

Dunlin

Calidris alpina

Category A

Winter visitor and passage migrant.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds across northern Europe, including northern and western Britain, northern Asia, eastern Greenland, Alaska and north-east Canada. Winters on most ice-free coasts of the northern hemisphere.

Kent status (KOS 2021):

In Kent it is a common passage migrant and winter visitor, which is scarce inland.



Dunlin at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)

The Dunlin 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 mile radius from Folkestone town hall. Whilst this range extends further inland than the current Folkestone and Hythe area, it is likely that it would have been seen at the coast and so most probably within the modern boundary.

Roger Norman considered it to be a fairly regular passage migrant at Nickolls Quarry in the 1950s, with spring records between the 14th March and 10th May, and autumn records between the 5th August and 19th September, with a late sighting on the 8th November. The largest passages occurred in autumn 1957 (39 bird/days) and the following spring 1958 (13 bird/days), with peak counts of eight on the 6th May 1958 and five on the 17th September 1957 (Norman 2007). He also noted it occasionally on the shore at Hythe Ranges in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Norman 2006).

There were few records between the late 1960s and mid-1980s, presumably due to low levels of coverage as it has been noted annually since.

Overall distribution

Figure 1 shows the distribution of all records of Dunlin by tetrad, with records in 16 tetrads (52%).

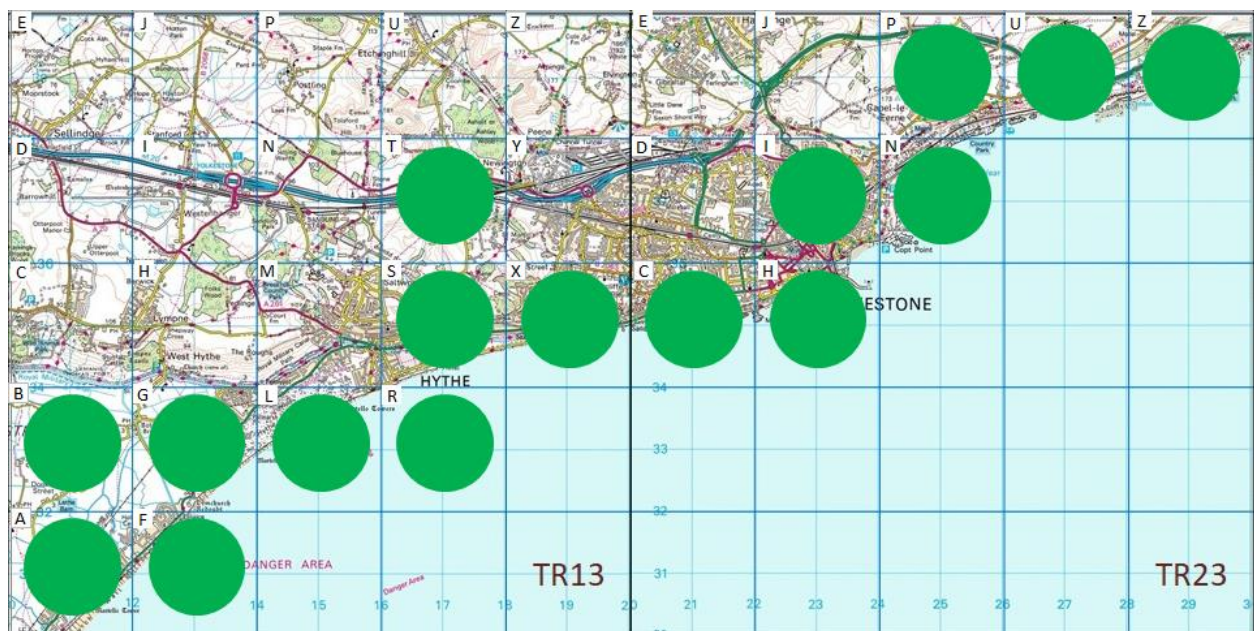


Figure 1: Distribution of all Dunlin records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

There were frequent records from Nickolls Quarry from the early 1990s and particularly between 1999 and 2005, when an area of shallow water, islets and mud existed at the site, attracting a range of migrant waders, but has subsequently been filled in. The first post-breeding arrivals there could occur from late June, with the earliest on the 26th June 2001, but more typically in July. Numbers generally increased during July, peaked in August and dwindled through September, with relatively few seen from October.

The peak passages occurred in 2000 (with a total of 83 bird/days logged between July and September) and 2002 (with 92 bird/days logged over the same period). Counts were only ever in single figures, with maxima of six on the 22nd July 1995 and seven on the 28th August 1998 and 23rd September 1994

Elsewhere small numbers may be noted from July, mostly at coastal sites and usually passing at sea or occasionally heard on nocturnal passage. Only singles have been recorded in July, with the exception of two flying east past Copt Point on the 26th July 1999, but August has produced counts of seven flying east past Hythe on the 1st August 2016, eight flying west past Copt Point on the 26th August 2003 and eight flying east at Abbotscliffe on the 30th August 1993, whilst in September seven flew east past Samphire Hoe on the 28th September 2007, ten flew west there on the 5th September 2006 and an exceptional total of 40 flew west there on the 11th September 2005.



Dunlin at the Dymchurch Redoubt (Brian Harper)



Dunlin at the Dymchurch Redoubt (Brian Harper)

Few were noted at Nickolls Quarry in October or November, with a total of just 35 bird/days between 1995 and 2005, but there were counts of four on the 1st November 1998 and the 2nd October 2003. Coastal sites however have produced much larger counts during this period, with totals of 25 or more logged on nine occasions:

- 25 west past Folkestone Pier on the 28th October 1989
- 50 west past Copt Point on the 2nd November 1998
- 25 west past Copt Point on the 5th November 1998
- 35 east past Mill Point on the 8th November 2010
- 111 east past Willop Outfall on the 6th November 2011
- 60 east past Samphire Hoe on the 11th October 2013
- 85 west past Samphire Hoe on the 11th November 2013
- 33 east past Mill Point on the 24th November 2016
- 39 west past Princes Parade on the 20th November 2022

Most sightings involve birds passing at sea but in 2003 a flooded field at the Willop Basin attracted a flock of up to 24 between the 14th November and the 3rd December, whilst Dave Weaver noted 24 at Nickolls Quarry on the 21st February 1982.

There are no regular wintering sites but birds are noted in most winters, particularly during cold weather when large influxes have occurred. In February 1991 a peak of 40 were present in the Folkestone Harbour/Copt Point on the 12th, in early January 1997 a flock in Folkestone Harbour reached a peak of 79 on the 9th (with 40 seen flying past Hythe on the 3rd) and in late December 2019 there were 112 at the Willop Outfall on the 27th.

The largest winter numbers to date however occurred in a severe cold spell in early February 2021, with a peak on the 8th when there were eight at Donkey Street and 65 at the Willop Basin, whilst 188 flew east at sea, giving a total for the day of 261. Another notable hard weather movement followed an unseasonably cold spell in March 2013 and involved a total of 225 flying east past Samphire Hoe between the 20th and 23rd.

Spring passage occurs mainly in the last week of April and first half of May, and is typically rather light, with a mean of 23 per annum in the last decade. An exceptional movement was witnessed on the 12th May 2012 when a total of 366 were logged passing Copt Point and there have only been ten other counts of 20 or more:

40 east past Copt Point on the 27th Apr 2004
51 east past Copt Point on the 1st May 2004
43 east past Copt Point on the 10th May 2004
22 east past Samphire Hoe on the 16th May 2008
22 east past Samphire Hoe on the 2nd May 2012
23 east past Samphire Hoe on the 5th May 2013
20 east past Hythe on the 26th Apr 2015
22 east past Mill Point on the 4th May 2020
30 east past Seabrook on the 8th May 2021
23 east past Mill Point on the 22nd April 2022



Dunlin at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)



Dunlin at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)



Dunlin at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



Dunlin at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)

Small numbers were also noted at Nickolls Quarry on spring migration, with a peak of nine there on the 23rd May 2000. Stragglers may be seen into late May and there has been a single record in the early part of June: one at Nickolls Quarry on the 11th June 2000.

Almost all records are from the coast or within an adjacent 1km tetrad however two were flushed from Beachborough Lakes on the 12th October 2017.



Dunlin at Botolph's Bridge (Nick Hollands)



Dunlin at Folkestone Harbour (Ian Roberts)



Dunlin at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)

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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