

White-winged Black Tern

Chlidonias leucopterus

Category A

Very rare vagrant.

2 records,
2 birds

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998, White & Kehoe 2022):

Breeds in eastern Europe from eastern Poland and eastern Romania into Russia. Winters at inland water bodies of Afrotropical region. A scarce passage migrant through northern and western Europe, including Britain where there are currently around 19 records per annum.

Kent status (KOS 2022):

It is a rare but regular passage migrant in the county.

Kent (KOS) records to end 2020: 117

Ticehurst (1909) noted the first record for Kent, which involved two seen at the Wicks on the 30th May 1891 but subsequent sightings between 1904 and 1922 were later discredited during a review of the “Hastings Rarities” (Nicholson & Ferguson-Lees 1962).

Harrison (1953) documented the second county record (one at Dungeness on the 17th May 1937) and the third county (and first area record): “on the afternoon of 15th May 1951 Sir Henry Woodward saw a bird off the sea front, between Sandgate and Hythe, which he believed was a White-winged Black Tern. His original description (20th May 1951) states: ‘I saw a tern appearing about 100 yards out, parallel to the shore, and was struck by its dark body – I observed it till it was out of recognisable distance and at its closest it was about 30 yards off – the body and head were all very dark, but the wings were almost white’.

In a subsequent letter (12th June 1951) the observer adds: ‘the dark body was noticeable as soon as I caught sight of it about 100 yards off and I never took my eyes off it until it had passed out of sight... The whitish wings, particularly at the shoulder, were very distinct and noticeable – it was alone’. I consider his identification substantiated”.

Taylor *et al.* (1981) provided a further 41 county records during their review period (1952-76), including annual records in the last 15 of those years “once observers learnt to identify this species in autumn plumage”, although none of these were local. Autumn has now proved to be the peak season of occurrence, with over two-thirds of Kent arriving between August and October (KOS no date).

The only other and recent record occurred some years later, when in 1992 Dale Gibson observed a juvenile flying flew west past Copt Point on the 24th September, which was later seen passing Dungeness.

It was formerly considered to be a national rarity to the end of 2005 when the British Birds Rarities Committee removed it from the list of species which it assessed, with over 850 sightings having been logged (Fraser *et al.* 2007).

The modern record by year is shown in figure 1.

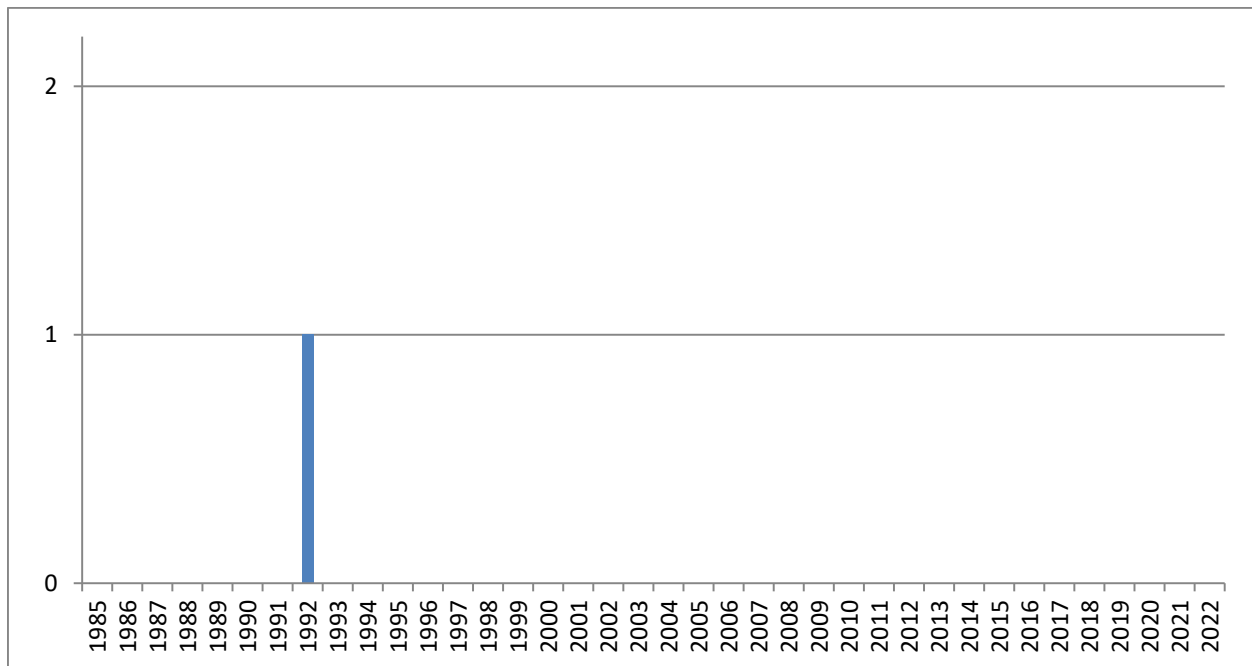


Figure 1: White-winged Black Tern records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

One record occurred in spring and the other in autumn. The records by week are given in figure 2.

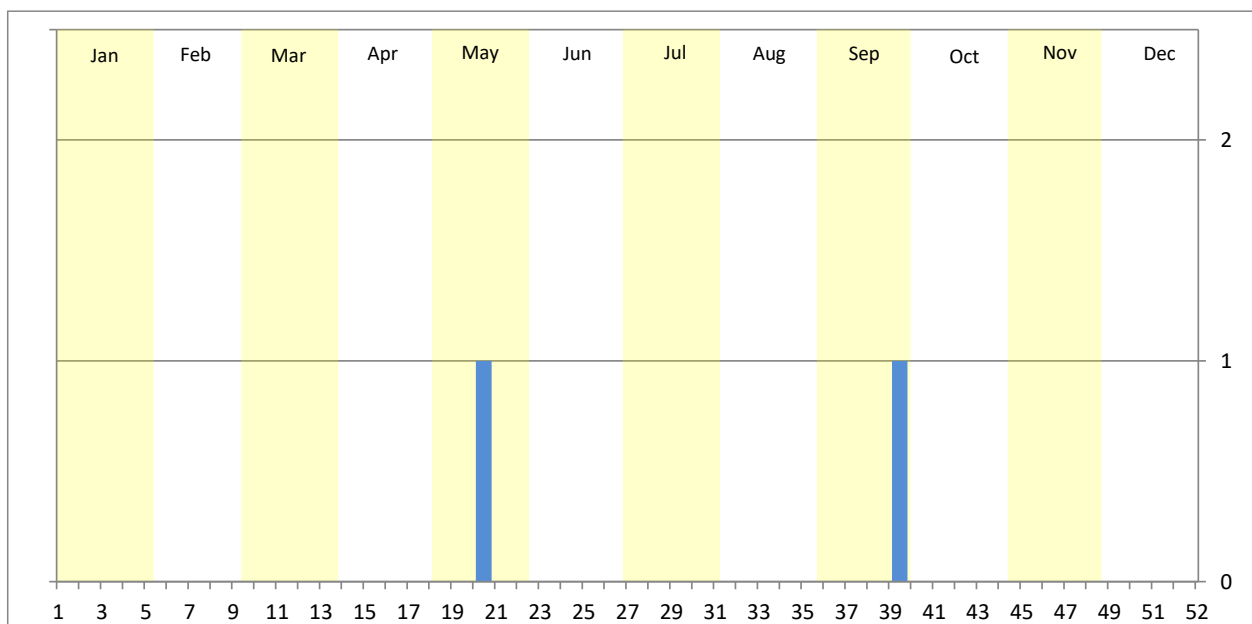


Figure 2: White-winged Black Tern records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the location of the second record by tetrad. The first sighting, described as being "between Sandgate and Hythe" could have been in TR13 S or TR13 X, and so is not shown on the map.



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

The full list of records is as follows:

1951 Sandgate, adult, 15th May (H. Woodward)

1992 Copt Point, juvenile flew west, 24th September (D. A. Gibson)

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.