

## Bearded Tit

*Panurus biarmicus*

Category A

Rare migrant and winter visitor.

22 records

Well scattered across mid-latitude Europe and central Asia to north-east China, being restricted to areas of suitable wetland. European populations are basically fairly sedentary, but subject to eruptive (diurnal) movements, the extent of which vary greatly and result in considerable fluctuation of range. Breeding areas are much reduced after severe winters (Snow & Perrins, 1998). In Britain mainly found in southern and eastern areas, with around 700 breeding pairs across nearly 100 sites (Holling *et al*, 2019).



Bearded Tit at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)

It is a local breeder, passage migrant and winter visitor in Kent (KOS, 2020). Bearded Tits were common in the north Kent marshes until about 1865 when they were lost due to destruction of reed-beds. The species was re-established for a few years in east Kent until extirpated by the severe winter of 1947. Since the end of 1940s, when only a handful of pairs bred in East Anglia, numbers have increased markedly at a national level. The major increase in reed-bed habitat, allied to milder winters and a growing population in the Dutch polders has allowed the species to spread throughout suitable habitat in Britain. The Kent population was thought to be in excess of 100 pairs in the most recent atlas and occupying almost all available habitat within the county (Clements *et al*, 2015).

It was first recorded locally on the 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1983, when a pair were seen in reeds between West Hythe and the West Hythe Dam by Neil Frampton, then almost ten years later two were reported in the same area on the 14<sup>th</sup> September 1993.

One was seen briefly in the reeds at the south end of the 'main bay' at Nickolls Quarry by Roger Norman on the 12<sup>th</sup> November 1998 before it flew off to the south-west. This site then saw a notable influx in autumn in 2001, when up to eight were present in reeds near the sewage works between the 28<sup>th</sup> October and 1<sup>st</sup> November, with two (thought probably to be a mobile part of same flock, although it is possible there may have been some 'turnover' of birds) in the 'long bay' there on the 29<sup>th</sup> October. This record was part of a wider influx along the south coast of England, which also included the first area record away from the Marsh: two which flew west past Abbotscliffe on the 1<sup>st</sup> November.



Bearded Tit at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)



Bearded Tit at Nickolls Quarry (Ian Roberts)

Nickolls Quarry then hosted an over-wintering pair in 2006/07, with an additional bird present for at least a week in December, two in January 2012 and one in December 2013. There were at least five there in December 2014, with at least four remaining into early April 2015 raising hopes that they might breed, but there were no further sightings.

Five were again present at the same site from January 2016 with a pair remaining until early April, with the male even heard singing but it departed soon after. There were four at this site again from November 2016 and a record count of 12 in October 2017, remaining until at least December, with two there in January 2018.

Nickolls Quarry has also hosted spring records of singles on the 16th March 2009 and 27th May 2012, and a pair on the 21st April 2018.

There have been no sightings at Nickolls Quarry since April 2018 and the reed-bed has largely been destroyed due to housing development work at the site, so further records at this site are now less likely.

Elsewhere Samphire Hoe recorded its first in October 2010, Abbotscliffe attracted another in the same month and singles were seen at Beachborough Lakes in October and November 2017, and April 2019. The records by year are shown in figure 1.

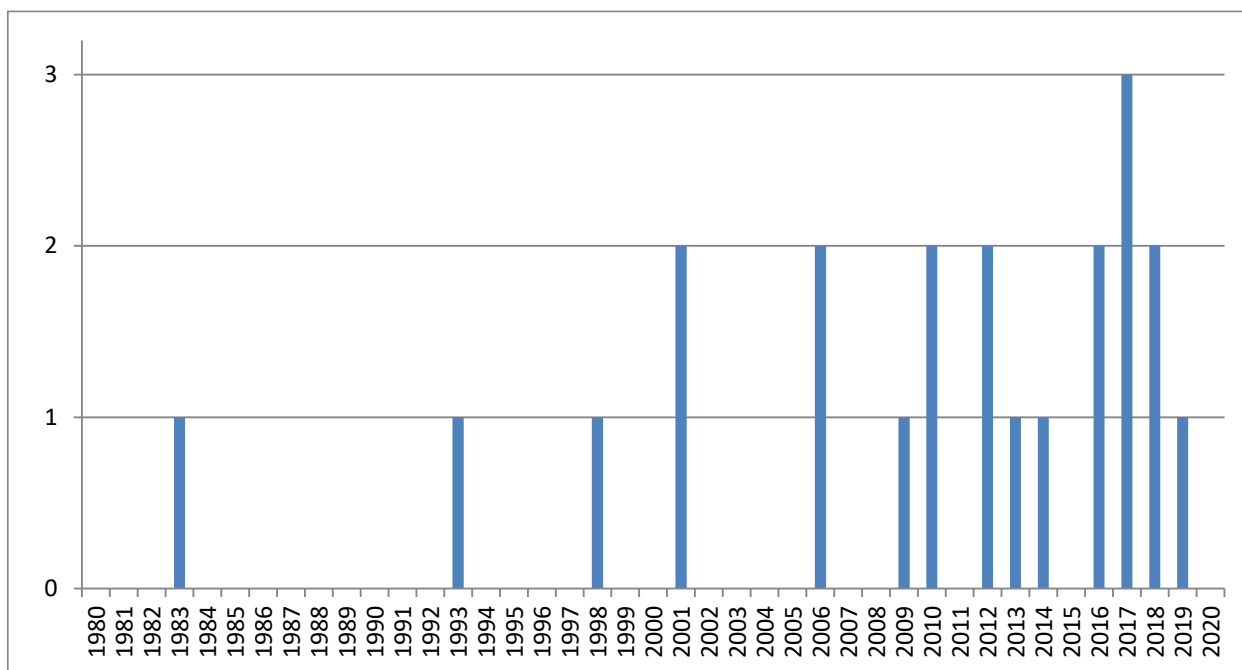


Figure 1: Bearded Tit records at Folkestone and Hythe

Most sightings have been in autumn, between mid-September (week 37) and mid-November (week 47), with others in December, January, March, April, and May, as demonstrated by figure 2.

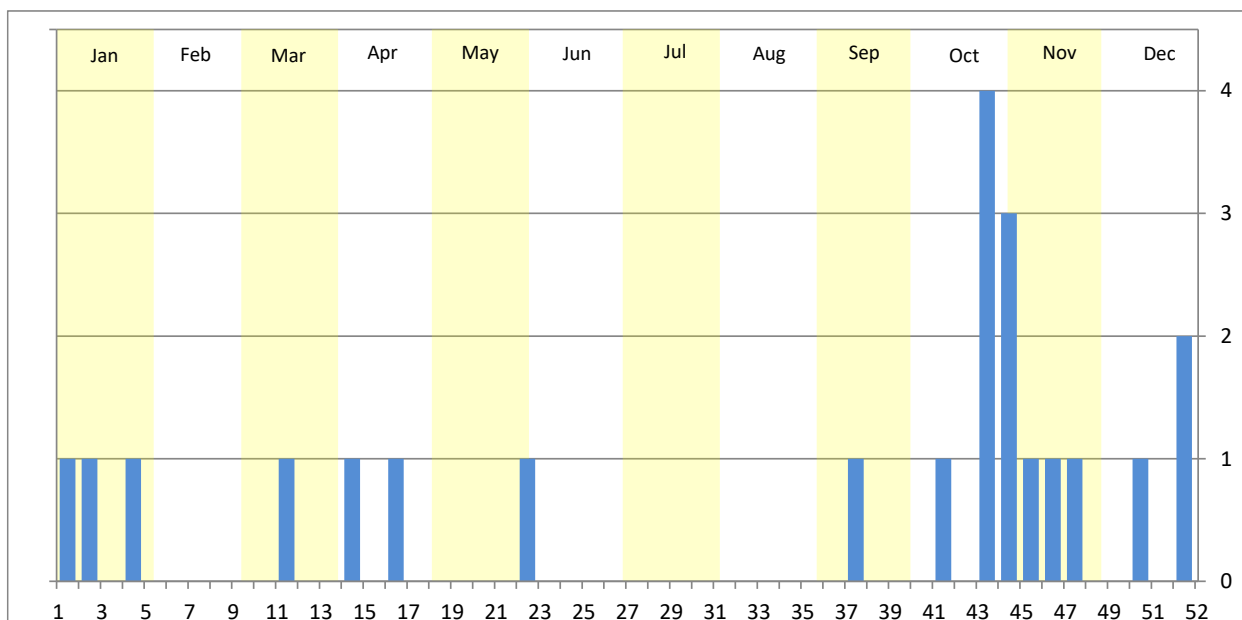


Figure 2: Bearded Tit records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the distribution of records by tetrad.



Figure 3: Distribution of all Bearded Tit records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad



Bearded Tit at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)



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Bearded Tit at Beachborough Lakes (Steve Tomlinson)



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The full list of records is as follows:

- 1983** Botolph's Bridge, pair between West Hythe and West Hythe Dam, 3<sup>rd</sup> November (N. C. Frampton)
- 1993** Botolph's Bridge, two along the canal cutting towards West Hythe Dam, 14<sup>th</sup> September (per R. K. Norman)
- 1998** Nickolls Quarry, one, seen briefly then flew south-west, 12<sup>th</sup> November (R. K. Norman)
- 2001** Nickolls Quarry, up to eight, 28<sup>th</sup> October to 1<sup>st</sup> November (R. K. Norman, D. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)
- 2001** Abbotscliffe, two flew west, 1<sup>st</sup> November (I. A. Roberts)
- 2006** Nickolls Quarry, pair, 21<sup>st</sup> November to 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2007, photographed (R. K. Norman, I. A. Roberts), with additional female or immature from 10<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> December
- 2009** Nickolls Quarry, male, 16<sup>th</sup> March, photographed (I. A. Roberts)
- 2010** Samphire Hoe, one, 13<sup>th</sup> October (P. Holt, T. Prentice)
- 2010** Abbotscliffe, one in bushes then flew west, 24<sup>th</sup> October (I. A. Roberts)
- 2012** Nickolls Quarry, two immature/females, 10<sup>th</sup> January, photographed (I. A. Roberts)
- 2012** Nickolls Quarry, one, 27<sup>th</sup> May (M. Harper)
- 2013** Nickolls Quarry, male, 26<sup>th</sup> December to at least 5<sup>th</sup> January 2014 (B. Harper, R. K. Norman, I. A. Roberts)
- 2014** Nickolls Quarry, at least five, 28<sup>th</sup> December, with at least four remaining until 5<sup>th</sup> April 2015, photographed (B. Harper, I. A. Roberts, R. K. Norman)
- 2016** Nickolls Quarry, five (three males), 3<sup>rd</sup> January to at least 24<sup>th</sup> February, with a pair remaining until at least 2<sup>nd</sup> April, and the male to the 8<sup>th</sup> April, photographed (B. Harper, I. A. Roberts)
- 2016** Nickolls Quarry, two, 6<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> November, increasing to four (two males) on the 18<sup>th</sup> November and remaining until at least early January, photographed (B. Harper, I. A. Roberts)
- 2017** Beachborough Lakes, one flew west, 26<sup>th</sup> October, photographed (S. Tomlinson)
- 2017** Nickolls Quarry, 12, 28<sup>th</sup> October to at least 6<sup>th</sup> December, photographed (B. Harper, I. A. Roberts)
- 2017** Beachborough Lakes, one, 1<sup>st</sup> November (S. Tomlinson)
- 2018** Nickolls Quarry, two, 26<sup>th</sup> January (M. Varley), possibly involving some birds from 2017
- 2018** Nickolls Quarry, pair, 21<sup>st</sup> April, photographed (B. Harper)
- 2019** Beachborough Lakes, one flew west, 9<sup>th</sup> April (S. Tomlinson)



Bearded Tit at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)

## **References**

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

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## **Acknowledgements**

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