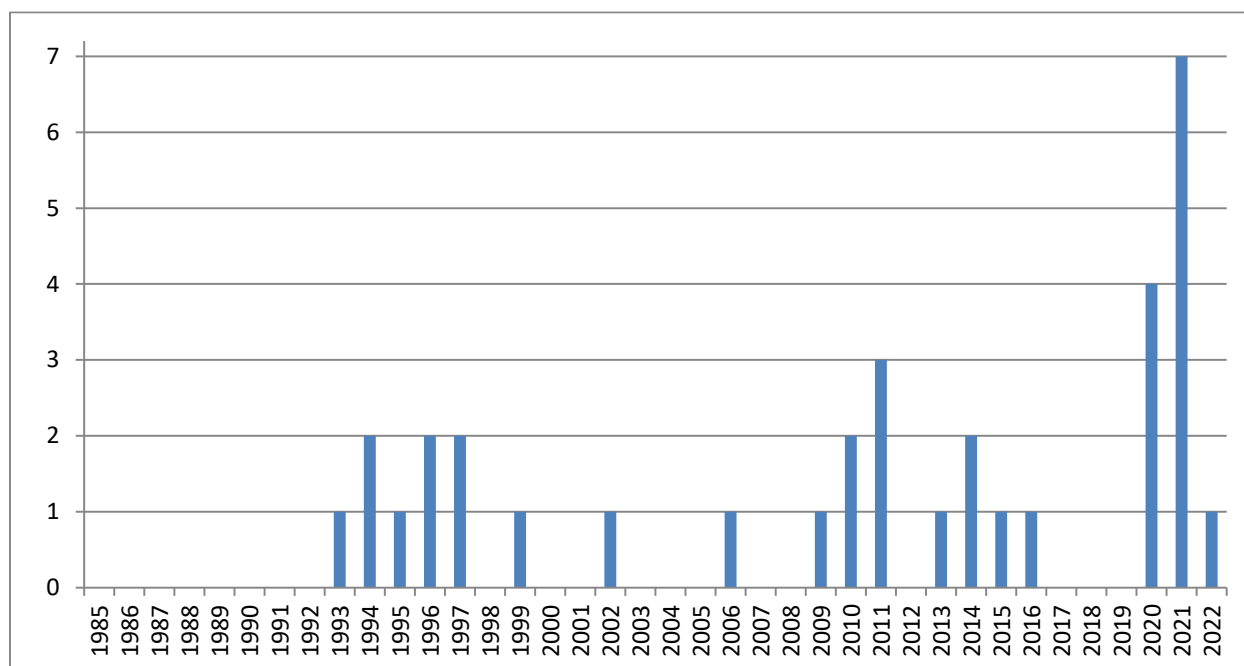


Figure 1: White-fronted Goose records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

Some occurrences have involved large numbers of birds, with counts in excess of 50 having been noted on six occasions: 75 were seen flying out to sea from Abbotscliffe on the 25<sup>th</sup> January 1997, 80 flew west at Hythe Ranges on the 27<sup>th</sup> December 1999, 180 were in fields at Donkey Street on the 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2010, an estimate of an exceptional 300 were seen flying in from the south then back out to sea at Nickolls Quarry on the 25<sup>th</sup> December 2010, up to 51 were in fields in the Willop Basin in late November/early December 2020 and a total of 104 (in flock of 23 and 81) flew east at Seabrook on the 1<sup>st</sup> March 2021.

Apart from one on the 12<sup>th</sup> November 2011, a marked arrival in late November 2020 and a flock of 30 that flew over Samphire Hoe on the 18<sup>th</sup> November 2022, all have been recorded between the 19<sup>th</sup> December (week 51) and 19<sup>th</sup> March (week 12), with a peak of five sightings in the last week of December, as shown in figure 2.

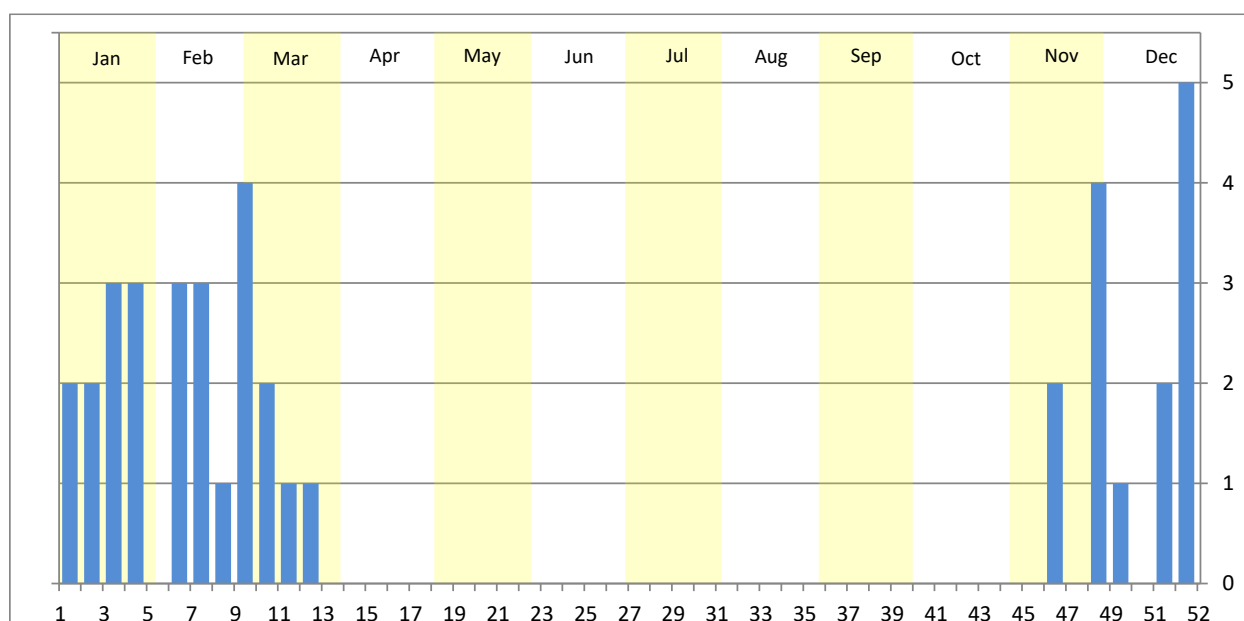


Figure 2: White-fronted Goose records at Folkestone and Hythe by week



Figure 3 shows the distribution of records by tetrad. Most of the records are either from the Romney Marsh area (39%) or from the coast (46%) where there have been records from a number of regularly watched sites (Hythe Ranges, Hythe, Princes Parade, Seabrook, Copt Point, Abbotscliffe and Samphire Hoe). There are inland records of birds flying over Hythe Roughs, Saltwood and Cheriton, whilst in February 2006 a flock spent nine days in the Folkestone Racecourse area (near Westenhangar) and in March 2021 flocks were seen at Cock Ash Lake and at Lympe.



Figure 3: Distribution of all White-fronted Goose records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad



White-fronted Goose at the Willop Basin (Brian Harper)



White-fronted Geese at Cock Ash Lake (Derek Smith)

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1891** Hythe, one shot in winter (per Ticehurst, 1909)
- Prior to 1909** Folkestone Warren, one shot, undated (per Ticehurst, 1909)
- 1958** Hythe Ranges, 47 (in flocks of 18 and 29) flew north-west, 9<sup>th</sup> February (R. K. Norman)
- 1958** Pennypot Farm, Palmarsh (now Pennypot Estate), 11<sup>th</sup> March (R. K. Norman)
- 1963** Hythe, 100, 3<sup>rd</sup> January (W. S. Nevin)
- 1969** Nickolls Quarry, ten, 13<sup>th</sup> January (R. K. Norman)
- 1980** Hythe Roughs, 15 flew west, 27<sup>th</sup> January (D. J. Weaver)
- 1993** Hythe, six flew east, 30<sup>th</sup> December (I. A. Roberts)
- 1994** Copt Point, 26 flew west, 16<sup>th</sup> January (D. A. Gibson)
- 1994** Nickolls Quarry, one, 25<sup>th</sup> February (R. K. Norman)
- 1995** Folkestone, 24 flew north, 24<sup>th</sup> December (P. Howe, H. G. Brown)

**1996** Nickolls Quarry, 29 flew east, 14<sup>th</sup> January (R. K. Norman)  
**1996** Nickolls Quarry, one, 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> February (R. K. Norman)  
**1997** Abbotscliffe, 75 flew out to sea, 25<sup>th</sup> January (D. A. Gibson)  
**1997** Copt Point, two flew west, 17<sup>th</sup> February (D. A. Gibson)  
**1999** Hythe Ranges, 80 flew west, 27<sup>th</sup> December (I. A. Roberts)  
**2002** Nickolls Quarry, three flew east, 19<sup>th</sup> March (R. K. Norman)  
**2006** Folkestone Racecourse Lake (Westenhanger), 14, 11<sup>th</sup> February, with 7 remaining until the 19<sup>th</sup> (I. A. Roberts, D. Brown)  
**2009** Botolph's Bridge, one, 2<sup>nd</sup> January (D. Brown)  
**2010** Donkey Street, 180, 22<sup>nd</sup> December, with 3 remaining until the 24<sup>th</sup> (I. A. Roberts, B. Harper)  
**2010** Nickolls Quarry, 300 flew in from the south and back out to sea, 25<sup>th</sup> December (D. Weller)  
**2011** Saltwood, 12 flew south, 16<sup>th</sup> January (P. Howe)  
**2011** Nickolls Quarry, six flew over, 12<sup>th</sup> November, photographed (B. Harper)  
**2011** Nickolls Quarry, six flew west, 5<sup>th</sup> December (R. K. Norman)  
**2013** Samphire Hoe, two flew east, 12<sup>th</sup> February (I. A. Roberts, P. Smith)  
**2014** Princes Parade, Seabrook, adult flew west, 26<sup>th</sup> January (I. A. Roberts)  
**2014** Nickolls Quarry, six flew west, 28<sup>th</sup> December, photographed, earlier seen over Seabrook (B. Harper, D. Wrathall)  
**2015** Willop Basin, adult, 15<sup>th</sup> February, photographed (B. Harper, I. A. Roberts)  
**2016** West Hythe, eight flew south-west, 17<sup>th</sup> January (I. A. Roberts)  
**2020** Donkey Street, adult, 29<sup>th</sup> November, with three adults on 30<sup>th</sup> November and six birds on the 1<sup>st</sup> December, photographed (B. Harper, I. A. Roberts)  
**2020** Hythe Imperial golf course, juvenile, 29<sup>th</sup> November, with adult and juvenile on 30<sup>th</sup> November, photographed (P. Smith, I. A. Roberts)  
**2020** Samphire Hoe, one, 29<sup>th</sup> November, with eight on 30<sup>th</sup> November (L. Collins, P. Holt, P. Smith)  
**2020** Willop Basin, seven, 30<sup>th</sup> November, increasing to 41 on the 1<sup>st</sup> December and 51 on the 2<sup>nd</sup> December, with varying numbers (between 2 and 46) present daily until the 10<sup>th</sup> December, photographed (I. A. Roberts)  
**2021** Seabrook, 104 (flocks of 23 and 81) flew east, 1<sup>st</sup> March (P. Howe)  
**2021** Cheriton, 30 flew over, 1<sup>st</sup> March (C. Gillard)  
**2021** Seabrook, 18 flew east, 2<sup>nd</sup> March (P. Howe)  
**2021** Willop Basin, four, 4<sup>th</sup> March (I. A. Roberts, B. Harper)  
**2021** Lympne, 27, 5<sup>th</sup> March, photographed (P. Sharp)  
**2021** Cock Ash Lake, six, 14<sup>th</sup> March, photographed (D. Smith)  
**2022** Samphire Hoe, 30 flew south, 18<sup>th</sup> November (P. Holt)

## References

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### ***Acknowledgements***

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

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White-fronted Goose at Donkey Street (Ian Roberts)