

Bewick's Swan

Cygnus columbianus

Category A

Rare passage migrant and winter visitor. 20 records, 171 birds

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds in northern Russia and winters in western Europe, with largest numbers in Britain and Ireland, and the Netherlands.

Kent status (KOS 2022):

It is a regular passage migrant and winter visitor to the county in declining numbers.



Bewick's Swan at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)

Bewick's Swan 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 the record would have been from the coast, and so would most probably have been within the modern boundary.

Ticehurst (1909) considered the species to be one of the "rarest of the hard-weather visitors" to the county and this situation was unchanged by the time of Harrison (1953), who confirmed that it was "one of the rarer wildfowl to visit our coasts". Taylor *et al.* (1981) described how the Bewick's Swan was formerly a rare visitor to Kent but became annual in its occurrence from the mid-1950s, with larger numbers from the 1970s, whilst Balmer *et al.* (2013) remarked that numbers in Britain and Ireland have declined after reaching a peak in the early 1990s and considered that there had generally been an eastward shift in the wintering range of this population, with more birds remaining in continental Europe, possibly due to generally milder winters.

The first definitive, dated local record occurred in 1970, when Geoffrey Munns saw seven at Nickolls Quarry on the 17th January but there were no further sightings until two were reported arriving in off the sea at Copt Point on the 9th November 1980. Nickolls Quarry provided the next two records, with Dave Weaver noting that a flock of 22 arrived into the pits at dusk on the 21st February 1982 and Sue and Chris Phillpott recalled seeing a flock of 29 there in January 1988 (Norman 2007).



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It was then recorded with some regularity between the late 1980s and 2000, with 10 records in the 13 years (at a rate of 0.8 per annum), but has been noted less frequently since, with seven records in the next 22 years (a rate of 0.3 per annum) which correlates with the national decline in wintering numbers since peaking in the early 1990s. Three years produced multiple records (all prior to 2000): in 1988, 1995 and 1999. The records by year are shown in figure 1.

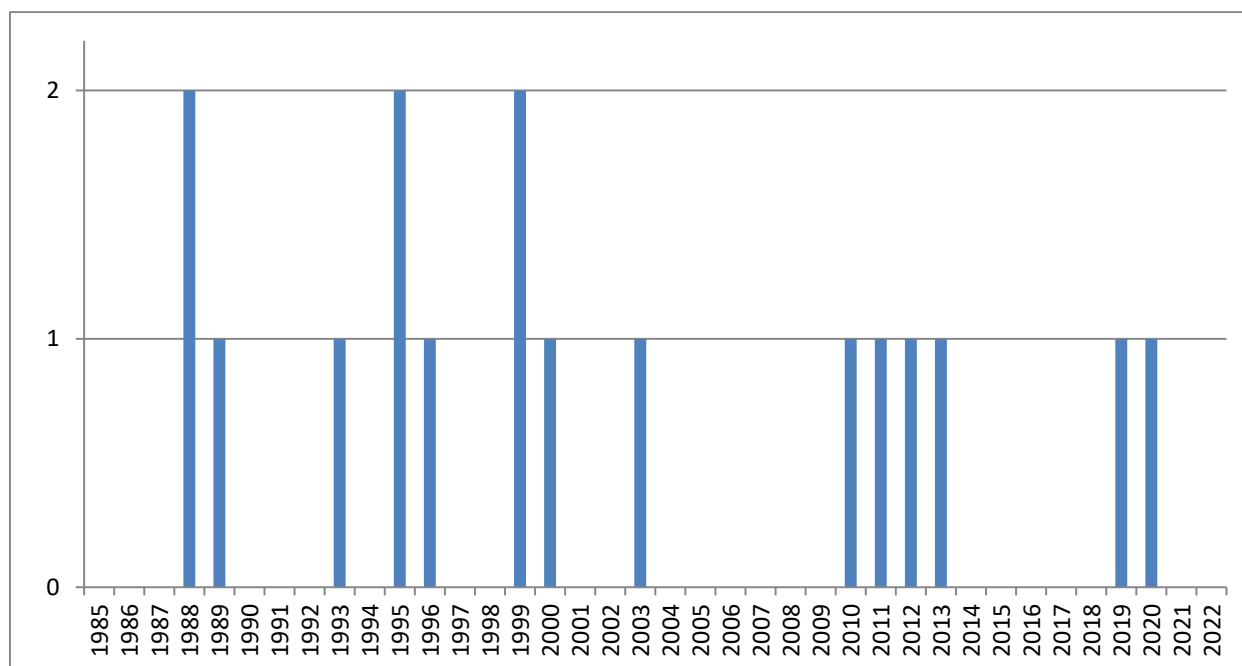


Figure 1: Bewick's Swan records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

Birds typically arrive in the county from late October and continue to do so through December, even into January in colder weather. Birds tend to depart in February or early March, but passage migrants can occur into April. Locally, the earliest arrival was 30th October (in 1993 and 1995) and the latest record was a migrating flock on 8th March 2011. January and December have produced the most records, with five. The records by week are given in figure 2, though there are additional undated records from December and January.

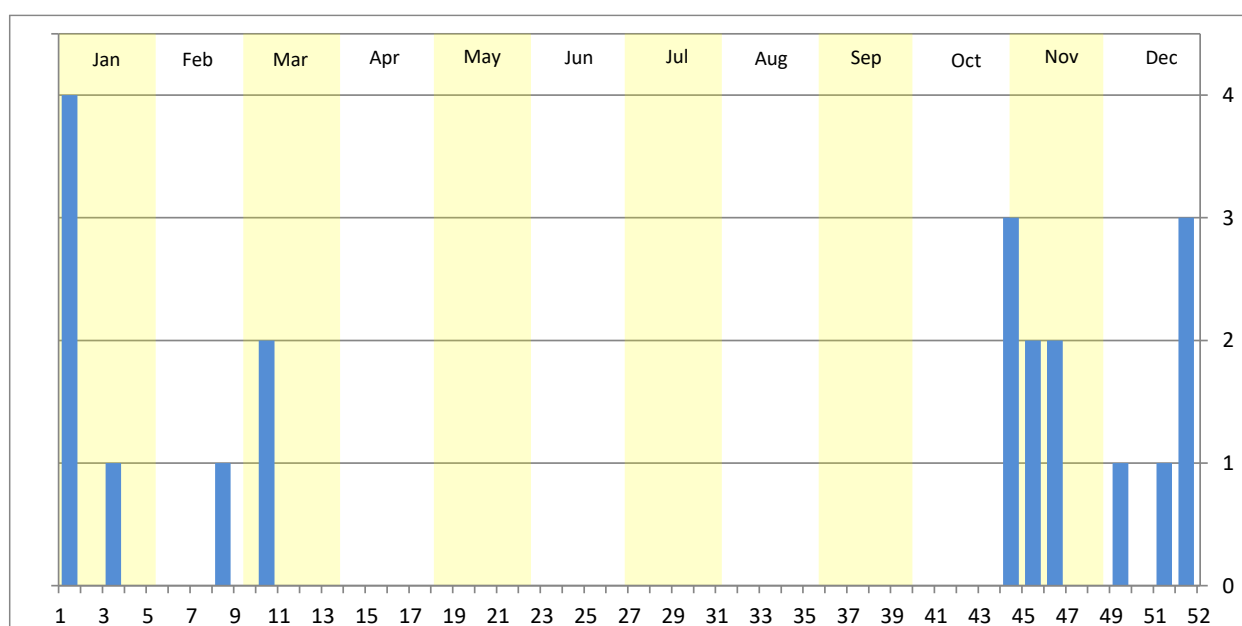


Figure 2: Bewick's Swan records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

The distribution of records falls into two distinct categories. The first relates to sightings of migrants away from the Romney Marsh area, with seven records in late autumn/early winter (between November and early January) and two in spring (March), including the largest flock recorded to date, of 61 birds (presumably the wintering flock from Romney Marsh departing).

The second relates to a combination of migrants and wandering winter birds in the Romney Marsh area, three of which were in late October/November, with the rest in December to February. Winter records have sometimes, though not always, been associated with cold weather. Figure 3 shows the location of records by tetrad.

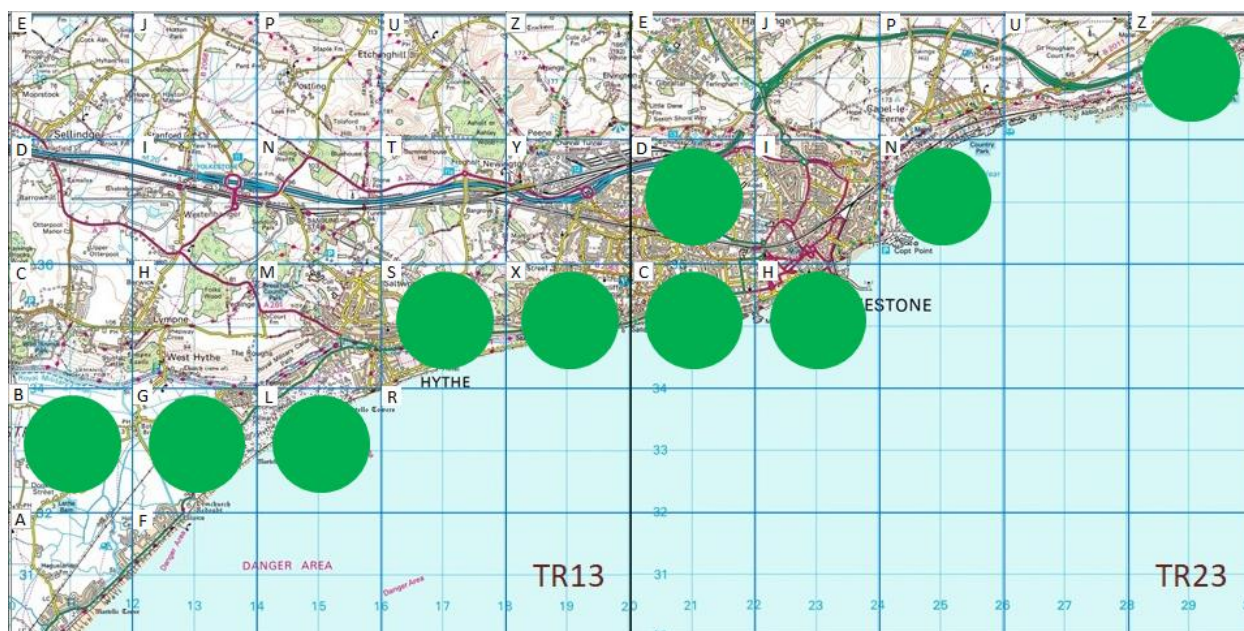


Figure 3: Distribution of all Bewick's Swan records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1970** Nickolls Quarry, seven, 17th January (G. F. A. Munns)
- 1980** Copt Point, two flew in off the sea, 9th November (reported)
- 1982** Nickolls Quarry, 22 arrived at dusk, 21st February (D. Weaver)
- 1988** Nickolls Quarry, 29, unknown date in January (R. & S. Philpott)
- 1988** Cheriton, one flew south, 5th December (J. P. Siddle)
- 1989** Mill Point, two flew west, 17th November (I. A. Roberts)
- 1993** Hythe Ranges, two flew in off the sea, 30th October (R. K. Norman)
- 1995** Nickolls Quarry, three flew west, 30th October (R. K. Norman)
- 1995** Nickolls Quarry, two, 30th December (R. K. Norman)
- 1996** Nickolls Quarry, one, 18th December (R. K. Norman)
- 1999** Samphire Hoe, one reported on main pond, 5th November (per D. E. Smith)
- 1999** Nickolls Quarry, eight flew north-east, 14th November (R. K. Norman)
- 2000** Botolph's Bridge, two, 29th December (R. K. Norman)
- 2003** Nickolls Quarry, 15 flew east, 3rd January (I. A. Roberts)
- 2010** Nickolls Quarry, ten, 25th to 28th December, in fields by Botolph's Bridge by day and roosting at Nickolls Quarry, photographed (D. Weller, B. Harper, I. A. Roberts)
- 2011** Mill Point, 61 flew east, 8th March (I. A. Roberts)
- 2012** Abbotscliffe, five flew west, 3rd November (I. A. Roberts)
- 2013** Samphire Hoe, 21 flew east, 6th March (I. A. Roberts)
- 2019** Battery Point, one drifted east at sea, 6th January (P. Howe)
- 2020** Samphire Hoe, five flew west, 2nd January (S. Cutt), with presumably four of the same flying west past Hythe 15 minutes later (D. Brown)

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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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Bewick's Swans at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)