

Snow Goose

Anser caerulescens

Category A, E

A very rare vagrant or escaped species 6 records

Breeds from north-east Siberia, eastward across North America to north-west Greenland. The closest breeding population to Europe, in north-west Greenland and around north Baffin Bay winters on the Atlantic coast from Maryland to North Carolina. Whilst genuine vagrants certainly occur in Europe, most records probably relate to escaped or feral birds.

Taylor *et al* (1981) described how the Snow Goose is a known vagrant to Kent on the basis of a ringing recovery in 1980: on the 1st March a flock of 17 white morph birds, including four immatures, was seen flying down the Thames at Broadness, and later seen at Cliffe. During the 18th to 26th April what was believed to be the same flock (13 adult and four first-winter white morph birds, plus a blue morph goose) was present in the Netherlands, when one of the white adults was seen to carry a ring indicating that it was a male Lesser Snow Goose ringed as a gosling in Canada in 1977. It seems likely that the whole flock was of Canadian origin.

As well as confirming that wild Snow Geese reach Kent this record also indicated that birds might interchange between Kent and the Netherlands (as with other geese) in response to severe weather, and that wintering birds remain late into the spring (and so might be encountered on passage in late April or even into May, as if often the case with species which breed in the very far north).

However Taylor *et al* considered that the true status of the species in the county was impossible to determine because of the frequency of escapes from British and European waterfowl collections. Whilst some records clearly relate to feral or escaped birds others might well be genuine vagrants. Neither the national nor county records committees formally assess records of this species.

It was first recorded at Folkestone and Hythe in February 1993, with a further six records to 2000, but none since, as shown by figure 1. 1998 produced three sightings, with two in 1994 and singles in 1993 and 2000.

The records by year are shown in figure 1.

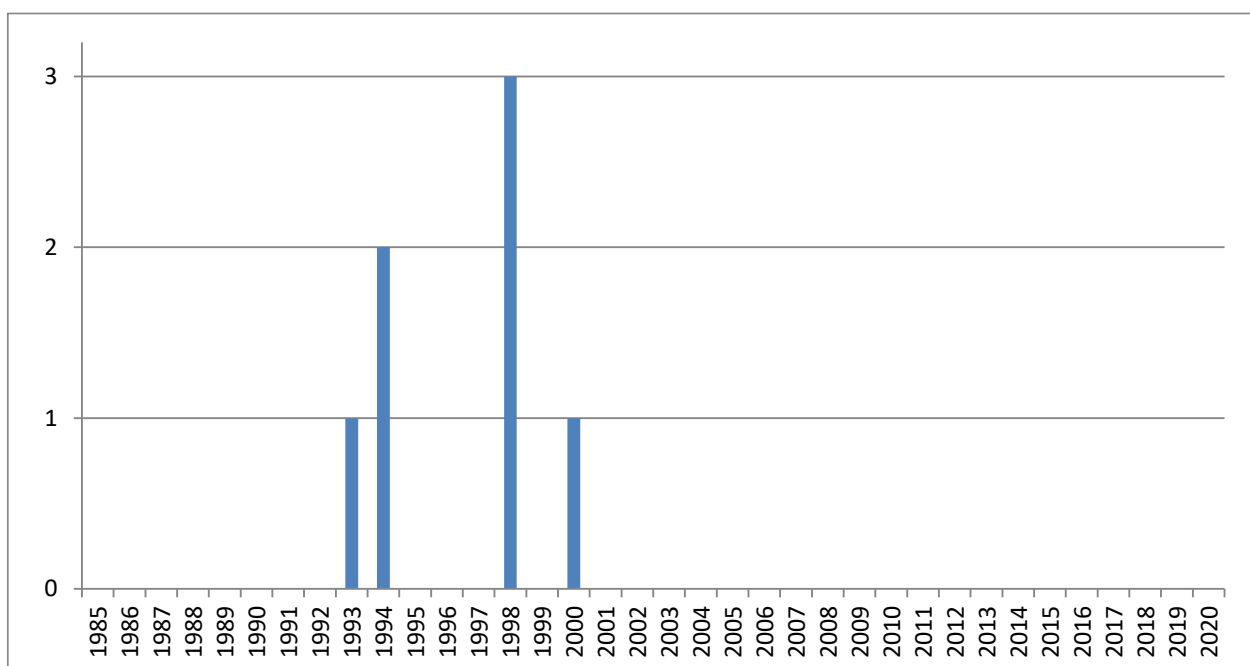


Figure 1: Snow Goose records at Folkestone and Hythe

There has been one winter record, in early February (week 5), five in spring between 30th March (week 13) and 17th May (week 20), and one in August. The latter bird clearly relates to an individual not of wild origin. The records by week are given in figure 2.

The records by week are given in figure 2 and figure 3 shows the distribution of records by tetrad.

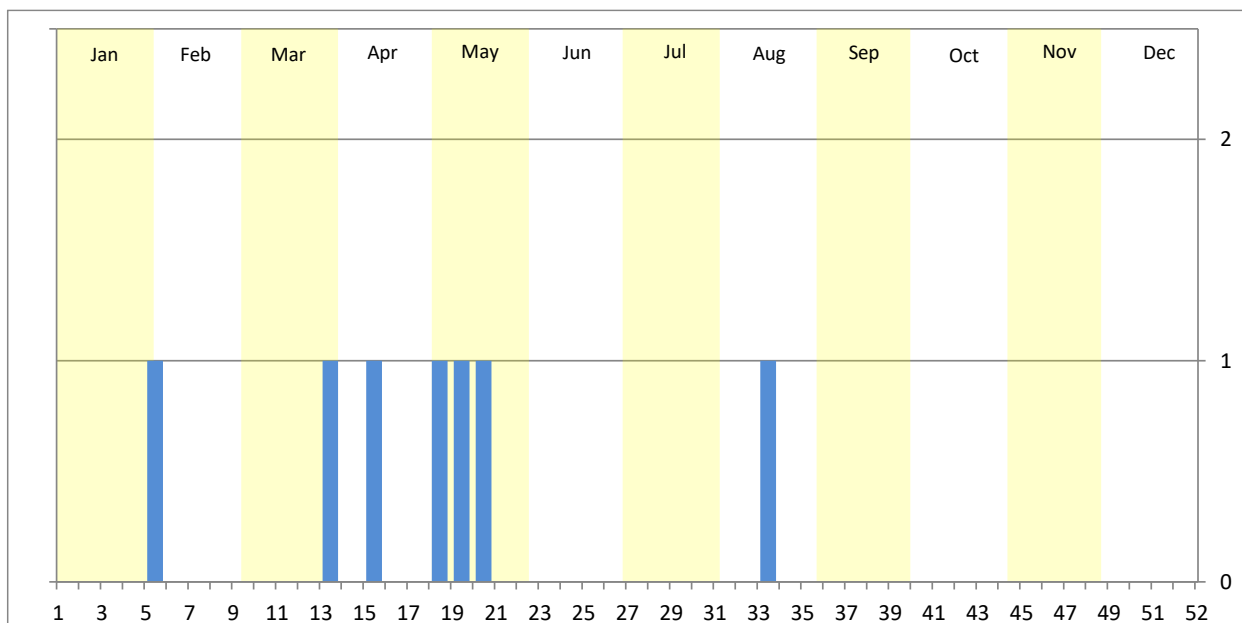


Figure 2: Snow Goose records at Folkestone and Hythe by week



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

Apart from a record of two flying east past Copt Point, all others have been in the Nickolls Quarry area.

Whilst the individual seen in August (1994) clearly relates to an escaped or feral individual, it is very difficult (if not impossible), to assess the origin of the others. All other records either relate to birds which might have been displaced by severe weather (in February 1993) or might have occurred as spring migrants (between 30th March and 17th May), with nothing to suggest that they were of certain escaped or feral origin. The distribution of Barnacle Goose records locally is rather different, where less than 20% of records appear to have reasonable credentials for being thought of as wild birds, and escaped or feral birds regularly occur in the summer months, including several long-stayers.

As there is no formal assessment of sightings either nationally or at a county-level it is left to individual observers to decide how best to categorise their records. In cases where there is nothing to suggest an escaped or feral origin, records could be considered to belong within category A, and that is how the species is currently treated on the Folkestone and Hythe list.

The full list of records is as follows:

1993 Nickolls Quarry, one with flock of 35 Barnacle Geese, 3rd to 8th February (R. K. Norman, I. A. Roberts *et al*)

1994 Nickolls Quarry, one, 11th April (R. K. Norman)

1994 Nickolls Quarry, one, 16th August (R. K. Norman), considered to be of escaped or feral origin*

1998 Nickolls Quarry, one, 4th May (I. A. Roberts)

1998 Copt Point, two flew east, 11th May (D. A. Gibson)

1998 Nickolls Quarry, one, 17th May (R. K. Norman)

2000 Nickolls Quarry, two, 30th March, presumed same on 6th April (R. K. Norman)

*excluded from the records total

References

Taylor, D., Davenport, D. & Flegg, J. 1981. *Birds of Kent*. Kent Ornithological Society

Acknowledgements

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