

Ruddy Duck

Oxyura jamaicensis

Category C1

Very rare vagrant.

7 records,
10 birds

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

A native of the Americas, the Ruddy Duck became established in Britain after captive birds escaped from the Slimbridge WWT reserve and began breeding in Somerset from the late 1950s.

Kent status (KOS 2022):

It is currently a rare vagrant in Kent.



Ruddy Duck with Pochard at Nickolls Quarry
(Ian Roberts)

Taylor *et al.* (1981) documented the first county record (at Bough Beech in November 1970), which had followed its gradual westward spread across the country, and there were almost annual records in Kent from 1975, although as Clements *et al.* 2013) noted breeding was not confirmed in the county until 1995. As the population grew (to 6,000 in Britain by 2001) and the range expanded, records from continental Europe increased and the species spread as far south as Spain and Morocco. By the mid-2000s the annual maxima in Kent exceeded 500, with a peak of around 50 pairs breeding.

It was first record locally in 1985 when Sue and Chris Philpott found four at Nickolls Quarry on the 17th February. After a gap of eight years Roger Norman recorded immature/females there on single dates in four consecutive years from 1993. There were no further sightings until 2002, when a female took up residence at Nickolls Quarry from the 15th November and lingered into early January 2003. Later that year a male was seen at the same site on the 8th May (Norman 2007). The records by year are shown in figure 1.

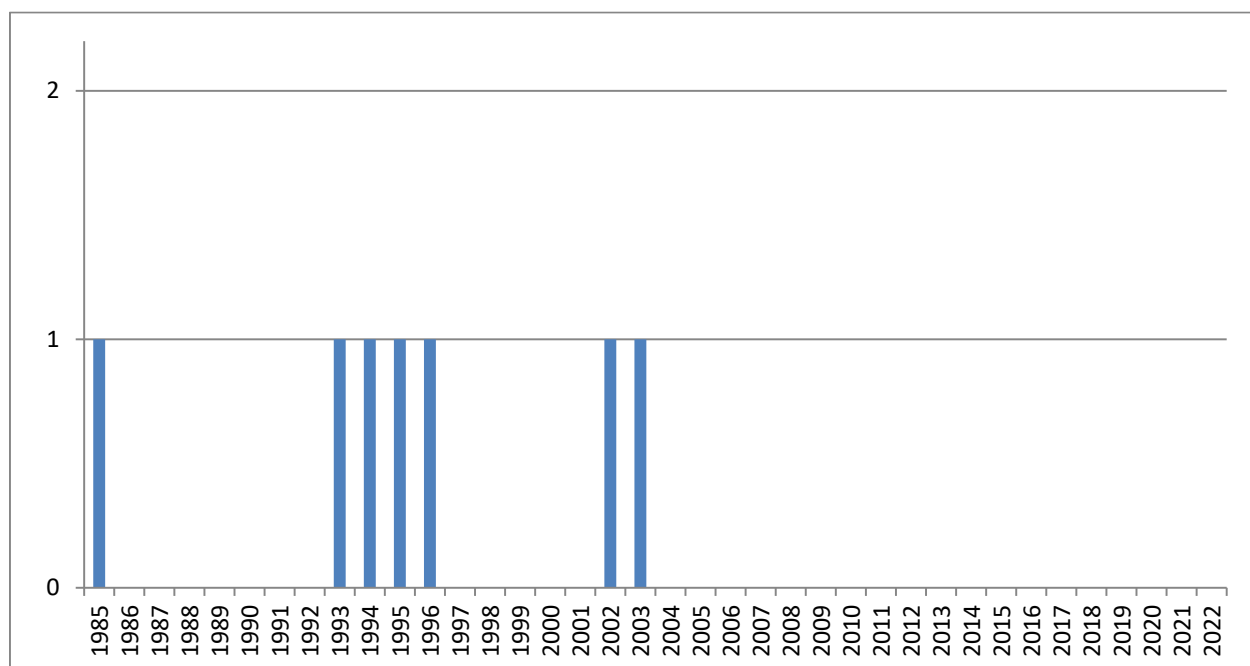


Figure 1: Ruddy Duck records at Folkestone and Hythe

Once it had arrived in Spain the Ruddy Duck began to hybridise with the endangered White-headed Duck, producing fertile offspring and thereby posing a major threat to the survival of this species. Although the Spanish authorities were able to deal effectively with the small numbers of Ruddy Ducks that had arrived in the country, the growing British population would have eventually made European colonisation inevitable and so in 2005 a five-year eradication programme began in Britain. Over 6,200 were culled and as a result numbers fell by almost 90% by 2009 (Henderson 2009).

The programme also managed to secure agreement at the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention for the eradication of the species completely across Europe by 2015 (Cranswick & Hall 2010). Although this further programme did not fully achieve its aim, very few Ruddy Ducks remain in Europe today.

Between 2005 and 2016 a total of 625 Ruddy Ducks were shot in Kent and it appears to have become extinct as a breeding bird in the county (A&PHA 2016; Clements *et al.* 2015). The Kent Bird Report for 2019 noted that this was “the first calendar year since 1973 with no reports of Ruddy Duck in Kent” and there none in 2020 (KOS 2021, 2022), but one was seen at Dungeness in autumn 2022 (RBA no date).

Although not impossible, further local area records would now appear to be extremely unlikely.

The records by week are given in figure 2. Apart from singles on 18th September and 8th May, all have arrived between the 21st November (week 47) and 23rd February (week 8), as shown in figure 2. Some, though not all, records were associated with cold weather.

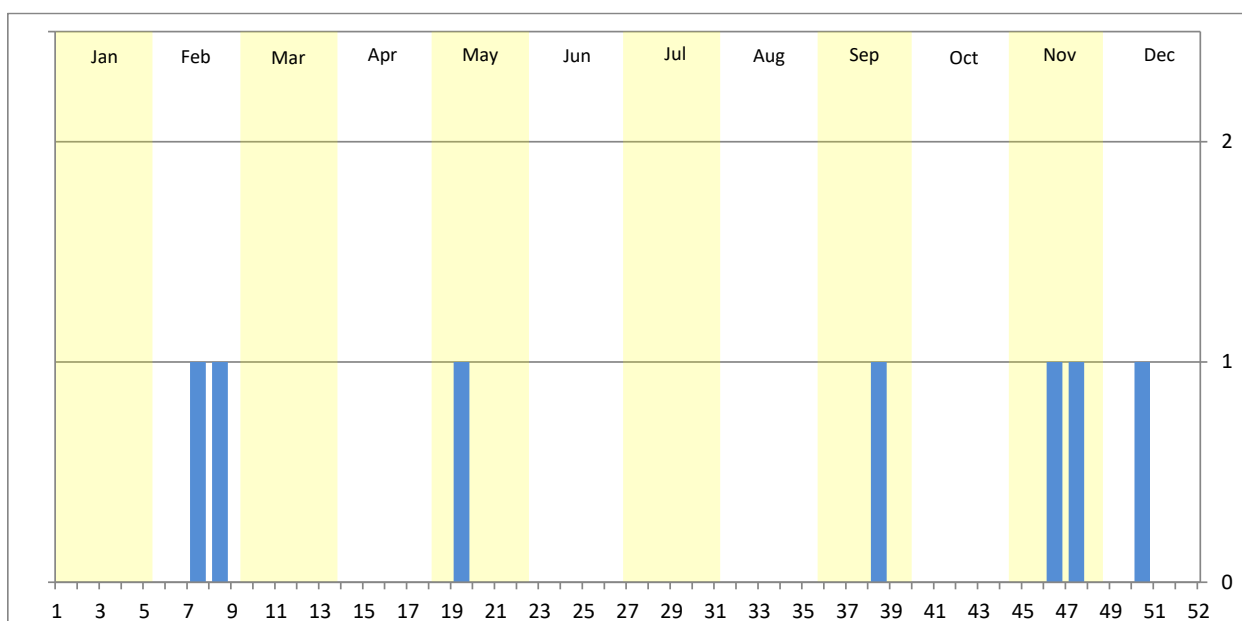


Figure 2: Ruddy Duck records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the location of records by tetrad. All records have been from Nickolls Quarry, and all but one were seen on just a single date, with the other lingering for 51 days.

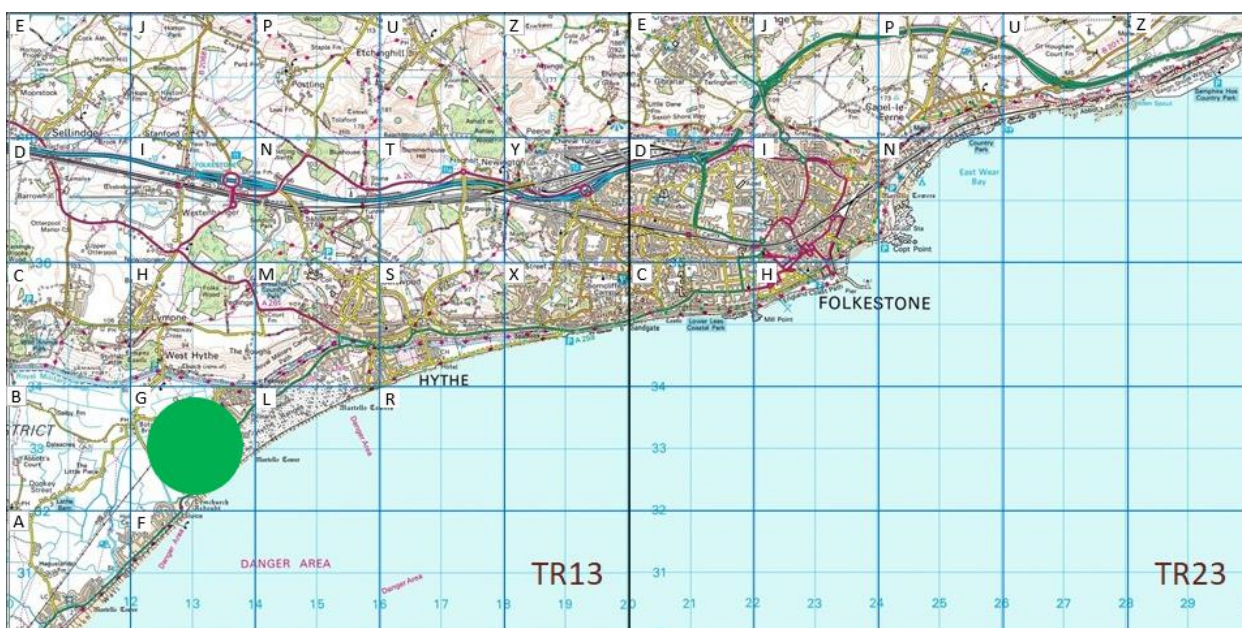


Figure 3: Distribution of all Ruddy Duck records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The full list of records is as follows:

1985 Nickolls Quarry, four, 17th February (R. & S. Philpott)
1993 Nickolls Quarry, immature/female, 21st November (R. K. Norman)
1994 Nickolls Quarry, immature/female, 18th September (R. K. Norman)
1995 Nickolls Quarry, immature/female, 10th December (R. K. Norman)
1996 Nickolls Quarry, immature/female, 23rd February (R. K. Norman)
2002 Nickolls Quarry, female, 15th November to 5th January 2003, photographed (R. K. Norman, I. A. Roberts)
2003 Nickolls Quarry, male, 8th May (R. K. Norman)

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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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