

Shoveler

Spatula clypeata

Category A

Winter visitor and passage migrant.

Breeds across most of northern Europe and Asia, also in north-west America. British breeders move southwards to Mediterranean to winter. Birds from south Fenno-Scandia and Russia migrate west and south-west mainly to Britain, the Netherlands and France (Snow & Perrins, 1998). A widespread but thinly distributed breeding species in Kent, with fewer than 100 pairs breeding in most years, but numerous as a passage migrant and winter visitor (KOS, 2020, Clements *et al*, 2015).

It was nationally scarce in the nineteenth century and was not included in Knight and Tolputt's "List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood" (1871), but protection after the 1880s led to its colonisation of much of lowland England.



Shoveler at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)

Harrison (1953) records that by 1919 "the Shoveler has much increased during the last few years as a breeding species in the Romney Marsh, and is extending its range considerably". The earliest known local sighting however did not occur until the 31st August 1952, when Roger Norman saw one at Nickolls Quarry, with another there the following year on the 18th January 1953. It was also one of the duck species shot by a wildfowler there in the 1954/55 winter and two were seen at the same site by Brian Uden in December 1957, remaining into January 1958. A pair were seen there by Roger Norman on several dates in April 1958 and Leslie Scrivener reported three there on the 9th April 1960.

Roger Norman noted up to four at Nickolls Quarry in April 1968 but there were no further records until Neil Frampton saw a pair at West Hythe dam on the 3rd April 1981. Ian Roberts observed single drakes flying west past Mill Point on the 11th August 1988 and 6th January 1989, whilst a pair flew east there on the 1st April 1990 and it has since proved to be a regular occurrence, mainly in spring on passage but also in autumn and winter.

Spring passage is mainly noted from coastal seawatching points and occurs between March and early May, with the mean annual total over the last decade of 40, whilst counts of over 20 have occurred on ten occasions as follows:

- 49 east past Copt Point on the 10th March 1995
- 34 east past Mill Point on the 16th April 2004
- 28 east past Mill Point on the 20th March 2005
- 27 east past Samphire Hoe on the 17th April 2008
- 22 east past Copt Point on the 3rd May 2011
- 41 east past Samphire Hoe on the 22nd March 2013
- 21 east past Samphire Hoe on the 23rd March 2013
- 32 east past Samphire Hoe on the 30th March 2018
- 24 east past Samphire Hoe on the 15th April 2019
- 25 east past Mill Point on the 5th April 2020

Spring migrants have also been noted at Nickolls Quarry, with a peak of eight there on the 22nd March 1996, and other inland sites, including Beachborough Lakes where there was a peak of five on the 11th April 2018.

The only summer records relate to a female seen by Roger Norman and Ian Roberts at Nickolls Quarry between the 28th June and the 2nd July 2002 and one reported on the sea off Samphire Hoe on the 25th June 2006. Autumn migrants begin to appear in August, with a peak of six at Nickolls Quarry on the 29th August 2003, but number are typically much lower than in spring, with only two double-figure counts: ten west past Copt Point on the 27th October 1997 and 45 east past the Hythe Redoubt on the 9th November 2001.

It is a scarce visitor in winter, often associated with periods of cold weather. Most records are from Nickolls Quarry or other sites on the Romney Marsh, with a few coastal sightings. Counts have included 18 at Nickolls Quarry on the 25th December 1994, six there on the 19th December 2010, six off the Willop Outfall on the 8th December 2012 and nine flying west past Mill Point on the 1st December 2017.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of all records of Shoveler by tetrad, with records from 13 tetrads (42%).

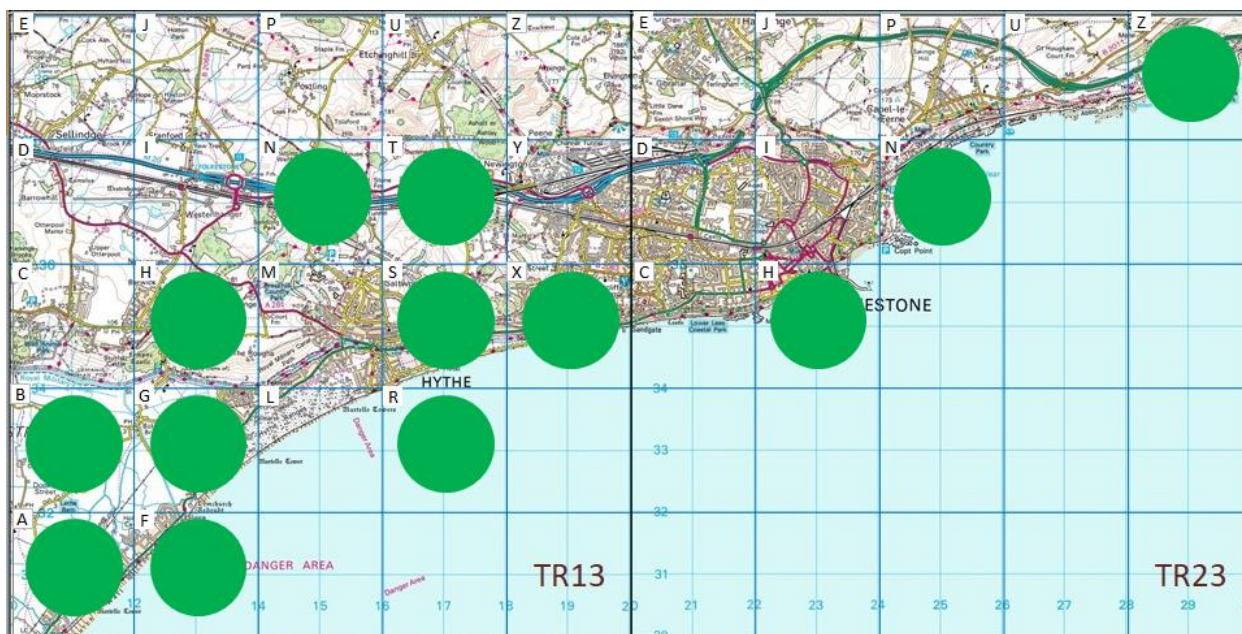


Figure 1: Distribution of all Shoveler records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad



Shovelers at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)

References

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Acknowledgements

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Shovelers at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)



Shovelers at Beachborough (Steve Tomlinson)