

Tundra Bean Goose

Scientific name Category A

Very rare vagrant. 11 records,
47+ birds

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds in the tundra of northern Russia east to Siberia, wintering in western Europe, mainly Germany, the Netherlands and France, with a small number in Britain.

Kent status (KOS 2022):

A scarce passage migrant and winter visitor to Kent, generally in small numbers, with occasional larger flocks. Typically recorded between late October and early April, most commonly occurring during spells of hard weather.



Tundra Bean Geese at Botolph's Bridge (Dave Brown)

Ticehurst (1909) wrote that "there is little doubt that the Bean Goose and the Pink-footed Goose are very often confused, so that their relative frequency in Kent is very difficult to define", and indeed they were considered conspecific until 1833, but the consensus amongst writers at time was that the Bean Goose was the more frequent in occurrence in the county. Ticehurst noted that Folkestone Museum had a Bean Goose that had been shot at Hythe (but did not provide a date, although it can be presumed to have been after 1871 as Knight and Tolputt did not mention the species within their "List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood").

Ticehurst also recounted (as what appears to be a later event) that "Mr. H. Lemmon informs me [that] a large number [of Bean Geese] were seen [at Hythe] in the in the hard winter of 1895-96. They frequented some fields at the back of the town, where they picked up a precarious livelihood and a good number were shot. They were all in extremely poor condition, and some were hardly more than skin and bone".

By the time of Harrison (1953) the Bean and Pink-footed Geese were again treated as races of a single species, only to be separated again when Taylor *et al.* (1981) compiled their county avifauna, whilst further taxonomic revision followed when, in January 2018, the British Ornithologist's Union (BOU) adopted the International Ornithological Congress (IOC) World Bird List which treated the Tundra (*Anser serrirostris*) and Taiga (*Anser fabalis*) forms of Bean Geese as separate species (BOU 2017).

Taiga Bean Geese breed within swampy, dense coniferous forest or birch scrub (a habitat known as "taiga"), whereas Tundra Bean Geese breed in flat, treeless expanses (known as "tundra"). Taiga Bean Geese tend to winter further to the east with only very small numbers regularly reaching Britain, where there are two traditional wintering sites: in the Norfolk Broads and in Stirlingshire. Balmer *et al.* (2013) showed no records of Taiga Bean Goose in Essex, Kent or along the southern coast of England during the 2007-11 Bird Atlas and in Kent it is considered to be a rare passage migrant and winter visitor (KOS 2019), having occurred on 39 occasions since 1968 (KOS no date).

The first modern records occurred in 1992, when a flock of 21 were reported arriving in off the sea at Copt Point on the 17th January and four were reported at Capel-le-Ferne on the 29th January. These were quickly followed by two seen by Roger Norman as they flew south-east and out to sea from Hythe Ranges on the 13th March 1993 (Norman 2006), whilst Dale Gibson saw five flying west at Copt Point on the 25th December 1996. At this time the two races (as they were then) of Bean Goose were not routinely separated, but these records seem very likely to have involved Tundra Bean Geese, the species that is far more regularly encountered in the county.

The first confirmed record of Tundra Bean Goose was found at Nickolls Quarry on the 15th February 1997, where it remained until the 23rd March, whilst another long-staying bird resided in the Botolph's Bridge/Nickolls Quarry area (feeding in the fields around Botolph's Bridge by day and roosting at the quarry overnight) between the 26th December 2001 and the 24th March 2002, with further sightings of possibly a different individual there on 14th and 16th April (Norman 2007).

There have been three subsequent records, but only once since 2011, as demonstrated by figure 1.

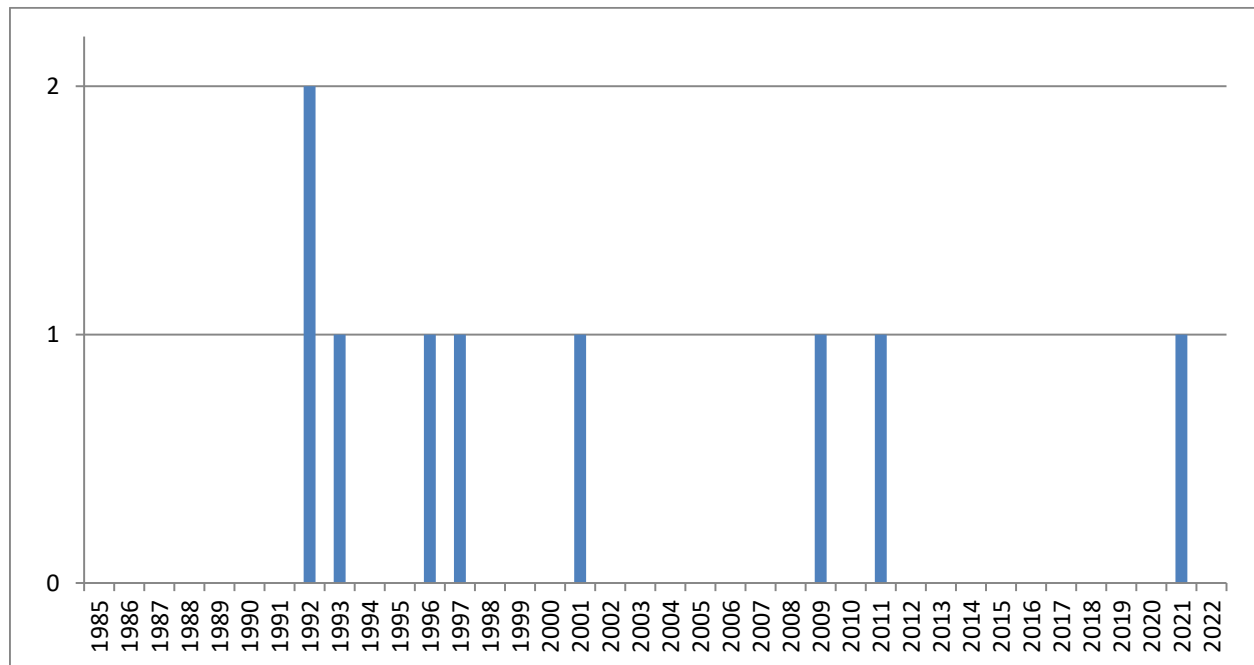


Figure 1: Tundra Bean Goose records at Folkestone and Hythe

The records by week are given in figure 2.

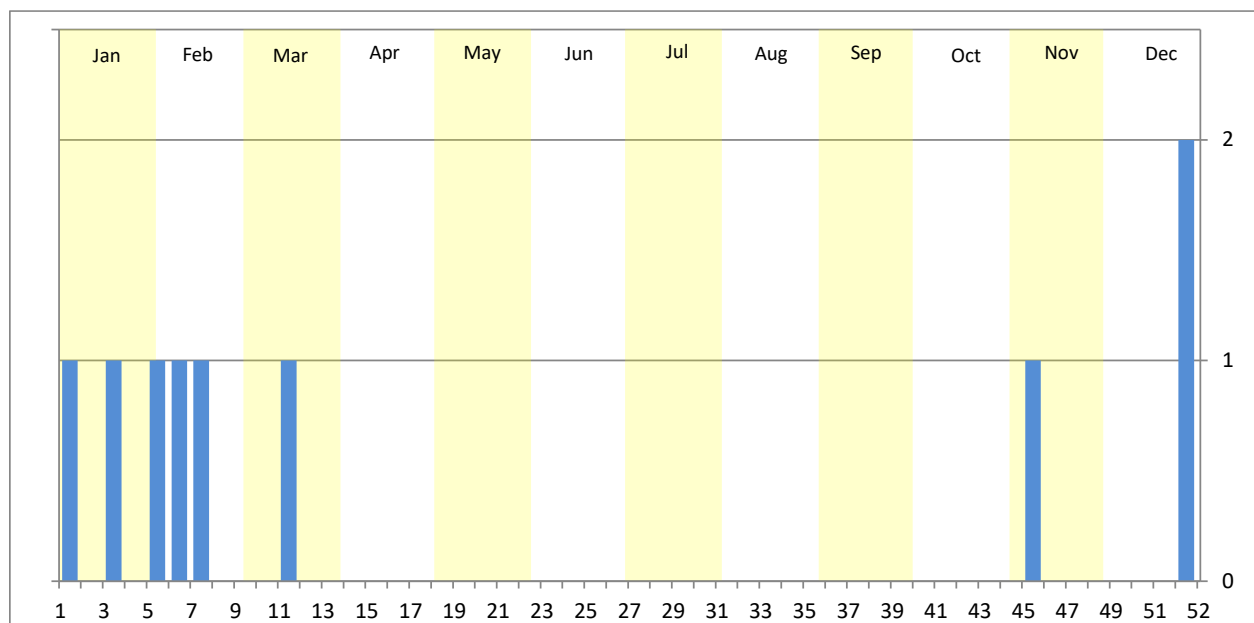


Figure 2: Tundra Bean Goose records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

The distribution of records is shown in figure 3. The records from coastal sites relate to migrants either in autumn (Abbotscliffe), spring (Hythe Ranges) or cold weather (Copt Point). There have been another five records from the Botolph's Bridge/Donkey Street/Nickolls Quarry, two of which were particularly long-stayers.



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

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1895/96** Hythe, “a large number” [Bean Geese sp.], in winter (H. Lemmon)
- <1909** Hythe, one [Bean Goose sp.] shot, in Folkestone Museum (per N. Ticehurst)
- 1992** Copt Point, 21 [Bean Geese sp.] flew in off the sea, 17th January (reported)
- 1992** Capel-le-Ferne, four [Bean Geese sp.], 29th January (reported)
- 1993** Hythe Ranges, two [Bean Geese sp.] flew south-east and out to sea, 13th March (R. K. Norman)
- 1996** Copt Point, five [Bean Geese sp.] flew west, 25th December (D. A. Gibson)
- 1997** Nickolls Quarry, one [Tundra Bean Goose], 15th February to 23rd March (I. A. Roberts, R. K. Norman)
- 2001** Botolph’s Bridge/Nickolls Quarry area, one [Tundra Bean Goose], 26th December to 24th March 2002 (I. A. Roberts, R. K. Norman), with further sightings of possibly a different individual on 14th and 16th April (R. K. Norman)
- 2009** Botolph’s Bridge, three [Tundra Bean Geese], with a single White-fronted Goose, 2nd January, photographed (D. & S. Brown)
- 2011** Abbotscliffe, two [Tundra Bean Geese] in wheat field for ten minutes then flew west, 9th November (M. D. Kennett)
- 2021** Lathe Barn (Donkey Street), five [Tundra Bean Geese] in fields to the south, then flew west, 8th February (I. A. Roberts)

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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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Bean Geese (three birds on left) and White-fronted Goose at Botolph's Bridge (Dave Brown)