

Black-winged Stilt

Himantopus himantopus

Category A

Very rare vagrant.

3 records,
3 birds

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Fairly widespread across Europe primarily in more southerly latitudes, but breeds regularly as far north as the Netherlands and increasingly further north including Britain on occasion. Winters mainly in Africa north of the Equator. Beyond Europe it has a widespread distribution across Asia, Australasia, Africa and the Americas.



Black-winged Stilt at Nickolls Quarry (Dale Gibson)

Kent status (KOS 2022):

It is a rare but increasingly regular vagrant to Kent that successfully bred in the county for the first time in 2017 and again in 2018.

Kent (KOS) records to end 2020: 113

It was formerly considered to be a national rarity to the end of 2016 when the British Birds Rarities Committee removed it from the list of species which it assessed (BBRC 2017). There had been a total of 598 records in Britain to the end of 2018, with the annual mean having increased from 1 in the 1970s to 26 in the latest decade (White & Kehoe 2019), whilst Kent had contributed almost 20% of the occurrences, with most occurring in spring or early summer, particularly in May.

Since the mid-2000s, there has been an increase in numbers of, and breeding attempts by, Black-winged Stilts in Britain. Influxes into Britain usually followed dry conditions in south-west Europe in spring but in more recent years arrivals have seen less correlation with the levels of drought in this area, suggesting that many birds are now arriving from increasing breeding populations in northern France and the Netherlands. It seems clear that this species is attempting to colonise Britain and our climate is expected to become increasingly suitable, however its establishment as a regular breeding species is by no means assured, as there is very little suitable breeding habitat which is free from disturbance and where predation levels are sufficiently low for stilts to fledge young (Ausden *et al.* 2016).

The first local record was at the site now known as Nickolls Quarry on the 23rd May 1965, seen by Bob Scott (then the warden of Dungeness Bird Observatory and RSPB reserve), C. H. Dean and others, which was the ninth county record and part of a record influx of 20 in the county that year. Over 30 years later, Ian Roberts found the second area record at the same locality on the 7th September 1997. A full account of that record is provided below. Some 25 years later, in 2022, Sean McMinn heard one flying south-west over Hythe after dusk on the same date as the first record: 23rd May.

The records by year are shown in figure 1.

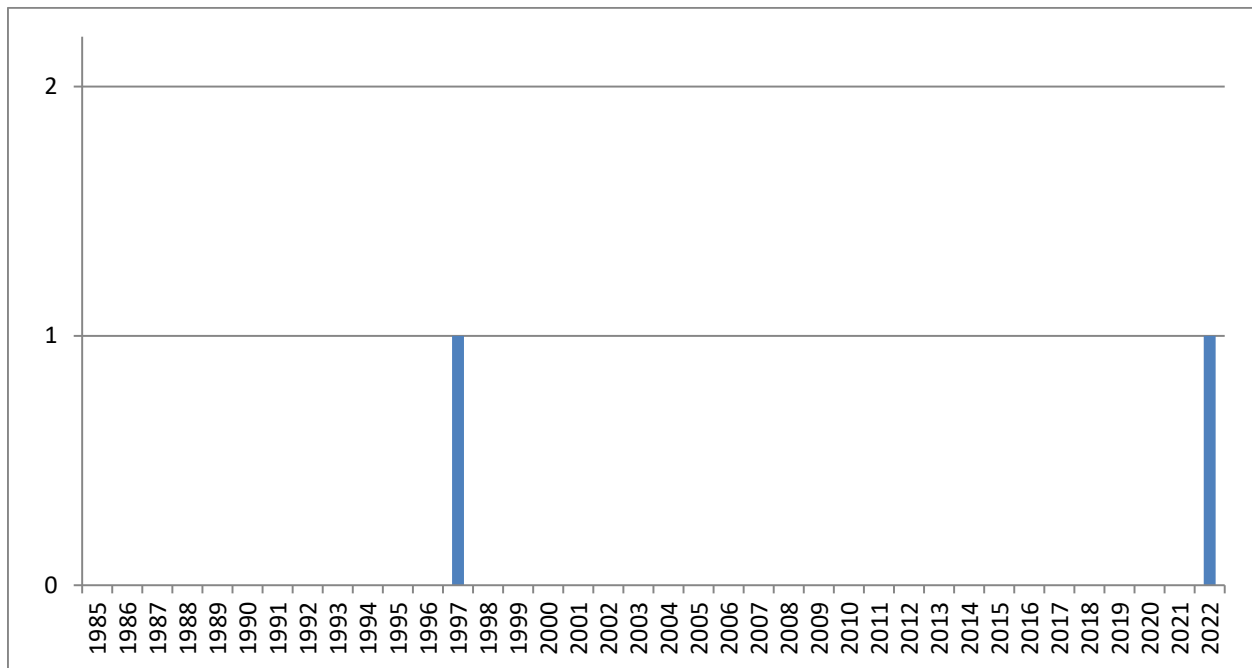


Figure 1: Black-winged Stilt records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

The records by week are given in figure 2.

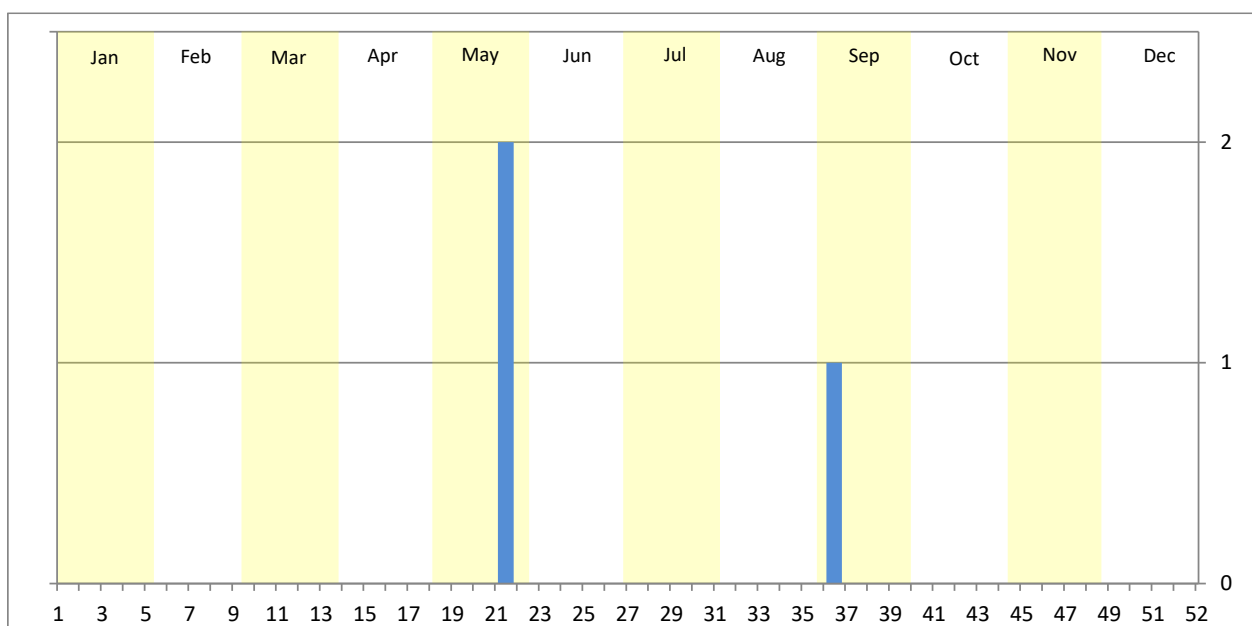


Figure 2: Black-winged Stilt records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the location of records by tetrad.



Figure 3: Distribution of all Black-winged Stilt records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The full list of records is as follows:

1965 Palmarsh, one, 23rd May (C. H. Dean, R. E. Scott, Dungeness Bird Observatory *et al*)

1997 Nickolls Quarry, one, 7th September, photographed (I. A. Roberts, D. A. Gibson)

2022 Hythe, one flew south-west, 23rd May (S. McMinn)

An account of the second area record is given below.

Black-winged Stilt at Nickolls Quarry

7th September 1997

By Ian Roberts

Weather conditions:

Dry and warm, with about 5-7/8 cloud cover, a light north-westerly wind (force 1-2) and good visibility.

Circumstances of the find:

At c.10:40 a.m. I was walking beside the newly excavated part of Nickolls Quarry. A flock of Lapwings which I had flushed were circling overhead, and I heard a Greenshank calling. I located it, quite high up, with the Lapwings and after a quick look I carried on.

A few moments later I looked upwards again and again saw a long-legged, tringa-type wader circling but was amazed quite how skinny and long-legged it appeared. When I raised my binoculars I realised why! It wasn't the Greenshank again, but was a Black-winged Stilt. It circled for a while then descended and landed on the old pit some distance away. As it came down, I could see against the background of the land, the white neck, underparts and 'V' on the back, the black wings and the long pink legs.

I went to the old pit (via the phone box to let Dale Gibson know) and found it feeding on the sandy area at the rear of the pit about 2-300 m away. I watched it and took some notes over 15 minutes or so, but was distracted by an Osprey passing over, and it had moved when I looked back. I waited for Dale to arrive, and we went back to the new pit where we soon re-located it on an island with Lapwings. It was closer than before, only about 100m away, and we took further notes over c.10 minutes before it flew off with the Lapwing flock.

I returned to the site in the evening and it was feeding on the old pit again. Dale also went back later on and it was still in the same area, and he took some record shots.

It was not seen the next day although access is restricted on weekdays.

Description of the bird:

Size, shape, jizz: An elegant, long-legged wader, with a long thin neck and a long, fine bill. The legs trailed in flight.

Head and upperparts: As a first-winter bird the general upperpart plumage was greyer and less contrasting than an adult. The crown was dull grey, with a paler neck with greyish mottling to the rear. The mantle was dark greyish or blackish and the coverts were blackish-brown with paler fringes. The tertials and primaries were blackish. In flight the secondaries and inner primaries showed a thin, white trailing edge. The back, rump and tail were white, producing a white 'V' on the back in flight.

Underparts: White.

Bare parts: Bill black, but possibly with a slightly paler base to the lower mandible. Legs dull pinkish.

Comments on the record:

The record was accepted by the British Birds Rarities Committee and appeared slightly belatedly in their annual rarity report for 1998 (Rogers *et al.* 1999). There had been 21 previous records in Kent and 310 nationally.

This was the second record for the Folkestone and Hythe area, with one seen at the same site on the 23rd May 1965. There were only five other sightings, involving a total of at least three individuals, in Britain in 1997. The Nickolls Quarry bird was presumably the same as the one which was present at Rainham Marshes (Essex) on the 10th to 20th September 1997.

References

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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.