

Whooper Swan

Cygnus cygnus

Category A

Very rare vagrant

10 records

There are two discrete breeding populations in the western Palearctic, one in Iceland and the other in Fenno-Scandia and Russia.

The former winters in Britain and Ireland, and the latter in north Germany, Denmark and Sweden, continuing to the Low Countries in cold weather.

It is uncertain whether any of this second population reaches Britain regularly.



Whooper Swan at Botolph's Bridge (Ian Roberts)

In addition around 28 pairs now breed in Britain (latest five year mean, *Holling et al*, 2019), mainly in northern and western Scotland, having originated from injured birds (possibly rehabilitated to the wild), which were subsequently joined by wild birds to form a resident breeding population (*Holling et al*, 2012).

Taylor et al (1981) noted that the status of the Whooper Swan had remained unchanged in Kent during a period which had seen the Bewick's Swan increase from a great rarity to a regular winter visitor. It continues to be a scarce passage migrant and winter visitor (*Kent Bird Report*, 2017).

Ticehurst (1909) records that one in Folkestone Museum was shot at Hythe by Mr. Benjamin Turner (gamekeeper of Major H. W. Deedes of the Saltwood Castle estate). The record is undated but was presumably prior to 1871 as the species was included in *Knight and Tolputt's "List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood"* published in that year. The first dated record in the Folkestone and Hythe area was in 1959, with a further sighting in the following year, and eight since 1985 as shown in figure 1.

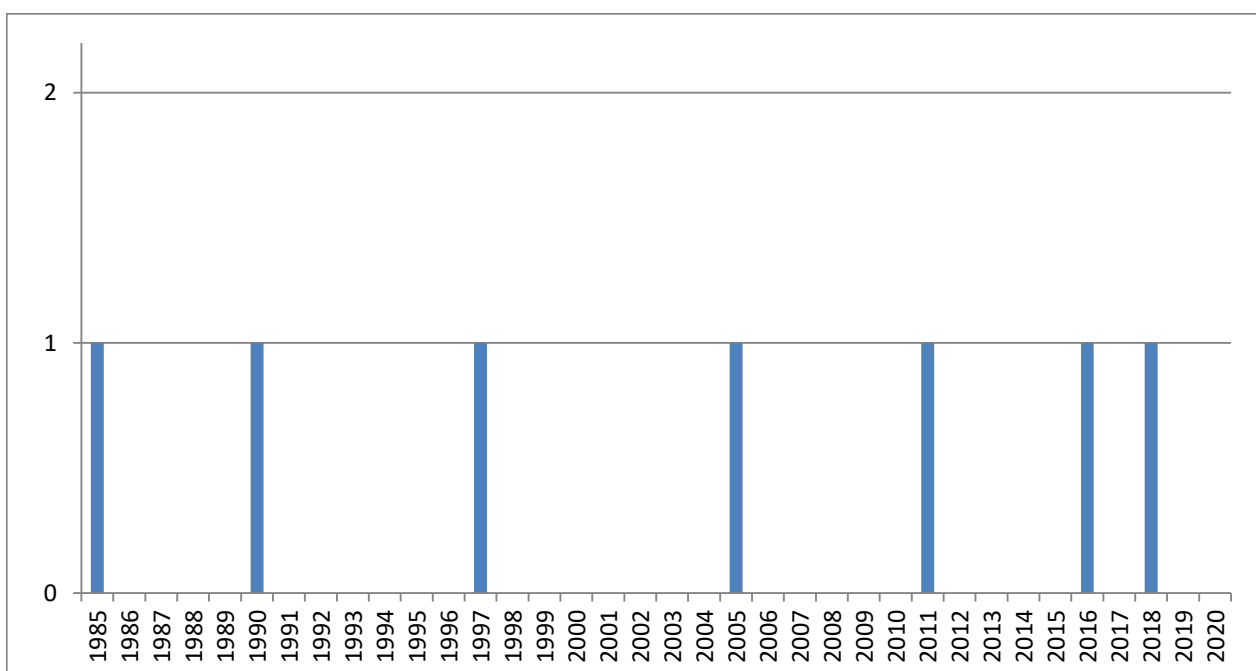


Figure 1: Whooper Swan records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

All dated records fall between 13th October (week 41) and 8th January (week 2). The records by week are given in figure 2 and there are two additional undated records (one from January/February).

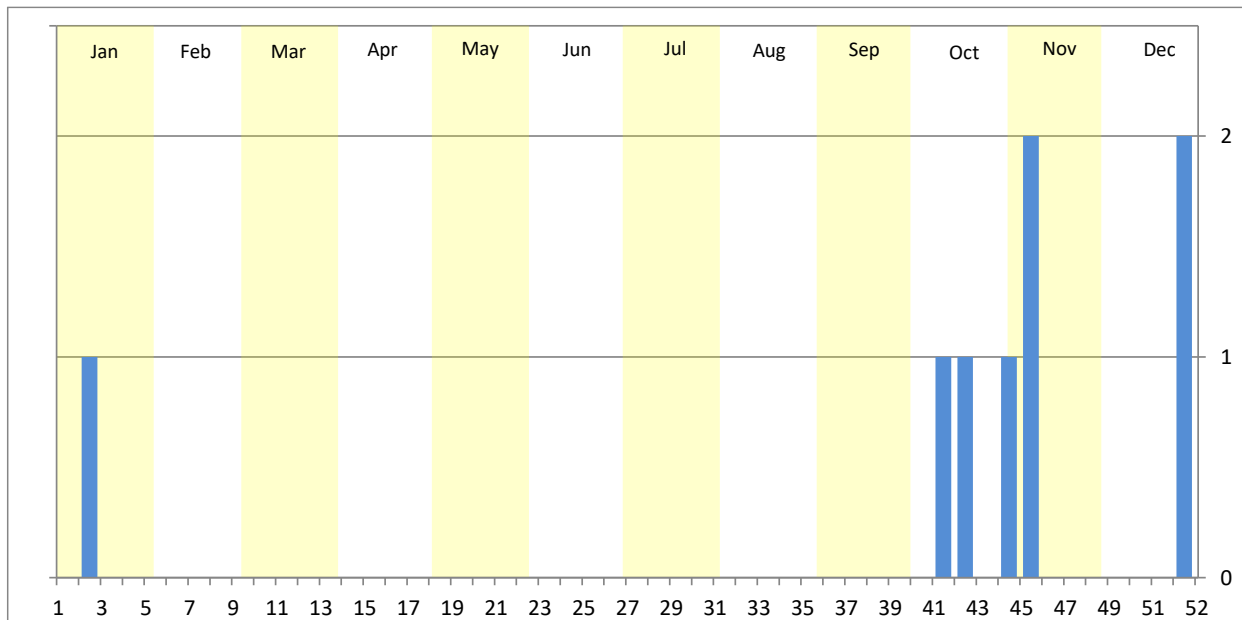


Figure 2: Whooper Swan records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the distribution of all records of Whooper Swan by tetrad.

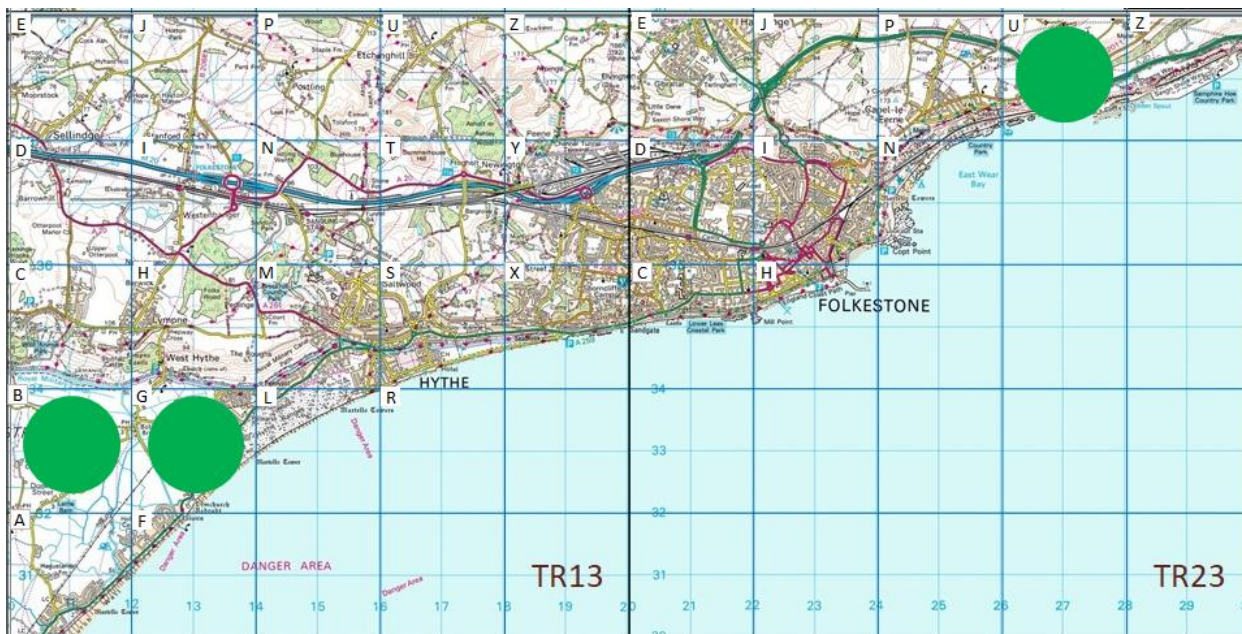


Figure 3: Distribution of all Whooper Swan records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The first four records have not been included in figure 3 as the location provided was not specific to a tetrad. Four of the six most recent sightings have been from Botolph's Bridge or Nickolls Quarry, with the other two at Abbotscliffe.

The full list of records is as follows:

- Prior to 1871** Hythe, one shot, undated (B. Turner)
- 1959** Folkestone, one, 2nd November (D. F. Musson)
- 1960** Folkestone, one, 13th October (D. F. Musson)
- 1985** Folkestone, eight flew south-west, 8th January (reported)
- 1990** Nickolls Quarry, three that were present in the Dymchurch area between 12th January and 4th February were reportedly seen at Nickolls Quarry on occasion (reported)
- 1997** Abbotscliffe, two flew south, 20th October (I. A. Roberts)

2005 Nickolls Quarry, three flew east, 28th December (I. A. Roberts)

2011 Nickolls Quarry, two flew west, 9th November (M. Casemore)

2016 Botolph's Bridge, adult, 6th to 16th November, photographed and video-recorded (B. Harper, I. A. Roberts, N. Webster *et al*)

2018 Abbotscliffe, one flew east, 26th December (M. Kennett)



Whooper Swan at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)

References

Holling, M. & the Rare Breeding Birds Panel, 2012. Rare breeding birds in the UK in 2010. *British Birds*, 105: 352-416

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Ticehurst, N. F. 1909. *A History of the Birds of Kent*. Witherby, London

Acknowledgements

The tetrad map images were produced from the Ordnance Survey [Get-a-map service](#) and are reproduced with kind permission of [Ordnance Survey](#).