

Spoonbill

Platalea leucorodia

Category A

Very rare vagrant.

14 records,
19 birds

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

The Spoonbill has scattered breeding distribution across southern Europe, eastwards through central Asia to north-east China, and from the Red Sea to India. It is dispersive and migratory, wintering in the Mediterranean basin and northern tropical Africa, occasionally in western Europe in mild winters. Its range was formerly more extensive, including nesting in Britain until the seventeenth century, with decreases mainly attributable to human impact on feeding habitats.



Spoonbill at Nickolls Quarry (Ian Roberts)

Kent status (KOS 2022):

It is an annual visitor to the county in small but increasing numbers.

Ticehurst (1909) wrote “that the Spoonbill was once a native of our county and that it bred there is highly probable, for it did so in the sixteenth century in most of the south-eastern counties of England”, however there was very little evidence to confirm this. During the nineteenth century it was a regular, perhaps annual visitor and Harrison (1953) mentioned numerous reports during the first half of the twentieth century.

It was during Harrison’s time that it was first recorded locally, when Roger Norman saw one at the Willop Basin on the 24th March 1950. He recalls how “I had seen my first Redshanks at the Willop Basin on the 23rd March 1950 and had gone back on following day and crawled through the long grass to the edge of the sewer to see them again. There were two Redshanks there plus a Spoonbill” (Norman pers. comm.).

Taylor *et al.* (1981) considered it to be an annual visitor in very small numbers but there were no further local records during their review period (1952-76). Since the 1980s it has undergone a huge expansion in range within Europe, combined with a steady population increase estimated at 5% per annum, spreading within France and the Netherlands, and nest building again in Britain for the first time in over 300 years in 2014. There are currently (as at 2019) around 35 pairs breeding at five sites in Britain, mostly in Norfolk and Suffolk (Eaton *et al.* 2021). The increase and spread has been attributed to improved legal protection and wetland habitat provision across the Continent, and a warming climate. Eaton *et al.* considered that, given the recent rates of increase, it would be a surprise if the Spoonbill did not become firmly established in our avifauna in the near future.

Just over forty years after the first local record, the same observer saw a flock of five flying east over Hythe Ranges on the 31st July 1991, which then settled at Nickolls Quarry for the evening, where they fed along the “creek” south of the “main bay” (Norman 2007). Further sightings followed on the 3rd March 1996, when Dale Gibson saw one flying east past Copt Point, and on the 12th May 1997, when Ian Roberts found one at Nickolls Quarry.

There were annual records between 2000 and 2004, with singles seen flying east past Copt Point on the 3rd May 2000, west over Abbotscliffe on the 3rd October 2001 and west past Copt Point on the 23rd March 2002, whilst two flew east past Samphire Hoe on the 3rd July 2003. Nickolls Quarry also produced singles from the 26th to 27th June 2003 and on the 21st March and 24th July 2004. There were no further sightings for a decade, before further singles were seen flying west over Saltwood on the 23rd June 2014, east past Seabrook on the 23rd April 2017 and east past Mill Point on the 3rd May 2020.

The records by year are shown in figure 1.

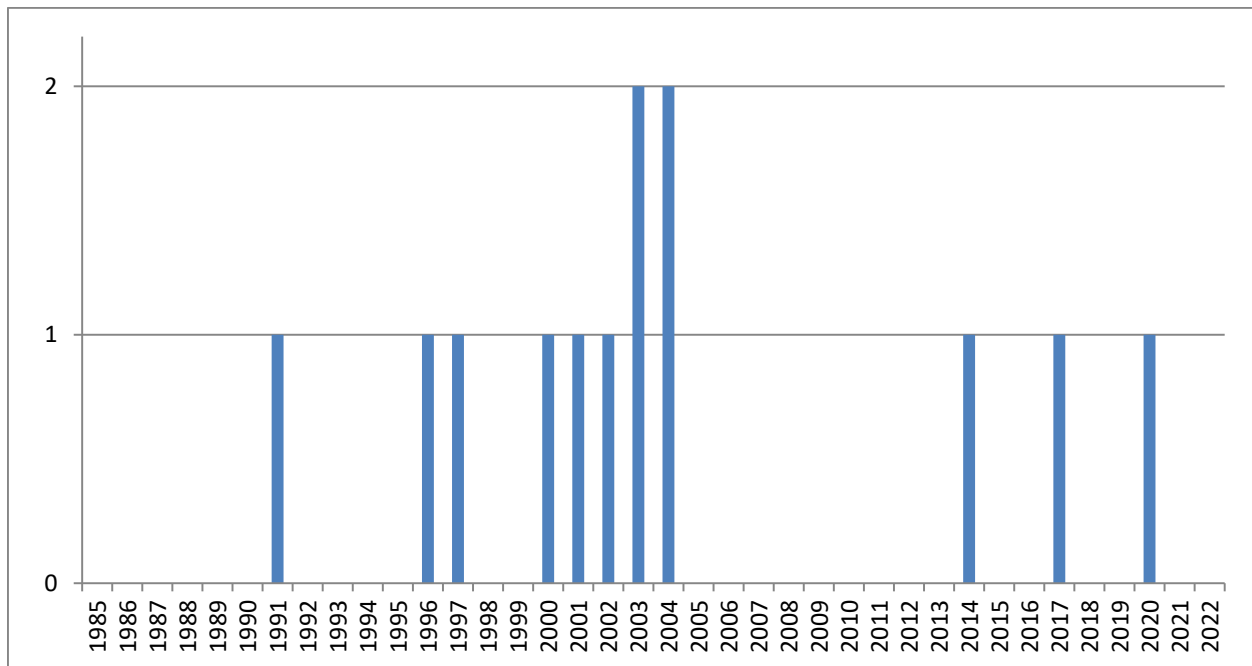


Figure 1: Spoonbill records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

The records by week are shown in figure 2. Records are quite well spread, though can broadly be grouped into spring (3rd March to 12th May), summer (23rd June to 31st July) and autumn (October) occurrences.

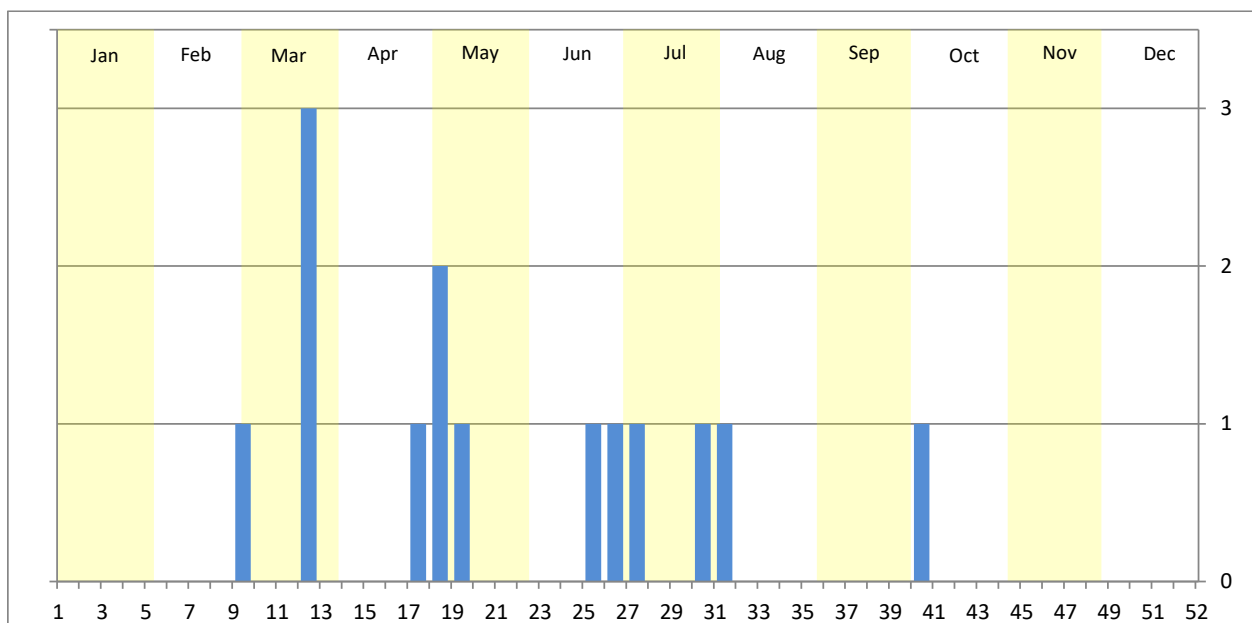


Figure 2: Spoonbill records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the location of records by tetrad.



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

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1950** Willop Basin, one, 24th March (R. K. Norman)
- 1991** Nickolls Quarry, five, 31st July, also seen flying east over Hythe Ranges (R. K. Norman). Earlier seen flying north-east over Dungeness RSPB
- 1996** Copt Point, one flew east, 3rd March (D. A. Gibson)
- 1997** Nickolls Quarry, one sub-adult, colour-ringed, 12th May (I. A. Roberts, D. A. Gibson)
- 2000** Copt Point, one flew east, 3rd May (D. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)
- 2001** Abbotscliffe, one flew west, 3rd October (D. A. Gibson)
- 2002** Copt Point, one flew west, 23rd March (I. A. Roberts)
- 2003** Nickolls Quarry, one, 26th to 27th June, photographed (R. K. Norman, I. A. Roberts)
- 2003** Samphire Hoe, two flew east, 3rd July (per D. E. Smith)
- 2004** Nickolls Quarry, one, 21st March (R. K. Norman)
- 2004** Nickolls Quarry, one, 24th July (R. K. Norman)
- 2014** Saltwood, one flew over, 23rd June (P. Howe)
- 2017** Seabrook, one flew east, 23rd April (S. McMinn)
- 2020** Mill Point, one flew east, 3rd May (C. Gillard)

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](#).

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Spoonbill at Nickolls Quarry (Ian Roberts)