

White-winged Black Tern

Chlidonias leucopterus

Category A

Very rare vagrant.

2 records

Breeds in eastern Europe from eastern Poland and eastern Romania into Russia. Winters at inland water bodies of Afrotropical region. A scarce passage migrant through northern and western Europe, including Britain where there are currently around 19 records per annum (Snow & Perrins, 1998, White & Kehoe, 2019).

It was formerly considered to be a national rarity to the end of 2005 when the British Birds Rarities Committee removed it from the list of species which it assessed, with over 850 sightings having been logged (Fraser *et al*, 2007). It is a rare but regular passage migrant in Kent, with 117 records to the end of 2019. All county records have occurred between the 3rd May and the 26th October, with over two-thirds arriving between August and October (KOS, 2021).

The first area record was documented by Harrison (1953), who noted that “on the afternoon of 15th May 1951 Sir Henry Woodward saw a bird off the sea front, between Sandgate and Hythe, which he believed was a White-winged Black Tern. His original description (20th May 1951) states: ‘I saw a tern appearing about 100 yards out, parallel to the shore, and was struck by its dark body – I observed it till it was out of recognisable distance and at its closest it was about 30 yards off – the body and head were all very dark, but the wings were almost white’.

In a subsequent letter (12th June 1951) the observer adds: ‘the dark body was noticeable as soon as I caught sight of it about 100 yards off and I never took my eyes off it until it had passed out of sight... The whitish wings, particularly at the shoulder, were very distinct and noticeable – it was alone’. I consider his identification substantiated”.

The only recent record concerns a juvenile which flew west past Copt Point on the 24th September 1992 and was later seen passing Dungeness.

The records by year are shown in figure 1.

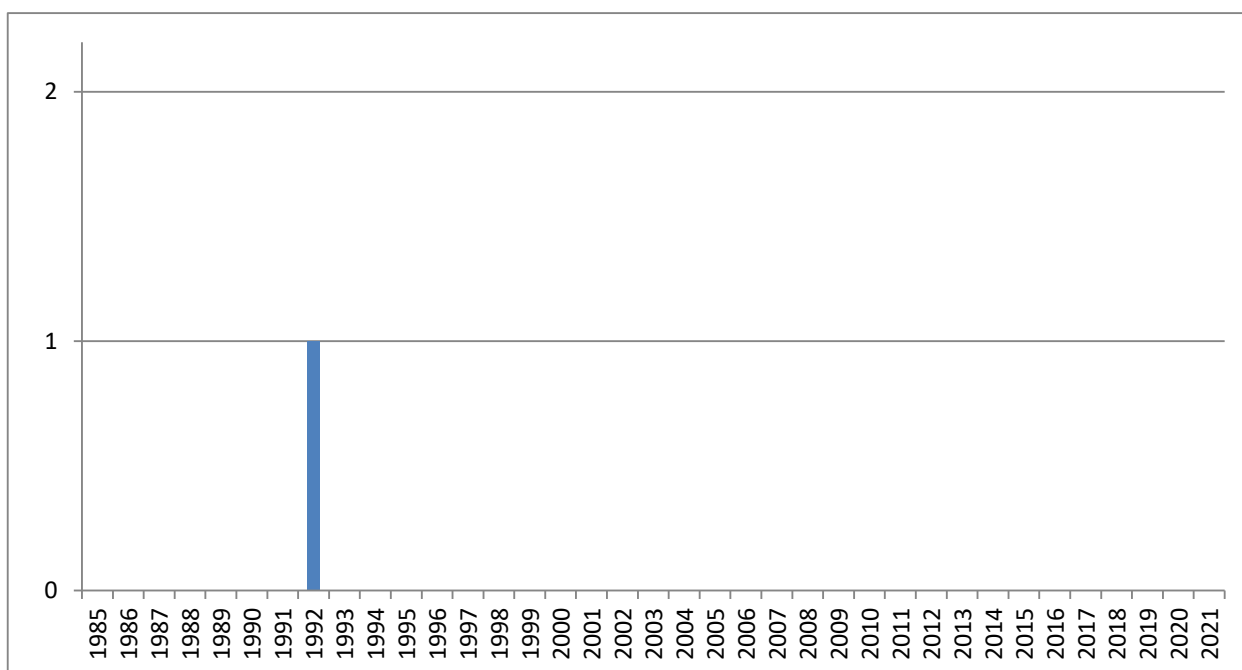


Figure 1: White-winged Black Tern records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

One record occurred in spring and the other in autumn. The records by week are given in figure 2.

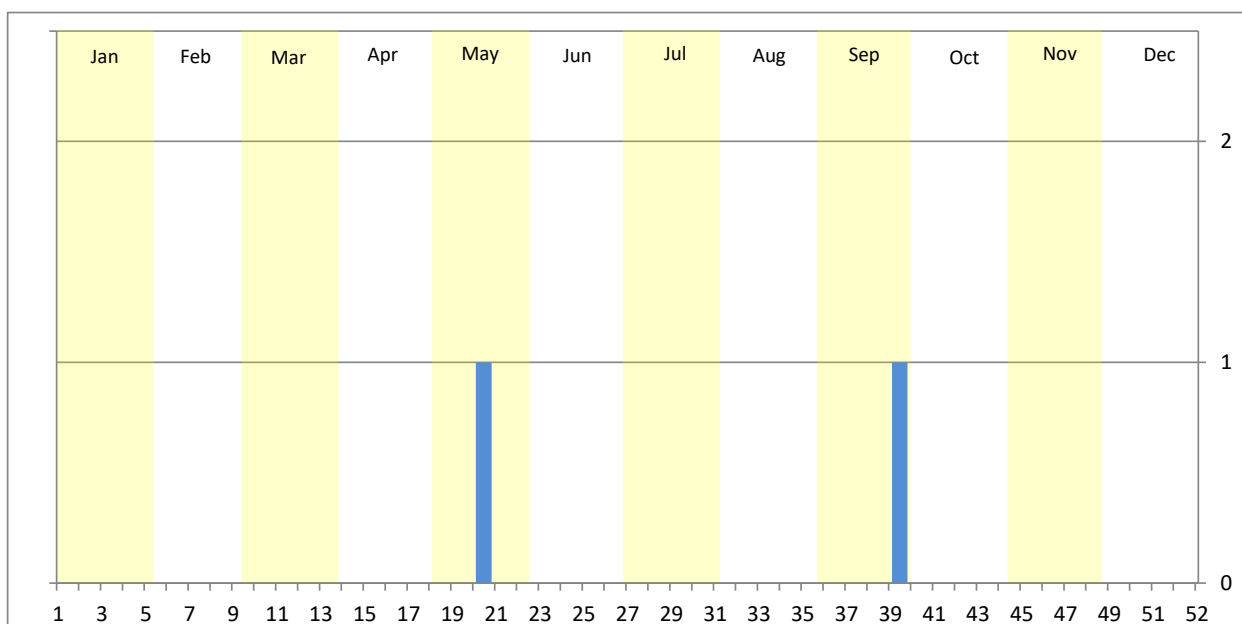


Figure 2: White-winged Black Tern records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the distribution of records by tetrad. The first sighting, described as being "between Sandgate and Hythe" could have been in TR13 S or TR13 X, and so is not shown on the map.

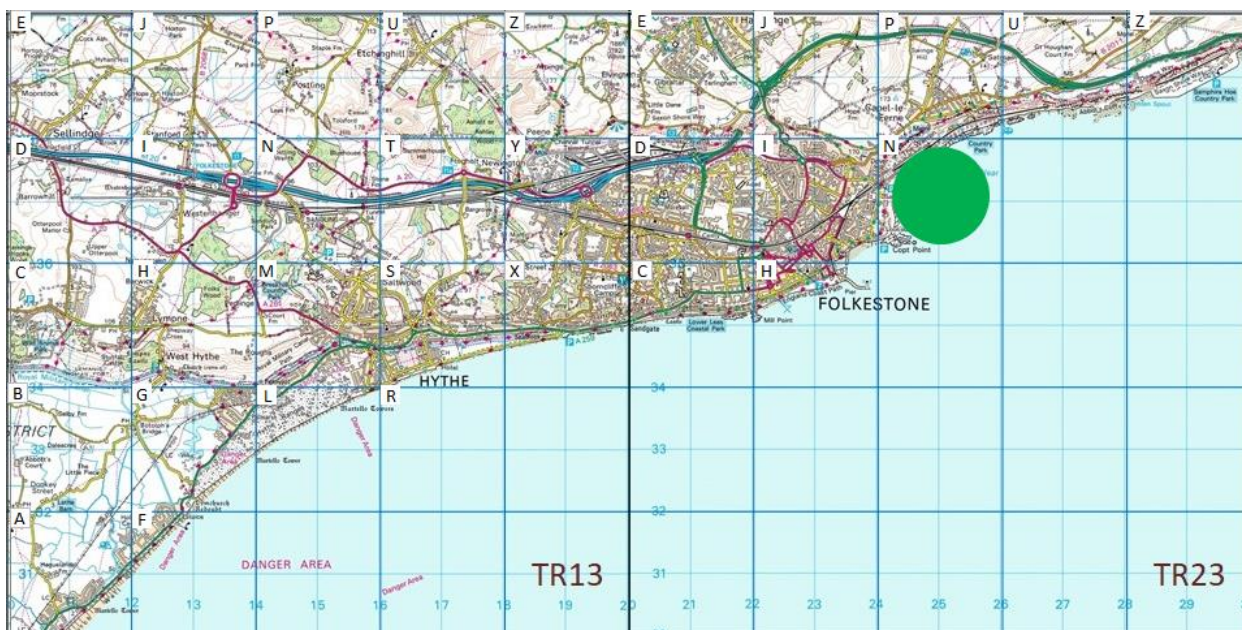


Figure 3: Distribution of all White-winged Black Tern records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1951** Sandgate, adult, 15th May (H. Woodward)
- 1992** Copt Point, juvenile flew west, 24th September (D. A. Gibson)

References

BBRC statistics: <https://www.bbrc.org.uk/main-information/statistics> (accessed 2021)

Fraser, P. A., Roger, M. J. & the Rarities Committee, 2007. Report on rare birds in Great Britain in 2005. *British Birds*: 100, 16-61.

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

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

White, S. & Kehoe, C., 2019. Report on scarce migrant birds in Britain in 2017. *British Birds*, 112: 444-468.

Acknowledgements

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