

Long-tailed Duck

Clangula hyemalis

Category A

Very rare vagrant.

13 records,
14 birds

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

It has a circumpolar breeding population, nesting in Iceland, Fenno-Scandia, northern Russia, Alaska, Canada and coastal Greenland, and is believed to have bred in Scotland on three occasions. Western Palearctic birds winter mainly around the coasts of north-west Europe, with the Baltic Sea considered to be the most important wintering area.

Kent status (KOS 2022):

It is an uncommon but regular passage migrant and winter visitor to Kent.



Long-tailed Duck at Samphire Hoe (Ian Roberts)

Ticehurst (1909) considered the Long-tailed Duck to be “one of the rarer ducks that are occasional visitors to Kent in the winter months”, however he speculated that “it is possible that from its liking for open water and its extreme hardiness in withstanding storms that it may be of more regular occurrence at some distance from the coast than is apparently the case”. Harrison (1953) concluded that “there would seem to be a great deal of evidence available now strengthening the above view”. Neither author cited any local records and it was not included by Knight & Tolputt in their “List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood” (1871).

Taylor *et al.* (1981) found it to be a regular winter visitor to Kent and a passage migrant in small numbers during their review period (1952-76) and it was during this time that the first local records occurred, with the first involving a first-winter bird seen off Folkestone by Dr. R. S. Pitcher on the 20th October 1957. This was soon followed by a first-winter female seen off Folkestone by David Musson on the 1st December 1959, whilst the same observer recorded an adult female off Folkestone on 1st February of the following year.

David Musson (together with William Nevin) then found one on the Hythe Canal between the 25th December 1960 (which lingered until the 12th January 1961), whilst he soon added another record of one off the Dymchurch Redoubt on the 19th January 1961 and William Nevin located one at Hythe on the 23rd December 1963.



Long tailed Duck at Samphire Hoe (Ian Roberts)

However, following this exceptional series of sightings, almost thirty years elapsed before another was reported off the Dymchurch Redoubt on the 10th February 1991. Then on the 2nd December 1995 Paul Howe and H. G. Brown then saw one off Sandgate, whilst on the 16th April 2000 Dale Gibson watched one flying east past Copt Point with Common Scoters, the first spring record.

After a gap of 13 years, a female was seen off Samphire Hoe by Mark Kennett and Ian Roberts on the 20th November 2013 and there were three records in consecutive years from 2017, with Marek Walford noting one in Folkestone Harbour on the 4th November 2017, Martin Collins and Barry Woolhouse seeing two flying east past Samphire Hoe on the 15th April 2018 and Ian Roberts watching one flying east past Mill Point on the 15th November 2019.

The records by year since 1985 are shown in figure 1.

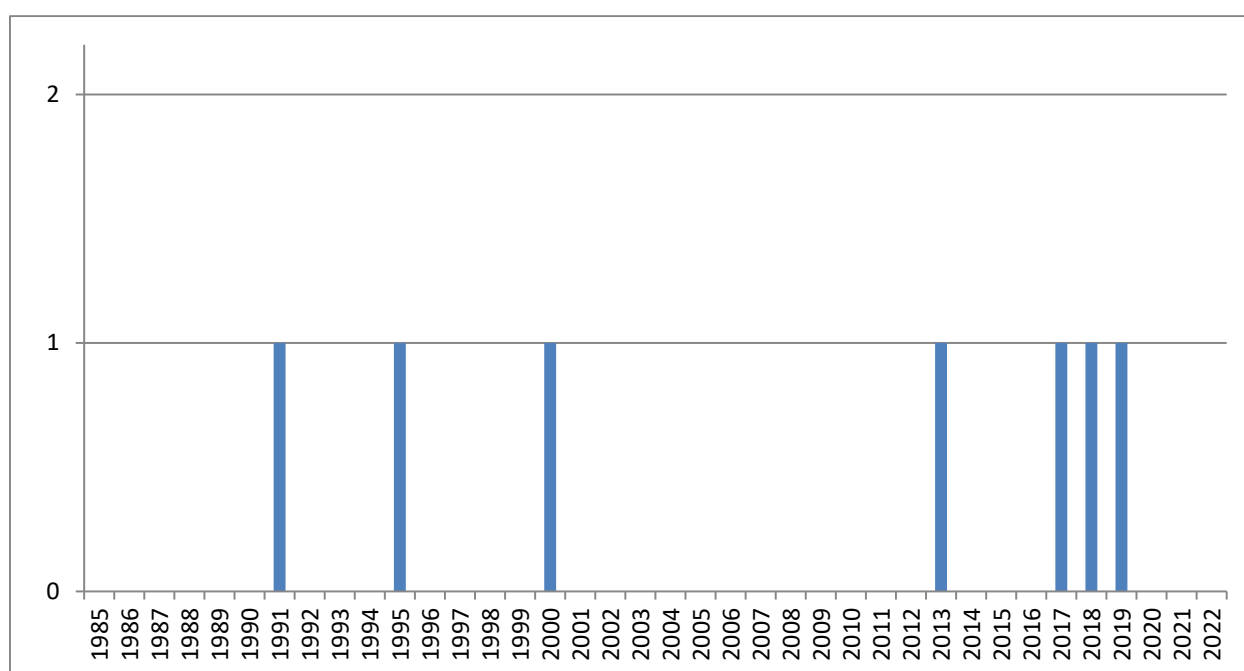


Figure 1: Long-tailed Duck records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

The records by week are given in figure 2. Apart from one on 20th October 1957 and spring migrants on the 16th April 2000 and 15th April 2018, all other records fall between 4th November (week 44) and 10th February (week 6).

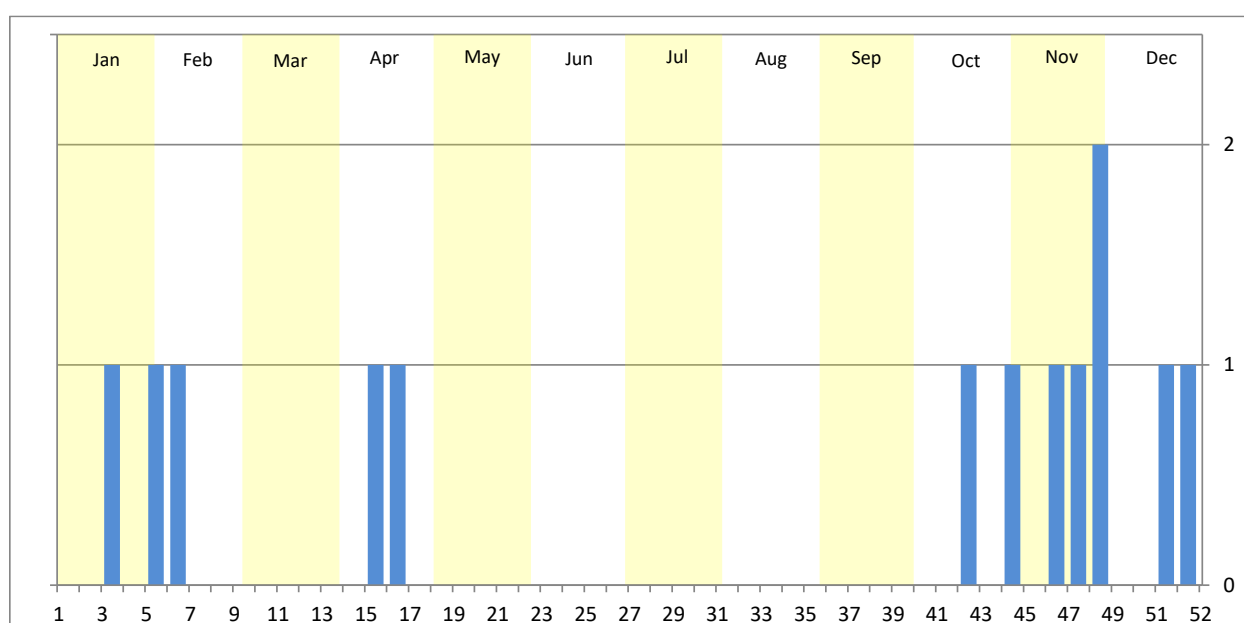


Figure 2: Long-tailed Duck records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the distribution of records by tetrad. Recent records have been seen from coastal watch-points or in Folkestone Harbour. Most early records have not been mapped due to a lack of sufficient details to identify the tetrad of occurrence.



Figure 3: Distribution of all Long-tailed Duck records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1957** Folkestone, first-winter, 20th October (R. S. Pitcher)
- 1959** Folkestone, first-winter female, 1st December (D. F. Musson)
- 1960** Folkestone, adult female, 1st February (D. F. Musson)
- 1960** Hythe Canal, one, 25th December to 12th January 1961 (W. S. Nevin, D. F. Musson)
- 1961** Dymchurch Redoubt, one, 19th January (D. F. Musson)
- 1963** Hythe, one, 23rd December (W. S. Nevin)
- 1991** Dymchurch Redoubt, one, 10th February (reported)
- 1995** Sandgate, one, 2nd December (P. Howe, H. G. Brown)
- 2000** Copt Point, one flew east with Common Scoters, 16th April (D. A. Gibson)
- 2013** Samphire Hoe, female on the sea then flew west, 20th November, photo (M. D. Kennett, I. A. Roberts)
- 2017** Folkestone Harbour, one, 4th November (M. Walford)
- 2018** Samphire Hoe, two flew east, 15th April (M. Collins, B. Woolhouse)
- 2019** Mill Point, one flew east, 15th November (I. A. Roberts)

References

- Harrison, J. M. 1953. *The Birds of Kent*. Witherby, London.
- Kent Ornithological Society (KOS) 1953-2022. *Kent Bird Reports*. Kent Ornithological Society.
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- Taylor, D., Davenport, D. & Flegg, J. 1981. *Birds of Kent*. Kent Ornithological Society.
- Ticehurst, N. F. 1909. *A History of the Birds of Kent*. Witherby, London.

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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Long tailed Duck at Samphire Hoe (Ian Roberts)