

# Snow Goose

*Anser caerulescens*

Category A, E

Very rare vagrant or escape.

7 records, 9 birds

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

Breeds from north-east Siberia, eastward across North America to north-west Greenland. The closest breeding population to Europe, in north-west Greenland and around north Baffin Bay winters on the Atlantic coast from Maryland to North Carolina. Whilst genuine vagrants certainly occur in Europe, most records probably relate to escaped or feral birds.

*Kent status (KOS 2021):*

It is known to have occurred as a wild bird in Kent but most records are likely to involve feral or escaped individuals.

Taylor *et al.* (1981) described how the Snow Goose is a known vagrant to Kent on the basis of a ringing recovery in 1980: on the 1<sup>st</sup> March a flock of 17 white morph birds, including four immatures, was seen flying down the Thames at Broadness, and later seen at Cliffe. During the 18<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> April what was believed to be the same flock (13 adult and four first-winter white morph birds, plus a blue morph goose) was present in the Netherlands, when one of the white adults was seen to carry a ring indicating that it was a male Lesser Snow Goose ringed as a gosling in Canada in 1977. It seems likely that the whole flock was of Canadian origin.

As well as confirming that wild Snow Geese reach Kent this record also indicated that birds might interchange between Kent and the Netherlands (as with other geese) in response to severe weather, and that wintering birds remain late into the spring (and so might be encountered on passage in late April or even into May, as if often the case with species which breed in the very far north).

However, Taylor *et al.* considered that the true status of the species in the county was impossible to determine because of the frequency of escapes from British and European waterfowl collections. Whilst some records clearly relate to feral or escaped birds others might well be genuine vagrants. Neither the national nor county records committees formally assess records of this species.

It was first recorded at Folkestone and Hythe in February 1993, with a further eight records to 2000, but none since, as shown by figure 1. 1998 produced three sightings (involving four birds), with two in 1994 and singles in 1993 and 2000.

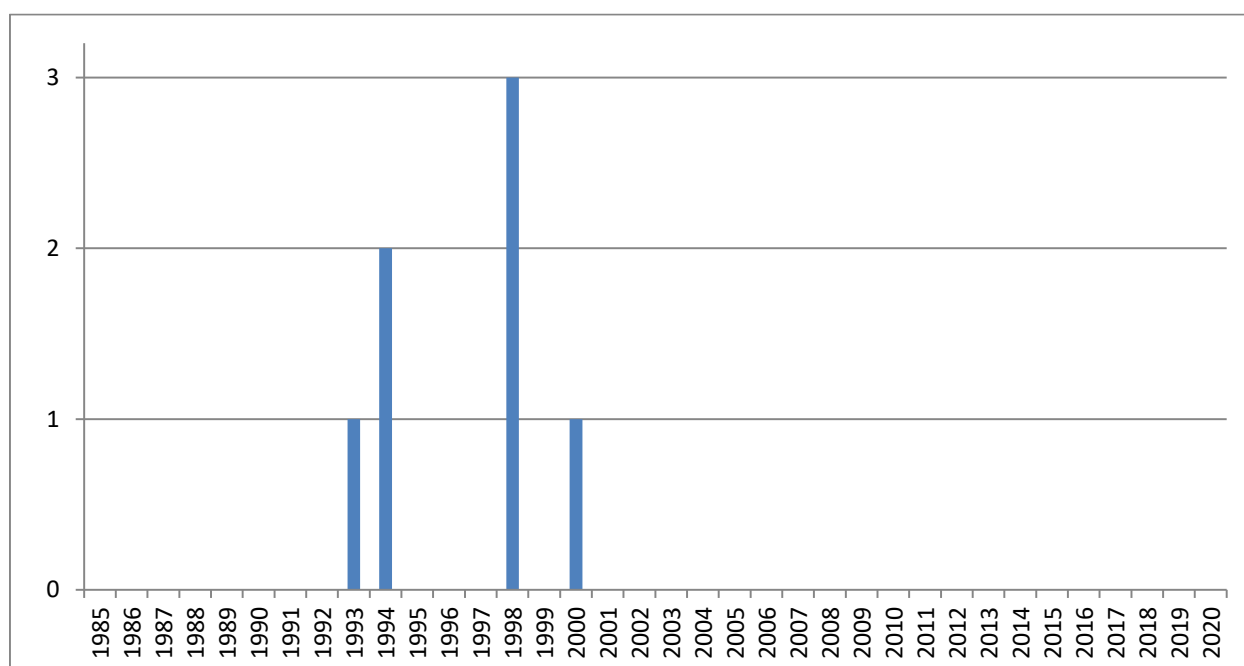


Figure 1: Snow Goose records at Folkestone and Hythe

The records by week are given in figure 2. There has been one winter record, in early February (week 5), five in spring between 30<sup>th</sup> March (week 13) and 17<sup>th</sup> May (week 20), and one in August. The latter bird clearly relates to an individual not of wild origin.

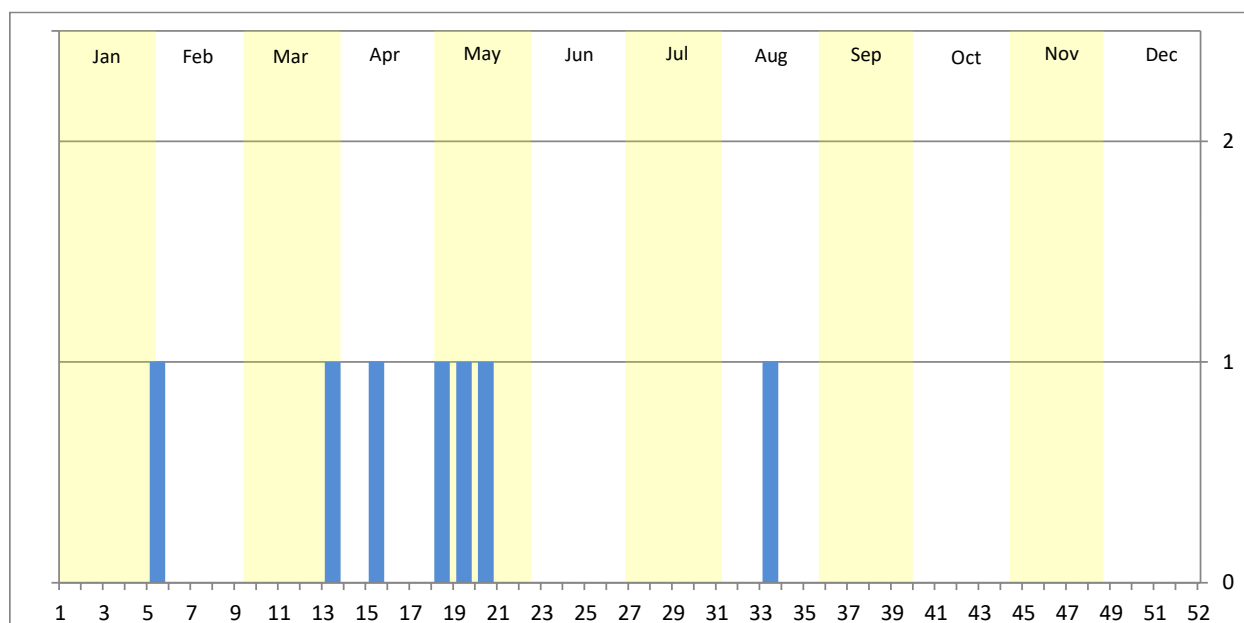


Figure 2: Snow Goose records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the location of records by tetrad. Apart from a record of two flying east past Copt Point, all others have been in the Nickolls Quarry area.



Figure 3: Distribution of all Snow Goose records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Whilst the individual seen in August (1994) clearly relates to an escaped or feral individual, it is very difficult (if not impossible), to assess the origin of the others. All other records either relate to birds which might have been displaced by severe weather (in February 1993) or might have occurred as spring migrants (between 30<sup>th</sup> March and 17<sup>th</sup> May), with nothing to suggest that they were likely to be of escaped or feral origin. The distribution of Barnacle Goose records locally is rather different, where less than 20% of records appear to have reasonable credentials for being thought of as wild birds and escaped or feral birds regularly occur in the summer months, including several long-stayers.

As there is no formal assessment of sightings either nationally or at a county-level it is left to individual observers to decide how best to categorise their records. In cases where there is nothing to suggest an escaped or feral origin, records could be considered to belong within category A, and that is how the species is currently treated on the Folkestone and Hythe list.

The full list of records is as follows:

**1993** Nickolls Quarry, with flock of 35 Barnacle Geese, 3<sup>rd</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> February (R. K. Norman, I. A. Roberts *et al.*).

**1994** Nickolls Quarry, 11<sup>th</sup> April (R. K. Norman).

**1994** Nickolls Quarry, 16<sup>th</sup> August (R. K. Norman), considered to be of escaped or feral origin (and excluded from the records total).

**1998** Nickolls Quarry, 4<sup>th</sup> May (I. A. Roberts).

**1998** Copt Point, two flew east, 11<sup>th</sup> May (D. A. Gibson).

**1998** Nickolls Quarry, 17<sup>th</sup> May (R. K. Norman).

**2000** Nickolls Quarry, two, 30<sup>th</sup> March, presumed same on 6<sup>th</sup> April (R. K. Norman).

### **References**

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

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.

Taylor, D., Davenport, D. & Flegg, J. 1981. *Birds of Kent*. Kent Ornithological Society.

### **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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