

Little Auk

Alle alle

Category A

Rare passage migrant and winter visitor. 27 records

Breeds in large colonies in Spitsbergen (5-7 million pairs), with smaller numbers in extreme northern Russia (Franz Josef Land and Novaya Zemlya), also in Greenland and the Siberian Arctic. Winters among broken pack-ice from the Barents Sea westwards into the Norwegian Sea, through the Denmark Strait to the Davis Strait, and south to the Grand Banks of Newfoundland.



Little Auk at Princes Parade (Nigel Webster)

It is more or less regular in small numbers south to Scotland, occurring further south in wrecks. These wrecks are typically a feature of the southern parts of its winter range and are fairly frequent on a small scale, with large events occurring occasionally, involving hundreds or thousands of birds. Whilst able to withstand storms at sea under normal conditions, prolonged gales may cause planktonic food to descend beyond reach; weakened birds then drift downwind, further south than normal, and become wrecked on meeting leeward coastline in continuing storms (Snow & Perrins 1998).

It is a scarce but regular late autumn passage migrant to Kent with occasional winter influxes (KOS 2020).

The species was included in Knight and Tolputt's "List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood" (1871). This list covered an area of six mile radius from Folkestone town hall. Whilst this range extends further inland than the current Folkestone and Hythe area, it is likely that it would have been seen at the coast and so most probably within the modern boundary.

In December 1955 one was seen by P. S. Redman close inshore off Folkestone Warren but it was some 35 years later before the next was seen by Roger Norman off the Dymchurch Redoubt in December 1990. Since then however it has occurred with some regularity, with 24 records in the 28 years since 1995, though records tend to be clustered around influxes of the species into the southern North Sea, and there have been many years without any sightings. The largest influxes to date were 1996 (with six records comprising 13 birds) and 2007 (with six records totalling 11 birds).

The records by year are shown in figure 1.

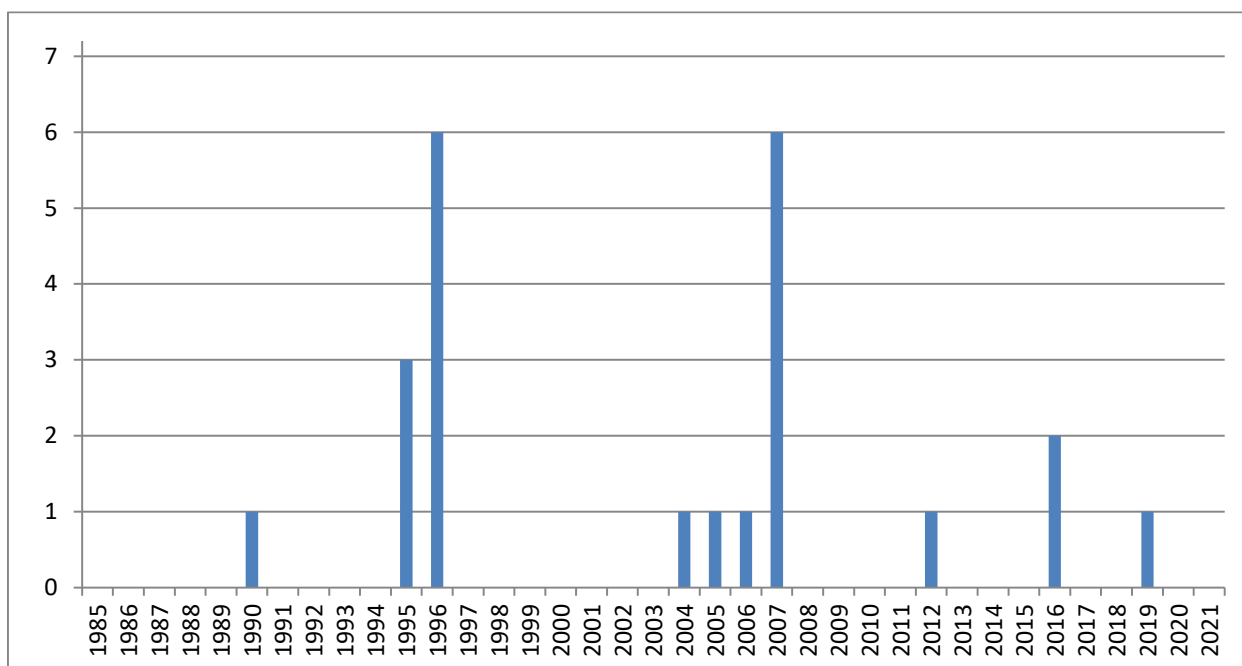


Figure 1: Little Auk records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

The majority (73%) of records have occurred in November, with four records in the December and singles in January, February and October. The records by week are given in figure 2.

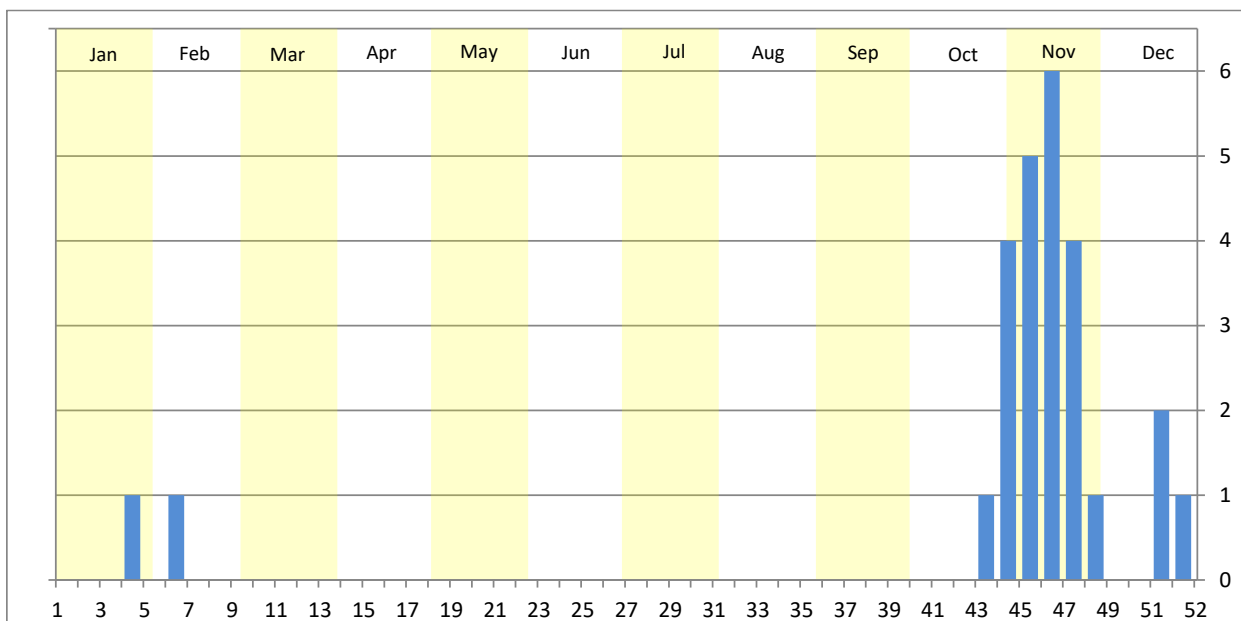


Figure 2: Little Auk records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

All records are from the coast between Hythe Redoubt and Samphire Hoe, apart from a storm-blown bird at Nickolls Quarry from the 22nd to 25th November 1996. Figure 3 shows the distribution of records by tetrad.



Figure 3: Distribution of all Little Auk records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The full list of dated records is as follows:

- 1955** Folkestone Warren, one close inshore, 18th December (P. S. Redman)
- 1990** Dymchurch Redoubt, one close inshore, 30th December (R. K. Norman)
- 1995** Copt Point, three (one flew west, two flew east), 2nd November (D. A. Gibson)
- 1995** Folkestone Harbour, one, 3rd November (D. A. Gibson)
- 1995** Sandgate, one, 5th November (P. Howe)
- 1996** Copt Point, one flew west, 11th February (D. A. Gibson)
- 1996** Copt Point, seven flew east, 14th November (D. A. Gibson)
- 1996** Folkestone Harbour, one, 14th November (D. A. Gibson)

1996 Copt Point, two flew east, 15th November (D. A. Gibson)
1996 Nickolls Quarry, one, 22nd to 25th November (R. K. Norman)
1996 Sandgate, one flew west, 1st December (P. Howe, H. G. Brown, R. Thorogood)
2004 Samphire Hoe, one flew west, 20th November (I. A. Roberts)
2005 Samphire Hoe, one, 23rd December (D. E. Smith, P. Holt)
2006 Mill Point, two (one flew east, one flew west), 2nd November (I. A. Roberts)
2007 Samphire Hoe, four (two groups of two) off seawall, 11th November (P. Holt)
2007 Folkestone Harbour, one flew west, 11th November (I. A. Roberts)
2007 Copt Point, three flew west, 11th November (I. A. Roberts)
2007 Samphire Hoe, one close inshore, 12th November (P. Holt)
2007 Battery Point (Seabrook), one close offshore, 12th November (M. Vandoen)
2007 Hythe, one flew east, 13th November, photographed (I. A. Roberts)
2012 Abbotscliffe, one offshore, 23rd January (P. Edmondson)
2016 Princes Parade, one offshore, 3rd November, photographed (N. Webster)
2016 Battery Point (Seabrook), one flew east, 6th November (B. Harper)
2019 Sandgate, one flew east, 23rd October (B. Harper)
2022 Princes Parade, one flew west, 20th November (B. Harper)
2022 Princes Parade, two flew east, 21st November (I. A. Roberts)



Little Auk at Princes Parade (Nigel Webster)



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Little Auk at Hythe (Ian Roberts)

References

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

Knight, V. & Tolputt, F. 1871. List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood. *Fourth Annual Report of the Folkestone Natural History Society*. Available at: www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/46103

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Acknowledgements

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