

Sooty Shearwater

Ardenna grisea

Category A

Scarce passage migrant.

54 records,
105 birds

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds in the sub-Antarctic, with most migrating rapidly across equatorial seas to winter in the temperate zones of the North Atlantic and North Pacific. Northward movements begin in late March but are mostly in April to May, when it travels up the western North Atlantic into North American waters, where most are still concentrated in June; begins spreading across the temperate North Atlantic in July, becoming widespread off north-west European coasts in August to October, with stragglers remaining into late November/early December (Snow & Perrins 1998).

Kent status (KOS 2022):

A scarce but regular autumn migrant to Kent.

The first area record is given by Harrison (1953) and was seen by the author: "whilst approaching Folkestone, and perhaps four or five miles offshore, on August 26th, 1948, I observed a single Sooty Shearwater flying south-west down the Channel".

After a gap of over 25 years, the next sighting involved one seen off Hythe in 1979. However, following the third record in 1988, the species has since been recorded with some regularity, being noted in 18 of the last 27 years, as demonstrated by figure 1. The best year to date was 2000, with six records involving a total of 25 birds, including a count of 8 on the 28th September and a flock of five together on the 2nd November. The highest count to date (11) was recorded at Hythe in 2014. Records are generally associated with strong onshore winds.

The records by year are shown in figure 1.

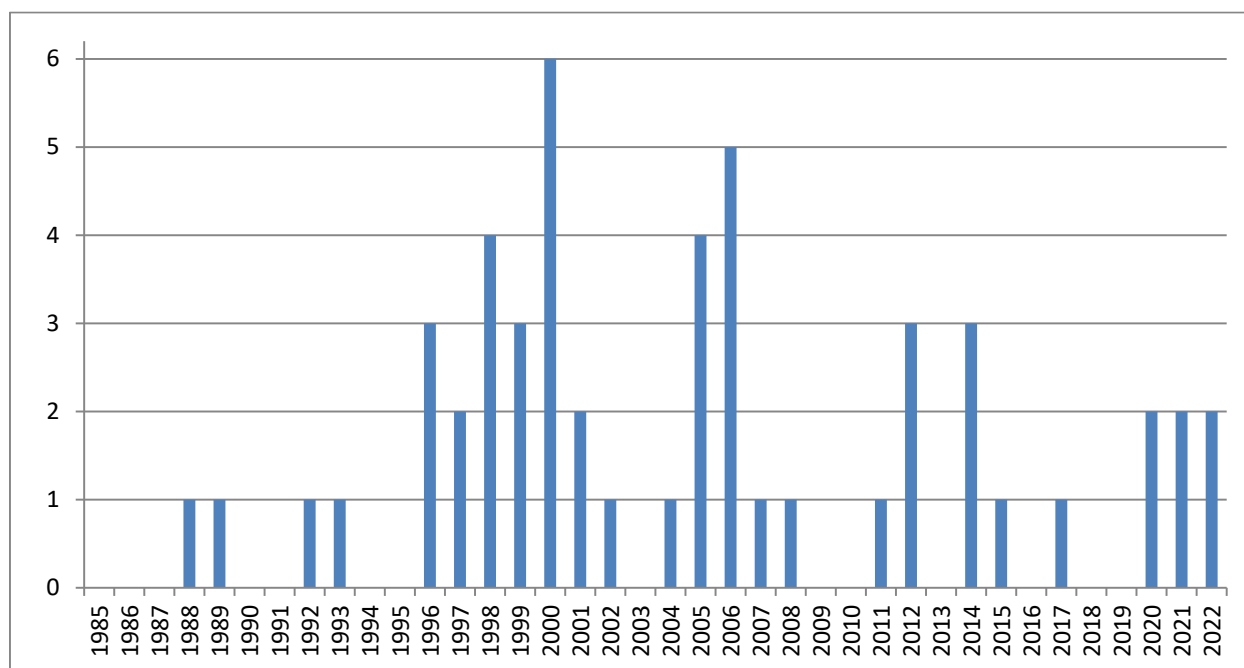


Figure 1: Sooty Shearwater records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

Apart from particularly early and late birds on 27th July (1993), 1st August (2008) and 7th December (1997), all have been recorded between 18th August (week 33) and 11th November (week 46), with a peak in late September/early October.

The records by week are given in figure 2.

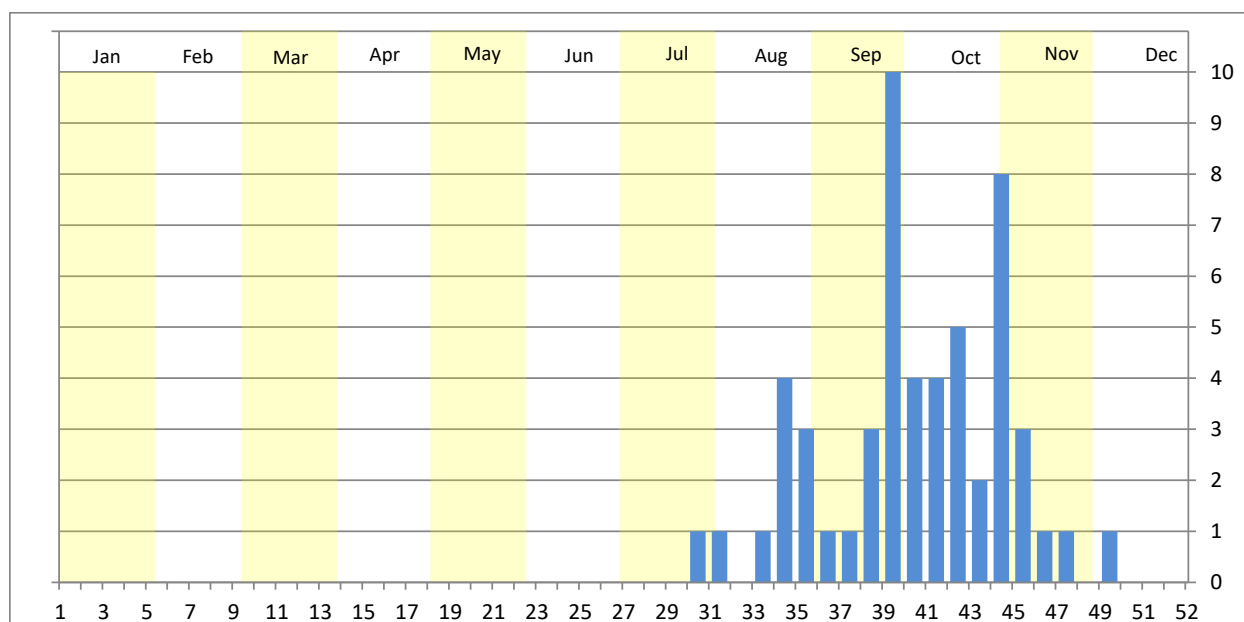


Figure 2: Sooty Shearwater records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

The vast majority of records are from the Copt Point/Folkestone Pier/Mill Point area (37), with six at Samphire Hoe and at Hythe and one at the Willop Basin. The first area record was seen four or five miles offshore of Folkestone. Figure 3 shows the location of records by tetrad.



Figure 3: Distribution of all Sooty Shearwater records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1948** At sea, one flew west 4-5 miles off Folkestone, 26th August (J. M. Harrison)
- 1979** Hythe, one, 18th August (Dungeness Bird Observatory)
- 1988** Mill Point, one flew west, 1st September (I. A. Roberts)
- 1989** Folkestone Pier, one flew west, 28th October (I. A. Roberts)
- 1992** Copt Point, two flew west, 24th September (D. A. Gibson)
- 1993** Folkestone Pier, one on sea, 27th July (D. A. Gibson)
- 1996** Copt Point, two flew west, 23rd August (I. A. Roberts)
- 1996** Copt Point, one flew west, 18th October (I. A. Roberts)
- 1996** Copt Point, one flew east, 10th November (I. A. Roberts)

1997 Copt Point, one flew west, 21st October (D. A. Gibson)
1997 Copt Point, one flew west, 7th December (D. A. Gibson)
1998 Copt Point, two flew west, 10th September (I. A. Roberts)
1998 Copt Point, one flew east, 30th September (I. A. Roberts)
1998 Copt Point, one flew west, 14th October (I. A. Roberts)
1998 Copt Point, one flew east, 21st October (I. A. Roberts)
1999 Copt Point, one flew east, 22nd August (D. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)
1999 Copt Point, one flew west, 18th September (D. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)
1999 Copt Point, two flew west, 20th September (D. A. Gibson)
2000 Copt Point, eight flew west, 28th September (D. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)
2000 Copt Point, six flew west, 29th September (D. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)
2000 Copt Point, four flew west, 12th October (D. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)
2000 Copt Point, one flew west, 28th October (I. A. Roberts)
2000 Copt Point, flock of five flew west, 2nd November (D. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)
2000 Copt Point, one flew west, 11th November (I. A. Roberts)
2001 Copt Point, one flew east, 5th October (I. A. Roberts)
2001 Copt Point, four flew west, 7th October (I. A. Roberts)
2002 Copt Point, four (two east, two west), 2nd September (I. A. Roberts)
2004 Copt Point, one flew west, 18th September (I. A. Roberts)
2005 Copt Point, one flew west, 21st October (I. A. Roberts)
2005 Mill Point, one, 24th October (I. A. Roberts)
2005 Copt Point, one flew west, 3rd November (I. A. Roberts)
2005 Copt Point, three, 8th November (D. A. Gibson)
2006 Samphire Hoe, one flew west, 7th September (I. A. Roberts)
2006 Samphire Hoe, one flew east, 24th September (I. A. Roberts)
2006 Copt Point, one, 24th September (D. A. Gibson), considered different to bird seen at Samphire Hoe
2006 Copt Point, one flew west, 30th September (I. A. Roberts)
2006 Copt Point, two flew west, 1st October (I. A. Roberts)
2007 Copt Point, three flew west, 24th September (I. A. Roberts)
2008 Samphire Hoe, one flew west, 1st August (per D. E. Smith)
2011 Samphire Hoe, one flew east, 9th October (I. A. Roberts)
2012 Copt Point, one flew west, 23rd September (D. A. Gibson)
2012 Samphire Hoe, one flew east, 25th September (per D. E. Smith)
2012 Folkestone Beach, one flew east, 4th November (I. A. Roberts)
2014 Hythe, 11 flew west, 8th October (I. A. Roberts)
2014 Hythe, one flew west, 18th October (I. A. Roberts)
2014 Hythe, two flew west, 2nd November (I. A. Roberts)
2015 Copt Point, two, 26th August (D. A. Gibson)
2017 Mill Point, one flew east, 31st October (I. A. Roberts)
2020 Willop Outfall, two flew west, 25th August (B. Harper)
2020 Mill Point, one flew west, 31st October (I. A. Roberts)
2021 Samphire Hoe, one flew west, 2nd October (I. A. Roberts)
2021 Hythe, one, 31st October (C. Gillard)
2022 Mill Point, five flew west, 3rd November (I. A. Roberts)
2022 Princes Parade, one flew west, 20th November (I. A. Roberts, B. Harper)

References

Harrison, J. M. 1953. *The Birds of Kent*. Witherby, London.

Kent Ornithological Society (KOS). 1953-2022. *Kent Bird Reports*. Kent Ornithological Society.

Snow, D. & Perrins, C.M. 1998. *The Birds of the Western Palearctic*. Oxford University Press.

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.