

Bewick's Swan

Cygnus columbianus

Category A

Rare migrant and winter visitor

20 records

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

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. 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.



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

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.

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

The first definitive, dated record of Bewick's Swan in the Folkestone and Hythe area, however, was in 1970, with further sightings in 1980 and 1982, and 17 since 1985 as shown in figure 1. Three years have produced multiple records – 1988, 1995 and 1999.

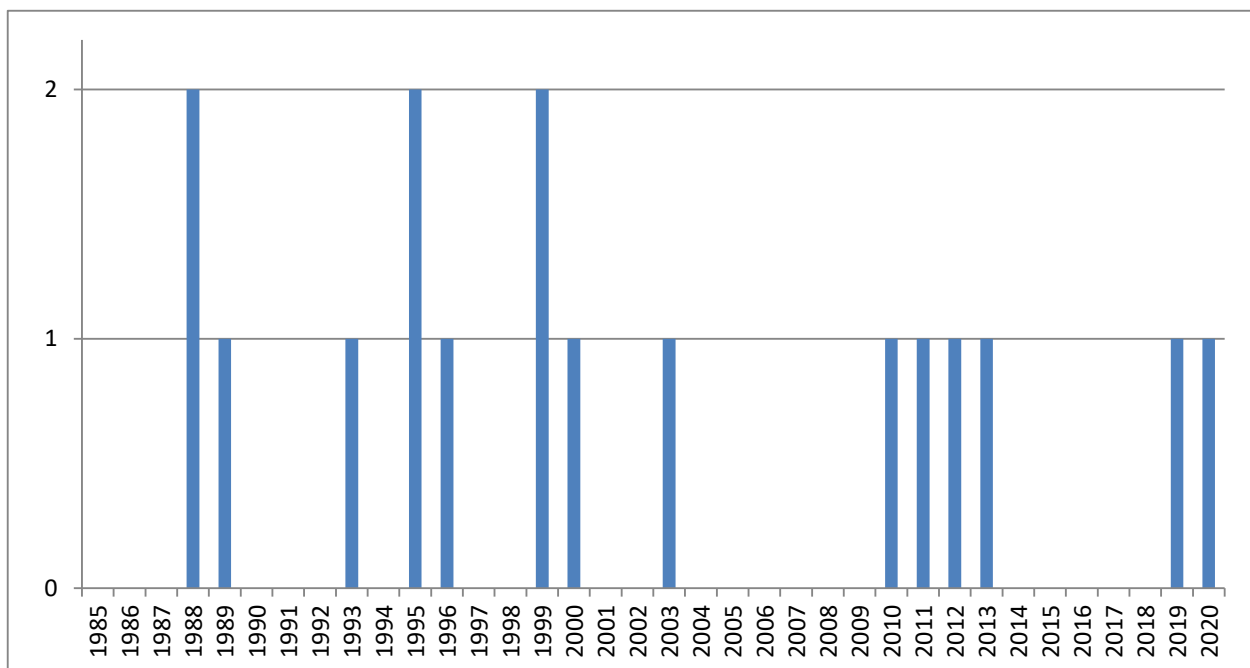


Figure 1: Bewick's Swan records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

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.

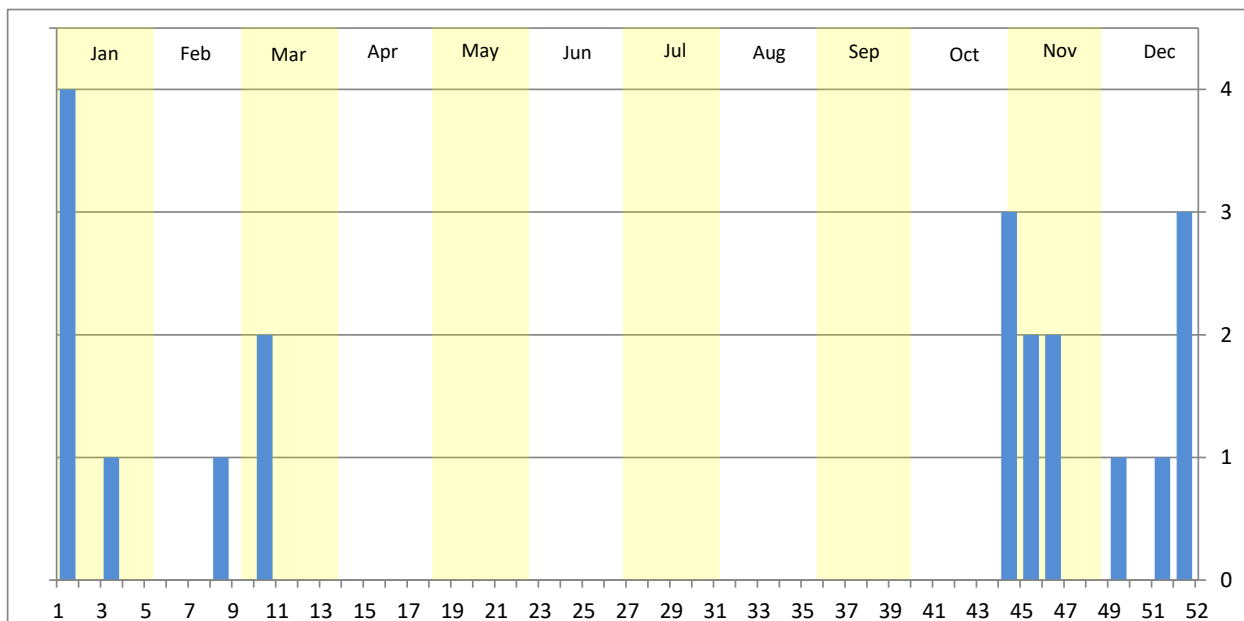


Figure 2: Bewick's Swan records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the distribution of all records of Bewick's Swan by tetrad.

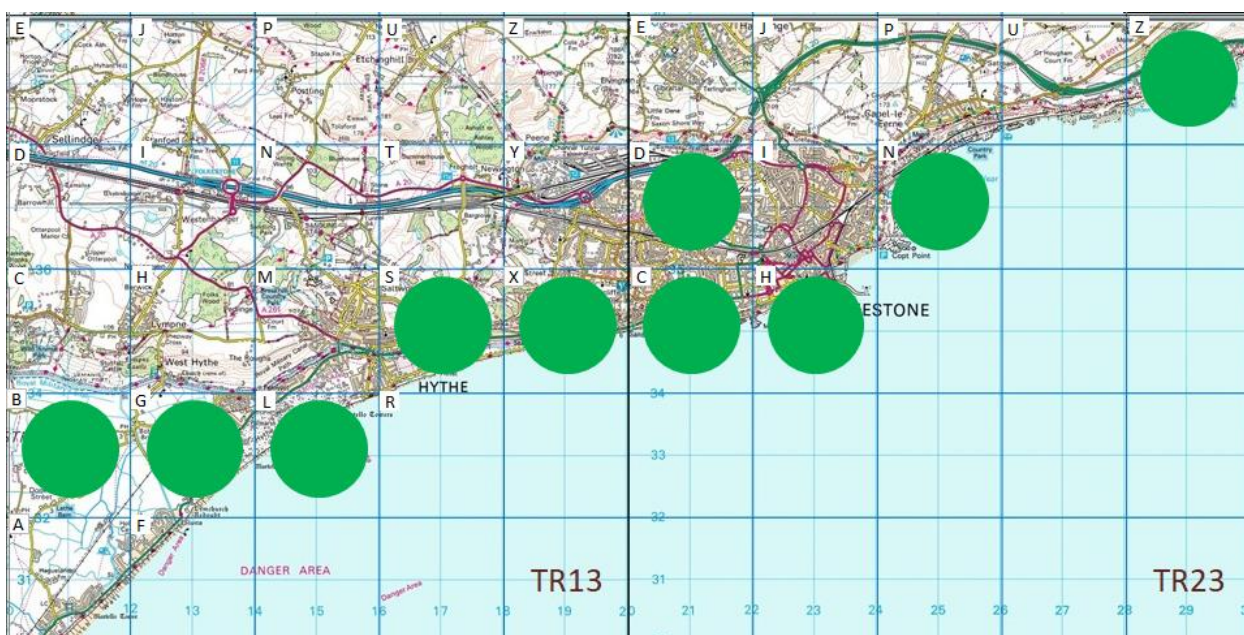


Figure 3: Distribution of all Bewick's Swan records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

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.



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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)

References

Balmer, D., Gillings, S., Caffrey, B., Swann, B., Downie, I & Fuller, R. 2013. *Bird Atlas 2007-11: The Breeding and Wintering Birds of Britain and Ireland*. British Trust for Ornithology

Knight, V. and Tolputt, F., 1871. List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood, *Folkestone Natural History Society Annual Report*, 1871

Taylor, D., Davenport, D. & Flegg, J. 1981. *Birds of Kent*. Kent Ornithological Society



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Acknowledgements

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