

# Arctic Tern

*Sterna paradisaea*

Category A

Passage migrant.

*World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):*

Breeds across northern Europe, eastwards across northern Asia, Alaska, northern Canada and Greenland. In Britain restricted to the north and west, mainly breeding in Scotland. The main wintering zone lies in the Antarctic pack-ice.

*Kent status (KOS 2021):*

In Kent it is a passage migrant, usually in small numbers but with occasional larger movements.

The Arctic Tern was not included in Knight and Tolputt's "List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood" (1871), whilst Ticehurst (1909) considered it to be "an annual visitor to the south coast of Kent in autumn, but its numbers are always small, while in spring it is quite rare". Neither he nor Harrison (1953) cited any local records, so the first documented sighting involved one seen by Roger Norman on the shore at Hythe Ranges on the 14<sup>th</sup> May 1952, with two seen on the shore there on the 16<sup>th</sup> August 1957 (Norman 2006).

There were no local records in the 1960s or 1970s, which is likely to have been due to a lack of coverage as there have been almost annual sightings since the mid-1980s.

## Overall distribution

Figure 1 shows the distribution of all records of Arctic Tern by tetrad, with records in 9 tetrads (29%).



Figure 1: Distribution of all Arctic Tern records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The earliest arrival involved two flying east past Copt Point on the 13<sup>th</sup> April 2003, whilst the only other record in the first half of April was two flying east past Samphire Hoe on the 15<sup>th</sup> April 2019. Spring passage mostly occurs in the last ten days of April and first half of May, and double-figure counts have involved:

- 22 east past Copt Point on the 11<sup>th</sup> May 1993
- 32 east past Copt Point on the 25<sup>th</sup> April 1999
- 10 east past Copt Point on the 10<sup>th</sup> May 2000
- 16 east past Hythe Redoubt on the 11<sup>th</sup> May 2000
- 10 east past Copt Point on the 6<sup>th</sup> May 2002
- 54 east past Mill Point on the 19<sup>th</sup> Apr 2005
- 12 east past Samphire Hoe on the 24<sup>th</sup> Apr 2006

20 east past Mill Point on the 27<sup>th</sup> Apr 2014  
53 east past Copt Point on the 29<sup>th</sup> Apr 2017  
29 east past Samphire Hoe on the 6<sup>th</sup> May 2018

Due to the difficulty in separating Common and Arctic Terns at distance a number of spring movements are logged are Common/Arctic Terns. The only sighting after mid-May involved three flying east past Copt Point on the 19<sup>th</sup> May 1998.

The only July record involved one seen at Nickolls Quarry on the 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1995 and autumn passage typically occurs between August and mid-October, when counts in excess of five are notable:

7 west past Mill Point on the 31<sup>st</sup> Aug 1988  
28 west past Copt Point on the 30<sup>th</sup> Aug 1997  
14 west past Copt Point on the 9<sup>th</sup> Sep 1998  
6 off past Copt Point on the 18<sup>th</sup> Aug 1999  
8 west past Copt Point on the 23<sup>rd</sup> Sep 1999  
17 west past Copt Point on the 4<sup>th</sup> Oct 2004  
6 on the beach at Copt Point on the 21<sup>st</sup> Sep 2007  
40 west past Copt Point on the 24<sup>th</sup> Sep 2007

Sightings after mid-October are unusual but outnumber records of Common Terns (by seven to three): singles off Samphire Hoe on the 20<sup>th</sup> October 2007, Copt Point on the 21<sup>st</sup> October 1997 and 24<sup>th</sup> October 1998, Mill Point on the 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2022, Copt Point on the 5<sup>th</sup> November 1998 and 8<sup>th</sup> November 2005, and in Folkestone Harbour on the 11<sup>th</sup> November 2005.

Taylor *et al* (1981) listed four winter records in Kent in their review period (1952-1976) that "referred to either Common or Arctic Terns" including one seen by B. Hawkes off Sandgate on the 28<sup>th</sup> December 1974.

The only records away from the coast have involved sightings at Nickolls Quarry. In addition to the July record above, there have been four others: on the 5<sup>th</sup> August 1986 "of six terns seen resting together, four were this species", on the 4<sup>th</sup> August 1992 "at least one bird was present with Common Terns", and singles were seen on the 8<sup>th</sup> August 1984 and 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2001 (Norman 2007).

## **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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