

Purple Sandpiper

Calidris maritima

Category A

Winter visitor and passage migrant.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds in Iceland, northern Fenno-Scandia, high-arctic islands, Greenland and north-east Canada, with one or two pairs in northern Scotland. Western Palearctic birds move south and west to coasts of north-west Europe. Outside of the breeding season it favours rocky islands, peninsulas and other coastal sectors exposed to vigorous wave action and some tidal range. Artefacts providing comparable conditions, such as breakwaters and piers, may also prove attractive, even when distant from natural habitat.

Kent status (KOS 2021):

In Kent it is a regular but declining local winter visitor and a passage migrant in small numbers.

The Purple Sandpiper was included in Knight and Tolputt's "List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood" (1871). Whilst this range extends further inland than the current Folkestone and Hythe area it is very likely that the record would have been from the coast, and so would almost certainly have been within the modern boundary.

Despite having been known to Knight and Tolputt, neither Ticehurst (1909), Harrison (1953) nor Taylor *et al.* (1981) make mention of any records within the local area, even though detailed accounts of their wintering sites are given. The first local reference in the Kent Bird Reports relates to 12 seen at Folkestone Warren on the 11th January 1970 and there was no further mention until two were present "at Folkestone" on the 13th January 1979, however it was recorded in good numbers almost annually in the 1980s and in smaller numbers in every winter since 1989/90. It was chiefly recorded at Folkestone Warren (where it favoured the sea defences known as the 'apron') or on Folkestone Pier, with only occasional sightings at Sandgate, Hythe and the Dymchurch Redoubt, however since the 2004/05 winter it has regularly used the newly created rock groynes at Hythe (opposite the ends of Stade Street and Twiss Road) and at Seabrook (Battery Point), with less frequent records from the Folkestone area.



Purple Sandpiper at Hythe (Brian Harper)



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Overall distribution

Figure 1 shows the distribution of all records of Purple Sandpiper by tetrad, with records in 12 tetrads (39%).



Figure 1: Distribution of all Purple Sandpiper records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Figure 2 shows the maximum winter counts since the 1980/81 winter.

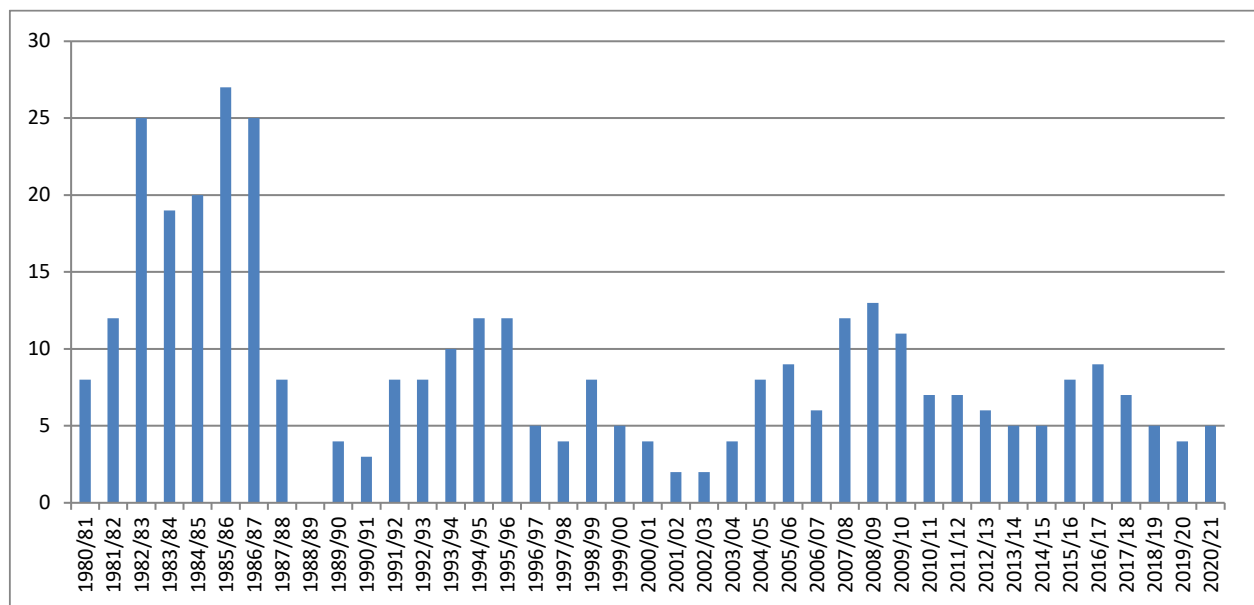


Figure 2: Winter maxima of Purple Sandpipers at Folkestone and Hythe

The largest counts ever to have been recorded involved 25 at Folkestone Warren on the 19th April 1983, up to 27 at there between February and April 1986 and 25 there on the 15th March 1987. Since the 1989/90 winter the largest counts have involved 12 (at Folkestone Warren on the 18th January 1995 and 12th March 1996, and at Hythe on the 26th January 2008 and 3rd January 2009).

It is not known why numbers reduced after the 1980s. KOS (2020) described it as a declining winter visitor however, although winter maxima have fluctuated over the last thirty years, the local population currently appears to be stable.

The earliest arrival was at Folkestone Warren on the 30th September 1984 and there have been just four records in the first three weeks of October, all of which appeared to relate to migrants: one flying west past Copt Point on the 7th October 1997, one flying east past Mill Point on the 10th October 2004, two flying west past Copt Point on the 14th October 1998 and four flying east past Copt Point on the 21st October 1997. The first arrival is typically in the last week of October or first week of November, with a mean arrival date over the most recent decade of the 31st October.



Purple Sandpiper at Hythe (Martin Casemore)



Purple Sandpiper at Hythe (Elliot Ranford)



Purple Sandpiper at Battery Point (Brian Harper)



Purple Sandpiper at Battery Point (Brian Harper)

The mean departure over the most recent decade has been the 6th May and birds have only lingered later than mid-May in two years, to the 20th May in 1987 and to the 18th May in 2019.

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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Purple Sandpiper at Hythe (Chris Bond)