

Gannet

Morus bassanus

Category A

Passage migrant and non-breeding visitor at all times of year.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds along Atlantic seaboard from north-west France northwards through Britain and Ireland, to Iceland and northern Norway, with a few colonies on the British North Sea coast. Also breeds in the west Atlantic, in the Gulf of St Lawrence and the coast of Newfoundland.

Kent status (KOS 2021):

In Kent it is a passage migrant, most numerous in autumn.

The Gannet 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 would have been very likely to have been recorded at the coast and so within the modern boundary. Furthermore, Ticehurst (1909) considered it to be "a regular winter visitor to the Channel off the east and south coasts of Kent". He also mentioned that the Folkestone Museum contained a single specimen, but there was nothing to indicate whether it was obtained locally. Harrison (1953) noted records in all months, with an increase in numbers during the first half of the nineteenth, although no double-figure counts were recorded.

The first fully documented record occurred on the 30th December 1951, when Roger Norman saw two off Hythe Ranges (Norman 2006) and then Dave Musson saw 30 off Folkestone on the 16th September 1960. Taylor *et al.* (1981) remarked that "the first large movement" in the county occurred later that same year and involved "130 in an hour off Dungeness" on the 24th October 1960. Roger Norman then noted nine flying west off the Dymchurch Redoubt in the 8th October 1961.

Taylor *et al.* stated that "since the mid-1960s, there has been a considerable increase in the numbers seen. This is partly as a result of an increase in systematic seawatching, but also undoubtedly linked with an increase in the Gannet population, particularly on the Bass Rock and at Bempton, on the east coast of Britain".

There were no further records locally between 1961 and 1984, when Roger Norman logged a total of 67 flying east past Hythe Ranges in two hours on the 9th August, and this was presumably due to a lack of coverage as there have been annual records since.



Gannet at Folkestone Pier (Elliot Ranford)



Gannet at Princes Parade (Brian Harper)



Gannet at Princes Parade (Brian Harper)

Overall distribution

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



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

Gannet numbers have continued to increase. Taylor *et al* reported that few were present in the county in June and July, and considered that a count of 43 off Dungeness was exceptional. Locally there have now been three-figure counts at this time on three occasions: 168 flying east past Copt Point on the 17th July 1998, 110 (80 east, 30 west) off Mill Point on the 15th June 2005 and 175 flying west past Samphire Hoe on the 12th July 2008.



Gannet at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



Gannets at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)

Taylor *et al* stated that there was a general increase around the coast during the autumn months, with migration being most marked from mid-September to mid-November, when counts of 250 or more have occurred locally on a number of occasions:

- 310 east past Copt Point on the 30th September 1998
- 985 west past Folkestone Beach on the 9th November 2012
- c.450 offshore of Hythe on the 13th October 2017
- 400 offshore (200 off Hythe Ranges and 200 off Mill Point) on the 29th October 2017
- 800 offshore of Hythe Seafront on the 23rd September 2018
- 580 west past Mill Point on the 31st October 2020
- 905 west past Samphire Hoe on the 2nd October 2021
- 450 east past Mill Point on the 17th October 2021
- 250 offshore of the Dymchurch Redoubt on the 17th November 2021
- 285 west past Princes Parade on the 21st November 2022

It was considered by Taylor *et al* to be at its least common in the winter months, but three-figure counts are now regular in this season, when there have been counts of 250 or more on six occasions:

730 east past Samphire Hoe on the 13th February 2015
250 west past Mill Point on the 13th December 2017
350 east past Samphire Hoe on the 8th January 2018
320 on/east past Samphire Hoe on the 3rd February 2018
350 east past Samphire Hoe on the 5th February 2018
300 offshore past Hythe on the 24th December 2020

An up-channel passage may be noted in March and April, when counts of 250 or more have occurred as follows:

510 east past Copt Point on the 21st April 2001
340 east past Copt Point on the 27th March 2004
346 east past Samphire Hoe on the 11th April 2008
260 east past Samphire Hoe on the 16th March 2012
450 east past Samphire Hoe on the 7th March 2013
563 east past Samphire Hoe on the 15th March 2013
361 east past Samphire Hoe on the 22nd March 2013
380 east past Mill Point on the 2nd March 2019
520 east past Mill Point on the 10th March 2021
270 east past Mill Point on the 26th March 2021
533 east past Samphire Hoe on the 8th April 2021
277 east past Samphire Hoe on the 11th April 2022



Gannet at Princes Parade (Ian Roberts)



Gannet at Folkestone Pier (Elliot Ranford)



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It is very rare inland, with just one local record that involved a juvenile found stranded on a playing field in Cheriton in August 1985.



Gannet at Folkestone Pier (Elliot Ranford)



Gannet at Folkestone Pier (Elliot Ranford)



Gannet at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



Gannet at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)

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](#).

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Gannet at Princes Parade (Brian Harper)



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Gannets at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)