

Sanderling

Calidris alba

Category A

Winter visitor and passage migrant.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds along the arctic shores of Siberia and Canadian, and also in Greenland and Spitsbergen. The winter distribution is very widespread, comprising the Americas, Africa, western and southern Europe, and across southern Asia.

Kent status (KOS 2021):

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

The Sanderling was not included in Knight and Tolputt's "List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood" (1871) and the documented records involved sightings made at Hythe Ranges by Roger Norman in the late 1950s. Roger recalled that it was "noted only in April 1957 and 1958 and on single dates in September and October 1957, with two to four birds involved except for nine flying east on the 25th April 1957 and 48 on the shore there two days later" (Norman 2006).



Sanderling at the Willop Outfall (Brian Harper)

It does not appear to have been recorded in the 1960s or 1970s, presumably due to low levels of coverage (although there is evidence of an apparent increase in the population using the African-Eurasian flyway since the 1980s, Reneerkens *et al.* 2009) and there were only infrequent sightings during the 1980s but regular observation since the 1990s has proven it to be a winter visitor to the shoreline between Dymchurch and Hythe Ranges and a coastal passage migrant.

Overall distribution

Figure 1 shows the distribution of all records of Sanderling by tetrad, with records in 10 tetrads (32%).



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

The first returning birds can be noted as early as mid-July but sightings in this month are rare, with one at Hythe Ranges on the 15th July 2001, two at the Dymchurch Redoubt on the 18th July 2000 and one at Hythe Ranges on the 23rd July 1995. Small numbers may be noted more regularly from August, with the earliest double-figure count being 12 at the Dymchurch Redoubt on the 6th November 1999.

Winter maxima along the shoreline between Dymchurch and Hythe Ranges vary considerably but usually reach double figures. Significantly larger numbers may occur in some years, sometimes associated with cold weather, with peaks of 30 or more noted in seven winters:

55 at the Willop Outfall on the 26th December 2012
46 at the Willop Outfall on the 27th December 2019
33 at Hythe Ranges on the 13th January 2001
55 at the Willop Outfall on the 7th February 2015
143 at the Willop Outfall on the 27th February 2021
34 at the Willop Outfall on the 19th February 2022
41 at the Willop Outfall on the 25th November 2022

Passage migrants move through this area during April and May and can involve large numbers, with counts of 30 or more recorded on six occasions:

48 at Hythe Ranges on the 27th April 1957
37 at the Dymchurch Redoubt on the 7th May 2004
83 at Hythe Ranges on the 17th April 2011
100 at the Dymchurch Redoubt on the 11th April 2020
120 at the Willop Outfall on the 1st April 2021
68 at the Willop Outfall on the 14th April 2022

Very few have been noted after mid-May and there has been just one sighting in early June, at the Dymchurch Redoubt on the 5th June 1999.



Flock of 83 Sanderlings at Hythe Ranges on the 17th April 2011 (Brian Harper)

Small numbers may occur elsewhere in winter, usually in the Folkestone Harbour/Copt Point and often associated with cold weather. The largest counts have involved up to six at Copt Point in January/February 1997, six there on the 28th January 1998, eight there on the 27th October 2012, up to six at Hythe on the 12th December 2012 and six in Folkestone Harbour on the 27th January 2013.

There is a small up-channel spring passage noted in most years, in April and May, when counts have included:

21 east past Mill Point on the 2nd May 1990
15 east past Copt Point on the 19th May 1998
21 east past Copt Point on the 10th May 2000
19 east past Copt Point on the 12th May 2002
21 east past Mill Point on the 12th May 2005
25 east past Samphire Hoe on the 7th May 2006
20 east past Copt Point on the 1st May 2007
17 east past Copt Point on the 2nd May 2011
47 east past Mill Point on the 10th May 2016



Sanderling at Hythe Ranges (Brian Harper)



Sanderling at Hythe Ranges (Brian Harper)



Sanderling at the Willop Outfall (Brian Harper)



Sanderling at the Willop Outfall (Brian Harper)

Autumn passage is less regular, with very small numbers noted between August and October, whilst cold weather may occasionally induce offshore passage, with counts including nine flying west past Folkestone Pier on the 7th February 1997 and 25 flying east past on the 24th March 2006.

The only record away from the coast involved five seen by Dave Weaver at Nickolls Quarry on the 19th February 1983 (Norman 2007).



Sanderling at the Willop Outfall (Brian Harper)



Sanderling at Hythe Ranges (Brian Harper)

Several colour-ringed birds have been noted at the Willop Outfall, with singles having been marked in Poland and Iceland and two in the Netherlands. The Polish-ringed individual was marked in August 2012 and seen at the Willop Outfall in December of the same year. The Icelandic-ringed bird was marked in May 2013 and was first noted at the Willop Outfall in January 2015, with subsequent sightings there in March 2017 and December 2017, having also visited Essex (in April 2014, August and November 2015 and April and October 2016) and Shetland (in July 2014).

The first Dutch-ringed bird was marked in the Netherlands in August 2012 and seen at the Willop Outfall in December of the same year, whilst the second one was marked in the Netherlands in August 2013 and seen at the Willop Outfall in February 2021, having been noted wintering in north-west France in 2013/14 and 2016/17 and observed on passage in the Netherlands in July/August 2014, March 2015, and August to October 2015.



The Icelandic-ringed Sanderling at the Willop Outfall
in January 2015 (Ian Roberts)



The Icelandic-ringed Sanderling at the Willop Outfall
in December 2017 (Brian Harper)

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Acknowledgements

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