

Leach's Petrel

Oceanodroma leucorhoa

Category A

Very rare vagrant.

10 records,
15 birds

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998, Woodward et al. 2020):

Breeds on undisturbed offshore islands around the coasts of Scotland, Ireland, the Faeroe Islands, Iceland and Norway. Outside of Europe it breeds off north-west Atlantic and north Pacific coasts, south to Mexico and Japan. North Atlantic breeding birds migrate south to winter in regions of tropical convergences.

The British breeding population has been estimated at around 50,000 pairs.



Leach's Petrel at Samphire Hoe (Ian Roberts)

Kent status (KOS 2022):

It is a scarce but regular autumn vagrant and rare winter visitor to the county.

Ticehurst (1909) noted that "it is mentioned as having occurred near Folkestone by Mr. Ulyett in his list of Folkestone birds" (1880), which was based upon Knight & 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. This range extends further inland than the current Folkestone and Hythe area and so this does not provide conclusive evidence of its occurrence here. Whilst it may appear likely that the record was from the coast, Ticehurst mentions that it "is one of those maritime species which is frequently blown ashore, or even far inland".

Harrison (1953) lists a number of records of stranded birds in Kent but only one sight record and Taylor *et al.* (1981) considered it to be a scarce autumn visitor to the county. During their review period (1952-76) there were just six records away from the north coast of Kent, which included the first local record which was caught at Folkestone Harbour by Captain W. G. Fluke and R. B. Codd on the 8th November 1958 and released the following day.

The next record did not occur for another 42 years, when Dale Gibson and Ian Roberts saw one flying west past Copt Point on the 28th October 2000, but remarkably another flew west there the following day, with a further two seen flying west there on the 26th October of the following year. In 2003 singles were found on cross-channel ferries on the 15th and 24th November, with both birds being taken to Samphire Hoe for release, whilst another flew west past Samphire Hoe on the 10th November 2005.



Leach's Petrel at Samphire Hoe (Ian Roberts)

In 2013 one was seen from a research vessel when four miles south of Folkestone on the 31st October and one flew west past Samphire Hoe on the 5th November. The most recent record involved an exceptional total of five that were seen passing west off Mill Point after a stormy night on the 1st October 2021, the synoptic chart showing the conditions preceding this movement is included as appendix 1.

The records by year are shown in figure 1.

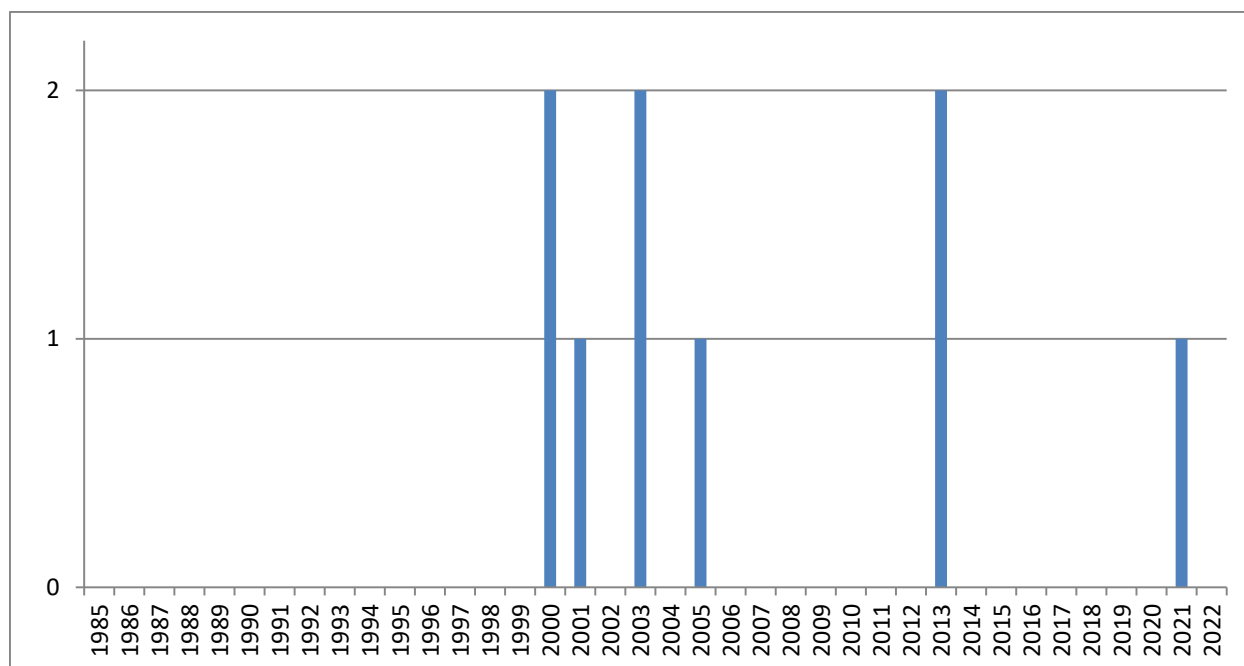


Figure 1: Leach's Petrel records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

The records by week are given in figure 2. All have been recorded between the 1st October (week 40) and 24th November (week 47).

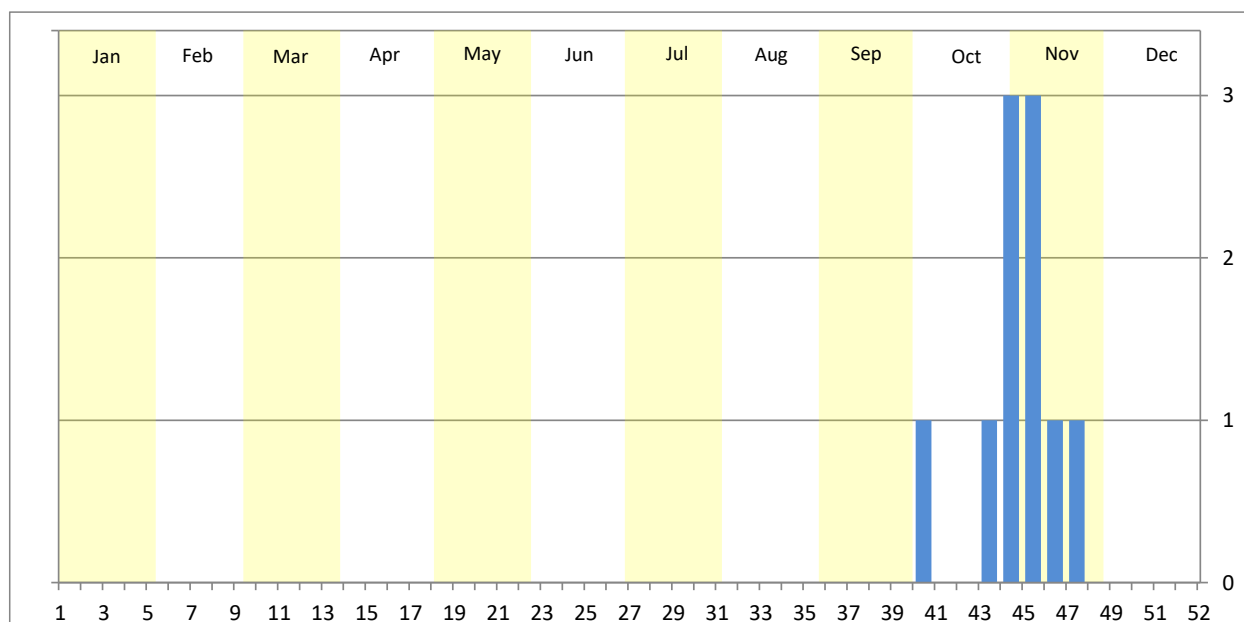


Figure 2: Leach's Petrel records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the location of records by tetrad.



Figure 3: Distribution of all Leach's Petrel records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad



Leach's Petrel at Samphire Hoe (Ian Roberts)

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1958** Folkestone Harbour, one caught, 8th November, was released the following day (W. G. Fluke, R. B. Codd)
2000 Copt Point, one flew west, 28th October (I. A. Roberts, D. A. Gibson)
2000 Copt Point, one flew slowly west, landing twice on the sea, 29th October (I. A. Roberts)
2001 Copt Point, two flew west, one lingering for c.10 minutes, 26th October (D. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)
2003 Samphire Hoe, one found on a cross-channel ferry was released, 15th November, photographed (P. Holt *et al.*)
2003 Samphire Hoe, one found on a cross-channel ferry was released, 24th November, photographed (P. Holt *et al.*)
2005 Samphire Hoe, one flew west, 10th November (I. A. Roberts)
2013 Folkestone, one seen from RV Endeavour four miles south of Folkestone, 31st October (per Rare Bird Alert)
2013 Samphire Hoe, one flew west, 5th November (I. A. Roberts)
2021 Mill Point, five flew west, 1st October (I. A. Roberts)

In addition, there is a record of two distant unidentified petrels, either this species or Storm Petrel (though probably Leach's Petrel), which flew west past Copt Point on the 19th September 2000.

References

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Acknowledgements

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Appendix 1

The most recent record involved an exceptional total of five that were seen passing west off Mill Point after a stormy night on the 1st October 2021, the synoptic chart showing the conditions preceding this movement is shown in figure 4.

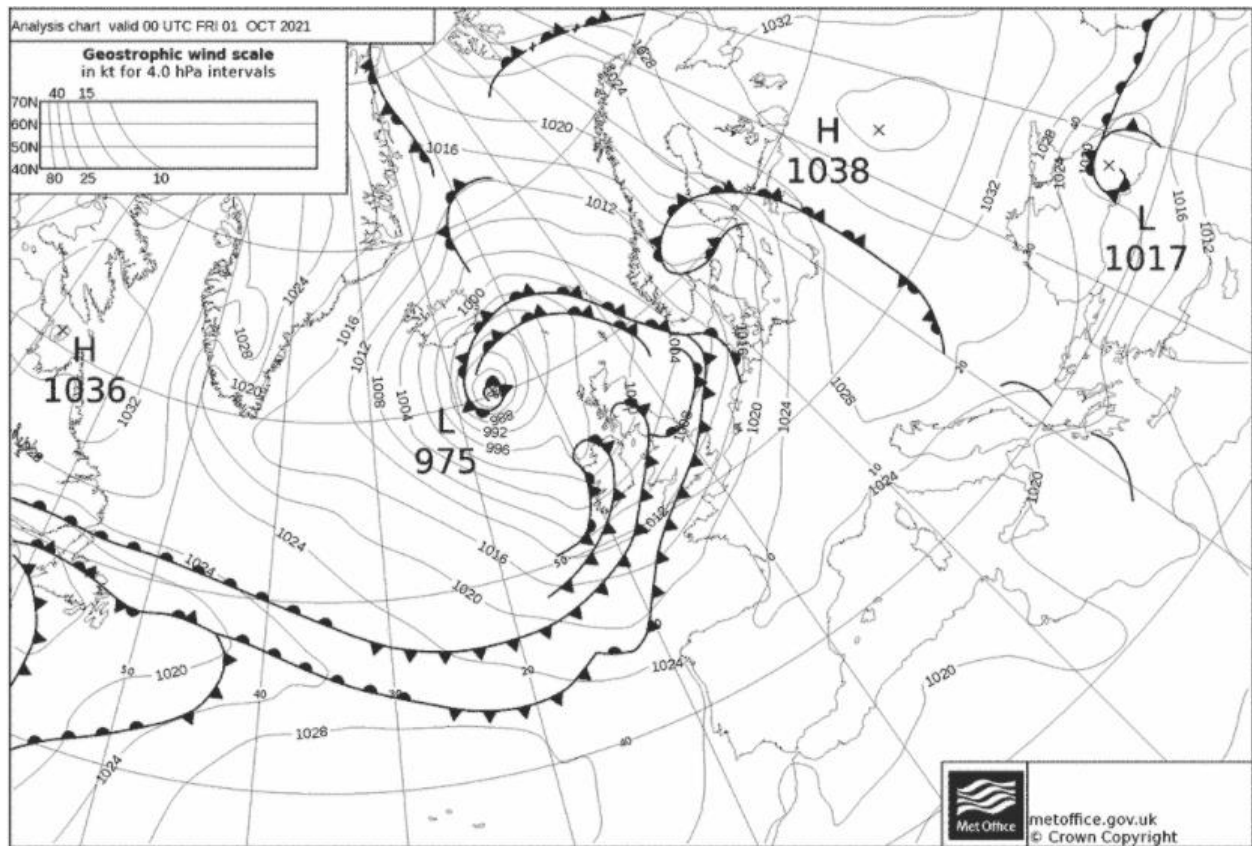


Figure 4: Synoptic chart at midnight on 1st October 2021, preceding the record movement of Leach's Petrels