

Sabine's Gull

Xema sabini

Category A

Very rare vagrant

6 records

Breeds in Greenland and eastern Canada, then migrates south-east across the open Atlantic Ocean towards Iberia and western Morocco before turning south and heading into the South Atlantic to winter off southern Africa. Present in European inshore waters mainly after westerly gales and in Britain occurs mainly in the Western Approaches, chiefly mid-August to mid-November. Migrates north in May but with far fewer in European inshore waters in spring. Also breeds in Alaska and Siberia, with these birds wintering in the Pacific Ocean (Snow & Perrins, 1998).



Sabine's Gull at Copt Point (Ian Roberts)

It is a regular autumn migrant to Kent (KOS, 2020).

Ticehurst (1909) provided details of a local sight record, that was only the second to be noted in the county: "On September 25th, 1896, Mr J. L. Bonhote wrote to me that he was able to identify with certainty an immature bird amongst the Black-headed Gulls feeding off the parade at Folkestone. It was very tame, and he was able to note every detail of its plumage and its forked tail".

The next area record came over a century later, when Dale Gibson saw a juvenile off Copt Point on the 31st August 1997, but the third followed much more quickly, with a juvenile lingering off the same site for much of the day on the 31st August in the following day. The fourth record involved another juvenile at Copt Point on the 12th October 2000, but the fifth related to an adult or first-summer at Copt Point (and later at Folkestone Beach) on the much more unusual date of 30th June (spring and summer records are very rare in the county and this appears to be the first to have been seen in June). The most recent record involved another autumn juvenile, seen off Battery Point on the 13th October 2021.

The modern records by year are shown in figure 1.

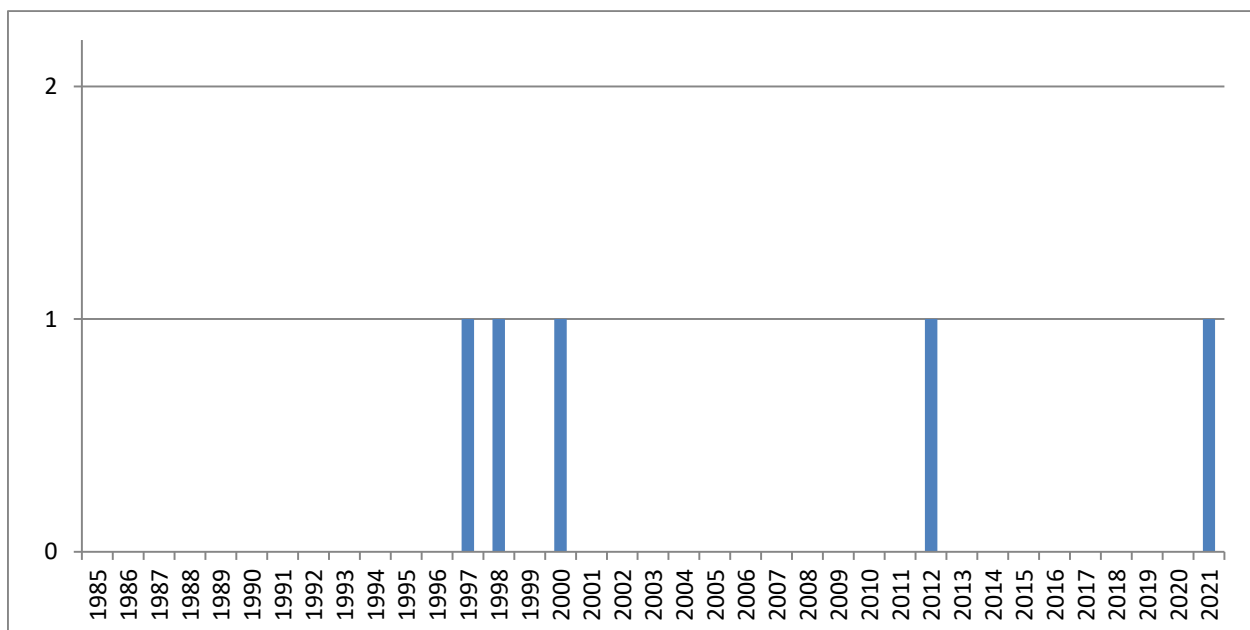


Figure 1: Sabine's Gull records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

The records by week are given in figure 2. Apart from the record in late June, all others have occurred in autumn, with two on the 31st August (week 35) and the others on 25th September (week 39), and 12th and 13th October (week 41), as demonstrated by figure 2.

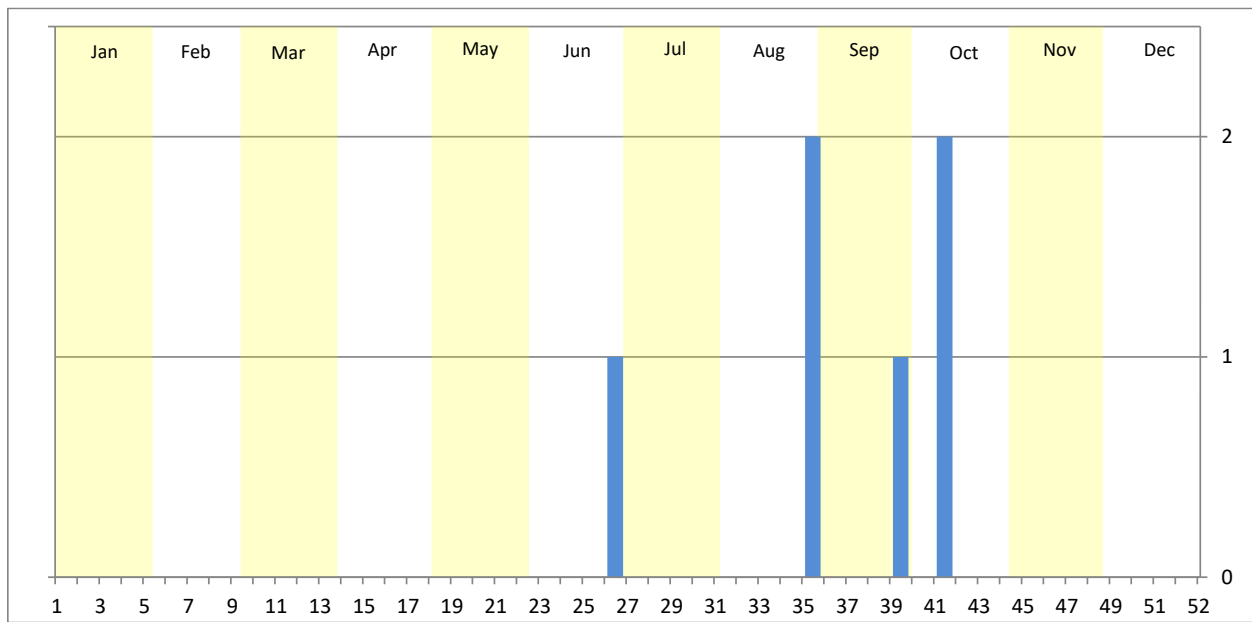


Figure 2: Sabine's Gull records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the distribution of records by tetrad.



Figure 3: Distribution of all Sabine's Gull records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1896** Folkestone, juvenile offshore, 25th September (J. L. Bonhote)
- 1997** Copt Point, juvenile offshore then drifted east, 31st August (D. A. Gibson)
- 1998** Copt Point, juvenile offshore from 08:30 to 17:30 at least, 31st August (I. A. Roberts *et al*)
- 2000** Copt Point, juvenile flew in from east and landed on the sea, 12th October (I. A. Roberts)
- 2012** Copt Point and Folkestone Beach, adult or first-summer flew west, 30th June, photographed (I. A. Roberts)
- 2021** Battery Point, juvenile offshore from 10:50 to 11:30 then flew west, 13th October (I. A. Roberts)

References

Kent Bird Reports. Kent Ornithological Society

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

Ticehurst, N. F. 1909. *A History of the Birds of Kent*. Witherby, London.

Acknowledgements

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Sabine's Gull at Folkestone Beach (Ian Roberts)