

Purple Heron

Ardea purpurea

Category A

Very rare vagrant.

7 records,
7 birds

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds across southern Europe with some as far north as north-eastern France and an isolated population in the Netherlands. Winters in sub-Saharan Africa. Decreasing across most of its range.

Kent status (KOS 2022):

It is a rare passage migrant to the county, which has been scarcer in recent years, although it bred in 2010.

Kent (KOS) records to end 2020: 167



Purple Heron at Nickolls Quarry (Ian Roberts)

The Purple Heron was considered to be a national rarity until 1982 when the British Birds Rarities Committee removed it from the list of species that it would assess (Grant *et al.* 1982), at which time a total of 425 records had been logged in Britain, with an average of around 18 per annum. Despite its decrease in range across Europe the number of migrants reaching Britain has remained fairly consistent, with annual averages of around 20 in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. There have even been signs of a recent increase, with an annual mean of 26 in the 2010s and a record total of 42 noted in 2020 (White & Kehoe 2022). It first bred successfully in Britain in 2010 at Dungeness (Holling *et al.* 2012). In Kent April and May accounting for the majority (55%) of records (KOS no date).

It was first recorded at Folkestone and Hythe in 1983, when one was seen flying over Copt Point on the 30th October, with the next four years later, when one flew over Folkestone Warren on the 28th July 1987. Five years later one was seen arriving in off the sea over Folkestone Harbour on the 15th May 1992 but then eleven years elapsed until the next flew east past Capel-le-Ferne Cliff-top Café on the 13th April.

There followed a wait of another decade before two occurred in consecutive years, one flying north over Saltwood on the 31st May 2013 and another, the first to be photographed, which flew circled over Nickolls Quarry on the 16th May 2014. The most recent record involved a juvenile reported flying over Hythe on the 10th September 2022. The records by year are shown in figure 1.

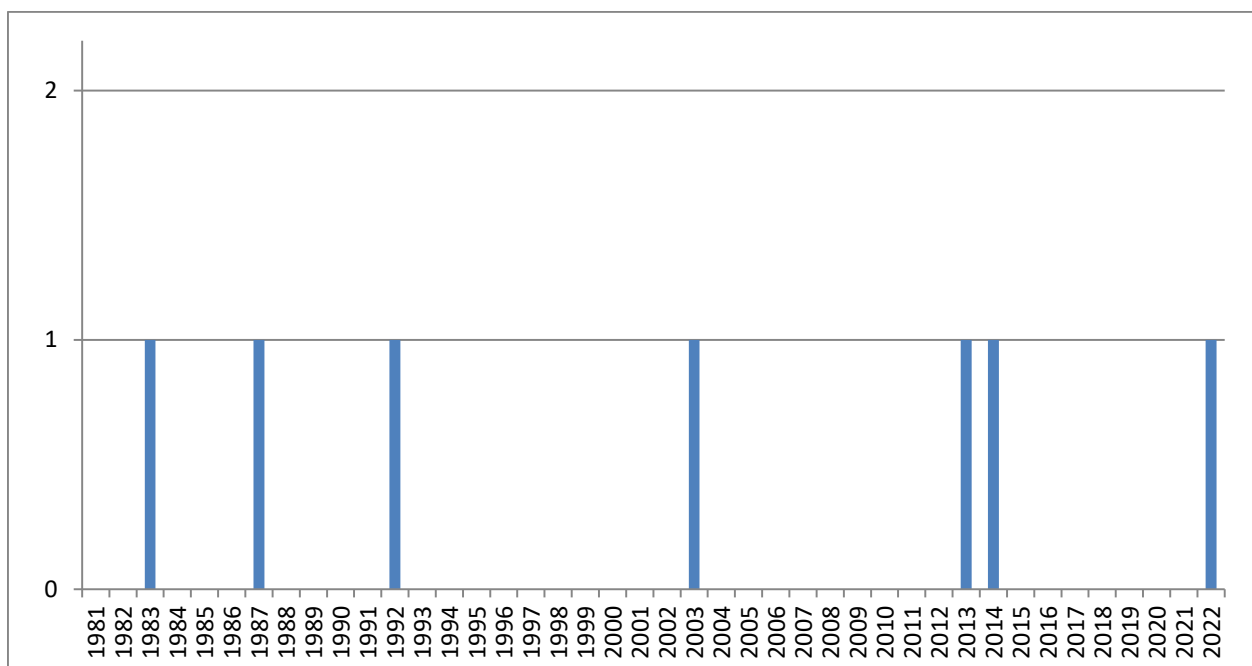


Figure 1: Purple Heron records at Folkestone and Hythe

The records by week are given in figure 2 and figure 3 shows the distribution of records by tetrad. Four of the seven local records (57%) occurred in April or May, including two in week 20.

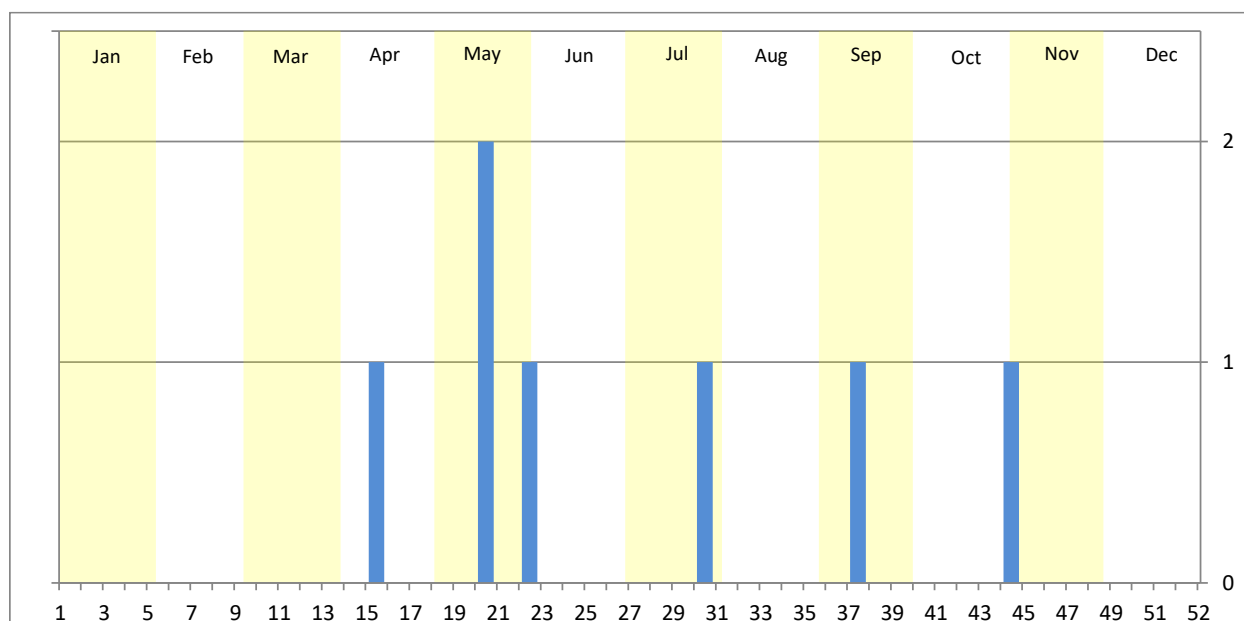


Figure 2: Purple Heron records at Folkestone and Hythe by week



Figure 3: Distribution of all Purple Heron records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1983** Copt Point, one flew over, 30th October (D. A. Gibson, J. A. Gibson, R. Philpott *et al*)
- 1987** Folkestone Warren, one adult flew over, 28th July (K. G. Holland)
- 1992** Folkestone Harbour, one sub-adult flew in off the sea then north-west, 15th May (D. A. Gibson)
- 2003** Capel-le-Ferne Café, one flew east, 13th April (D. A. Gibson, J. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)
- 2013** Saltwood, one flew north, 31st May (P. Howe)
- 2014** Nickolls Quarry, one flew in from east, circled and flew back east, 16th May, photographed (I. A. Roberts)
- 2022** Hythe, juvenile reported flying over A259, 10th September (reported)

References

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Snow, D. & Perrins, C.M. 1998. *The Birds of the Western Palearctic*. Oxford University Press.

White, S. & Kehoe, C. 2022. Report on scarce migrant birds in Britain in 2020. *British Birds* 115: 365-389.

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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Purple Heron at Nickolls Quarry (Ian Roberts)