

Gadwall

Mareca strepera

Category A, C2

Winter visitor and passage migrant, bred in 2021.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998; Clements et al. 2015):

Breeds across much of Europe eastwards across Asia to Japan and south to Iran, also in western North America. Migratory in northern and eastern parts of its range, with some wintering in England where they join the mostly sedentary population which is believed to have mostly derived from a wild pair captured in Norfolk about 1850 and subsequently put down at an estate in the Brecks.

Kent status (KOS 2021):

In Kent it is a scarce but increasing breeding species and a more widespread winter visitor.



Gadwall at Hythe (Brian Harper)

The Gadwall was not included in Knight and Tolputt's "List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood" (1871) and Ticehurst (1909) considered it only to be "a rare autumn and winter migrant" to the county. Harrison (1953) reported that it became more regular particularly in the 1930s and 1940s, writing of successful breeding in the Stour Valley and on the Thames marshes in the 1940s

Harrison remarked that, "considering the increase of this duck in Norfolk, which occurred a considerable time ago, it would seem that its establishment as a nesting species in Kent was slow in coming about". Taylor *et al.* (1981) commented on a marked increase since the late 1960s, although qualified that this may be partly explained by the release of over 100 birds at the Sevenoaks reserve but even so still considered it to be a scarce and local breeding species, with numbers supplemented by immigrants from the continent.

Clements *et al.* wrote that it did not become a regular breeding species in the county until the 1970s and that the number of occupied tetrads had trebled since the second Kent atlas (1988-94), with a spreading on to the Romney Marsh in the "hinterland of Dungeness".



Gadwall at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)



Gadwall at Brockhill Country Park (Brian Harper)

The first local record does not appear to have occurred until January 1985, when Sue and Chris Philpott noted up to four at Nickolls Quarry (Norman 2007). The next sightings soon followed however, with Ian Roberts watching a flock of seven flying west past Mill Point on the 8th July 1988 and Pat Miller finding a pair at Nickolls Quarry on the 26th February 1989. There have been annual records thereafter and it is a regular, but uncommon, passage migrant and winter visitor.

Overall distribution

Figure 1 shows the distribution of all records of Gadwall by tetrad, with records from 17 tetrads (55%).

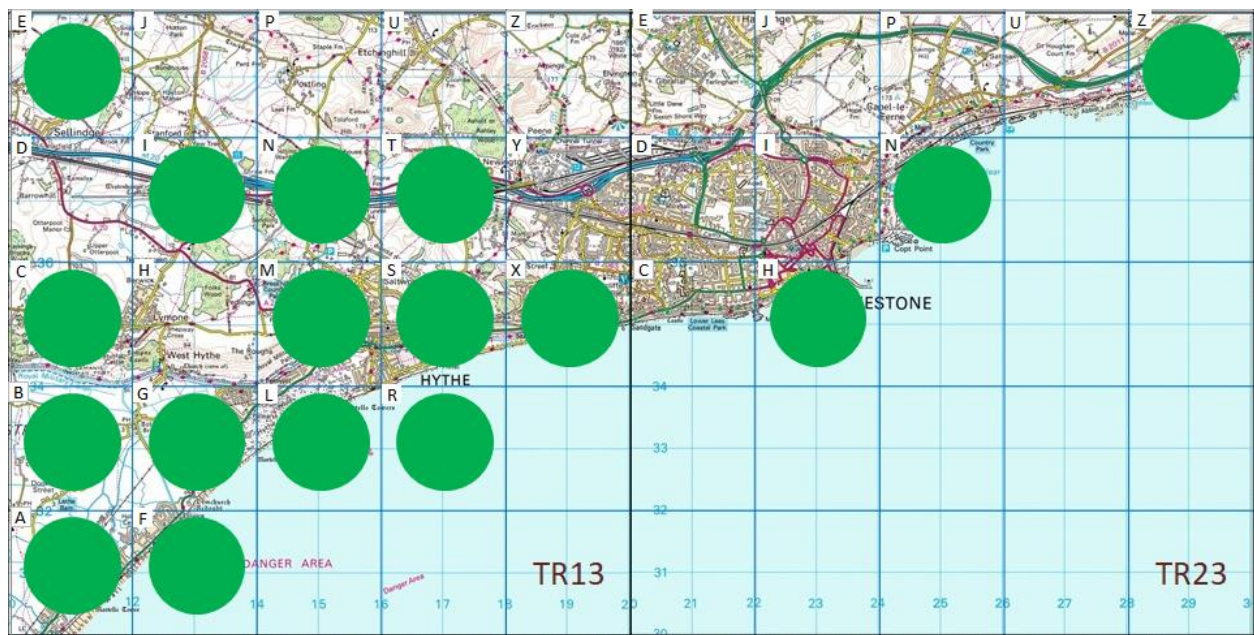


Figure 1: Distribution of all Gadwall records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The first autumn migrants are typically noted in October. There only has only been one August sighting (a female at Nickolls Quarry on the 11th August 2003) and just three in September records: 11 at Nickolls Quarry on the 7th September 1994, two west past Samphire Hoe on the 12th September 2007 and one on the sea off Folkestone Beach on the 28th September 2014. Autumn migrants have been noted in most years since 1990, typically with single figure counts but ten flew past Samphire Hoe on the 15th November 2013, about 25 (in a mixed flock of 50 duck that appeared to be mostly Gadwall and Pintail) flew west past Mill Point on the 12th November 2016 and 12 were at Nickolls Quarry on the 28th October 2018.

Larger numbers can occur in December sometimes, but not always, associated with the onset of cold weather. In 1995 up to 14 were present at Nickolls Quarry between the 8th and 14th December, with up to 16 there from the 22nd to 29th December 1996, 20 there on the 22nd December 2007 and in December 2010 there was a peak of 34 there on the 24th (with up to 27 remaining into early January 2011), whilst 20 flew west past Hythe on the 2nd and 15 (probably part of the Nickolls Quarry flock) were seen at nearby Botolph's Bridge on the 27th. There was an exceptional movement of wildfowl off the Willop Basin in a chilly north-easterly wind on the 8th December 2012 which included a record count of 150 Gadwall. Most recently in 2022, there were 17 at Hoorne's Sewer in late December.



Gadwall at Hythe (Brian Harper)



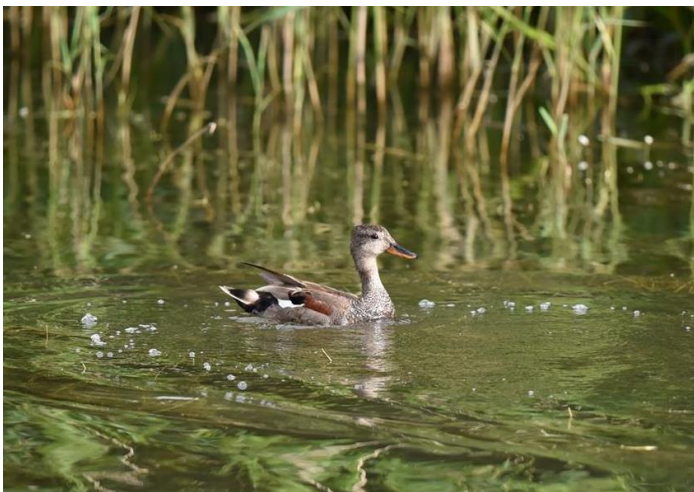
Gadwall at Hythe (Ian Roberts)

It is an uncommon winter visitor and small numbers tend to be found on more secluded and undisturbed bodies of water such as the lake at the former Folkestone Racecourse (near Westenhanger) and Chesterfield Wood.

There largest counts in January/February have been at these sites, where there were 20 at Chesterfield Wood on the 3rd January 2004, 32 there on the 3rd January 2009, 24 at Folkestone Racecourse on the 31st January 2011, 23 at Chesterfield Wood on the 10th January 2014 and 18 at Folkestone Racecourse on the 8th February 2017.

A light spring passage is noted in some years, typically between mid-March and early May, with just small numbers involved and larger counts of seven east past Mill Point on the 16th April 2014, 17 east there on the 20th March 2005 and in March 2013 seven flew east past Samphire Hoe on the 9th, with 11 east there on the 22nd and 12 east there the following day.

After a few sightings of a pair in the Donkey Street/Hoorne's Sewer area in March and April 2021 a female was flushed off a nest containing three eggs on the bank of the Hoorne's Sewer on the 2nd May, but there were no subsequent reports. There have been very few sightings after mid-May but four were seen at Nickolls Quarry on the 18th May 2004 and 28th May 2003, four flew west past Copt Point on the 12th June 2000, two flew west there on the 13th June 2011 and an eclipse drake was seen on the canal at Princes Parade on the 13th June 2016. The only July record was the one referred to above (the second ever occurrence in the area).



Gadwall at Princes Parade (Nigel Webster)

Also worthy of mention is an apparent Brewer's Duck (a hybrid between Gadwall and Mallard) seen at Chesterfield Wood on the 12th January 2014.



Apparent Brewer's Duck (Gadwall x Mallard hybrid) at Chesterfield Wood (Ian Roberts)

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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