

Red-throated Diver

Gavia stellata

Category A

Winter visitor and passage migrant.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds across northern Europe, from Scotland eastwards through Fenno-Scandia eastwards across northern Asia and North America, also in Iceland, Greenland and the north Pacific islands. European birds migrate to winter on tidal waters, mainly inshore, around the Atlantic and North Sea coasts, usually south to north-west France, and further south to the Mediterranean in cold winters.



Red-throated Diver at Seabrook (Brian Harper)

Kent status (KOS 2021):

In Kent it is a regular passage migrant and common winter visitor, scarce inland and in summer.

The Red-throated Diver 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 miles radius from Folkestone town hall, therefore extending further inland than the current Folkestone and Hythe area, so this does not provide conclusive evidence of its occurrence here, however it would have been very likely to have been recorded at the coast and so within the modern boundary. Furthermore, Ticehurst (1909) considered it to be "a common autumn and winter visitor to the south and east coasts of the county".

The first fully documented record occurred on the 5th January 1951, when Roger Norman saw two at Nickolls Quarry and he commented that "during the 1950s oiled birds were seen regularly" there, with a number of individuals sadly being found dead. Brian Uden noted a peak of five there on the 12th January 1951, whilst Roger also noted up to four birds off Hythe Ranges during the winter months in the 1950s (Norman 2006; 2007).

There were few reports in the 1960s or 1970s, no doubt due to a lack of coverage, although several oiled birds were seen offshore between Folkestone and Hythe in February 1966. In the 1980s R. & S. Philpott noted it as "an infrequent visitor" to Nickolls Quarry and there have been annual sightings since 1986.

Overall distribution

Figure 1 shows the distribution of all records of Red-throated Diver by tetrad, with records in 16 tetrads (52%).

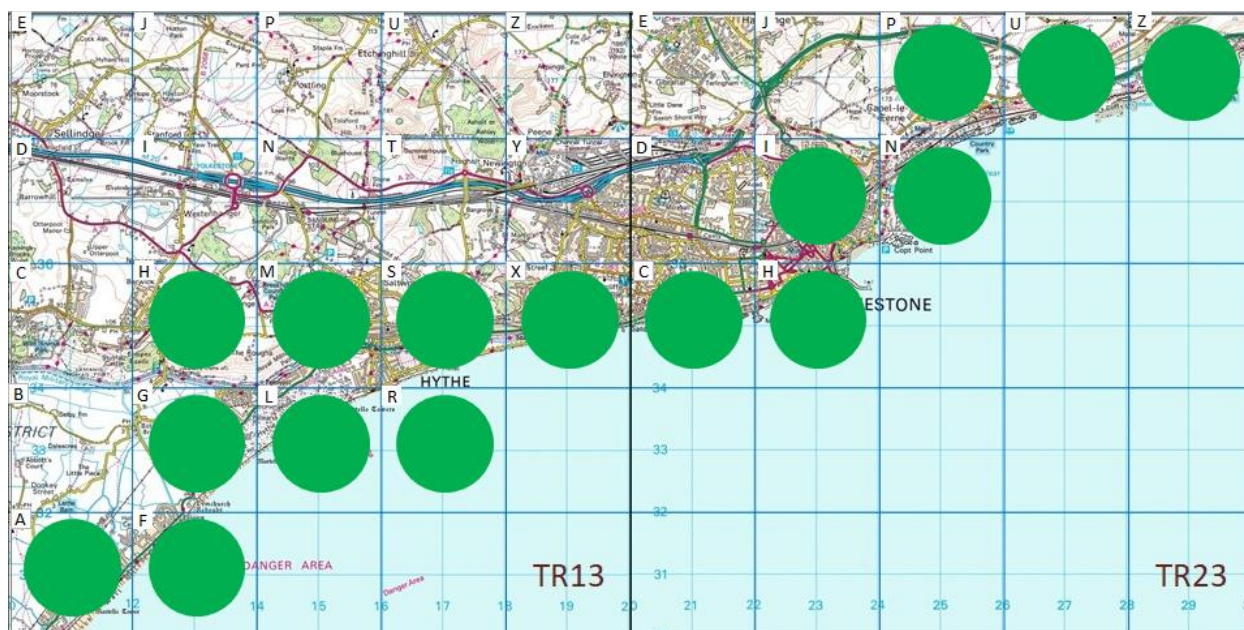


Figure 1: Distribution of all Red-throated Diver records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The earliest autumn arrival was seen at Nickolls Quarry on the 7th September 1997 and there have been three other sightings in the first week of September: one flying west past Copt Point on the 12th September 1993, one on the sea there on the 13th September 2009 and one on the sea off Hythe Ranges on the 15th September 2017. Birds are more typically noted in late September or in October, with a mean arrival date over the last decade of the 4th October.

Numbers remain low in October and the earliest double-figure count occurred on the 9th November 2012, when 13 flew past Folkestone Beach, whilst the only count in excess of 50 in November involved 60 flying east past Mill Point on the 28th November 2021.



Red-throated Diver at Nickolls Quarry (Ian Roberts)



Red-throated Diver at Hythe (Michael Stevens)

The earliest three-figure count involved 162 flying west past Folkestone Beach on the 8th December 2012 and there have been four others in December: 130 on/west past the Willop Outfall on the 21st December 2012, 159 east past Copt Point on the 29th December 1996, 457 west past Mill Point on the 13th December 2017 and 535 west past Seabrook on the 24th December 2016.



Red-throated Diver at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)



Red-throated Diver at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)

Numbers typically peak in January or February. Harrison (1953) considered that large winter movements were localized and perhaps connected to factors such as weather, tide and feeding habits.

Counts of 200 or more have been noted as follows:

468 east past Copt Point on the 22nd February 1996
200 west past the Dymchurch Redoubt on the 20th January 2009
416 east past Seabrook on the 28th February 2015
302 east past Mill Point on the 27th January 2017
667 west past Seabrook on the 29th January 2019
260 west past Hythe on the 5th January 2020
300 off past Hythe Ranges on the 2nd January 2021

An up-channel spring passage may be evident between early March and mid-May, when three figure counts have been logged as follows:

167 east past Copt Point on the 3rd March 1996
117 east past Copt Point on the 9th March 1996
105 east past Copt Point on the 7th March 2001
107 east past Mill Point on the 8th March 2011
223 east past Hythe and Samphire Hoe on the 10th March 2013
403 east past Seabrook on the 8th April 2013
170 east past Samphire Hoe on the 3rd March 2018
232 east past Samphire Hoe on the 4th March 2018



Red-throated Diver at Hythe (Glenn Tutton)



Red-throated Diver at Hythe (Glenn Tutton)

The mean departure over the last decade has been the 2nd May and stragglers may linger into the second May, when one flew east past Samphire Hoe on the 17th May 2013, one was seen off Copt Point on the 18th May 1996 and one was seen off Samphire Hoe on the 27th May 2008, and two have been seen in early June: singles off Samphire Hoe on the 4th June 2013 and Hythe on the 6th June 2006.



Red-throated Diver at West Hythe (Ian Roberts)



Red-throated Diver at Nickolls Quarry (Ian Roberts)

Away from the coast it has continued to be an infrequent visitor to Nickolls Quarry, with a peak in recent years of four there on the 30th November 2002. It has become scarcer there since 2003, with no sightings since March 2016. Other inland records have comprised one flying over Botolph's Bridge on the 1st January 1999, one flying north-west over Nickolls Quarry on the 2nd December 2006, one flying inland at the Willop Basin on the 2nd January 2010, at least one on the Royal Military Canal between West Hythe and Seabrook between 15th and 26th January 2015, one flying over Folkestone on the 25th January 2015 and one on the main pond at Samphire Hoe on the 28th November 2002.



Red-throated Diver at Seabrook (Brian Harper)

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](#).

I am indebted to Andrew Henderson and Tim Hodge for providing access to the Kent Ornithological Society archives.