

Black Guillemot

Cephus grylle

Category A

Very rare vagrant.

1 record

Breeds along the coasts of Ireland, northern Britain, Iceland, Fenno-Scandia eastwards along the coast of northern Siberian, Alaska, Greenland and eastern North America. Resident and dispersive, showing less movement than other auks and less often encountered outside the breeding range (Snow & Perrins, 1998).

It is a rare vagrant to Kent, with 26 previous records, the most recent of which was seen in 2011. Half of these were recorded from Dungeness, with six along the east coast between St. Margaret's bay and Ramsgate, and six along the north coast between Reculver and Swalecliffe (a further, nineteenth century record, has no location details). Seven were recorded in late winter/spring (between February and May), with nine in summer/early autumn (between late July and September) and seven in late autumn/early winter (November/December) (a further three, nineteenth century records, are undated) (KOS, 2021).

The only local occurrence, and 27th county record, involved one seen by Ian Roberts as it flew east close inshore past Samphire Hoe on the morning of the 18th September 2021.

The record by year is shown in figure 1.

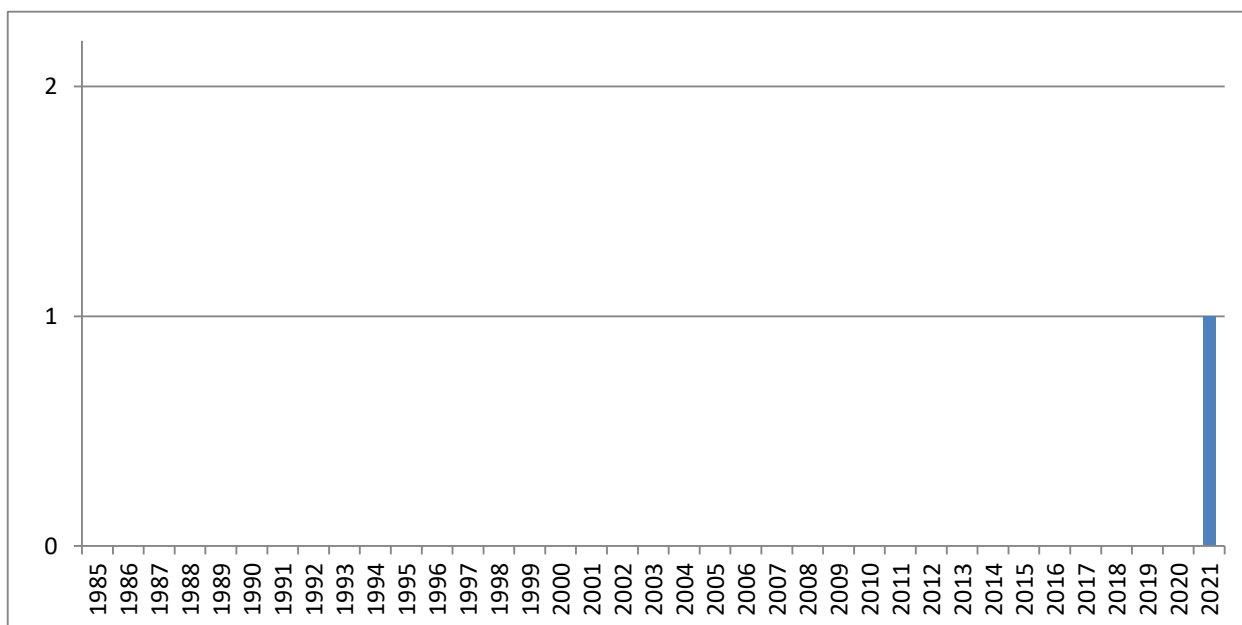


Figure 1: Black Guillemot records at Folkestone and Hythe

The record by week is given in figure 2.

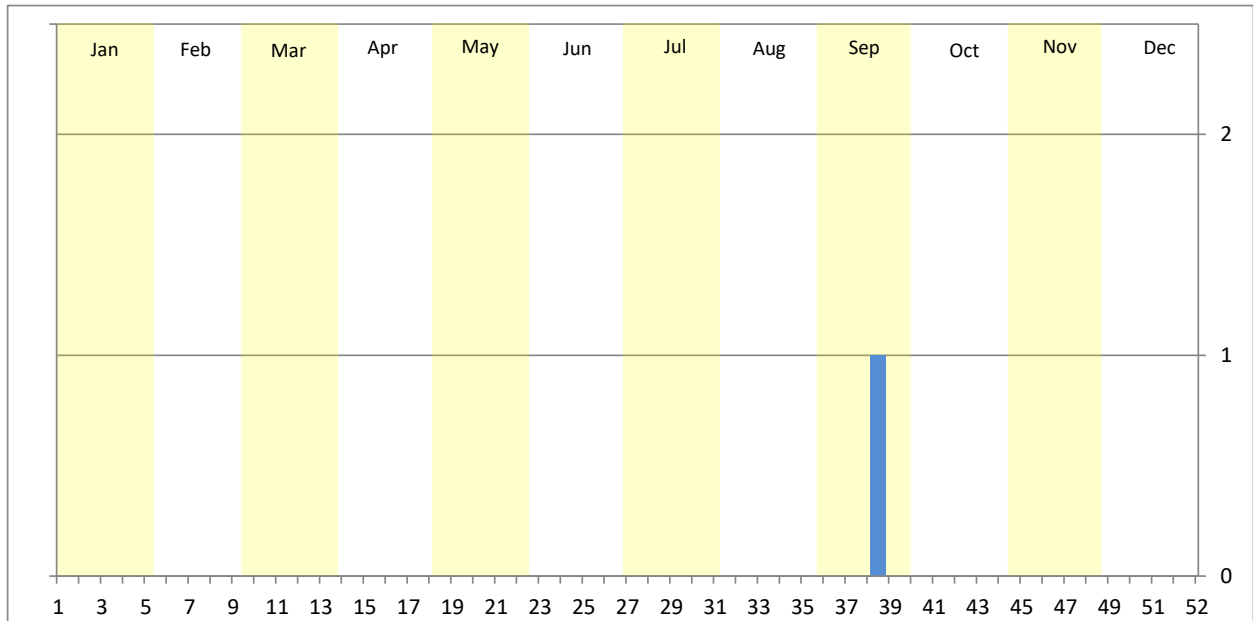


Figure 2: Black Guillemot records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the distribution of records by tetrad.

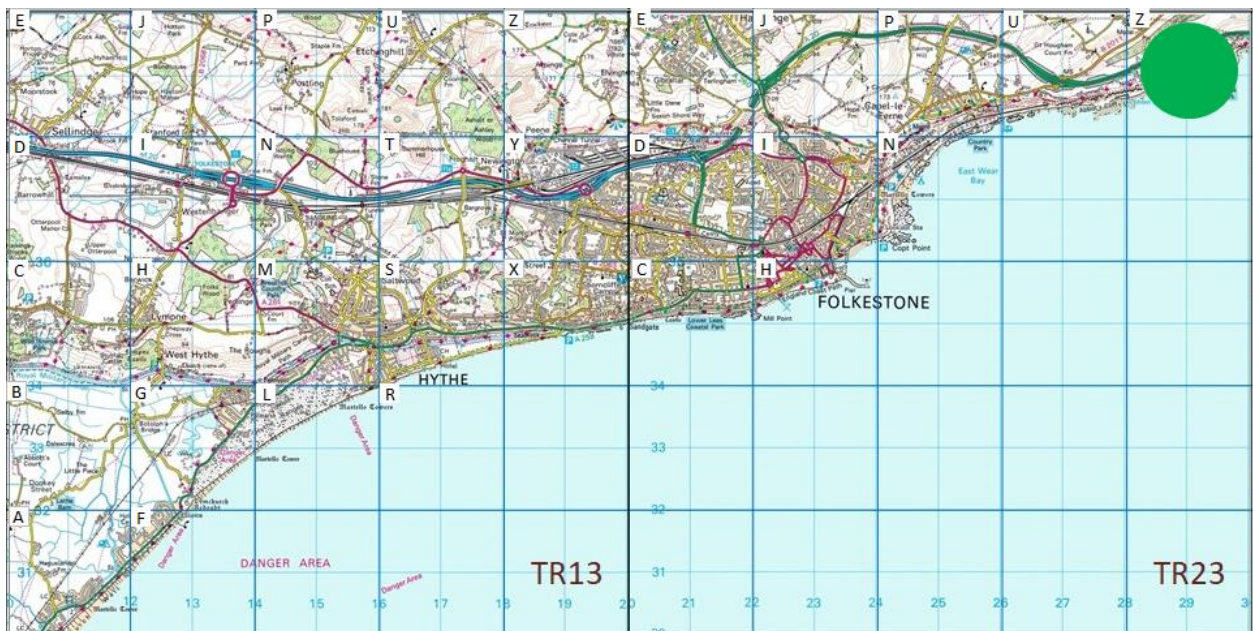


Figure 3: Distribution of all Black Guillemot records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The full list of records is as follows:

2021 Samphire Hoe, one flew east, 18th September (I. A. Roberts)

An account of the first area record is given below.

Black Guillemot at Samphire Hoe
18th September 2021

(Ian Roberts)

Weather conditions:

It was fairly calm with a light south-easterly breeze, partially overcast and with excellent visibility (particularly to the west and south, but less so to the east where the sun was causing some glare on the sea).

Circumstances of the find:

Having recorded my first Balearic Shearwater of the year off the Dymchurch Redoubt on the previous day, I felt encouraged to give seawatching another go, hopeful that the south-easterly breeze (although very light) might induce some movement. I had just set up the telescope and pointed it straight out to sea when I picked up a close flock of seven Teal, with another bird just in front of the group. It was auk-like in shape and flight but had very obvious white wing-panels on otherwise seemingly dark upperparts. As inconceivable as it was, it had to be a Black Guillemot, a species I had seen in good numbers on a trip to Orkney just six weeks previously. I noted the quite peculiar jizz, with the head held fairly high and the full, low-lying belly and vent.

As it was close inshore and flying fast it had passed by far too quickly and was already heading away when I realised I hadn't made much note of the plumage. The clear, symmetrical white wing panels contrasted strongly with the dark upperparts but the ventral area appeared paler as it headed away, whilst I had seen very little of the head or underparts. It would appear that it was adult, possibly in transition to non-breeding plumage.

It continued heading east but changed its course slightly as it began moving further out to sea to avoid Dover Harbour's Admiralty Pier. It was now flying directly away from me and becoming more distant and I lost sight of it as it passed into the glare.

Description of the bird:

Size, structure, shape: it had the obvious appearance of an auk but was smaller than Guillemot with a distinctive jizz due to its head being held fairly high and having a full, low-lying belly and vent.

Head and upperparts: clear, symmetrical white wing panels contrasting strongly with otherwise seemingly dark upperparts.

Underparts: little was noted of the underparts, except that the ventral area appeared paler.

Bare parts: bill appeared dark and pointed. The feet were not noticeable with the views that were had.

References

Kent Bird Reports. Kent Ornithological Society

KOS Kent list: <https://kentos.org.uk/kent-list> (accessed 2021)

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](#).