

# Wigeon

*Mareca penelope*

Category A

Winter visitor and passage migrant.

*World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998; Holling et al. 2019):*

Breeds across most of northern Europe and Asia, east to the Pacific. Most are highly migratory, moving south or south-west to British, Atlantic, Mediterranean and North Sea coasts and other wetland areas. It first bred in Britain in 1897, increasing to an estimate of around 200 pairs in 2017, the majority of which were in northern England and north and west Scotland.

*Kent status (KOS 2021):*

In Kent it is a common passage migrant and winter visitor, with large influxes in cold weather. Occasionally breeds.



Wigeon at Nickolls Quarry (Ian Roberts)

The Wigeon 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 miles radius from Folkestone town hall, therefore extending further inland than the current Folkestone and Hythe area, so this does not provide conclusive evidence of its occurrence here, however it seems very likely that it was recorded coastally and so within the modern boundaries. Furthermore, Ticehurst (1909) considered it to be "one of the most numerous ducks that visit us in winter", noting that "in unusually hard winters they are numerous enough all round the coast" of the county. Ticehurst could find no evidence of breeding in Kent, but Harrison (1953) documented several instances on the North Kent Marshes and on Romney Marsh.

Taylor *et al.* (1981) did not report any further cases of nesting and reported a decline in the numbers wintering on the Romney Marsh due to widespread drainage, but still considered it to be a common winter visitor and passage migrant, with occasional large increases during severe weather on the continent, and this remains true to the present day, although Clements *et al.* (2015) reported that it may still breed on occasion, with the last confirmed instance at Lade in 2010.

The first documented local record was on the 18<sup>th</sup> November 1950, when Roger Norman saw 20 on the sea off the Hythe Redoubt and noted 120 there later the same winter on the 16<sup>th</sup> January 1951 (Norman 2006). Brian Uden saw a drake the following year at Nickolls Quarry on the 12<sup>th</sup> January 1952, Gene Tunney saw eight there on the 25<sup>th</sup> January 1954 and seven on the 7<sup>th</sup> March 1954, and Roger Norman saw nine there on the 26<sup>th</sup> January 1958 (Norman 2007).



Wigeon at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



Wigeon at Samphire Hoe (Ian Roberts)



None were noted in the 1960s and 1970s but this was presumably due to a lack of coverage, as Dave Weaver noted it in the Nickolls Quarry area on three occasions in early 1982, including 18 on the 14<sup>th</sup> January, Roger Norman found 200 to be present at Nickolls Quarry in severe weather in early 1985 and there have been annual records from 1987.

### Overall distribution

Figure 1 shows the distribution of all records of Wigeon by tetrad, with records from 15 tetrads (48%).

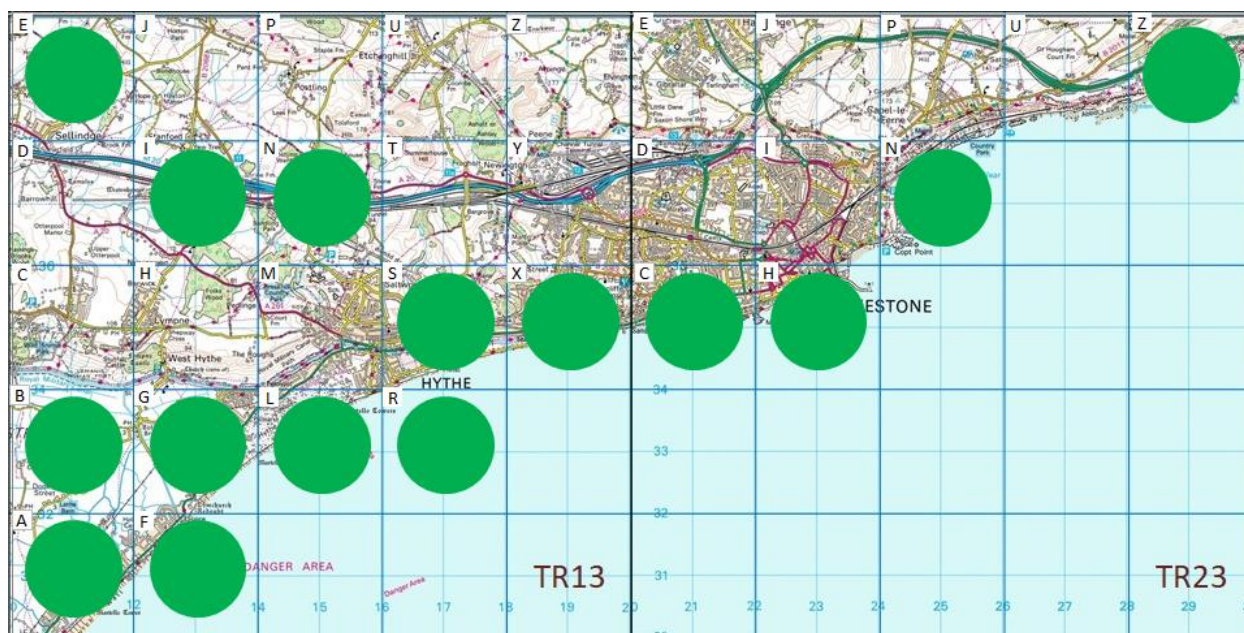


Figure 1: Distribution of all Wigeon records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The first autumn migrants may occur as early as the 20<sup>th</sup> August (2020) when one was seen at Cock Ash Lake but records in this month are few (with a peak count of 28 west past Copt Point on the 26<sup>th</sup> August 2003), and sightings in September or October are more typical. Autumn counts have included 50 on the sea off Hythe on the 28<sup>th</sup> October 2018, 52 flying east past Samphire Hoe on the 12<sup>th</sup> September 2005, 97 flying west there on the 9<sup>th</sup> October 2011, 109 passing Copt Point (6 west, 103 east) on the 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2002, 154 passing there (54 west, 100 east) on the 15<sup>th</sup> September 2002, 81 off the Willop Outfall on the 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2020 and 205 flying east past Samphire Hoe on the 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2021.



Wigeon at Samphire Hoe (Ian Roberts)

There is no regular wintering population and the numbers recorded in this season vary considerably. In some years very few are noted and these are often short-stayers or birds passing through. However very large numbers sometimes occur, usually in response to cold weather, and there have been six occasions where more than 400 have been logged:

484 (376 east past Copt Point/Hythe Redoubt, with 108 on the sea) on the 8<sup>th</sup> December 2002  
600 west past Hythe on the 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2010  
1,550 on the sea off Hythe Ranges on the 25<sup>th</sup> December 2010, increasing to 2,850 on the 27<sup>th</sup> December  
615 (440 east past Mill Point/Willop Outfall, with 175 on the sea) on the 8<sup>th</sup> December 2012  
1,230 west past Samphire Hoe on the 17<sup>th</sup> January 2013  
c.600 on the sea off Hythe Redoubt on the 24<sup>th</sup> January 2013

Spring passage can be evident from early March until late April but is normally very light and not witnessed annually. Double-figure counts are unusual and day totals of more than 20 have only occurred on four occasions:

43 at Nickolls Quarry on the 4<sup>th</sup> March 2005  
34 east past Mill Point on the 20<sup>th</sup> March 2005  
21 east past Samphire Hoe on the 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2013  
21 east past Mill Point on the 4<sup>th</sup> April 2014

There have been just records in early May, a male at Nickolls Quarry on the 4<sup>th</sup> May 2015 and a pair on the sea off Hythe on the 5<sup>th</sup> May 2018, and there is an isolated mid-summer record of six flying west past Copt Point on the 11<sup>th</sup> July 1998.



Wigeon at Nickolls Quarry (Ian Roberts)



Wigeon at Nickolls Quarry (Ian Roberts)

## References

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### ***Acknowledgements***

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