

Great Northern Diver

Gavia immer

Category A

Rare passage migrant and winter visitor. 48 records, 51 birds

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds in Iceland, Greenland and North America, wintering around coasts of western Europe.

Kent status (KOS 2022):

It is a scarce passage migrant and winter visitor to coasts in Kent, rare inland and in summer.



Great Northern Diver at Seabrook (Brian Harper)

It was first recorded locally in 1960 when David Musson saw one at Folkestone on the 7th March but there were no further sightings until one at Folkestone on the 21st May 1984 (per the Kent Bird Report for that year). Thereafter, Peter Wells recalled seeing one at Nickolls Quarry in winter 1986 or 1987 and Richard Stone saw a summer plumaged bird offshore from Mill Point on the 17th and 21st September 1988.

In 1989 singles were seen off Copt Point on the 3rd January and Mill Point on the 12th February and it has been noted with some regularity since, as figure 1 demonstrates. Overall there have been records in 22 of the 38 years between 1985 and 2022, with a total of 45 sightings across this period.

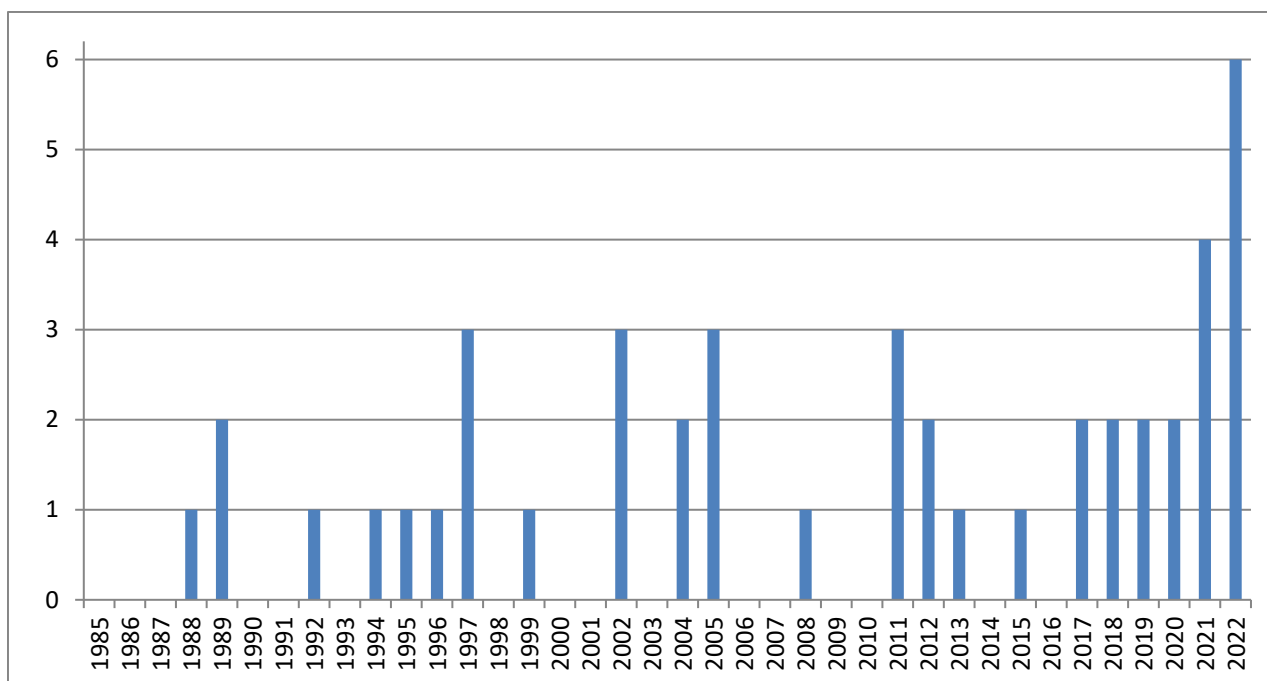


Figure 1: Great Northern Diver records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

It remains unpredictable in its appearance though locally with three records in four years, and a peak of six in 2022, but none in others.

A particularly early bird was seen off Mill Point from the 17th September 1988 and an autumn migrant flew west past Copt Point on the 27th October 1997. The other records are split between winter occurrences from 14th November to 7th March, and spring migrants, which have been noted from the 31st March to the 21st May (weeks 13 to 21), as shown in figure 2.

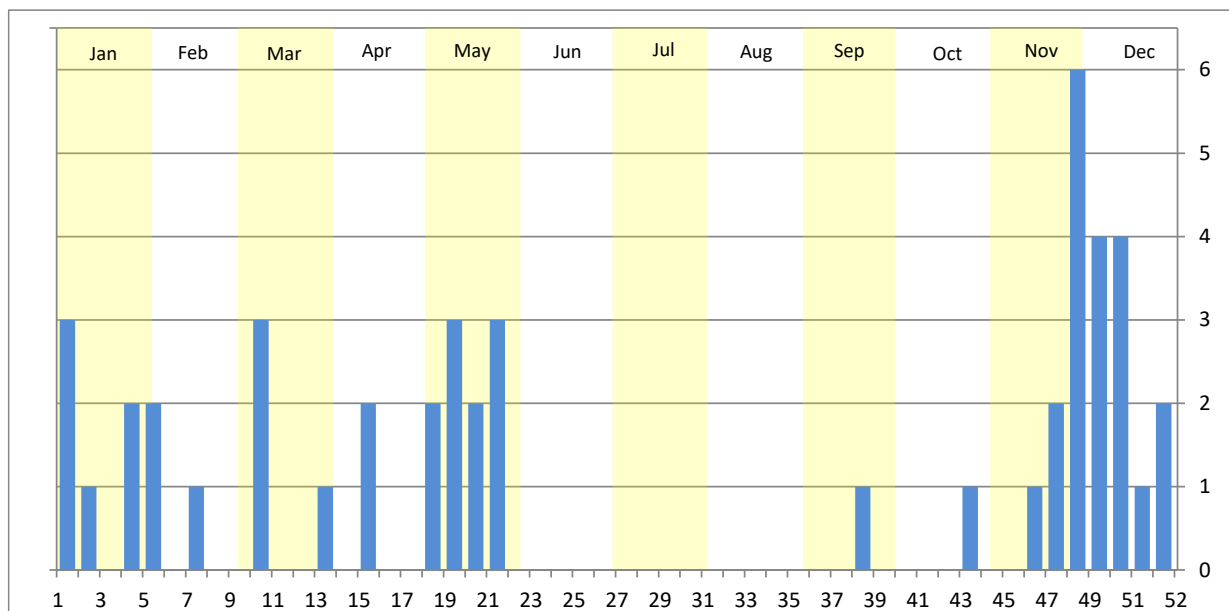


Figure 2: Great Northern Diver records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the distribution of records by tetrad. The majority of records have been from the Folkestone area (with 9 at Copt Point/Folkestone Warren, 6 at Mill Point and two early records “at Folkestone”, where the site was unspecified), Samphire Hoe (10), Battery Point/Sandgate (7), and the coast between the Willop Outfall and Princes Parade (9), with inland records from Nickolls Quarry (3) and a particularly approachable individual which ranged widely along the canal between Hythe and Seabrook in December 2011.



Figure 3: Distribution of all Great Northern Diver records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1960** Folkestone, one, 7th March (D. F. Musson)
- 1984** Folkestone, one, 21st May (per Kent Bird Report)
- c.1986** Nickolls Quarry, one in winter 1986 or 1987 (P. Wells)
- 1988** Mill Point, one in summer plumage, 17th and 21st September (R. C. Stone)
- 1989** Copt Point, one, 3rd January (per Kent Bird Report)
- 1989** Mill Point, one flew west, 12th February (I. A. Roberts)
- 1992** Nickolls Quarry, one in the west pool, 26th December (S. Hollands)
- 1994** Copt Point, one flew east, 21st May (D. A. Gibson)
- 1995** Sandgate, one, 17th December (D. A. Gibson)

1996 Sandgate, one, 13th December (P. Howe, H. G. Brown, R. Thorogood)
1997 Sandgate, two flew east, 22nd January (P. Howe)
1997 Sandgate, one flew east, 29th January (P. Howe)
1997 Copt Point, one flew west, 27th October (D. A. Gibson)
1999 Hythe Redoubt, one on the sea then flew west, 6th March (I. A. Roberts)
2002 Copt Point, one flew west, 1st May (I. A. Roberts)
2002 Copt Point, one flew west, 14th May (I. A. Roberts)
2002 Copt Point, one flew east, 28th November (I. A. Roberts)
2004 Sandgate, one offshore, 26th January (I. A. Roberts)
2004 Copt Point, two flew east, 21st May (I. A. Roberts)
2005 Samphire Hoe, one, 30th January (Reported)
2005 Copt Point, one flew east, 12th May (D. A. Gibson), also past Samphire Hoe (I. A. Roberts)
2005 Mill Point, one offshore, 27th November, photographed (I. A. Roberts)
2008 Samphire Hoe, one flew west, 9th May (I. A. Roberts)
2011 Copt Point, one flew east, 1st May (D. A. Gibson), also past Samphire Hoe (I. A. Roberts)
2011 Hythe Canal, juvenile ranging between Hythe and Seabrook, 6th to 11th December, photographed (M. Marsh, I. A. Roberts, B. Harper *et al*)
2011 Samphire Hoe, one, 7th December (D. E. Smith)
2012 Folkestone Beach, one flew east, 29th November (I. A. Roberts)
2012 Folkestone Warren, one feeding close inshore, 1st December (P. Chantler), possibly same as above
2013 Samphire Hoe, one, 19th to 20th November (P. R. Smith, M. D. Kennett)
2015 Mill Point, two flew east, 14th May (I. A. Roberts, B. Harper)
2017 Princes Parade, one on the sea, 14th November (B. Harper, I. A. Roberts)
2017 Princes Parade, one on the sea, 2nd December, photographed (I. A. Roberts)
2018 Between Sandgate and Seabrook, one on the sea, 9th April (N. C. Frampton)
2018 Samphire Hoe, one flew east, 15th April (S. Cutt)
2019 Mill Point, one on the sea, 3rd January, photographed (I. A. Roberts, B. Harper, D. Brown)
2019 Sandgate/Seabrook, one on the sea, 5th January to 1st February, photographed (P. Howe, I. A. Roberts, N. C. Frampton *et al*), considered to be same as above
2019 Samphire Hoe, one flew west, 10th March (S. Cutt)
2020 Samphire Hoe, two flew west, 12th December (S. Cutt)
2020 Sandgate, one, 31st December to 5th March 2021, increasing to two (presumably having been joined by the individual first seen at Hythe Ranges) from 3rd to 8th January, photographed (B. Harper *et al*)
2021 Hythe Ranges, one, 2nd January (S. McMinn), presumed same as above
2021 Willop Outfall, one, 31st March (B. Harper)
2021 Samphire Hoe, one flew east, 9th May (I. A. Roberts, M. Collins, B. Woolhouse)
2021 Samphire Hoe, one on the sea, 14th December, photographed (P. Smith)
2022 Seabrook, one flew east, 10th January (P. Howe)
2022 Princes Parade, one flew west, 21st November (I. A. Roberts)
2022 Nickolls Quarry, one, then flew east, 1st December (I. A. Roberts)
2022 Battery Point, immature, 4th December, then seen between Marine Parade (Hythe) and Battery Point on several dates to at least 11th December, photographed (B. Harper, C. Gillard, P. Howe, S. McMinn *et al*)
2022 Fisherman's Beach, Hythe, one flew east, 9th December (S. McMinn)
2022 Princes Parade, a second individual present on 16th December (M. Whybrow)

References

Kent Ornithological Society (KOS). 1953-2022. *Kent Bird Reports*. Kent Ornithological Society.

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

Acknowledgements

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

I am indebted to Andrew Henderson and Tim Hodge for providing access to the Kent Ornithological Society archives.



Great Northern Diver at Mill Point (Ian Roberts)



Great Northern Diver at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



Great Northern Diver at Sandgate (Ian Roberts)



Great Northern Diver at Hythe (Brian Harper)



Great Northern Diver at Hythe (Mark Tomlins)