

Twite

Linaria flavirostris Category A
Rare passage migrant. 21 records

Breeds in upland Britain and Ireland, also in Norway, Russia and Turkey, discontinuously eastwards to Mongolia, western China and the eastern Himalayas. British and Irish populations winter chiefly along the coast, with birds breeding in the southern Pennines moving south-east to winter chiefly on the east coast from Lincolnshire to northern Kent. Some birds cross the North Sea, mainly to the Low Countries. Populations breeding in Fenno-Scandia and Russia winter in northern and eastern Europe. There was a widespread decline in Britain in the twentieth century, which is reflected by the reducing numbers of winter and passage birds further south (Snow & Perrins, 1998). It is an increasingly irregular and steadily declining passage migrant and winter visitor to Kent, which is rare inland (KOS, 2020).

The species was included in Knight and Tolputt’s “List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood” (1871). This list covered an area of six mile radius from Folkestone town hall. Whilst this range extends further inland than the current Folkestone and Hythe area, it is likely that it would have been seen at the coast and so most probably within the modern boundary.

Taylor *et al* (1981) described how wintering Twite numbers in Kent began to increase during the 1950s, with three-figure counts on the saltmarshes of north and east Kent by the early 1960s. The first documented local records occurred in 1960, when Roger Norman saw three at Nickolls Quarry on the 23rd March and Dave Musson noted two flying west at Folkestone on the 13th October and six flying west there on the 8th November.

Taylor *et al* documented a continued increase and concluded that the average winter population in the county at the end of their review period (1976) was about 1,200 birds, although there were no further local sightings until the 1980s, presumably due to a lack of coverage. In 1984 Rob Lee saw 12 flying west at Copt Point on the 21st October, then in 1989 Ian Roberts saw eight flying west at Mill Point.

Thereafter it occurred with some regularity in the 1990s, with 12 records in the eight years between 1993 and 2000, but has only been noted on four occasions since, including two intriguing and possibly related sightings from the Cheriton area in February 2017. This decrease reflects the position across the county, where the winter population has decreased from 1,200 in the mid-1970s to just one bird in 2018/19. Balmer *et al* (2013) highlighted a loss of wintering birds from southern England, although this was offset by a gain in more northern areas, possibly in response to climatic change. The records by year are shown in figure 1.

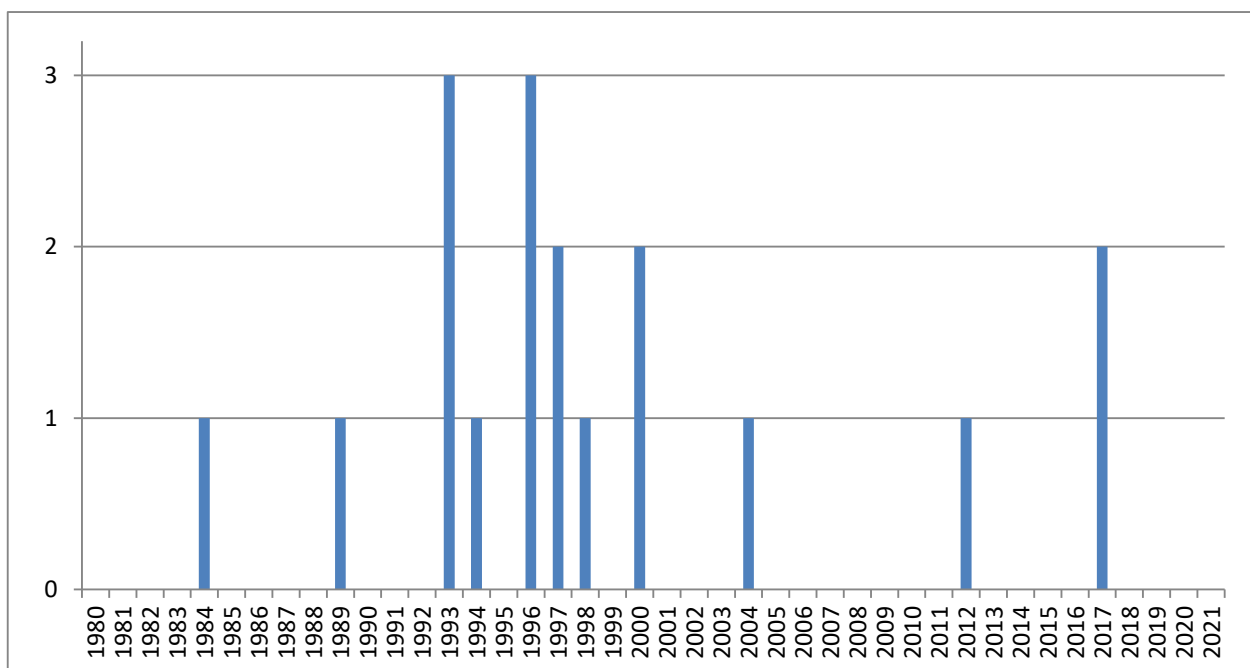


Figure 1: Twite records at Folkestone and Hythe

The majority (67%) of records have occurred in late autumn, between the 12th October (week 41) and 8th November (week 45), with two in January, three in February and two in March, as shown in figure 2.

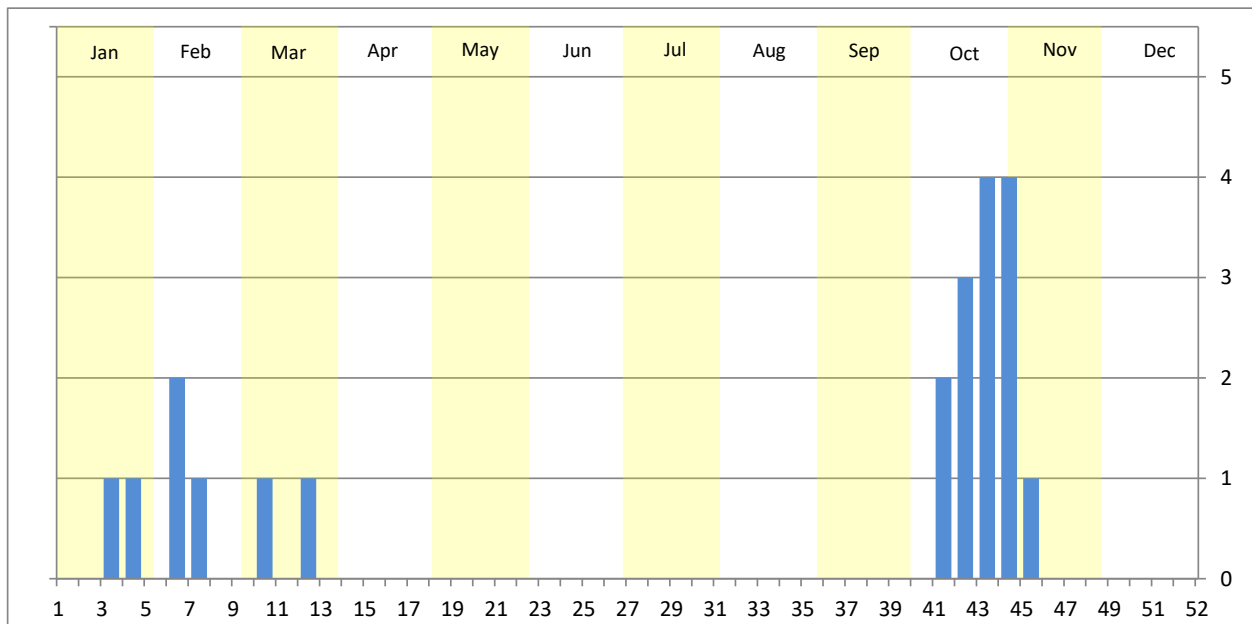


Figure 2: Twite records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the distribution of records by tetrad.



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

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1960** Nickolls Quarry, three at new pit, 23rd March (R. K. Norman)
- 1960** Folkestone, two flew west, 13th October (D. F. Musson)
- 1960** Folkestone, six flew west, 8th November (D. F. Musson)
- 1984** Copt Point, 12 flew west, 21st October (R. Lee)
- 1989** Mill Point, eight flew west, 1st November (I. A. Roberts)
- 1993** Hythe Ranges, one flew south-west, 17th January (R. K. Norman)
- 1993** Nickolls Quarry, one flew west, 17th October (R. K. Norman)
- 1993** Abbotscliffe, 12, 29th October (D. A. Gibson)
- 1994** Nickolls Quarry, seven flew west, 27th October (R. K. Norman)

1996 Nickolls Quarry, one with Linnets, 17th February (R. K. Norman)
1996 Abbotscliffe, eight flew west, 19th October (D. A. Gibson)
1996 Abbotscliffe, one flew west, 23rd October (D. A. Gibson)
1997 Nickolls Quarry, two, 26th October (R. K. Norman)
1997 Abbotscliffe, two, 30th to 31st October (D. A. Gibson)
1998 Abbotscliffe, 14 flew west, 12th October (D. A. Gibson)
2000 Nickolls Quarry, one, 5th March (R. K. Norman)
2000 Samphire Hoe, one with Linnets, 19th October (D. E. Smith)
2004 Samphire Hoe, one, 2nd November (P. Holt)
2012 Saltwood, small flock (one seen but several heard) flew south, 24th January (P. Howe)
2017 Cheriton (Shearway area), eight, 6th February (J. Varley)
2017 Cheriton (Broadmead Village), c.20-30, 9th February (J. Wood), possibly related to above sighting

References

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Acknowledgements

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