

Arctic Tern

Sterna paradisaea

Category A

Passage migrant.

Breeds across northern Europe, eastwards across northern Asia, Alaska, northern Canada and Greenland. In Britain restricted to the north and west, mainly breeding in Scotland. The main wintering zone lies in the Antarctic pack-ice (Snow & Perrins, 1998).

In Kent it is a passage migrant, usually in small numbers but with occasional larger movements (KOS, 2020).

Arctic Tern was not included in Knight and Tolputt's "list of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood" (1871) so the first documented record relates to one seen by Roger Norman on the shore at Hythe Ranges on the 14th May 1952, with two seen on the shore there on the 16th August 1957.

There were no local records in the 1960s or 1970s, which is likely to have been due to a lack of coverage as there have been almost annual sightings since the mid-1980s.

The earliest arrival involved two flying east past Copt Point on the 13th April 2003, whilst the only other record in the first half of April was two flying east past Samphire Hoe on the 15th April 2019. Spring passage mostly occurs in the last ten days of April and first half of May, and double-figure counts have involved:

- 22 east past Copt Point on the 11th May 1993
- 32 east past Copt Point on the 25th April 1999
- 10 east past Copt Point on the 10th May 2000
- 16 east past Hythe Redoubt on the 11th May 2000
- 10 east past Copt Point on the 6th May 2002
- 54 east past Mill Point on the 19th Apr 2005
- 12 east past Samphire Hoe on the 24th Apr 2006
- 20 east past Mill Point on the 27th Apr 2014
- 53 east past Copt Point on the 29th Apr 2017
- 29 east past Samphire Hoe on the 6th May 2018

Due to the difficulty in separating Common and Arctic Terns at distance a number of spring movements are logged are Common/Arctic Terns. The only sighting after mid-May involved three flying east past Copt Point on the 19th May 1998.

The only July record involved one seen at Nickolls Quarry on the 22nd July 1995 and autumn passage typically occurs between August and mid-October, when counts in excess of five are notable:

- 7 west past Mill Point on the 31st Aug 1988
- 28 west past Copt Point on the 30th Aug 1997
- 14 west past Copt Point on the 9th Sep 1998
- 6 off past Copt Point on the 18th Aug 1999
- 8 west past Copt Point on the 23rd Sep 1999
- 17 west past Copt Point on the 4th Oct 2004
- 6 on the beach at Copt Point on the 21st Sep 2007
- 40 west past Copt Point on the 24th Sep 2007

Sightings after mid-October are unusual but outnumber records of Common Terns (by six to two): singles off Samphire Hoe on the 20th October 2007, Copt Point on the 21st October 1997, 24th October 1998, 5th November 1998 and 8th November 2005, and in Folkestone Harbour on the 11th November 2005.

Taylor *et al* (1981) listed four winter records in Kent in their review period (1952-1976) that "referred to either Common or Arctic Terns" including one seen by B. Hawkes off Sandgate on the 28th December 1974.

The only records away from the coast have involved sightings at Nickolls Quarry. In addition to the July record above, there have been four others: on the 5th August 1986 “of six terns seen resting together, four were this species”, on the 4th August 1992 “at least one bird was present with Common Terns”, and singles were seen on the 8th August 1984 and 3rd August 2001.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of all records of Arctic Tern by tetrad, with records in 9 tetrads (29%).



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

References

Kent Bird Reports. Kent Ornithological Society

Knight, V. and Tolputt, F., 1871. List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood, *Folkestone Natural History Society Annual Report*, 1871

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

Acknowledgements

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