



*Solitary and Green Sandpiper by Ian Holmes*

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## Editorial

It with a sense of melancholy that I record the passing of two friends who both truly deserved the epithet 'stalwarts of the society'. This issue includes an obituary for **Don Taylor**, in so many respects a man who worked on behalf of the KOS for so many years that his name became synonymous. The extent of his involvement is detailed here, but I know from those who worked in its compilation that there is so much more to tell. Sadly, we must also recognise the passing of **Ian Hodgson**, another friend who contributed so much. It is of particular significance as Ian was, amongst so many other contributions, editor of KOS News for eleven years from 1994 to 2004. More complete acknowledgements of both friends will appear on the society's Facebook page in due course.

On the bird front it has been an extraordinary autumn, with two new birds for the county recorded in the recent sightings section, both of which by some enormous fluke I both managed to see! As the season progresses, we are seeing some extraordinary weather with considerable persistent heavy rain, high water levels and squally conditions building to damaging gales. I often hear birders speculating on the possible outcomes of such events and even being excited by the prospects but we should always remember that the extreme weather which is good for birding can be catastrophic for the birds caught up in it; in the recent sea passage accompanying Storm Ciaron a young Storm Petrel was found dead in Dover Harbour, at a time when it should have been well on its way to the South Atlantic. This is not new; a few months ago, I was given a dried, formalin specimen of a Leach's Petrel which died storm-bound at Sandwich Bay in 1952 and appears as a record in the first KBR!

Good birding

Norman

## News and announcements

### Avian Influenza

#### How you can help

- Don't touch dead or sick birds.
- Keep dogs on leads to prevent them from finding and picking up dead birds.
- Clean bird feeders and bird baths regularly.

#### Report dead and sick birds

- Record in the [BirdTrack app](https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/birdtrack) <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/birdtrack>. This allows researchers to follow the disease's geographical spread and rapidly assess potential impacts on populations.
- Report to [Defra](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/report-dead-wild-birds), so that if needed, dead birds can be collected for testing <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/report-dead-wild-birds> 03459 33 55 77 (call charges may apply)

**Dawn Balmer, BTO Head of Surveys:** *Thank you to everyone who has submitted records of dead birds to BirdTrack which allows us to monitor the spread of Avian Influenza, and also to Defra/DAERA, which may collect the birds for testing.*

#### References, links and further reading:

Birdtrack: <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/birdtrack>

Defra: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/report-dead-wild-birds> 03459 33 55 77 (call charges may apply)

<https://www.bto.org/community/news/202306-avian-influenza-mortality-rises-threatened-gull-and-tern-colonies>

<https://www.bto.org/community/news/202305-wave-avian-influenza-hitting-black-headed-gulls>

<https://www.bto.org/understanding-birds/avian-influenza>

## Request for **2022** RBBP Records

The 2022 RBBP report for Kent will shortly be compiled, so please submit any unreported data for RBBP species asap for inclusion in the report.

Especially required: records (with BTO breeding codes, or at least comment such as singing male, feeding young, visiting nest site, fledged young etc) for Garganey, Shoveler, Pochard, Quail, Turtle Dove, Little Ringed Plover, Marsh Harrier, Long-eared Owl, L/S Woodpecker, Peregrine, Hobby, Bearded Tit, Black Redstart and Hawfinch.

RBBP records can be submitted directly, in confidence, to either Brian Watmough [brianwat@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:brianwat@yahoo.co.uk) (2022 only), David Smith [sbcchair@gmail.com](mailto:sbcchair@gmail.com) (2023 onward) or Murray Orchard [murray.orchard@live.co.uk](mailto:murray.orchard@live.co.uk)

Thank You.

## BTO Winter Gull Survey (WinGS) 2024-25

### **CALLING KENT LAROPHILES!**

The Winter Gull Survey collects information about our wintering gull populations, through the coordinated effort of volunteer surveyors across the UK.

In winter, gulls flock together to roost communally on lakes, reservoirs and estuaries, in groups that can reach the thousands.

The Winter Gull Survey (WinGS) will run over the winters of 2023/24 and 2024/25 to collect updated information on the numbers and distributions of these wintering gulls in the UK, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.

WinGS volunteers visit gull roost sites, counting five key species: Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull and Great Black-backed Gull. These gulls are all of conservation concern, and their breeding populations are either Amber- or Red-listed in the UK.

Gathering more detailed information about wintering populations, and which roost sites they rely on, will help us protect them and develop more effective conservation strategies.

### **Key roost sites**

If you sign up to visit a key roost site, you will count gulls from a fixed point as the birds arrive to roost at dusk. You may do this alone or with a team of other volunteers, especially on larger sites. If your site is part of a larger team site it is important that you liaise with the team leader and carry out the count on the agreed date.

Roost counts at key sites will involve recording a large number of birds, some of which will continue to arrive during and after dusk. We do not expect observers to be able to identify all birds to species, and you will be able to record some gulls as 'large gull species' or 'small gull species' or even just as 'gull species'. However, it is important that as many gulls as possible are identified to the species level.

### **Sample squares**

If you are visiting a sample square, either at the coast or inland, you will need to follow the same guidance, although sample sites are standalone sites and will not normally involve working with a team.

- Full instructions for data collection will be published closer to the time of the surveys. In the meantime, you can contact [wings@bto.org](mailto:wings@bto.org) with any questions or queries.

### **Sign-up and survey dates**

You can browse and sign up now for WinGS survey sites (both at key roost sites and sample squares) from the BTO website [Winter Gull Survey | BTO - British Trust for Ornithology](#).

- Oct 2023: Sign-ups for the 2023/24 winter counts begin.
- Jan 2024: Survey visit(s) for the 2023/24 winter counts.
- Apr 2024: Sign-ups for the 2024 autumn counts begin (dates TBC).
- Sept 2024: sign-ups for the 2024/25 winter counts.
- Jan 2025: Survey visit(s) for the 2024/25 winter counts.

To sign-up, you will need to log in to the WinGS portal to request sites.

- You will need a MyBTO account to log in to the WinGS portal. If you don't already have one, you can [create a MyBTO account now](#).

In Kent there will be a mix of coastal stretches, both estuarine and open sea, plus a few inland water bodies to be counted, principally the Stour Valley lakes and Bough Beech reservoir. It is hoped to use WeBS counters at many of the key coastal stretches, and some key inland sites, coordinated by the appropriate WeBS Local Organisers. However, more volunteers will be required to cover sample sites and to assist WeBS counters at coordinated counts of some key sites, where teams of counters will be needed.

If you would like to participate in this survey, please sign up as above and request a site, or contact your WeBS Local Organiser who will advise on what to do (see below).

WeBS Local Organisers in Kent;

**Thames**, Murray Orchard - [murray.orchard@live.co.uk](mailto:murray.orchard@live.co.uk)

**Medway**, Bob Knight - [riknight53@gmail.com](mailto:riknight53@gmail.com)

**Swale**, Brian Watmough - [brianrwat1@gmail.com](mailto:brianrwat1@gmail.com)

**East Kent**, Heather Mathieson - [HeatherMathieson@outlook.com](mailto:HeatherMathieson@outlook.com)

**Pegwell Bay**, Steffan Walton – [steffan.walton@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:steffan.walton@hotmail.co.uk)

**Dungeness area**, Dave Walker – [dungenessobs@vfast.co.uk](mailto:dungenessobs@vfast.co.uk)

**All other areas (including West Kent)**, Murray Orchard - [murray.orchard@live.co.uk](mailto:murray.orchard@live.co.uk)

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We would like to encourage members to contribute items or photographs for inclusion in the newsletter, especially regarding birds in Kent. If you are interested, I am always happy to offer advice or assistance to aspiring authors. To facilitate page composition text needs to be presented as a Word document, photos or illustrations as j-peg files.

**Norman McCanch (Editor) : [nvmccanch@hotmail.com](mailto:nvmccanch@hotmail.com)**

We like to keep in touch with all our members, so if you change address, email address or phone numbers please remember to inform our membership secretary, Chris Roome. He can be contacted at:

**Chris Roome, Rowland House, Station Rd., Staplehurst TN12 0PY**

**Tel: 01580 891686 e-mail: [chrisroome105@icloud.com](mailto:chrisroome105@icloud.com)**

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## Obituary - Don Taylor

Don Taylor was born on 2nd October 1938 and died on 27th October 2023. He had been afflicted by Alzheimer's disease for a few years but only recently had his mobility been severely impaired. After a fall and a spell in hospital, he was able to return home to be with his wife Trish when he died. And so passed one of the leading figures of the Kent birding world for the past fifty years.

He attended Haberdashers' Aske's Boys' School in Hertfordshire, and later Loughborough College where he graduated in 1962, but his formative birding experiences were centred on north London. For much of the 1950s, he lived in Hampstead, close to the Heath where he saw such London rarities as Short-eared Owl, Jack Snipe and Shore Lark. Cycle trips took him all around west and north London, finding Great Grey Shrike, Leach's Petrel and flocks of Smew. As he met local ornithological 'celebrities' and attended LNHS meetings, watching, studying and recording birds soon became a real enthusiasm.

In those days, teenagers (and perhaps even their parents) thought little of long-distance cycle rides. On one memorable trip to Cley in Norfolk, Don left his rucksack in a hut while he walked along the East Bank. Richard Richardson, revered by all who visited Cley, was some way off and gesticulated upwards. Don could not see what it was but, returning to the hut, found that Richard had sketched a Bee-eater flying towards Hampstead on his notebook's cover. Sadly, he later lost that notebook, but that kind attention had Don bewitched, bothered and bewildered, and hooked on birds for life.



Don had married Jane Collins, and their son Kevin had arrived, by the time that they moved to Canada, where they lived from 1962 to 1964, returning with a daughter Sheila as well. It was in Canada that he was introduced to Bird Races, where you see how many species you can find in a single day, something that became a regular fixture in his birding year. On an early one with Canadian friends at Point Pelee in 1963, he notched up 135 species – and 55 of them were new to him!

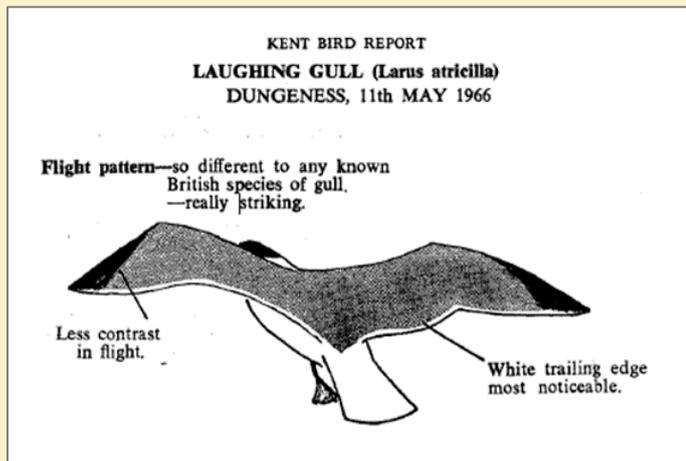
Returning to Britain, he was soon living in Aylesford. This placed him close to the centre of Kent, and he remained in this general area for over fifty years. Most of Don's professional life was spent at Sutton Valence School, south of Maidstone, where he taught Design Technology from 1969 to 1993. He was soon at the centre of Kent birding, too. He became recorder for Central Kent as early as 1965 and served in official capacities in the society for many years, including as President from 2001 to 2015.

It wasn't long before he made his mark on bird-finding in the county, when he and Billy Buck encountered an adult Laughing Gull at Dungeness on 11th May 1966. This was the first for Britain for a while, until a Sussex record from the 1920s was disinterred from the archives. Don was always keen to add to his Kent list, and for quite a few years headed the table; his final tally was 372 species.

He was, of course, a regular visitor to the county's hotspots but he also became a great exponent of patch watching. The area in which he lived was not the most exciting but he found worthwhile sites, first at Langley Park Farm from 1970 to 1981 and then at Boughton Park and Wierton Hill Farm from 1985 until 2018 when he and Trish moved to Bristol. At both, he was enthusiastically supported by Bob Bland, who recalls Don's energy, and how difficult he could be to keep up with, but thinks there was never a cross word between them. The time that Don spent on these sites was staggering but the value was obvious. He knew everything about the seasonal and long-term changes, how birds used the site, how to find the difficult species, and of course that effort paid off in finding scarce and rare species. There were many of those in both places but the outstanding one was the White-throated Needle-tail at Boughton Park in May 1991. His accounts of those patches appear in two books, *Birdwatching in Kent* (1985) and *Birding in Kent* (1996), and in the Kent Bird Reports for 1983 and 1998. Don's writing style may not be the most lyrical or fluid, but those accounts are evocative reads and stand as valuable records. Don would have been shocked to see Langley Park Farm as building spreads over it and there is scope for someone to investigate the changes in both areas since his time.

Don was meticulous in record-keeping and processing information. His stint as editor of the Kent Bird Report from 1969 to 1981 saw the report transformed in the amount, quality and accuracy of content. He also oversaw the introduction of many more sketches and photographs than previously, raising the attractiveness of the report. During the late 1970s, in addition to preparing the KBRs – and, not to forget, going to work – Don with David Davenport, another stickler for

accuracy, was somehow finding the time to put together the Birds of Kent. Don had the knack of persuading people to help with projects, but always subtly and with no obvious pressure. I was in my mid 20s and of unknown ability when asked to join the Birds of Kent writers, yet Don (with David) took the risk and steered me through the process, with the result that I had the great satisfaction of contributing to the book and joining the Kent Bird Report writing team (and find myself doing it still, forty-five years later, thanks Don!).



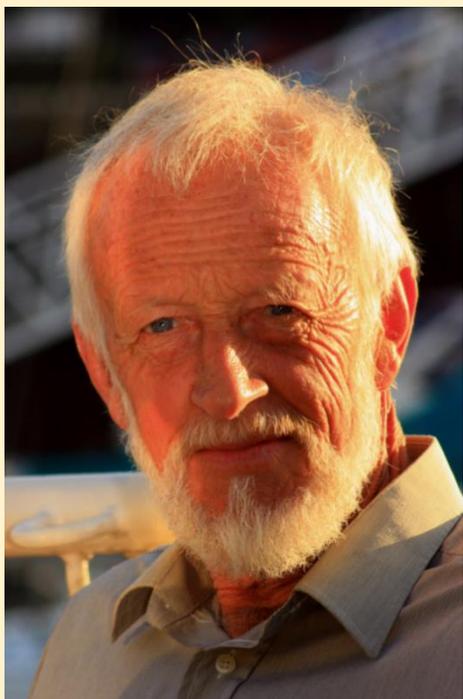
After Canada, Don had continued with bird races. He put together a Kent team for the first Country Life/RSNC competition in 1986 and had the great satisfaction of winning against groups from around the country. The fact that he did so can be attributed not least to the way Don steered his team, without seeming to, to contribute individual strengths to the joint effort. Bird races require considerable skill, in knowing where birds might be found and managing the time available, but also can be fun with chance encounters adding to that. Don's team found or saw quite a few notable species; that Laughing Gull was one, while later rarities included Squacco Heron, Red-rumped Swallow and Little Egret (well, that was 1988!). But they didn't always win, easy birds were missed, and the weather could be rotten. At times like that, the team came to think that spring can really hang you up the most.

Among the non-avian features of those bird races was Don injecting insulin as the team was shooting up the M2, and his instructions on how to cope if he became hypoglycaemic. OK, he had been living with type 1 diabetes for quite a while, but his low-key yet efficient way of dealing with it was striking. This was as true high in the Bolivian Andes as in Kent.

One of the admirable things about Don was his calm drive to achieve his ambitions. He showed this throughout his involvement with the birding world and, I feel sure, in other parts of his life. I can imagine that to everything he brought the same quiet dedication and purposefulness. There was of course sometimes a little conflict between different interests. Don was a great jazz fan, and I recall that days out on Saturdays often had to end in time for Jazz Record Requests on Radio 3.

His first marriage had ended and during the time that I knew Don he was with Trish Pringle. She provided huge support to him over the years, not to mention putting up with his enthusiasms (or were they obsessions?). To me, and I'm sure to other birding visitors to Loose, she was always so kind, considerate and interested in our strange activities. Don seemed accepting and was characteristically matter-of-fact when he told me of the Alzheimer's diagnosis though obviously it must have been hard to receive – but probably even harder for Trish who has looked after him during these last years. Our condolences and best wishes go to her, and to Kevin and Sheila, to Trish's daughter Caroline and to the wider family.

One of Don's sidelines was leading bird tours, generally for Ornitholidays around Europe but sometimes further afield. On one to Lake Neusiedl in 1968, they bumped into Geoff Burton who was on his first birdwatching holiday, on a shoestring and with little idea of how to get to the good places. Don offered the chance to join the group for a share of transport costs and threw in his good company and the benefit of his knowledge: typical of his kindness.



Later, Don became a more adventurous traveller, in search of birds generally and particularly on a quest to see all the waders of the world. I enjoyed a few with him, including to Ecuador and the Galapagos, where I recall being with Don when we 'cleaned up' on Darwin's finches! He had earlier taken in good heart the appalling pun "Can you see the Iguana, Don?".

He never quite completed his wader quest, not helped by taxonomic splitting making it increasingly unreachable. Trips included the long boat journey out to St Helena for the Wirebird, and – just in time – a quick jaunt to Morocco for the soon-to-disappear Slender-billed Curlew. The more gruelling ones were with fellow obsessives Tony Prater and David Rosair. One memorable trip was to Isla de los Estados in Argentina, travelling in a small, motorised yacht in rare calm conditions in the Drake Passage, climbing to the high plateau and eventually seeing the Fuegian Snipe at ten metres range. Another to Indonesia gave them flight calls and sightings of the ultra-rare Sulawesi Woodcock. His greatest disappointment was not seeing the Chatham Islands Snipe despite crawling around on hands and knees underneath a solid growth of Tree Hebes.

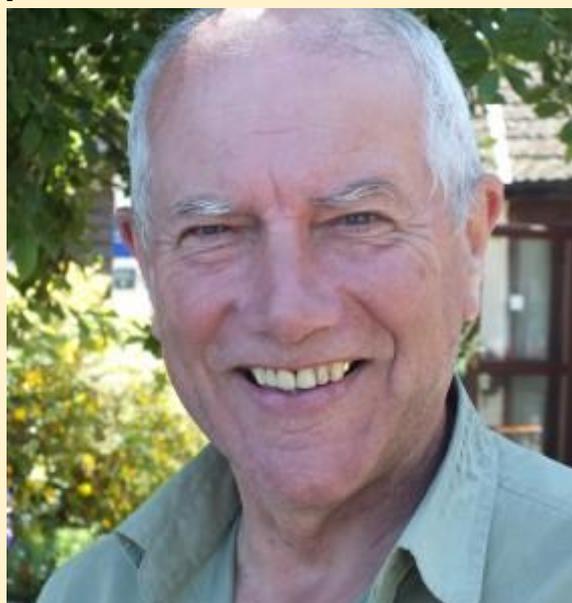
Out of the wader quest came another of Don's books: the well-reviewed Waders of Europe, Asia and North America (2005), excellently illustrated by Stephen Message. But for us in Kent, his name will always be most associated with the Birds of Kent. First published in 1981, with a revised edition in 1984, it is starting to show its age now but remains the definitive account of birds in the county at the time. It wouldn't have appeared without Don and for that, and much else, we should be grateful.

If you knew him or have enjoyed his books, take five to remember Don, and maybe listen out for a strange meadowlark.

**Andrew Henderson**

A revised version of this obituary will be placed on the KOS website in due course.

## Obituary – Ian Hodgson



Ian Hodgson, who died on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2023, was brought up in Dover and lived in East Kent for all but the last two of his 72 years.

He attended Dover Grammar School, where he was once reprimanded for lack of attention only for the lesson to be interrupted to watch the waterspout that had distracted him. His first job was with Lloyd's Bank before moving to Townsend Thoreson/P & O Ferries. After some years he was made redundant and worked for a pizza parlour, later moving to Canterbury, holding several jobs locally, always arranged to allow as much early morning birding as possible.

By today's standards he was a late starter to birding, his first interest sparked by a Northern Wheatear on the clifftop sometime in his late twenties. Much of his early birding was at Sandwich Bay, in company with Trevor & Terry Wyatt.

Later he concentrated on his "patch" at South Foreland, in company at first with Tony Greenland, from 1977 to 2007, rarely travelling elsewhere in Kent or the UK, except for a few birdraces, in the days when they were popular and environmentally accepted, in Kent & France with David Tomlinson and even in New Jersey with Killian Mullarny

and Mark Constantine. As well as his commitment to St Margaret's, Ian always had time for survey work, where his precise record keeping was greatly valued, helping Andrew Henderson and the RSPB with studies at the Stour Estuary, Ouse Washes, Wales and elsewhere.

He had a particular affection for birding in Southeast Asia and India, and latterly in South & Central America, leading friendly groups on many trips. Butterflies too, became a fascination on visits to Eastern Europe, as did moths, revelling in the different species trapped at his Dorset home by comparison with those from Sandwich.

Never interested in "twitching", his particular interest was bird migration and he was regularly on site at dawn for an hour or two of "vismig", originally on the blockhouse below the South Foreland lighthouse and when that became too precarious for comfort because of cliff falls, at the top of the valley. Even when passage was slow, the conversation rarely flagged, with Bath & England rugby and England cricket usually providing plenty to moan about; and there was always travel to plan with birds or butterflies in mind, or even ballet or beer to discuss.

Highlights from those many hours must have included the Middle-Spotted Woodpecker on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1995, a potential first for Britain that "got away" as BBRC and BOU would not accept a single observer record: in those days few and certainly not Ian, carried a camera. 1200 Ring Ousels on 7<sup>th</sup> October 1998 must have been quite a sight too. Breeding birds were not ignored, with particular detail being gathered on the relatively short-lived colony of Marsh Warblers in the valley and nearby.

Every year Ian would produce a report on the birds of St Margaret's, with longer term reviews in 1991 and 2002. As with so many similar documents, they make sad reading. 2000 Lesser Whitethroats in the valley on 28<sup>th</sup> August 1979 remind us of the numbers we now miss, as do so many of the species counts for the earlier years.

John Clements has particular reason to thank Ian for his regular attendance at South Foreland, as when John suffered a heart attack whilst ringing one autumn morning in 2005, Ian recognised the severity of the situation, called an ambulance and then took the nets down before dealing with John's car.

Ian was also much involved with the KOS: first contributing records in 1976, by the following year he was Area Recorder for East (1978-83), joint Editor of the KBR with Tim Hodge from 1985 to 88, both working together with Sally Hunter to ensure full tetrad coverage for the KOS Breeding Atlas of 1988-94. Ian edited the KOS Newsletter in its then monthly print form from 1993 to 2004. His dry wit enlivened many KBR Aspects of the Year and Newsletters, Sandwich Bay Reports and blogs both from there and later from Dorset.

His genial character, field skills and meticulous record keeping led him to be head-hunted for the position of Warden at Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory in 2007, where he made a considerable impact, not only on the birds, but on all the biological records, bringing them all up to date after some years of neglect and producing reports for the missed years. His regular coverage of the estate encouraged others to spend more time in the field and later he worked hard to enable a smooth transition to Steffan Walton.

Returning to his usual spot at St Margaret's on retirement from SBBO, the area was not the same; fewer birds, many more dogs and Ian's eyesight and hearing were not as sharp as previously and his knees were telling of too many overs of fast bowling for Barns Close Cricket Club at Deal in his youth. He and Karen moved to a lovely cottage in the Dorset countryside near Maiden Castle in May 2021, but the eye problem was diagnosed as cancer too late and in December 2022 he was given three months at best.

That he survived long enough to enjoy Wheatears, the Swallows that fledged from their outhouse, the Tour de France and the Ashes series he regarded as a bonus, passing away peacefully at home with Karen, his partner and wife of eighteen years, and their cat close by.

**Chris Cox**

## Articles

### DABBLING DUCKS, part 1

November can be a depressing time of year, but it does see the arrival in Kent of large numbers of wildfowl from their breeding grounds in northern Europe and beyond. Here, I'm going to summarise the county status of seven species of dabbling duck. When I was younger, dabblers were all in the genus *Anas* but are now separated into several genera. In this article, I am including those in *Spatula* and *Mareca*: Garganey, Blue-winged Teal, Shoveler, Gadwall, Falcated Duck, Wigeon and American Wigeon. After the main species' texts, I have included short entries about reported hybrids and escapes (though Falcated Duck does get its own full entry). The Kent Bird Reports contain separate Escapes sections only from 1976 onwards, so I have restricted my attention to them to that period. The other dabblers will follow in part 2, if I ever get around to it.

Mostly, my series of articles present count data for the period from 1952 to the present. In this case, the charts concentrate on 1977 to the present. Before that, counting of wildfowl numbers was patchy (it is still not perfect!) and using what there is in charts would be misleading. My thanks go to Robin Mace for

accelerating provision to me of the 2022 records, and to Brian Watmough, Bob Knight and Murray Orchard for helping with the 2022 north Kent Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) data.

For the commoner species here, I refer to national and international importance levels. These, by convention, represent local (in our case, recording area or county) populations that amount to 1% or more of the relevant geographical population. For more information on this, search online for 'BTO species threshold levels'.

## Garganey



*Garganey by Tim Ballard*

Garganey is the odd one out among the seven species, being a summer visitor from south of the Sahara rather than a resident and/or winter visitor from the north. It has always been a scarce species in Kent and, indeed, throughout Britain. Ticehurst (*History of the Birds of Kent*, 1909) thought that it had increased since spring shooting had been stopped, but it seemed restricted to Romney Marsh and the north Kent marshes, and he had heard no reports of it in east Kent. By Harrison's time (*Birds of Kent*, 1953), it had definitely increased further and was known in the Stour valley and elsewhere in the county. One snippet that is worth repeating: on 16th August 1947, 63 Garganey were shot at Stodmarsh!

Gillham & Homes (*Birds of the North Kent Marshes*, 1950) believed that up to 20 pairs bred on the Thames marshes but fewer did so to the east. The county population at that time may have been in the range 50-100 pairs. The North Sea floods of February 1953 lead to a dip in breeding numbers in north Kent but there was a brief resurgence in the early 1960s, with estimates of 13-18 pairs there, 16 pairs in the Stour marshes and four pairs on Romney Marsh (Taylor *et al.*, 1981, *Birds of Kent*).

By the mid 1970s, Garganey had declined sharply, with only 5-10 breeding pairs reported in most years and none in some years. Numbers have remained low for much of the time since then, though there was a short-lived period from 1999 onwards when up to 20 pairs may have been present, coinciding with the development of highly suitable habitat at Grove Ferry and also, perhaps significantly, with above average rainfall.

There was also a reduction in the distribution, likely to have been associated with agricultural intensification in low-lying areas. Typically, Garganey breed in grazing marshes and favour areas of rushes or rough grassland close to dykes in which to nest. Garganey are inconspicuous when nesting and, although some broods of young are seen in some years, others probably remain hidden from view (and predation before fledging is likely to result in the loss of some, perhaps many). The numbers of tetrads in Kent in which Garganey were recorded in atlas surveys were as follows, in each case showing all tetrads (2x2km squares) with records and, in brackets, tetrads with probable or confirmed breeding:

1967-73: 29 (19)      1988-94: 26 (7)      2008-13: 25 (7)

The breeding distribution remains concentrated in the north Kent marshes, the Dungeness area and the Stour valley from Stodmarsh down to Sandwich Bay (*Kent Breeding Bird Atlas 2008-2013*, Figure 1). The atlas estimated a county population of 10-20 pairs; that may have been a reasonable guess for 1999-2005 but was probably an over-estimate for the atlas years themselves. For the past fifteen years or so, no more than about ten pairs are thought to have attempted breeding in the county.

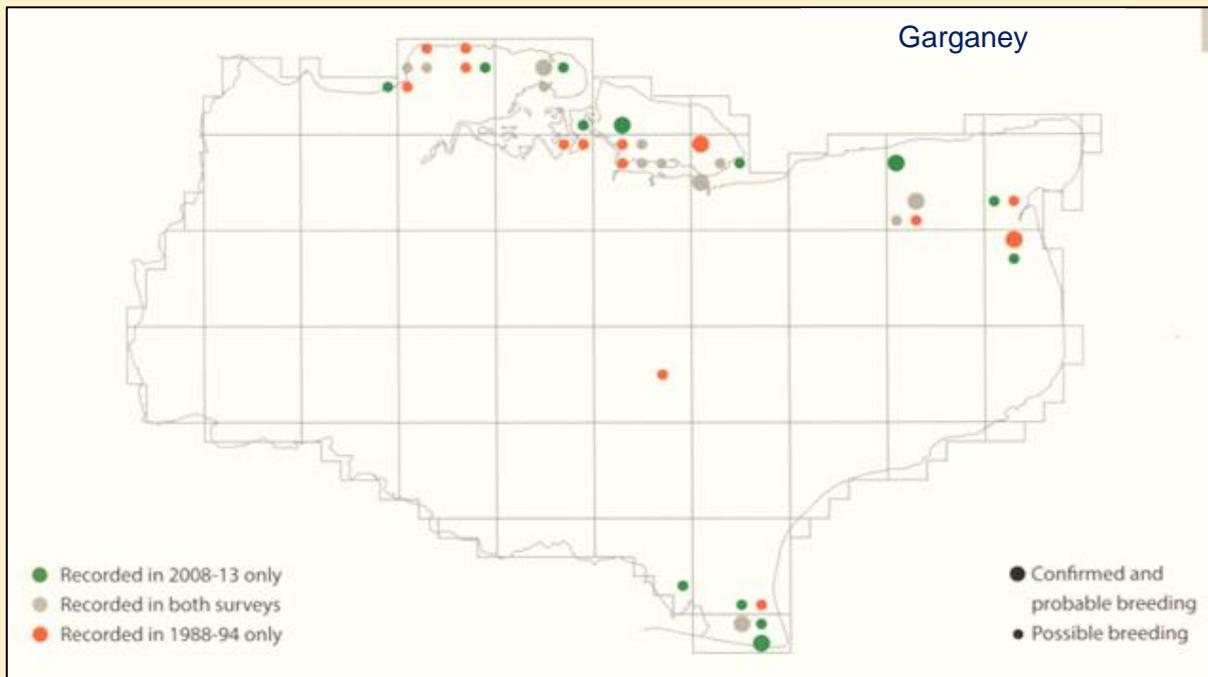


Figure 1. Garganey breeding distribution

Figure 2 shows the annual maxima each year from 1952 to 2021, taken from Kent Bird Reports. It is based on the peaks for each area, excluding offshore passage birds. The pattern, with a decline to the early 1990s and a short-lived resurgence around 2000, matches the trend in breeding numbers, though peak counts probably often involve birds breeding elsewhere. Note that in the 1950s, most reports did not define the size of large flocks.

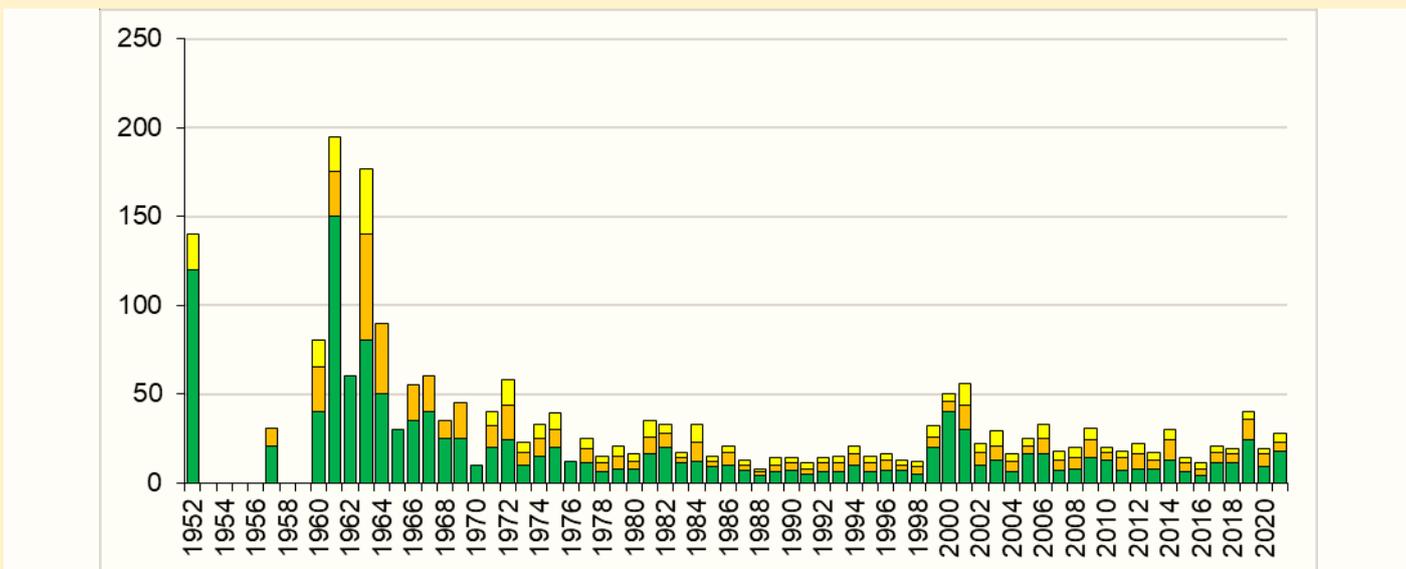


Figure 2. Garganey: annual maxima (excluding offshore counts at Dungeness)

Values shown in green are the highest, and when available, the second and third highest are shown in orange and yellow respectively. Counts for each year were selected only if they applied to different sites.

Plainly, there was a decline from the early 1960s, reaching the lowest levels in the 1990s. There was a marked increase during 1999-2001, which I attribute to the addition of the Grove marshes to the

Stodmarsh NNR; raising of water levels and creation of pools creating suitable open marshy conditions for Garganey (and other species). Those conditions have largely gone from there, as vegetation growth has largely been unchecked (though the potential definitely exists for clearance to re-establish more open conditions). Similar wetland improvement schemes, for example on Sheppey, at Seasalter and on Worth Marshes, may well have enabled Garganey numbers to remain a little above the lows of the 1990s for the past twenty years, and I should not be surprised to see a marked rise in numbers again as a result of those schemes. Table 1 lists the highest counts in the periods before and after 1970, in this case including offshore passage. Note that the Grove marshes flooded in 1961, creating temporarily ideal conditions for Garganey.

<b>Table 1. Garganey: largest counts</b>		
Counts of 50 or more shown during 1952-1969, and 30 or more during 1970-2021.		
7th April 1952	Stodmarsh	120
6th July 1961	Grove/Stodmarsh	150
Early August 1962	Walland Marsh	60
Summer 1963	North Kent	60
Summer 1963	South Kent	80
27th August 1964	High Halstow	50
22nd August 2000	Grove/Stodmarsh	40
August 2001	Grove/Stodmarsh	30
2nd April 2005	Dungeness offshore	39
16th March 2022	Dungeness offshore	31
21st March 2022	Dungeness offshore	32

Figure 3 shows the mean monthly maxima over a 45 year period, showing peaks during spring and especially during August. We do not know how the late summer counts relate to local breeding birds. Are the flocks derived from pairs nesting in the Kent marshes, or do some come from further afield?

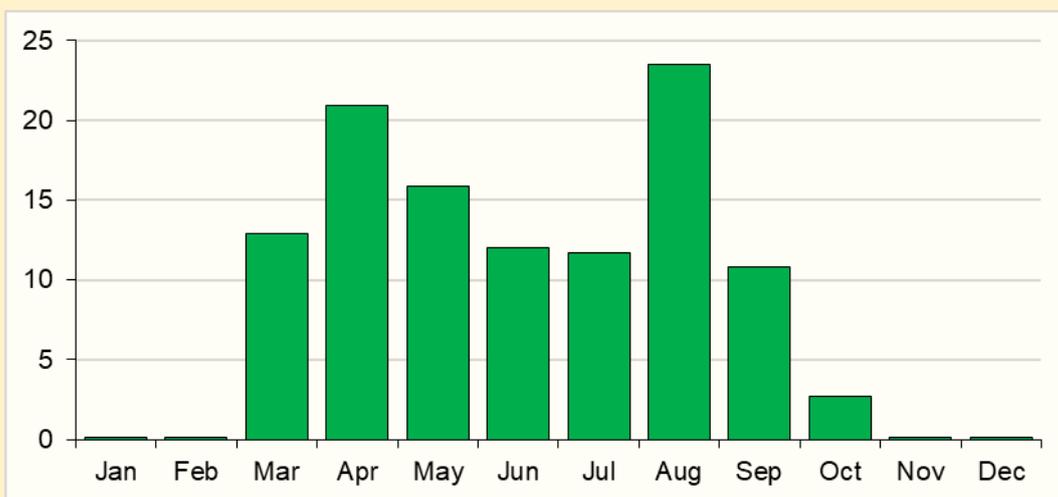


Figure 3. Garganey: mean monthly peaks 1977/78-2021/22 (including offshore counts at Dungeness)

The extreme dates prior to 1952 were 3rd February and 25th November; there were two records for 3rd February, in different years, and one of them was dead and estimated to have died in mid January. Table 2 shows the average first and last dates for each decade from 1952 to 2021; these are fairly even, with no indication of earlier arrival and an unconvincing trend towards later departure recently. The calculations of these dates omitted a few records in December and January (see below) and, again ignoring those, the earliest was one at Swale NNR on 11th February 2000 and the latest was one at Sevenoaks on 27th November 1982. There have been February arrivals in five other years, and last dates in November in eight other years.

Table 2. Garganey: first and last dates		
	Mean first date	Mean last date
1952-1960	7th March	4th October
1961-1970	7th March	8th October
1971-1980	10th March	28th September
1981-1990	12th March	7th October
1991-2000	10th March	26th October
2001-2010	9th March	17th October
2011-2020	14th March	15th October

There were December-January records in nine winters during 1952-2021, falling between 1981/82 and 2004/05 and then in 2020/21. A drake at Gazen Salts nature reserve in Sandwich during three winters between 1984 and 1989 was assumed the same throughout and to have been an escape from a wildfowl collection. It's not impossible that other winter records also may have been escapes. Some were seen on single dates but there were others than remained for a while including, in 1999/2000, one at Grove during 21st November-1st January and another at Dungeness during 20th December-3rd February.

One facet of the spring arrivals is the offshore easterly passage at Dungeness. This isn't enormous (most years' totals are under 20 and, until 2022, I think the highest year total was 48 in 2005) but the highest counts can be similar to the maxima on land. There wasn't the emphasis on seawatching in the early days of the KOS as there is now (which is why offshore birds are excluded from Figure 2), so we can only speculate that counts then might have been higher. From the 1980s onwards, there are better records. The highest day total was 39 on 2nd April 2005, and ten were seen at Samphire Hoe on the same day; other annual maxima were 16 on 30th March 2019, and 15 on both 15th April 2006 and 18th March 2009. Then there was the outstanding spring of 2022. The Dungeness offshore spring passage amounted to 116 birds, including 31 on 16th March, 32 on 21st March and 25 on 22nd March.

**Blue-billed Teal:** there was one on Elmley RSPB Reserve on 13th September 2002.

**Puna Teal:** a drake was present on Elmley RSPB Reserve on 15th July 2002 with presumably the same bird seen at Cliffe Pools on 10th and 12th August 2002.

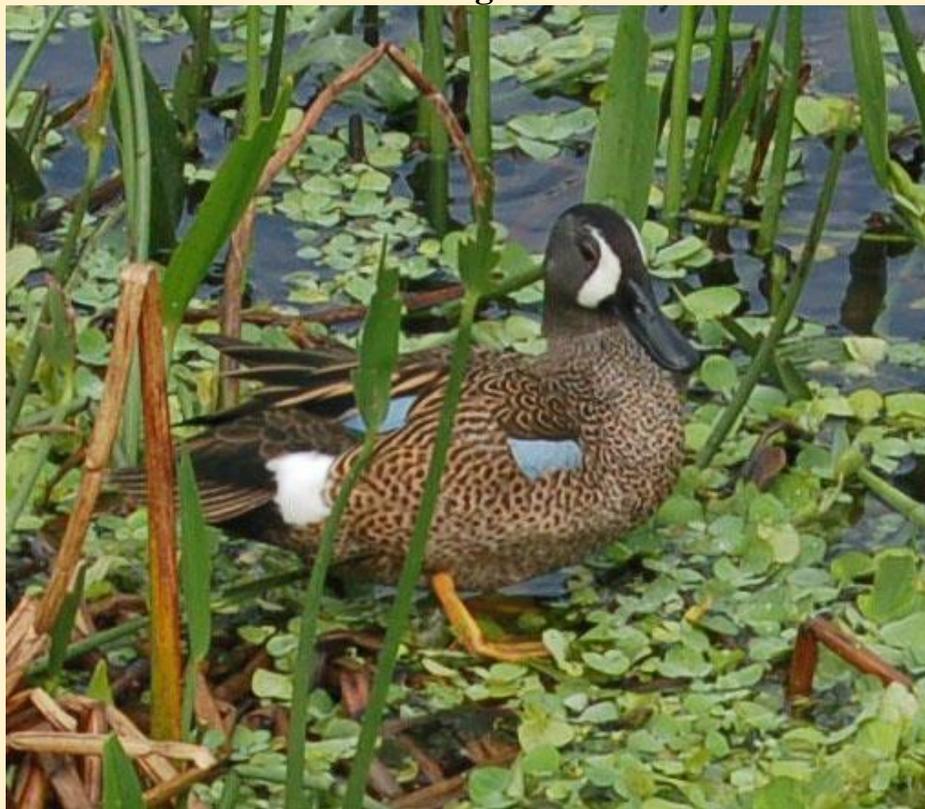


Puna Teal, Elmley by Norman McCanch

I am including details of escapes as they appear in Kent Bird Reports. Records of escapes receive minimal scrutiny by KOS and, generally, identifications are taken as submitted by observers. In the case of the two species above, I suspect an error was made in one case or another. Both are blue-billed, dark-capped and very similar to one another. Puna was formerly a race of Silver Teal, the South American equivalent of

Blue-billed (formerly Hottentot) Teal. That all records fell within a two-month period of 2002 seems a bit too much of a coincidence.

### Blue-winged Teal

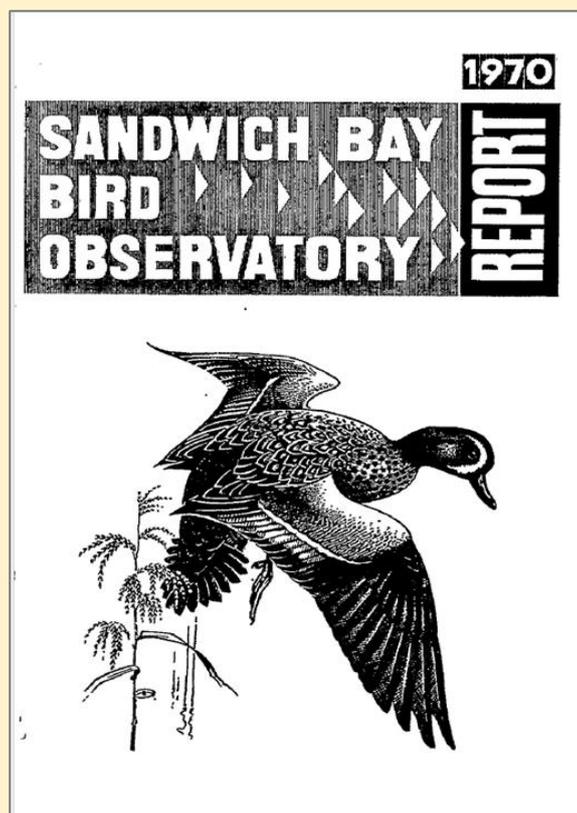


*Blue-winged Teal. Florida by Pat Straughan*

The first Blue-winged Teal to be recorded in Kent was a drake on the pool at the Sampher on 14th April 1970, found by Dennis Batchelor and Dave Richardson. A sketch by Dennis Harle features on the front cover of that year's Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory report. Twelve more have occurred subsequently (up to 2022) as listed in Table 3 below.

Note that this list follows British Birds Rarities Committee judgements, in treating the 1998 records as different from one another, and the Elmley bird of 2000 different from that at Stodmarsh during 1999-2001.

The bulk of records fell in the period 1978-2000, matching the national pattern which saw a surge in occurrence during those years. We don't know the reason for that and, while the listed records are considered to be of trans-Atlantic vagrants, there is always a suspicion that some Blue-winged Teals could be escapes from wildfowl collections. There was a series of records at Connaught Water in Epping Forest, Essex, believed to involve escapes, between 1994 and 2003, including three in 1995 and probable nest-building in 1996 (Wood, *The Birds of Essex*, 2007).



<b>Table 3. Records of Blue-winged Teal in Kent.</b>		
<b>Year</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Notes</b>
1970	Sandwich Bay	Male, 14th April
1978	Stodmarsh	Male, moving between Stodmarsh and Westbere, 4th May-17th June
1994	Stoke Lagoon	Female, accompanying a male Shoveler, 18th-30th May
1998	Grove Ferry	Male, 14th-28th June
1998	Dungeness	Male in eclipse plumage, 6th-30th August and 12th September
1998	Stodmarsh	Two males in eclipse plumage, 24th October
1998	Reculver	Two males and one female, 11th-12th November
1999	Stodmarsh	A male, 31st January, 1st-25th March and then from 14th November 1999 until 31st January 2001
2000	Elmley	Male, 9th May
2014	Sandwich Bay	Female, 22nd-30th April

**Cinnamon Teal:** once regarded solely as an escape, this species is a potential vagrant to Britain. Males in full plumage are scarcely an identification problem, but females (and juveniles) are very similar to those of Blue-winged Teal. There are useful articles about distinguishing Cinnamon from Blue-winged Teal in *British Birds* (vol. 70 pp 290-894, July 1977) and on the *BirdGuides* website (under articles>species profiles).

One (sex not reported but assumed male) was at Minster (Thanet) on 10th May 1990. There was a female at Bough Beech reservoir during 25th September-7th October 2001, with presumably the same bird there again on 21st March-16th April and 13th-21st July 2002. A female first seen at Stodmarsh in mid November 2015 paired with a Shoveler in 2016 and produced a brood of six ducklings. There were no later reports of those young birds, and the individual seen there again on 8th January 2017 is assumed to have been the same female.

### Shoveler



*Shoveler by Ian Holmes*

Kent is a highly important area for Shoveler, in the breeding season and in winter, and this is one species of dabbling duck that is still increasing. It is very much a species of the open coastal marshes and the lower Stour valley. While some do occur on water bodies further inland, the numbers there are relatively small.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Shoveler was more numerous as a breeding bird than as a winter visitor (Ticehurst, 1909, *History of the Birds of Kent*). It bred, and locally was as abundant as Mallard, throughout the north Kent marshes and also on Romney Marsh. The breeding birds were believed to depart in winter, and as a winter visitor the species was irregular and scarce. By the middle of the century, numbers had increased at both seasons, but especially in winter in north Kent, where counts of up

to 300 had been made on the Thames marshes and 150 on the Swale (Gillham & Homes, 1950, *Birds of the North Kent Marshes*; Harrison, 1953, *Birds of Kent*).

During 1952-1976, some 120 or more pairs were estimated to breed in the county, with about 100 pairs in north Kent, 20-30 pairs in the Stour valley and only a handful on Romney Marsh (Taylor *et al.*, 1981, *Birds of Kent*). During that period, the majority in north Kent were on the Swale (Hudson, *KBR* 1966 pp 85-98), representing a change since the 1940s, when most were on the Thames (Gillham & Homes 1950). The wintering population averaged around 500-750 birds, though it was evidently highly variable. High counts included 650 on the Thames, 420 on the Medway and 484 on the Swale, and also a remarkable estimate of 2,000 on flooded fields at Grove Ferry in February 1961. Inland counts, such as up to 35 at Bough Beech, also were higher than previously recorded, and an easterly spring passage off Dungeness was discovered, with an exceptional peak of 927 on 31st March 1971.

The favoured breeding habitat of Shoveler in Kent is grazing marsh, especially where there are shallow and secluded feeding areas. They are now concentrated in the north Kent marshes, with smaller populations in the Stour valley and at Dungeness and Walland Marsh (Figure 4).

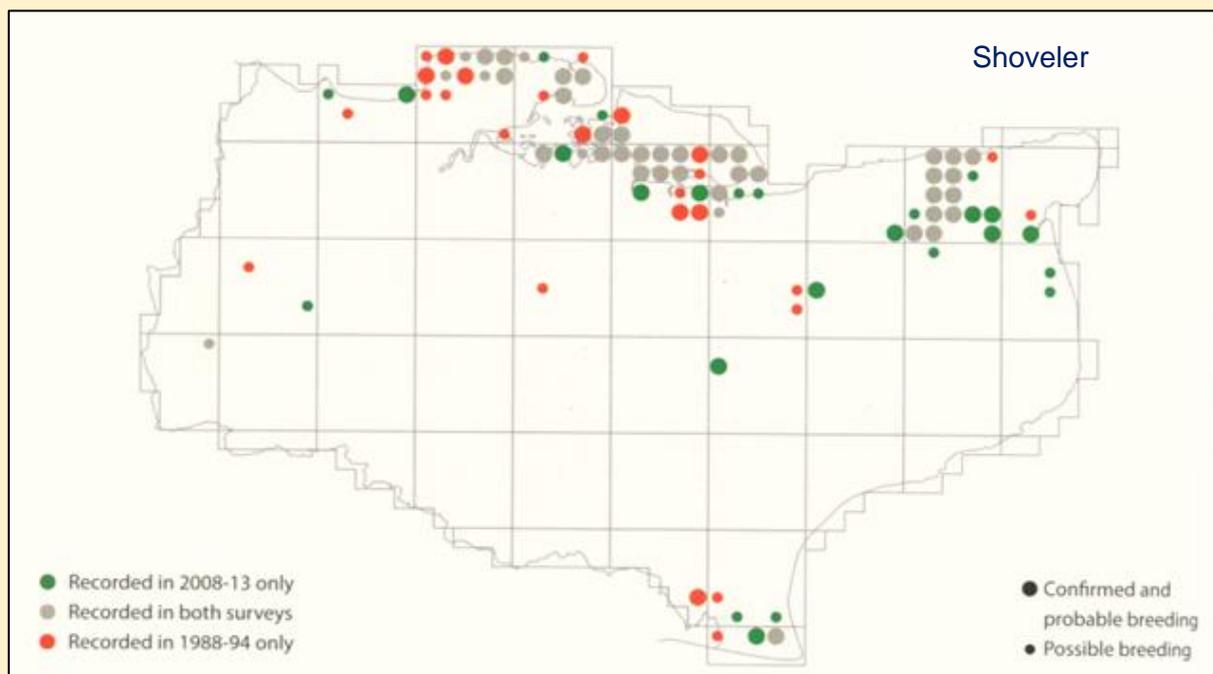


Figure 4. Shoveler breeding distribution, 2008-13

Breeding is hard to prove and estimates of breeding populations tend to be available only for a few areas in any one year. In years of relative abundance, there may be 50 or more pairs on the Swale marshes, 30 pairs on the Thames marshes and a few around the Medway, 20 pairs in the Stour valley and Wantsum marshes, and ten or fifteen pairs in the Dungeness and Walland Marsh area. Numbers appear to vary considerably, however, depending on the wetness of the marshes and there was a pronounced dip during the dry years of the 1990s, when the total may have fallen by as much as half. The *Kent Breeding Bird Atlas 2008-13* estimated 50-100 pairs, but I suspect that is an under-estimate in good years. The Kent population is very important nationally, contributing as much as 10% of the 1,000-1,500 pairs in Britain.

The majority of Shoveler from British breeding stock migrate to spend the winter in France, Iberia or around the western Mediterranean, and this is also the destination of others passing through Britain in autumn (BTO *Migration Atlas*, 2004). Those present in Kent in autumn and winter are from Europe eastwards through the Baltic to Russia, as indicated by a Latvian-bred bird shot on Romney Marsh in December 1980. There does appear to be some mixing of populations, however, with one bird ringed as a duckling at Elmley in June 1993 found long dead in Russia in May 1998. That bird, found 3,300 km from Kent by the River Pechora, was I think our most distant recovery – unless anyone can pip it.

In winter, Shoveler feed primarily in shallow fresh or brackish pools, where they are a familiar sight shovelling up food, but they do also sometimes use tidal waters. They are somewhat more widespread than in the breeding season, with moderate numbers sometimes present on inland gravel pits and the like.

While winter numbers had been increasing through much of the twentieth century, the rise levelled out during the 1970s and 1980s before starting to increase again (Figure 5). The trend in Kent matches the national one quite closely, including the steeper rise from about 2010, which has been especially noticeable

on the Thames marshes. The county population has probably risen from about 1,500 in the mid 1970s to about 2,500 at present. The current thresholds for importance (implying that the number present is at least 1% of the relevant national or international total) are 190 for Britain and 650 for north-west Europe, so it can be seen that the county is of major importance, with 13% of the British population and 4% of the north-west European one.

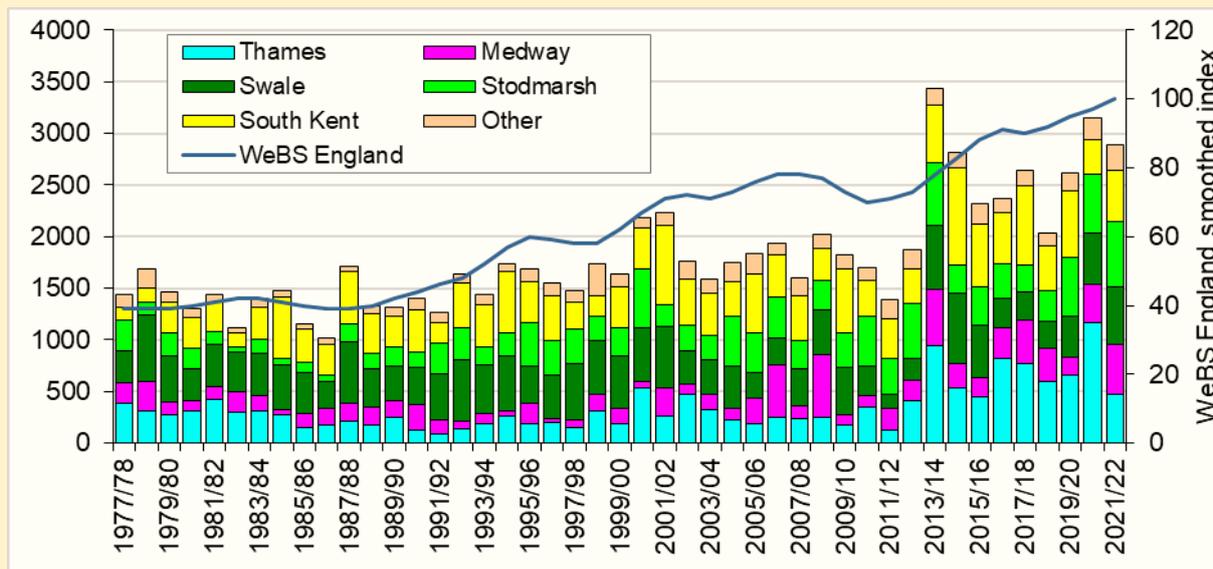


Figure 5. Shoveler annual maxima

South Kent includes Dungeness & Walland Marsh; Stodmarsh includes nearby parts of Stour valley; Other sites are Minnis Bay/Reculver, Sandwich/Pegwell Bays, Leybourne/New Hythe, Bough Beech and Sevenoaks WR.

Thresholds for Shoveler’s national and international importance have changed a lot over the years, as better information has become available, and populations have changed. Table 4 shows those five-year means qualifying as internationally important in **red and bold**, nationally important in **blue and bold**, and the two values *below* national importance shown black, using thresholds that were current in each period.

Table 4. Five-year mean annual Shoveler peaks in selected areas									
	1977/78-1981/82	1982/83-1986/87	1987/88-1991/92	1992/93-1996/97	1997/98-2001/02	2002/03-2006/07	2007/08-2011/12	2012/13-2016/17	2017/18-2021/22
Thames	340	245	170	196	286	293	228	628	732
Medway	170	134	179	94	149	220	228	295	358
Swale	420	380	421	472	534	317	338	461	395
Stodmarsh area	194	78	192	293	328	349	341	426	463
Dungeness/Walland	228	333	357	453	401	433	421	586	536

Table 5 shows the maximum counts in each of these areas, with a threshold for what’s included for each. Inland maxima have included 69 at Bough Beech in September 1981, 74 at New Hythe in December 1996, 78 between Ashford and Canterbury in December 2016 and 100 at Whetsted GP in March 2018. It is worth noting that there seems to be little correlation between Shoveler numbers and winter temperatures, although there were high counts on both the Medway and Swale in the cold weather of January 1979.

Table 5. Shoveler maxima in selected areas	
Thames >500	650 January 1959, 500 December 1968, 531 February 2001, 500 Cliffe December 2013, 750 Cliffe January 2014, 910 Cliffe March 2014, 791 Cliffe January 2017, 673 January 2019, 600 February 2019, 516 January 2020, 661 February 2020, 1,002 Cliffe February 2021.
Medway >400	420 January 1971, 509 November 2006, 601 December 2008, 554 January 2014, 428 January 2018, 485 January 2022.

Swale >600	600 Capel Fleet March 1967, 650 Elmley January 1979, 603 November 1987, 601 November 2001, 605 January 2014, 613 February 2014, 690 January 2015.
Stodmarsh area >500	Up to 2,000 February-March 1961, 574 November 2000, 537 December 2012, 604 October 2013, 520 January 2014, 575 January 2020, 575 February 2021, 618 December 2021; 628 March 2022.
Sandwich area <150	250 Monks Wall February 1999, 151 February 2003, 161 March 2021; 166 February 2022.
Dungeness area >600	600 October 1984, 600 November 1994, 760 October 2001, 614 October 2009, 556 December 2013, 920 January 2015, 942 February 2015, 620 March 2015, 600 October 2015, 770 January 2018, 644 February 2020.

As with other wildfowl, the seasonal occurrence chart (Figure 6) – showing sums of area peaks averaged for two periods – understates the numbers present in summer, when the birds are widely dispersed and less easily counted. However, the recorded totals and no doubt the true totals rise through September and October, with the highest numbers in the county as a whole present from December to February. There have been, though, some differences between areas within the county and over time. Figure 6 shows one aspect of this; the highest mean monthly totals for the first 35 years in the analysis were in December-January but in the final ten years (during the period of the recent steep rise in numbers), there is a more pronounced peak in January-February.

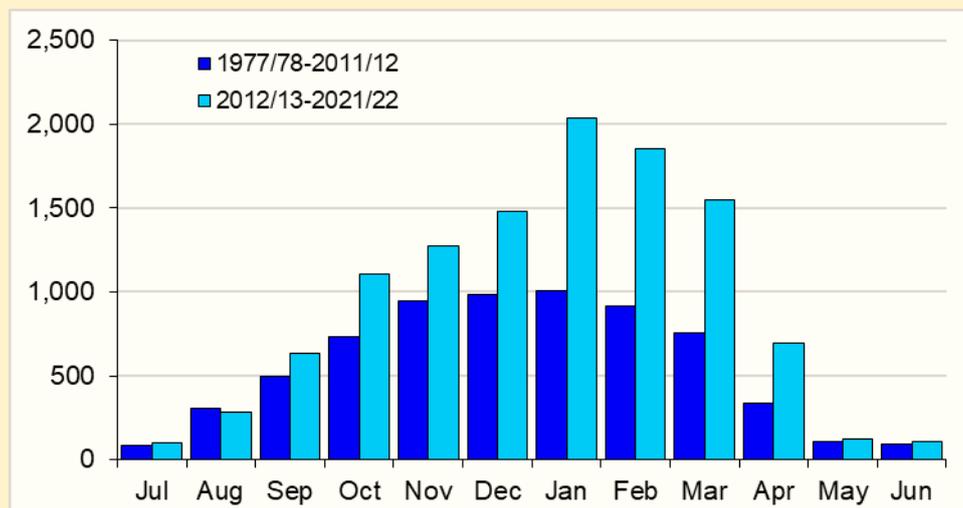


Figure 6. Monthly pattern of Shoveler occurrence

Looking at seasonal patterns in various parts of the county, it was apparent that in north Kent there has always been a January-February peak, though it has become more marked. Elsewhere, the peak formerly was often earlier and that was particularly the case at Dungeness, where it occurred during September-November more often than not. However, in the recent ten years that has changed, and the area has joined north Kent in having January-February peaks.

Except in spring, little offshore Shoveler passage is apparent. The largest recorded autumn movements during 1977-2006 were 48 SW at St Margaret's Bay on 6th November 1982 and 185 W at Dungeness on 9th November 1992, both during major wildfowl movements. There was also a count of 107 flying W over Nor Marsh in the Medway on 28th August 1990, but this presumably involved more local birds. Mid-winter movements such as 24 N at Sandwich Bay on 6th January 1995 are unusual.

Easterly spring passage off Dungeness in spring extends from early March to mid May. It seldom exceeds 500 birds in total, but there have been a few occasions when much larger totals have been recorded. Day-counts of more than 250, in addition to that in 1971 mentioned earlier, include 1,200 on 31st March 1990 when large totals were also counted at several Sussex coastal locations (James 1996), 398 on 10th March 1995 when 49 were also seen moving E at Folkestone, and 1,327 on 1st April 2004. This spring passage is presumably of birds wintering to the south-west returning to north-east Europe.

*Hybrids:* A drake hybrid, believed to be a cross between Shoveler and Mallard, was seen at South Swale LNR on 21st February 1990. A male Shoveler at Stodmarsh in 2016 paired with an escaped female Cinnamon Teal, producing six ducklings.

**Australian Shoveler:** One was seen at Lade Pits on 13th October 1990.

## Gadwall



*Gadwall by Nick Smith*

In the nineteenth century, the Gadwall was a rare autumn and winter visitor to Kent, with only about a dozen records documented by Ticehurst (*History of the Birds of Kent*, 1909). It slowly increased early in the twentieth century, assisted by a growing East Anglian population derived from releases in Norfolk around 1850, and the first confirmation of breeding in east Kent was in 1939 and in north Kent in 1942 (Harrison, *Birds of Kent*, 1953). There was evidently some immigration in the cold winter of 1946/47, when the first count of 20 was recorded, at Cooling. During 1952-1976, the increases of both breeding and wintering populations accelerated, especially from the mid 1960s. The process was assisted by the release of 135 Gadwalls at Sevenoaks during 1965-1972. Winter counts reached 31 at Grove in January 1961 and 40 at Cliffe in December 1969. Pairs were summering regularly from about 1959 and by 1976 about ten pairs probably attempted breeding each year (Taylor *et al.*, *Birds of Kent*, 1981).

Numbers of breeding pairs have continued to increase since then, throughout the north Kent marshes, in the Stour valley, at Dungeness and on Walland Marsh (Figure 7). Breeding in central or west Kent was first recorded at Sevenoaks in 1967, but has only rarely been confirmed since, and mainly at Sevenoaks and Bough Beech. Maxima from 1998 onwards included 26 pairs on the Thames marshes, 54 pairs on the Swale marshes, 11 pairs on Grove marshes and 39 pairs at Dungeness, with the highest county total of 84 pairs in 2000. However, few breeding reports have come from areas away from reserves, and the Stour valley as a whole has been poorly recorded; the true total by 2006 was probably well in excess of 100 pairs. The *Kent Breeding Bird Atlas 2008-13* gave an estimate of 150-200 pairs. Relatively few broods are seen each year, but presumably it was enough to maintain a population increase, unless it was still being promoted by immigration. We don't know whether the increase has been maintained during the past ten years; there have been even fewer and more localised estimates than before.

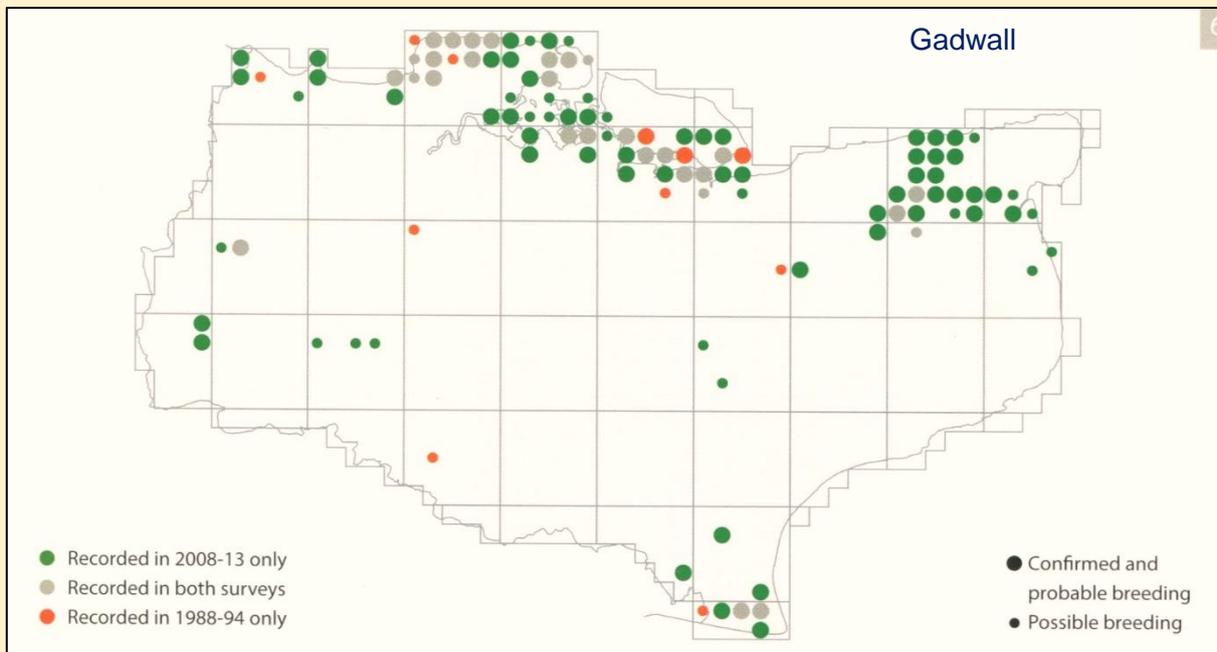


Figure 7. Gadwall breeding distribution

The increase in wintering numbers which began in the 1960s was sustained until about 2015 but then appears to have reversed (Figure 8). Birds are more widespread than in summer, with significant numbers using many inland waters, especially gravel pits, as well as the coastal marshlands. Mostly, the inland totals are smaller than in coastal areas, however, and there is a pattern of pits holding large numbers for only short periods (see below); I've included Whetsted GP as an example site in western Kent but others, such as Bough Beech, Sevenoaks and New Hythe have held similar numbers at times. The Stour totals include counts from Chilham down to Reculver and Sandwich.

There is considerable movement between sites; the data may include some duplication especially for nearby areas, and I have worries that some of the large totals during 2010 to 2015 may include some exaggerated area sums in the KBRs – I've not had the time or energy to review them all. But allowing for that, there still seems to have been a decrease of at least 40% in wintering numbers in Kent since 2010.

The pattern in Kent has reflected, and of course contributed to, the ten-fold rise in the national index (see the WeBS line for England in Figure 8). There isn't a clear indication of decline nationally yet, unlike in Kent, but maybe a hint of it. Certainly, the index levelled out at about the same time that decline started in Kent.

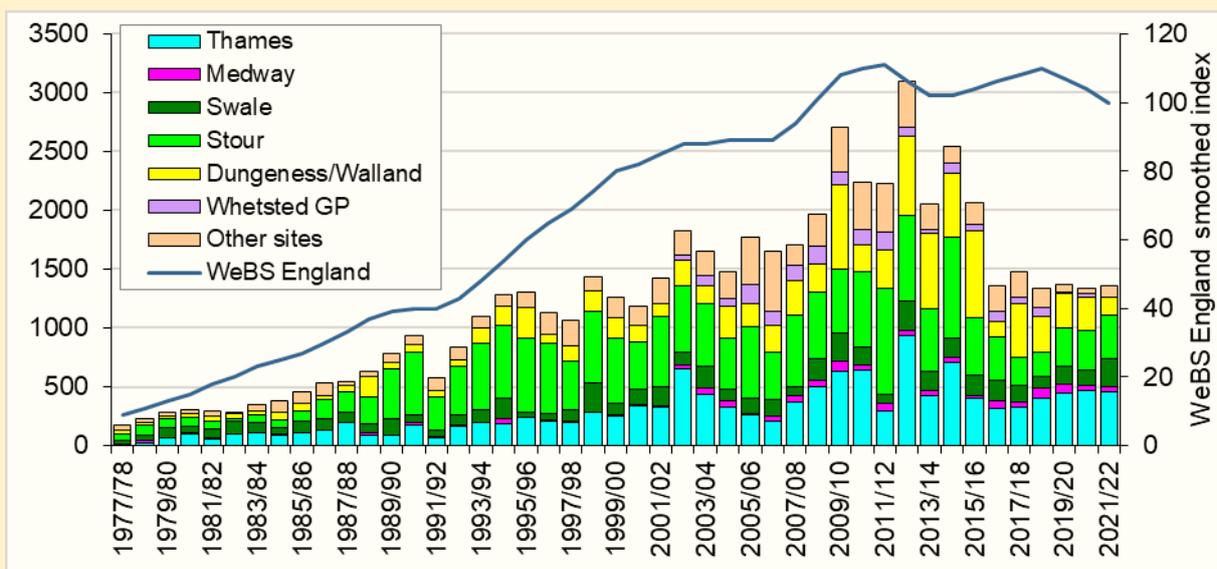


Figure 8. Gadwall annual maxima

Thresholds for Gadwall's national and international importance have changed greatly over the years, as populations have changed, and better information has become available. Table 6 shows those five-year means qualifying as internationally important in **red and bold**, nationally important in **blue and bold**, and

values below national importance shown black, using thresholds that were current in each period. There were no significant Gadwall reports at Whetsted (Stonecastle Quarry), where quarrying began in 1981, until 2002/03. None of the individual 'other sites' qualified as nationally important. The county total at its height was probably around 2,000 but has fallen to around 1,300 in the most recent five-year period; the latter figure represents about 4% of the British total.

	1977/78- 1981/82	1982/83- 1986/87	1987/88- 1991/92	1992/93- 1996/97	1997/98- 2001/02	2002/03- 2006/07	2007/08- 2011/12	2012/13- 2016/17	2017/18- 2021/22
Thames	51	109	120	199	278	378	490	556	420
Medway	9	3	13	13	9	37	57	44	60
Swale	56	89	88	93	152	132	146	185	152
Stour	73	81	325	563	513	511	652	641	340
Dungeness/Walland	30	47	80	139	143	211	365	545	297
Whetsted GP						94	132	69	35
Other sites	37	72	69	126	180	405	461	298	200

While the trend of increase has been apparent in most individual areas, and in the county as a whole, there are some sites which have experienced different patterns. For example, at the Chilham-Canterbury lakes, there was a rapid increase from the mid 1980s to a peak of 176 in November 1990 after which numbers fell to fewer than 50 in most years. At Westbere and Seaton, counts have shown two peaks, around 1993-1995 in both areas and then 2009-2012 at Westbere and 2011-2015 at Seaton. While sometimes varying counting efficiency may lead to such patterns, I believe in these cases they result from changing food availability. At Whetsted, numbers rose quickly to exceed 100 during 2006-2012 but have declined since then.

Gadwalls are mainly vegetarian, feeding on various pondweeds which can experience a boom in growth once newly dug pits become established, but then become less prolific once the lakes mature. The increase and decrease of Gadwall populations on gravel pits presumably follows this cycle. Individual pits will vary of course, so the timing of peaks will vary and – in the case of Seaton for example – there may be further cycles in plant growth. Another facet of Gadwall feeding behaviour is their association with Coots. Gadwalls are extremely vain birds, and don't like to spoil the fine vermiculation of their plumage by too much dabbling and upending, so they tend to hang around Coots, waiting for them to surface with weed, whereupon the Gadwalls grab it and run. I have briefly looked at Kent data to see if there might be a correlation between Gadwall and Coot numbers on gravel pits, but unfortunately there doesn't seem to be.

In Table 7, I have included some of the highest counts made in the county. Mostly these are the all-time peak counts at single sites or in wider areas, but I have also included notably high counts during the period when numbers were increasing.

Thames	100 in November 1980 was the first three-figure area total; 930 including 246 at Cliffe and 632 at Yantlet/Stoke in February 2013;
Swale	251 in March 1999; 247 in February 2013;
Stour valley	208 in the whole valley on 30th December 1989; 176 on Chilham-Canterbury Lakes on 25th November 1990; 115 on the small Vauxhall Lakes, Canterbury, in February 1991; 293 at Seaton on 12th December 1993 was a single site Kent record; same day counts for the valley of 382 in January 1994 & 374 including 199 at Fordwich/Westbere in December 1994; 360 at Stodmarsh in October 2002; 359 on Collard's Lake in December 2007; 163 on Monkton reservoirs in December 2009; 172 at Reculver in December 2010; 367 at Seaton on 8th February 2015;
Dungeness area	666 in December 2012; 744 including 555 at Lade in November 2015;
West Kent	166 at Whetsted and 155 at New Hythe in December 2006; 152 at Bough Beech in December 2010;

Although some Gadwalls are resident, the majority are winter visitors, with about one-third to one-half of those in the British Isles in winter thought to originate in eastern Europe (*Migration Atlas*). The pattern of an increase to peak numbers during November-February followed by a decline through to April (Figure 9) was maintained throughout 1977/78-2021/22. There is a slight difference in seasonal pattern between north Kent and other areas, with the brackish marsh populations reaching their peaks later in the winter than those at fresh marsh sites. Interestingly, this difference is similar to that for Coot.

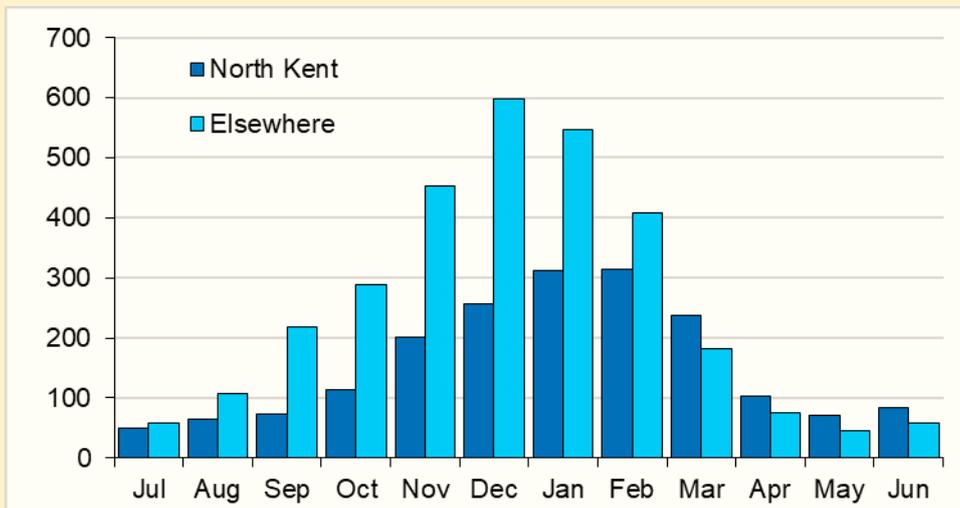


Figure 9. Monthly pattern of Gadwall occurrence, 1977/78-2021/22

Only seventeen ringing recoveries affecting Kent (all moving to Kent, in fact) are included in the online BTO Ringing Report. Thirteen came from elsewhere in southern England and four overseas ones were from Estonia, south Sweden, north Germany and The Netherlands. However, there were also at least seven recoveries of birds released at Sevenoaks in the 1960s: they involved one to north Germany, three to northern France and three to western France.

Offshore movements are seen quite frequently in spring and autumn, though they are never very large. Easterly spring passage is most evident at Dungeness, especially between early March and mid May. Most day totals there are of no more than 20 birds but there were 56 E on 3rd April 1987, 79 E on 10th March 1995 (the same date as a large Wigeon movement), 43 E on 1st April 1999, 57 E on 20th March 2005, 42 E on 2nd April 2011, and 33 E on 9th April 2013.

Autumn and winter movements are more widespread, including 97 W at Dungeness on 9th November 1992, 22 W at Dungeness on 22nd November 1993, 24 E at Foreness on 21st December 1996, 44 W at Swalecliffe on 19th December 2009, 58 W at Dungeness on 2nd December 2010, 34 W at Swalecliffe plus a concentration off Hythe of 55 W, 30 E and 65 on the sea on 8th December 2012, and 50 W at Reculver on 30th November 2013.

*Hybrids:* Mallard x Gadwall hybrids were at Elmley on 29th-30th December 1998 and at Cliffe between 29th January 2001 and 26th January 2002. A drake Gadwall x Wigeon hybrid was at Oare Marshes on 2nd March 2003. Other hybrids may well have been reported, but I haven't been rigorous at noting them and I suspect KBRs have not always mentioned them.

## Falcated Duck



*Falcated Duck, West Hythe by Norman McCanch*

There are now seven British records of Falcated Duck accepted as being wild vagrants (BOURC's category A), some present over several years. None of these was in Kent but there have been five individuals in Kent placed in category D, implying doubt that they were of natural origin. They are listed in Table 8.

<b>Table 8. Records of Falcated Duck in Kent.</b>		
All records are of birds of unknown, possibly captive origin. Records in italics are assumed repeat sightings of individuals seen previously.		
<b>Year</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Notes</b>
1987	Motney Hill	Male, 6th February-17th March.
<i>1987</i>	<i>Lower Rainham</i>	<i>Male, 26th-31st May; assumed same as Motney Hill.</i>
2000	Grove Ferry	One, 29th August-1st September.
2003	West Hythe	Male, West Hythe and Lympe, 15th April-14th June.
2006	Higham Bight	Male, 18th December until at least 24th December.
<i>2007</i>	<i>Cliffe Quarries</i>	<i>Male, 21st January-3rd February; assumed same as Higham Bight.</i>
<i>2007</i>	<i>Swanscombe</i>	<i>Male, 22nd February; assumed same as Higham Bight and Cliffe.</i>
2008-2010	Southfleet	Male, Broadditch Pool, 18th January 2008 until at least 5th February 2010; possibly the same as at Higham and Cliffe in 2006-2007 but counted as different.

The Southfleet bird was present for over two years but there are gaps in the record, either because it was absent or because it was not looked for or reported. The 'official' sources, in *Kent Bird Reports* and *British Birds*, are between them somewhat contradictory but the first and last dates are probably about right.

## Wigeon



*Wigeon by Linda Garrett*

Wigeon is primarily a winter visitor to Kent, with the highest numbers found on the north Kent marshes. Early authors tended not to record the numbers present, so we know little about trends before 1952. However, there had been counts of 3,000-4,000 at Cliffe in December 1936, and 3,500 across the whole of north Kent on 30th October 1948, and there were estimates of up to 500 on the Medway and 2,000 on the Swale (Gillham & Homes, *The Birds of the North Kent Marshes*, 1950). Elsewhere in the county, there were clearly large numbers present early in 1937, including 1,100 on Romney Marsh on 31st January and what I suspect to be a very crude estimate of 10,000 on the Stour marshes at about the same time (Harrison, *Birds of Kent*, 1953). Between 1952 and 1970, numbers were considered to have doubled in north Kent (Harrison, *Wildfowl of the North Kent Marshes*, 1972). Maxima in the principal areas during 1952/53-1976/77 were 15,000 on the Thames in February 1956, 9,456 on the Medway in January 1974 and 10,000 on the Swale in January 1977 (Taylor *et al.*, *Birds of Kent*, 1981). Elsewhere, there were 1,200 on the Wicks in March 1956, and 1,500 on flooded fields at Grove in December 1961.

Numbers continued to rise, especially on the Swale, after 1977. Figure 10 shows each winter's maxima in six areas, each of which held an average of at least 1,000 birds during 1977/78-2021/22. The vast majority of the county's Wigeon are found in these areas, but smaller numbers, not included in Figure 10, can be found further inland, for example elsewhere in the Stour valley system or at gravel pits and reservoirs in west Kent. Maxima on those areas include 680 at Bough Beech and 1,240 at Reculver/Wantsum in cold weather in January 1985, and 877 at Seaton Pits in January 2005.

The WeBS index for England as a whole (see line on Figure 10) indicates that the wintering population has stabilised since about 2010, and perhaps even started to decline. This may also be the case in Kent, but there has been so much year on year variability that it difficult to be sure.

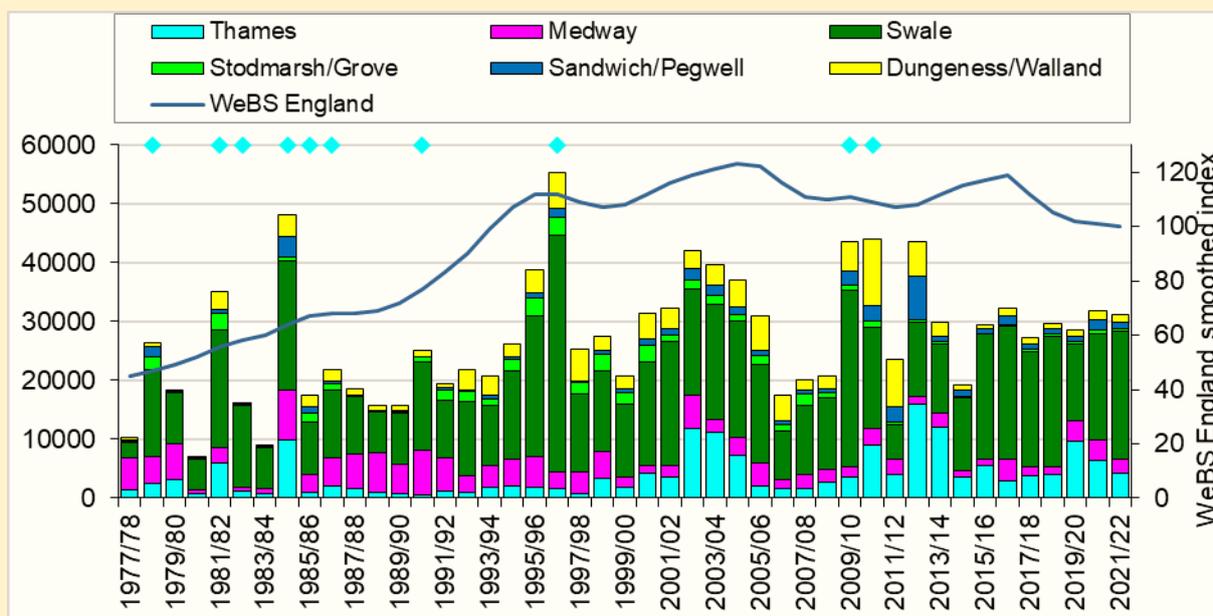


Figure 10. Annual Wigeon maxima in selected areas

The blue diamonds above the chart indicate winters in which the mean temperature of the coldest month during December-February in south-east and central southern England was 2°C or below (Met Office data from [www.metoffice.gov.uk/research/climate/maps-and-data/uk-and-regional-series](http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/research/climate/maps-and-data/uk-and-regional-series)). It should be borne in mind that cold weather influxes will be triggered by temperatures in the areas where the birds come from but, typically, when it's cold in Kent, it's colder on the continent. Years with counts far higher than neighbouring ones have generally been cold ones, but it's not a clear correlation. There are several years with cold months when numbers were not above that period's average.

Note that the Swale count 40,090 on 12th January 1997 may have included some duplication as flocks floated down the Swale, but the more conservative estimate of 30,000-35,000 was still much higher than any previous total.

Table 9 indicates which areas have held Wigeon in numbers that exceed importance levels, taking into account the gradual rise of their thresholds. Internationally important numbers are in **red and bold**, nationally important in **blue and bold**, and values below national importance are shown black. The Swale has been internationally important throughout, one of fewer than ten such areas in Britain, while the Thames, Medway and Dungeness/Walland Marsh area have each achieved national importance in some five-year periods. During 2017/18-2021/22, the Swale held the fifth highest number of Wigeon of all WeBS recording areas in the UK (*BTO WeBS Online Report*). The Swale has attracted over half of the county's Wigeon throughout the forty-five year period.

Given the importance of the Swale throughout to Wigeon, it's not surprising that the county as a whole is of considerable significance. Recently, Kent has been holding at least 6% of the British total and 2% of the north-west European total.

Table 9. Five-year mean annual Wigeon peaks in selected areas									
	1977/78- 1981/82	1982/83- 1986/87	1987/88- 1991/92	1992/93- 1996/97	1997/98- 2001/02	2002/03- 2006/07	2007/08- 2011/12	2012/13- 2016/17	2017/18- 2021/22
Thames	2,722	2,921	1,006	1,640	2,703	6,801	4,169	8,035	5,622
Medway	3,923	3,618	6,189	3,876	2,724	3,229	2,369	1,880	2,462
Swale	10,231	12,653	9,961	20,333	15,611	16,429	15,400	16,134	18,887
Stodmarsh	1,110	684	626	2,191	2,088	1,402	992	303	460
Sandwich/Pegwell	581	1,043	245	700	772	1,293	1,788	2,285	1,117
Dungeness/Walland	882	1,628	891	3,824	3,510	4,304	5,619	2,274	1,143

While many of the changes in numbers using each area probably relate to wider population size trends and to habitat changes within the area, we may well have a fairly common problem with county bird

data here. Some ups and downs may be due to variation in the completeness of coverage, and in some cases may even relate to the presence and then absence of a single observer. For Wigeon, I'd like to draw attention to changes on the Medway. In the five years prior to those included in Table 9, the average Medway peak was 7,106, around double what it was during the next ten years. The mean peak was high again during 1987/88-1991/92 but then fell once more. Those changes could have been genuine, but I would point out that Jeffrey Harrison (a leading figure in wildfowl recording on the Medway) died in 1978, and that a few years from 1987 onwards saw particularly intensive co-ordinated counting on the Medway. My belief is that those events were contributory to the changes.

Table 10 lists the highest counts in the principal areas holding lots of Wigeon. I have tried to include all high counts above certain thresholds, as indicated.

<b>Table 10. Wigeon maxima in selected areas, 1952-2022</b>	
Thames >10,000	15,000 on Cliffe-Cooling Marshes on 26th February 1956; 10,640 in the Thames area in January 1969; 11,839 in Thames in February 2003; 11,187 in Thames in January 2004; 16,000 in Thames on 11th January 2013; 12,000 at Egypt Bay-St Mary's Bay on 12th January 2014.
Medway >6,000	Annual peaks on the south Medway of 6,500-8,600 each year during 1969-1974, the highest being 8,600 in January 1974; 6,000 on the Medway in January 1977; 6,000 on the Medway in January 1980; 6,868 on Medway low tide count on 3rd-4th December 1988.
Swale >20,000	20,000 at Elmley on 25th-31st December 1981; 22,000 at Elmley on 12th-13th January 1985; 24,000 in the Swale area including 17,000 at Elmley on 6th February 1996; 40,090 in Swale on 12th January 1997; 30,150 in January 2010, with 20,052 in February; 21,178 in Swale in January including 18,000 at Elmley; 22,039 in Swale in January 2019; 21,843 in Swale in January 2022.
Stodmarsh/Grove >2,000	2,100 in January 1979; 3,000 on 31st December 1981; 3,000 in February 1996; 2,550 in December 1998; 2,810 in January 1999; 2,692 in December 1999; 2,050 in December 2007.
Sandwich/Pegwell Bays >2,000	2,007 in January 2002; 3,440 in January 2003 with 2,062 in February; 2,100 in January 2010; 2,700 in January 2011; 2,530 on 13th February 2012; 2,560 on 4th December 2012; 7,280 on 17th-28th January 2013.
Dungeness area >5,000	6,100 at Dungeness in December 1996; 5,294 at Dungeness/Walland Marsh in December 1997; 11,368 in the Dungeness area, most at Scotney Court pits, in December 2010; 7,975 at Dungeness on 12th February 2012; 6,000 at Dungeness in January 2013.
Other areas >2,000	2,401 in Reculver/Minnis Bay area in January 1985; 2,850 on the sea at Hythe on 27th December 2010; 2,240 at Reculver in early January 2011.

The feeding behaviour of Wigeon has been studied in some detail on the north Kent marshes, especially on the Medway and at Elmley (Olney, quoted by Harrison *Birds of the North Kent Marshes* 1972, Gillham & Homes *The Birds of the North Kent Marshes* 1950, Oliver *Birdwatching on the North Kent Marshes* 1991 & *KBR* 1999 pp 143-148, and Rowlands, *KBR* 1993 pp 160-178). Historically and up to 1977, Wigeon tended to roost on sheltered tidal channels and through much of the winter fed largely on the mudflats and saltmarshes during daylight hours, although they used the grazing marshes at night; use of areas inside the sea walls in daytime was made only after mid winter and particularly in spring. Their behaviour suggested that the use of grazing marsh was restricted because of wildfowling pressure. The pattern changed considerably after the establishment of Elmley as a nature reserve, with birds now highly concentrated on the protected grazing marshes, where they graze in large packs across the short grassland swards, and roost on freshwater floods. They continue to be more widely dispersed at night, with birds seen flying west from Elmley towards the mouth of the Swale at dusk, and also after the end of the shooting season. Outside protected areas, the intertidal habitats probably remain as important as grazing marsh, and some feeding does take place on arable crops.

The first arrivals are usually in the second half of August, with a notable total of about 430 on the Swale by the end of the month in 2001. The pattern of the subsequent gradual build up to a January peak followed by a slightly steeper decline (Figure 11, showing average sums of peaks at the principal areas) has been very stable throughout the period and between areas. Small numbers, usually fewer than 30, often remain into May and occasionally through the summer, although some of these may be injured birds.

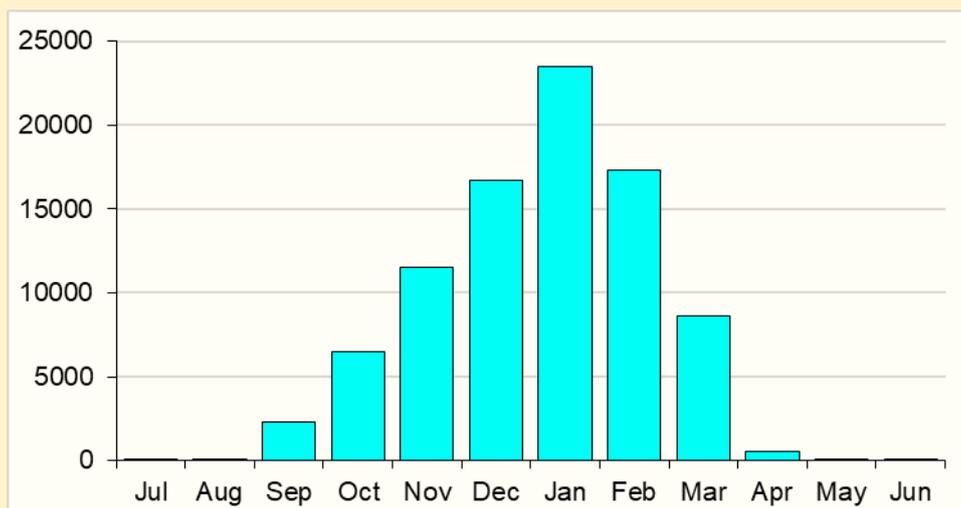


Figure 11. Monthly pattern of Wigeon occurrence, 1977/78-2021/22

Wigeon wintering in Kent probably breed mainly in Russia, though only two of the 75 county ringing recoveries involve that country. One was ringed as a nestling not far from St Petersburg in July 1947 and recovered at Harty that October. The other was ringed on Chetney Marshes in February 1963 and shot on the Ob river 3,900 km away that May. Some birds using Kent move further south; one also ringed on Chetney in February 1963 was shot in south-west Spain in December 1972. There may also be some Icelandic-breeding birds here, in some years at least, though there are no ringing recoveries from there, and only three in Scotland.

Offshore passage can occur at any time from autumn to spring but is most evident in October-November and in cold weather. Counts of 1,000 or more are listed in Table 11; only the highest counts are mentioned – often other sites also saw counts of several hundred on the same dates. Early autumn movements can be seen from mid August, such as 64 flying W at Swalecliffe on 18th August 2001 and 54 W at Minnis Bay on 23rd August 1986. Most of the early movements involve at the most a few hundred birds, but there was a particularly large arrival on 15th-16th September 1984. Three-figure counts are commonplace later in the autumn or during cold spells in winter, but larger totals are still unusual as shown in Table 11. Spring passage takes place mostly unobserved, but some easterly movements are seen. They are most evident at Dungeness, where large examples are 649 E at Dungeness on 10th March 1995 and 415 E on 17th March 1996, but there has also been a count of 800 E at Foreness on 20th March 1987.

<b>Table 11. Wigeon: large offshore movements, 1952-2022</b>		
Counts of over 1,000 are shown.		
1956	31st January	1,253 S at Dungeness.
1978	30th-31st December	1,074 N & 378 S at Sandwich Bay on 30th; 2,500 W at Allhallows on 31st.
1981	31st December	1,118 E at Foreness.
1984	16th September	1,574 N at Sandwich Bay.
1985	15th January	1,260 W Minnis Bay
1987	10th-11th January	5,600 W Allhallows on 10th, 3,570 W Minnis Bay, 2,123 W Foreness, 1,600 N & 1,596 S Sandwich Bay, 2,019 SW St Margaret's Bay, 2,500 W Dungeness; 1,550 W Allhallows on 11th.
1993	14th October	1,063 W at St Margaret's Bay.
2005	23rd January	1,430 in off the sea at Dungeness.
2010	2nd December	1,851 W at Dungeness.
2013	17th January	1,230 W at Samphire Hoe & 1,700 W at Dungeness.
2015	16th November	4,000 flying high W at Oare Marshes.

On most of these occasions with high offshore passage counts, there were also above average numbers in the wintering areas. The direction of movement in December 1981 is noteworthy: these were presumably birds returning to the continent at the end of an early winter cold spell. A similar return

movement coinciding with a thaw was recorded in January 1985, when observations included 640 leaving Reculver towards the NE on the 26th.

So far as breeding is concerned, Ticehurst suspected that it occasionally took place in Kent, and Harrison provided details of about five cases of confirmed breeding during 1910-1948, plus others in which it was suggested by the birds' behaviour. During 1952-1976, there were five more records of confirmed breeding, two on the Medway, two on Sheppey and one on Walland Marsh. The only instances of nesting definitely having occurred during 1977-2022 were as follows: at Elmley in 1983, when a duck was seen with eight young, 1985 and 1998 (though KBRs do not give details in the latter years), and at Lade Pits in 2010 when a pair reared three young. There have been several other cases of pairs which remained well into the spring and may well have attempted breeding. Most summering birds have been in north Kent or the Dungeness area, but they have also been seen in the east Kent marshes and even inland in west Kent.

*Hybrids:* A hybrid Wigeon x Teal was seen at Swale NNR on 15th March 1999. A drake Gadwall x Wigeon hybrid was at Oare Marshes on 2nd March 2003.

**Chiloe Wigeon:** this is one of the commoner non-native wildfowl kept in captivity, and one of the most frequently reported as an escape. Kent Bird Reports mention around 49 individuals, between the first at Bough Beech in 1976 and 2009 (Figure 12). In earlier years, escaped birds were perhaps generally ignored (there no mention of Chiloe Wigeon before 1976 – but no separate Escapes section before then anyway), but the absence of reports since 2009 is surprising and I have no explanation for it.



*Chiloe Wigeon, Grove Ferry by Norman McCaugh*

Birds were found across the county but mainly at inland wetlands such as Bough Beech, Chilham Lakes and the Stodmarsh area. Most were single birds and when the sex was reported all were drakes (though perhaps observers sometimes did not realise that the sexes are less dissimilar compared to Eurasian Wigeon). There have been two together on a few occasions, and there were four at Mote Park, Maidstone, on 14th April 1988.

I wondered whether the spike of records in 1987-1988 might be due to birds escaping from collections as a result of the October 1987 storm, but four of the six 1987 records precede 15th October.

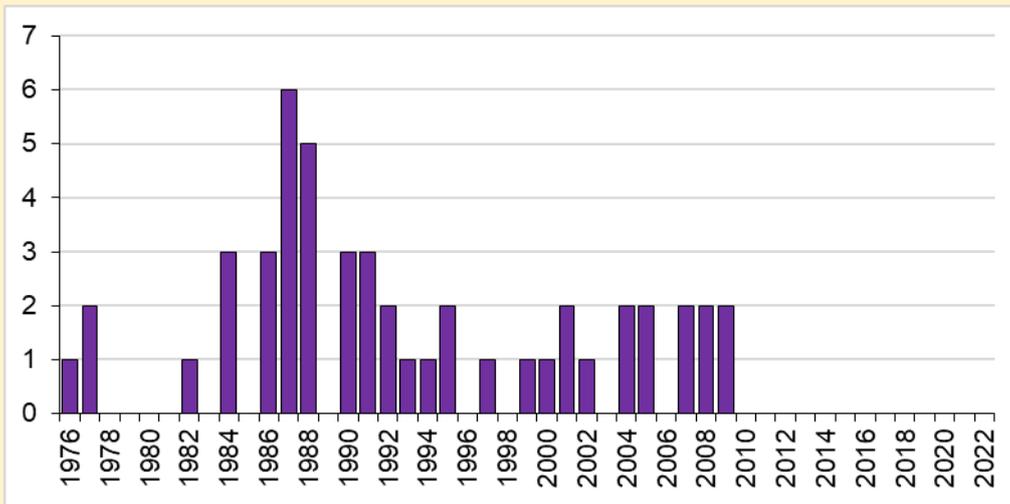


Figure 12. Chiloie Wigeon: annual totals

### American Wigeon



American Wigeon, Hokkaido by Brian Summerfield

The first American Wigeon accepted for Kent was a male shot at Monkton on 15th March 1917; it was part of the Guy Mannering collection, later presented to Maidstone Museum. That seems straightforward but – oh dear – as so often with rarity records, when you start checking, everything unravels.

The first publication of the record, as above, appears to have been in Harrison (*Birds of Kent*, 1953). He placed the record in square brackets, questioning whether it was of genuinely wild occurrence. Taylor *et al.* (*Birds of Kent*, 1981) included the record as of a wild bird, with no comment on Harrison’s assessment. Meanwhile, a catalogue of the Mannering collection by C D Borrer in 1960 (see the online *Historical Rare Birds*) had listed the bird as a female shot on 5th March 1917. Eric Philp (then curator of natural history at the museum), in about 1985, also listed it as 5th March, as a full-grown female. Several years ago, I had hoped that someone would double- or triple-check the specimen’s sex and label but (a) that never happened and (b) I have a notion, possibly false, that the Mannering collection may have been dispersed. So, we are left in doubt, though my view is that the catalogues are more likely to be correct than Harrison. It would be wonderful if someone would take on the task of reviewing thoroughly all of the museum and private bird collections affecting Kent, though I would add the caution “Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch'intrate”.

<b>Table 12. Records of American Wigeon in Kent.</b>		
Records in italics are assumed repeat sightings of individuals seen previously.		
<b>Year</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Notes</b>
1917	Monkton	See text. Best bet is that this was a female, shot on 5th March.
1961	Sheppey	Immature male, Windmill Creek, 28th October.
1977	Gazen Salts, Sandwich	Female, 11th April-2nd May. Those are the BBRC details, which take priority but note that the KBR 1977 says immature female, 31st March-12th April while the SBBO 1977 report says immature male and, in different places, 1st-30th April and 11th-30th April. Sometimes you just can't win.
1977	Westbere	<i>One on 23rd May; assumed the same as at Gazen Salts. The KBR says it was seen at both Westbere and Stodmarsh and was present to the "end of June".</i>
1982	Elmley	Male, 4th-26th April.
1983	Elmley	First-year male, 8th April-21st May. Seen to mate with a female Wigeon.
1987	Sandwich Bay	Female, 25th-26th February. The KBR says female/immature.
1990	Elmley	Male, 11th-21st April.
1991	<i>Elmley</i>	<i>Male, 1st-11th May, assumed by BBRC to be the same as in 1990 (but note that the KBR says it was a first-year male). Seen displaying to a female Wigeon.</i>
1992	<i>Elmley</i>	<i>Adult male, seen 13th, 28th, 29th, assumed same as in 1990 &amp; 1992.</i>
1993	<i>Minnis Bay</i>	<i>Adult male, 8th-9th January, assumed same as Elmley 1990-1992.</i>
1997	Cliffe	First-winter male, 28th September-14th October.
1999	Dungeness	Male, RSPB Reserve, 25th and 28th April. The KBR says 24th-28th April.
2000	Elmley	Female, 18th April-4th May, paired with a male Wigeon. The KBR says 19th April-4th May.

A further record that appeared in the KBR at the time and in the *Birds of Kent*, 1981, involved a male at Stoke Lagoon on 27th April 1968. Unfortunately, this was not submitted to the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC) at the time and, when it eventually was, it was found 'not proven' (*British Birds* 104 p.629).

Thus, we have a total of ten individuals recorded in Kent, based on the assessments published in *British Birds*. As can be seen in table 12, some of the KOS judgements differ from those of BBRC, which would alter the total, but KOS has a policy in common with most county bird clubs of abiding by BBRC decisions. There are also minor differences in the exact dates when birds were present, and in a couple of cases in the sex of the bird. It would be good to iron out those differences, but it would be very time-consuming (my file of rare and scarce birds in Kent has 14,000 records) and in many instances probably impossible to be sure of the true facts.

### **Reasons to be changing, part 1**

It's beyond the scope of this article to discuss in detail the theories of and research into the reasons behind the population trends of these duck species. But maybe I can summarise the more obvious patterns, and list a few of the stronger contenders for their causes.

**Garganey:** a summer visitor, this declined severely during the 1960s and 1970s and, despite some slight signs of improvement, the population remains at a low level.

**Shoveler:** breeding numbers haven't altered much since the 1970s, though there are ups and downs associated with years being wet or dry. The wintering population has risen steadily throughout the period. Kent is of major national and international importance for Shoveler.

**Gadwall:** huge increases have taken place since the 1970s, in both breeding and wintering numbers. However, there has been a substantial decline, at least in the wintering population, over the most recent ten or twelve years. The Thames marshes and Stour valley are nationally important for Gadwall.

**Wigeon:** breeding numbers are insignificant but the winter population especially on the Swale is enormous. Numbers show much year-to-year variability but were increasing steadily until the turn of the century but have remained fairly stable since then (and the national population seems to be declining). The Thames marshes are nationally important, and the Swale is internationally important for Wigeon.

**Climate change:** Until recently, wintering numbers may have been increasing because winters here were less cold on average than previously, allowing better over-winter survival. However, the continuation of that 'climatic amelioration' has allowed wintering duck to remain on continental Europe, a phenomenon known as 'short-stopping' resulting in fewer reaching Britain. The continuing rise in Shoveler doesn't match the pattern but their wintering area was centred further south than, say, Wigeon; they may now be staying in Britain rather than travelling to Iberia or beyond (which may in addition be becoming too dry for them).

**Habitat change:** There are many interacting factors here. Among the positive ones for ducks are the construction of numerous water-filled aggregate pits and reservoirs and the growing network of nature reserves providing secure feeding and roosting areas relatively free from disturbance and shooting. Among negative ones are the conversion of grazing marsh to arable use (though that has now gone into reverse), built development on or close to wetlands, and the reduction in saltmarsh areas through sea level rise and erosion.

**Disturbance:** the areas affected by wildfowling, and perhaps its intensity, have declined over the past century; that may have contributed to increases of duck numbers. Conversely the recent growth in intrusive informal recreation in coastal areas (jet skis, dogs, you name it) may deter significantly the wildfowl use of some areas.

Importantly, these factors operate not only here in Kent. Habitat change, pollution, persecution and the rest can have effects all along the migration routes, from northern Russia to Senegal. The effects there may parallel those here, accentuating the consequences, or they may have work in contrary directions. Teasing apart the tangle of factors influencing bird numbers is a huge job requiring scientific skills and insight, not to mention time and money. As birders, we can help by submitting records, but the clever stuff will have to be done by people like the BTO and the RSPB Centre for Conservation Science – and if you believe that we need to know why bird numbers are changing, in order to do something about the declines that currently seem so prevalent, then you should be supporting them.

Andrew Henderson

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## **Black-winged stilts at RSPB Worth Marshes by Vicki People, RSPB Reserve Warden**



*Worth Marshes, RSPB Images*

It's a regular May morning at the reserve and the news come in. Two pairs of Black-winged Stilts have been spotted on the shallow lagoon at RSPB Worth Marshes and it looks like they are here to breed. We know to not get too over-excited – Black-winged Stilts have a habit of getting peoples' hopes up and we've already had a pair arrive earlier in the season and decide not to stay. But this time looks different – these birds look set for the long haul.

Located on the east Kent coast just a stone's throw from the continent, it's been anticipated that RSPB Worth Marshes might prove a draw for birds like the Black-winged Stilts for a while. In the past five years, with generous funding from the Water Environment Grant, the site has undergone a massive transformation from predominantly arable and dry grazing marsh to what it is now: 250 hectares of lowland wet grassland with a range of pools and scrapes, fringed with pre-existing wet woodland and scrub. The focus of reserve management here has been to provide winter refuge and spring breeding ground for species that depend on this ever-declining habitat – both those common to the UK and rarer visitors from abroad. Due to the project works 2023 is the first year the site has stayed significantly wet over the winter, scrapes and pools are looking good and we have everything crossed for a successful breeding season. To have the stilts appear so soon is both thrilling and terrifying. Thrilling, because - if successful – this will be the first time these birds will have bred successfully on the reserve. Terrifying, because of why they are here. Drought in their normal breeding areas in France and Spain have forced these birds north, along with other species such as Night Heron, Purple Heron and Great Reed Warbler. Needless to say, from the time they arrive, it is imperative we do everything we can to help them successfully raise young.

We quickly erect a temporary fence to reduce the risk of predation. Things seem to be going well, with two pairs scratching their nests and settling on eggs within a few days of their arrival. Things look even better when a third pair amazingly puts in an appearance – though these are quickly ousted by some particularly aggressive Coots that aren't too keen on sharing their territory. Sadly, our first pair gives up their nest about halfway through the incubation period. We are left with one valiant pair and the next few weeks are incredibly tense.

Daily monitoring shows these young birds to be excellent parents – vigorously defending their nest and taking turns to incubate the eggs. Their hard work pays off and within a few weeks, four chicks appear and soon start to feed around the muddy edges of the lagoon. It's a marvel to see them and we watch on nervously as each day they venture further afield with parents frantically keeping an eye on them. Soon, those signature long legs start to grow and it isn't long before they start to look more like the elegant parents that have looked after them so well. By early mid-July the chicks take their first flight and before long the family moves off – a mixture of relief and triumph reigns over the marsh. It's been a fabulous sight to behold and we are so excited for what next year will bring to our RSPB Kent reserves



Juvenile Black-winged Stilt by Martin Collins

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## KENT BIRD SIGHTINGS FOR SEPTEMBER and OCTOBER 2023 - Chris Hindle

*Species printed in **red** require descriptions or good quality photographs to be accepted by the British Birds Rarities Committee (species in capital letters) or the KOS Rarities Committee (species in lower case). The results of these committees' deliberations are regularly published in this newsletter.*

### WEATHER

High pressure influenced the UK's weather for the first half of **September**, bringing fine, sunny, dry conditions and the most significant spell of warmth since June. From the 4<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> the UK experienced a significant heatwave with temperatures exceeding 30°C somewhere in the UK for seven consecutive days: a September record whilst Faversham saw the highest temperature on the 10<sup>th</sup> when 33.5°C was recorded, making it the hottest day of the year. However, the heat brought several thunderstorms and some intense downpours. The second half of the month saw an abrupt change to much more unsettled and autumnal weather with westerly weather bringing in Atlantic storms, notably Storm Agnes from the 27<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup>.

The weather in the first half of **October** was warm and sunny particularly from the 7<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> when 26.1°C was recorded at West Malling on the 9<sup>th</sup>. The second half of the month was unsettled and very wet at times with, for instance, 93 mm of rain measured at Bishopstone.

## PARTRIDGE TO WILDFOWL

A **Quail** was heard at Harty Marshes on Sept 9<sup>th</sup> whilst another was heard at Cobham on Sept 15<sup>th</sup>.

The first **Dark-bellied Brent Goose** of the autumn was seen at Grenham Bay on Sept 5<sup>th</sup> whilst 13 **Pink-footed Geese** flew NW over Cliftonville on Oct 14<sup>th</sup> and a **Black Brant** was found at Seasalter on Oct 30<sup>th</sup>.

After six **Russian White-fronted Geese** were seen at Stodmarsh on Oct 18<sup>th</sup> up to 17 birds were recorded from Worth Marshes and North Foreland.

Two **Whooper Swans** were seen at Dungeness RSPB between Oct 16<sup>th</sup> and the end of the month.

Up to 53 **Egyptian Geese** were seen at Dungeness, Scotney Court GPs, Hartlake Road, Sandwich Bay, Stodmarsh and Dunorlan Park. At Bough Beech there was a peak count of 182 in September.

A **Ruddy Shelduck** was seen at Bough Beech during October whilst as many as 31 **Mandarins** were recorded from Bough Beech with one at Bekesbourne.

One or two **Garganey** were seen at Grove Ferry/Stodmarsh, Worth Marshes, Oare Marshes and Dungeness RSPB with the last bird of the year seen at Dungeness RSPB on Oct 15<sup>th</sup>.

A juvenile **Scaup** was reported from Seasalter on Oct 19<sup>th</sup> and the first two **Velvet Scoters** of the autumn were reported flying past Herne Bay on Sept 17<sup>th</sup> with two or three at Seasalter on Oct 17<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>, two at Foreness on Oct 20<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>, one at Swalecliffe on the 23<sup>rd</sup> with three there on the 30<sup>th</sup> and two at DBO on the 31<sup>st</sup>.

Single **Long-tailed Ducks** were reported flying past North Foreland on Oct 20<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> and from Tankerton and Seasalter on the 29<sup>th</sup>.

The first **Goosander** of the autumn was seen at Seabrook on Oct 18<sup>th</sup> after which up to three birds were reported from Seasalter, Sandwich Bay, Hythe and Seabrook.

## NIGHTJAR TO WADERS

A **PALLID SWIFT** was seen at Kingsgate on Oct 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> and one was seen at Bockhill and later in the day at Sandown Castle on the 26<sup>th</sup>.

A **Corncrake** was seen at Samphire Hoe on Sept 4<sup>th</sup>.

A **Slavonian Grebe** was recorded at Seasalter from Oct 29<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> whilst a **Black-necked Grebe** was still present at Lade on Sept 3<sup>rd</sup> with others seen at Seasalter on Sept 29<sup>th</sup> and Oct 19<sup>th</sup>, at Scotney on Oct 6<sup>th</sup>, Dungeness RSPB on Oct 27<sup>th</sup> with two at Bough Beech the next day.

The juvenile **Stone-curlew** first seen at Cliffe Pools in August was still there on Oct 9<sup>th</sup> whilst another was heard flying over at Sandwich Bay on the night of the 26<sup>th</sup>.

In September two **Dotterel** were found at Bockhill on 2<sup>nd</sup>, one flew over Sandwich Bay on the 9<sup>th</sup>, there were two at Langdon Cliffs on the 14<sup>th</sup>, one at Oare Marshes intermittently from the 22<sup>nd</sup> to Oct 6<sup>th</sup> and one at Elmley on the Sept 27<sup>th</sup>.

During September and October up to 10 **Curlew Sandpipers** were seen at Dungeness RSPB, Cliffe Pools, Pegwell Bay, Sandwich Bay, Pegwell Bay, Foreness, Whitstable, Elmley, Swalecliffe and Oare Marshes.

A **Temminck's Stint** was seen briefly at Oare Marshes on Sept 1<sup>st</sup> and a **Purple Sandpiper** was seen at North Foreland on Sept 2<sup>nd</sup> whilst there was also one at Swalecliffe on Oct 16<sup>th</sup> and Shellness on the 30<sup>th</sup>.

During these two months as many as three **Little Stints** were seen at Dungeness RSPB, Reculver Marshes, Elmley, Bough Beech, Pegwell Bay, Sandwich Bay and Cliffe Pools.

A juvenile **Pectoral Sandpiper** was seen at Bough Beech on Sept 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> and a **Red-necked Phalarope** was seen briefly at Sandwich Bay on Sept 27<sup>th</sup> and again on the 30<sup>th</sup>.

A **Grey Phalarope** was identified at Cliffe Pools on October 17<sup>th</sup> and remained there until the the end of the month whilst another was seen at Sandwich Bay on the 18<sup>th</sup>.

A **SOLITARY SANDPIPER** was photographed at Stodmarsh on Oct 15<sup>th</sup> and refound on the 26<sup>th</sup> and remained there until the 31<sup>st</sup>. If accepted by BBRC it would be a new species for Kent.



*Solitary Sandpiper by Terry Laws*

The first **Jack Snipe** of the autumn was seen at Sandwich Bay on Oct 10<sup>th</sup> after which single birds were seen at Sandwich Bay, Bockhill and South Foreland.

During September one or two **Wood Sandpipers** were seen at Stodmarsh, Foreness, Oare Marshes, Worth Marshes and Sandwich Bay. As many as three **Spotted Redshanks** were seen at Sandwich Bay, Cliffe Pools, Elmley, Swalecliffe, DBO, Oare Marshes and Reculver.

#### GULLS TO SHEARWATERS

A **Sabine's Gull** was reported from the mouth of the Swale on Sept 3<sup>rd</sup> and two were reported flying S at North Foreland on Oct 9<sup>th</sup> with one at St Margarets-at-Cliffe on the 13<sup>th</sup> and one reported from Samphire Hoe on the 16<sup>th</sup>. Single birds were also reported from North Foreland on Oct 20<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> and DBO from the 29<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup>.



*Sabines Gull by Mark Lopez*

During these two months up to 130 **Little Gulls** were seen at DBO, Dungeness RSPB, Reculver, Grenham Bay, Oare Marshes, Shellness, North Foreland, Bockhill, Ramsgate, Shellness, Foreness, Sandwich Bay, Herne Bay, Walpole Bay, Swalecliffe and Broadstairs. In breezy conditions on Oct 20<sup>th</sup>, 264 flew past North Foreland and 117 flew E at Cliftonville.

The adult **BONAPARTE'S GULL** that returned to Oare Marshes on July 6<sup>th</sup> was still there on Sept 6<sup>th</sup>.

One or two **Caspian Gulls** were seen at Dungeness, North Foreland, Foreness, Cliftonville, Plumpudding Outflow, Reculver, Sandgate, Pegwell Bay, Sevenoaks WR, Deal and Walmer and as many as four **Yellow-legged Gulls** were recorded at DBO, Lower Hope Point, Reculver, Pegwell Bay, North Foreland and Cliffe Pools.

A **GULL-BILLED TERN** was reported from Seasalter on Oct 20<sup>th</sup> and then flew E whilst a **WHISKERED TERN** was photographed and identified at Stilebridge near Tonbridge on Sept 24<sup>th</sup>. If accepted by BBRC it will be the fifteenth record for Kent.



*Whiskered Tern by Alan Pavey*

During September up to six **Black Terns** were recorded from Cliffe Pools, Warden Point, Pegwell Bay, Lower Hope Point, North Foreland, DBO, Dungeness RSPB and Tankerton. In October three flew past DBO on the 4<sup>th</sup>.

A **Roseate Tern** was reported flying upriver at Lower Hope Point on Sept 13<sup>th</sup>.

During September and October up to seven **Great Skuas** were recorded from DBO, Shellness, Seasalter, North Foreland, Swalecliffe and Tankerton.

Six **Pomarine Skuas** were seen at North Foreland with two at DBO on Sept 2<sup>nd</sup> and single birds were recorded at Sandwich Bay on the 13<sup>th</sup> and Seasalter on the 17<sup>th</sup> with two seen across the Swale at Shellness. On Sept 19<sup>th</sup> there was also one at North Foreland, with one at Tankerton the next day and another at Swalecliffe on the 28<sup>th</sup>. In October one was reported flying S at North Foreland on the 9<sup>th</sup> and one or two were seen at DBO and St Margarets-at-Cliffe on the 13<sup>th</sup>, Reculver, Grenham Bay and DBO on the 17<sup>th</sup>, North Foreland on the 20<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, Grenham Bay on the 26<sup>th</sup>, Swalecliffe on the 28<sup>th</sup> and Tankerton on the 29<sup>th</sup>.

During these two months as many as 84 **Arctic Skuas** were at DBO, Shellness, North Foreland, Foreness, Lower Hope Point, Sandwich Bay, Bockhill, Hythe, Minnis Bay, Grenham Bay, Cliffe, Aycliffe, Oare Marshes, Reculver, Swalecliffe Grain, and Tankerton.



*Long-tailed Skua by Mark Chidwick*

A juvenile **Long-tailed Skua** was seen at Tankerton on Sept 1<sup>st</sup> whilst another flew S at North Foreland on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and others flew past DBO on the 11<sup>th</sup> and were seen at Foreness and Grenham Bay on the 13<sup>th</sup>. On Sept 17<sup>th</sup> single birds were reported from Walmer, North Foreland and Shellness with one at Sandwich Bay the next day and three at North Foreland and one at Deal Pier on the 20<sup>th</sup>. One flew past DBO on the Sept 26<sup>th</sup> and one juvenile also flew S over Sandwich Bay on Oct 18<sup>th</sup>.

An adult **Black Guillemot** was seen flying E at Seasalter on Sept 11<sup>th</sup> whilst one was also seen there on Oct 17<sup>th</sup> and a **Puffin** was reported from Shellness on Sept 17<sup>th</sup>. The first returning **Red-throated Diver** was recorded from DBO on Sept 6<sup>th</sup> and in October one or two **Black-throated Divers** were reported from Pegwell Bay, DBO, Shellness, Grenham Bay, Seasalter and North Foreland with a **Great Northern Diver** was seen at Cliftonville on Oct 2<sup>nd</sup>. A **Leach's Petrel** flew E at Reculver on Sept 13<sup>th</sup> and others flew W at DBO on the Sept 24<sup>th</sup> and Oct 9<sup>th</sup>.

Two **Balearic Shearwaters** flew W at DBO with one at North Foreland on Sept 3<sup>rd</sup>, one also at North Foreland on the 17<sup>th</sup> with one at Sandwich Bay on the 19<sup>th</sup>. On Sept 20<sup>th</sup> there were eight at St Margarets-at-Cliffe, five at Sandwich Bay, three at Deal Pier and one at Walmer. Birds were also seen at Bockhill on the Sept 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>, at South Foreland on the 24<sup>th</sup> with two at Walmer on the 28<sup>th</sup>. Three were then reported from North Foreland on Oct 9<sup>th</sup> with one at DBO on the Oct 13<sup>th</sup> and two there on the 29<sup>th</sup>.

**Shearwater counts at Dungeness Observatory Sept 13<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup>**

	<b>Balearic</b>	<b>Sooty</b>	<b>Manx</b>
13 <sup>th</sup>	<b>2</b>	-	-
14 <sup>th</sup>	<b>1</b>	-	-
15 <sup>th</sup>	<b>9</b>	-	-
16 <sup>th</sup>	<b>2</b>	-	-
17 <sup>th</sup>	-	-	<b>1</b>
18 <sup>th</sup>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	-
19 <sup>th</sup>	<b>211</b>	<b>9</b>	-
20 <sup>th</sup>	<b>179</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>4</b>
21 <sup>st</sup>	-	-	-
22 <sup>nd</sup>	-	-	-
23 <sup>rd</sup>	-	-	-
24 <sup>th</sup>	<b>8</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>7</b>
25 <sup>th</sup>	-	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
26 <sup>th</sup>	<b>1</b>	<b>12</b>	-
27 <sup>th</sup>	-	-	-
28 <sup>th</sup>	<b>2</b>	-	-
29 <sup>th</sup>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	-
30 <sup>th</sup>	-	-	-



*Balearic Shearwater by Mark Chidwick*

During September one or two **Manx Shearwaters** also flew past North Foreland, Sandwich Bay, Cliffe and Reculver. In October one was seen at DBO on the 13<sup>th</sup> with three on the 28<sup>th</sup>.

A **Cory's Shearwater** was reported flying N then S off Deal on Sept 18<sup>th</sup> and was seen again the next day at Walmer.

Two **Sooty Shearwaters** flew S past North Foreland and Walmer on Sept 18<sup>th</sup> with two at Sandwich Bay and one at Walmer on the 19<sup>th</sup>. Two were also seen at North Foreland with one at Deal on the 20<sup>th</sup> and two were at Hythe on the 26<sup>th</sup>. In October there were 17 at DBO on the 13<sup>th</sup> and four on the 28<sup>th</sup>.

#### WHITE STORK TO WOODPECKERS

A **BLACK STORK** was seen flying over Lydd, Walland Marsh and Dungeness on Oct 9<sup>th</sup> whilst 35 **White Storks** were reported thermalling over Stodmarsh on Sept 15<sup>th</sup> with up to five seen during September and October at Woodnesborough, Sandwich Bay, Appledore and Bough Beech.



*Black Stork by Bob Knight*

A **BROWN BOOBY** was reported flying E at Grenham Bay on Oct 9<sup>th</sup>. If submitted and accepted by BBRC it will be the second record for Kent after the first seen flying E at Swalecliffe on 19<sup>th</sup> August 2019.

Up to four **Shags** were seen at Oare Marshes, Sandwich Bay, Swalecliffe, Herne Bay, Foreness, Mill Point, Dover Harbour and North Foreland.

Three **Glossy Ibises** were present at Dungeness RSPB during September and October. In addition, single birds were also seen at Capel Fleet on Sept 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> at Sandwich Bay on Sept 22<sup>nd</sup>, Egypt Bay on the Sept 26<sup>th</sup>, Stodmarsh on Oct 27<sup>th</sup> and Oare Marshes on the 28<sup>th</sup>.

Up to 24 **Spoonbills** were seen at Cliffe Pools, Pegwell Bay, Worth Marshes, Sandwich Bay, Capel Fleet, Reculver, Elmley and Oare Marshes.

A **Bittern** was seen in flight at Shuart on Sept 11<sup>th</sup> and during October single birds were recorded from Dungeness RSPB, Sandwich Bay, Elmley and Oare Marshes.

During September and October as many as 20 **Cattle Egrets** were seen at Reculver, Worth Marshes, Elmley, Dungeness RSPB and Grove Ferry/Stodmarsh.

An adult **Night-Heron** flew across Worth Marshes on the morning of Sept 5<sup>th</sup> and a juvenile **Purple Heron** was seen at Ham Fen on Sept 21<sup>st</sup>.

As many as 14 **Great White Egrets** were seen at Dungeness RSPB with lesser numbers at Oare Marshes, Reculver Marshes, Shuart, North Foreland, Copt Point, Foreness, Northward Hill, Riverside CP, Capel Fleet, Worth Marshes, Minster Marshes, Bockhill, Abbotscliffe, Sandwich Bay, Bough Beech and Grove Ferry/Stodmarsh.

Single **Ospreys** were recorded from Oare Marshes, Swalecliffe, Tankerton, Elham, Riverside CP, Samphire Hoe, Cliffe Pools, North Foreland, Godmersham, Nor Marsh and Bough Beech with the last bird at Hothfield seen into November.

Records of single **Honey Buzzards** from coastal sites during September came from South Foreland, Worth Marshes and Samphire Hoe.

During September and October ring-tailed **Hen Harriers** were seen at Stodmarsh/Grove Ferry, Knockholt, Worth Marshes, Sandwich Bay, Cliffe Pools, Langdon Bay and South Foreland.



*Pallid Harrier by Moi Hicks*

A juvenile **PALLID HARRIER** was seen in the Northward Hill area from Sept 21<sup>st</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup>. A juvenile was also seen at Seabrook at 0700 on Oct 3<sup>rd</sup> and what was almost certainly the same bird was discovered at Dungeness RSPB later that morning and was present in the area until the Oct 15<sup>th</sup>. One was also reported from Pegwell Bay on Oct 22<sup>nd</sup>.

One or two **Red Kites** were seen at Penshurst Place, Bockhill, Bough Beech, Nethergong, Swalecliffe, Newnham, Southborough and Hythe with 48 counted at Knockholt on Oct 16<sup>th</sup>.

A **Black Kite** was reported from Dungeness RSPB on Sept 3<sup>rd</sup> and a **White-tailed Eagle** was seen at Bough Beech on Sept 25<sup>th</sup>.

#### OWLS TO HIRUNDINES

Two **Long-eared Owls** were seen at Elmley during September.

As many as six **Short-eared Owls** were recorded from Sandwich Bay, Herne Bay, Cliftonville, Swalecliffe, Tankerton, Cliffe Pools, Lade, Reculver, Leysdown-on-Sea, South Swale NR, Shellness, Ramsgate, Northward Hill, Elmley, DBO, South Foreland, Bockhill, North Foreland, Grenham Bay, Samphire Hoe, Foreness and Shuart.

A **Bee-eater** was reported from Borough Green on Sept 9<sup>th</sup>.

A **Wryneck** was seen at Langdon Cliffs on Sept 2<sup>nd</sup> with one at Abbotscliffe from Sept 3<sup>rd</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> and others at Northward Hill on Sept 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>, Ramsgate on the 13<sup>th</sup>, Sandwich Bay on the 14<sup>th</sup> and North Foreland on the 17<sup>th</sup>. One was also found at DBO on Sept 22<sup>nd</sup>.



*Wryneck and Red-backed Shrike by Mike Fitch*

A male **Red-footed Falcon** was seen at Graveney Marshes on Sept 8<sup>th</sup>, an adult female was reported from Bough Beech on Sept 11<sup>th</sup> and a juvenile was seen at South Foreland on Sept 23<sup>rd</sup>.

After a **Merlin** flew over Sandwich Bay on Sept 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> single birds were recorded from Capel Fleet, Dungeness RSPB, Swalecliffe, Shuart, Abbotscliffe, Hampton, Reculver, Harty, Cliffe Pools, North Foreland, Sandwich Bay and DBO.

A first winter **Red-backed Shrike** was found at Abbotscliffe on Sept 2<sup>nd</sup> and was still there on the 10<sup>th</sup> and one was also seen at Sandwich Bay on Sept 3<sup>rd</sup> with another first year and at Reculver Marshes on the 8<sup>th</sup>.

A **Great Grey Shrike** was seen at South Foreland on Oct 10<sup>th</sup> and a **Hooded Crow** was seen at Bockhill on Sept 23<sup>rd</sup> with one at Swalecliffe on Oct 22<sup>nd</sup>.

A **Woodlark** was observed at DBO on Sept 6<sup>th</sup> with others at DBO on Sept 30<sup>th</sup>, Bough Beech on Sept 31<sup>st</sup> and Oct 4<sup>th</sup>, Cliftonville and DBO on Oct 14<sup>th</sup>, flying E at Walpole Bay on the Oct 21<sup>st</sup> with two over DBO on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. A **Shorelark** was also reported flying S past North Foreland on Oct 18<sup>th</sup>.

An American **CLIFF SWALLOW** was discovered at North Foreland on Sept 19<sup>th</sup> in blustery conditions but was still there the next day. This will be a new species for Kent and the 15<sup>th</sup> for the UK if accepted by BBRC.



*Cliff Swallow by Mark Chidwick*

There was a huge westerly hirundine movement on Sept 24<sup>th</sup> with, for example, 35,000 **House Martins** and 15,000 **Swallows** at Bockhill.

#### WARBLERS TO WHEATEARS

Single **Wood Warblers** were seen at Sandwich Bay on Sept 18<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>.

The first **Yellow-browed Warbler** of the autumn was reported from Sandwich Bay on Sept 21<sup>st</sup> after which one or two birds were recorded from Reculver Marshes, Bockhill, Sandwich Bay, DBO, Kingsgate, Knockholt, North Foreland, Margate, Marden, Pegwell Bay and Northdown Park.

A **Pallas's Warbler** was found at Cliftonville on Oct 26<sup>th</sup> with another at Copt Point on the 29<sup>th</sup>.

A **SAVI'S WARBLER** was identified at Sandwich Bay on Sept 9<sup>th</sup> and single **Siberian Chiffchaff** were reported from Bough Beech on Sept 31<sup>st</sup> and Dungeness RSPB on Oct 27<sup>th</sup>.

During September one or two **Grasshopper Warblers** were recorded from Bockhill, Worth Marshes, Reculver Marshes, Sandwich Bay, Swalecliffe, Aycliffe and Abbotscliffe.

A first year **Barred Warbler** was trapped and ringed on Reculver Marshes on Sept 4<sup>th</sup> and another was seen briefly at Hope Point on Sept 29<sup>th</sup> whilst another was seen well at Walmer Beach the next day.



*Barred Warbler by Steve Reynaert*

Single **Dartford Warblers** were seen at DBO on Sept 30<sup>th</sup> and Oct 1<sup>st</sup> and again on Oct 15<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> with one at Foreness on Oct 30<sup>th</sup> and another at Langdon Bay on the 31<sup>st</sup>.

Up to seven **Firecrests** were recorded at Bough Beech, Margate Cemetery, Enbrook Park, Lypne, Mill Point, Sandwich Bay, Bockhill, Herne Bay, Copt Point, Stodmarsh, Reculver and Shuart.

A **Red-breasted Flycatcher** was reported from a private garden at North Foreland on Sept 14<sup>th</sup>.

During September up to three **Pied Flycatchers** were seen at Sandwich Bay, Aycliffe, Samphire Hoe, South Foreland, Dungeness, Leysdown-on Sea, Ramsgate, Cliftonville, Nethercourt Park, Lydd Ranges, Bockhill and Pegwell Bay with one at Sandwich Bay on Oct 1<sup>st</sup>.

A **SHORT-TOED TREECREEPER** was reported from Langdon Cliffs on Sept 6<sup>th</sup> and another was ringed at DBO on October 16<sup>th</sup>.

The first **Ring Ouzels** of the autumn were seen on Oct 9<sup>th</sup> with five at Abbotscliffe and one or two at Chamber's Wall, Langdon, Ramsgate, Bockhill, Worth Marshes and North Foreland. After this up to eight birds were recorded from DBO, Sandwich Bay, Langdon Bay, Bockhill, Samphire Hoe, Bough Beech, Reculver, Margate, Seasalter, Kingsdown, Northward Hill, Cliftonville, South Foreland and Abbotscliffe.

Up to four **Black Redstarts** were recorded from Dungeness, Cliftonville, Samphire Hoe, Sandwich Bay, Aycliff, Walpole Bay, Plumpudding, Reculver, Tankerton, Seasalter, Hampton Pier, Faversham Creek and Abbotscliffe.

#### SPARROWS TO BUNTINGS

The first **Water Pipit** of the autumn was seen at Stodmarsh on Oct 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> after which as many as five birds were recorded from Oare Marshes, Grove Ferry/Stodmarsh, Worth Marshes, Swalecliffe, Swanscombe Marsh, Dungeness RSPB and Sandwich Bay.

During this period single **Hawfinches** were reported from Alkham, Shorne Woods, Marden, Cliftonville and Langdon Hole with two flying S at North Foreland on Oct 26<sup>th</sup>.

A **Twite** was seen at Halstow Marshes on Oct 2<sup>nd</sup> and another was reported from Cliftonville on the 21<sup>st</sup> with six reported from Oare Marshes on Oct 25<sup>th</sup>.

As many as 21 **Crossbills** were seen at Lypne, Sandwich Bay, Bockhill, Halstead and DBO whilst a **Serin** flew over South Foreland on Oct 26<sup>th</sup>.



*Lapland Bunting by Russ Blackman*

The first **Lapland Bunting** of the autumn was seen at Foreness on Sept 16<sup>th</sup> and the next at DBO on Oct 4<sup>th</sup> after which single birds were recorded from Reculver Marshes, Langdon Bay, Foreness, North Foreland, Bockhill and Cliftonville.



*Snow Bunting by Bryan East*

After the first **Snow Bunting** was seen at Brooksend on Sept 27<sup>th</sup> single birds were recorded from Minnis Bay, Brooksend, St Mary's Bay and Seasalter.

An **Ortolan Bunting** flew NW with two Linnets at Kingsdown on Sept 10<sup>th</sup>.

**DBO** = Dungeness Bird Observatory    **BBRC** = British Birds Rarities Committee

**RSPB** = Royal Society for the Protection of Birds    **BOU** = British Ornithological Union

**"The Patch"** = the warm water outflow from Dungeness Nuclear Power Station

**NNR**=National Nature Reserve    **NR**=Nature Reserve    **LNR**=Local Nature Reserve

**FC** = Field Centre    **WR** = Wildlife Reserve    **GP** = Gravel Pits    **CP** = Country Park

#### CONTRIBUTORS

This summary owes much to the contributors to the various sites in "Latest Sightings" on the KOS Website at [www.kentos.org.uk](http://www.kentos.org.uk), KOSForum, Twitter and the RBA Hotline.

Records have been contributed by A. Appleton, B. Benn, P. Beraet, Bockhill Birders, R. Bonsor, Bough Beech (per A. Ford), E. Brown, D. Bunney, N. Burt, G. Burton, F. Cackett, J. Cantelo, J. Carnell, P. Carr, R. Carr, M. Casemore, J. Chantler, P. Chantler, M. Chidwick, R. Collins, G. Coultrip, K. Cutting, DBO (per D. Walker), B. East, D. Ellingworth, A. Farrar, D. Faulkener, Folkestone and Hythe Birds (per I. Roberts), N. Frampton, C. Gibbard, R. Gomes, M. Gould, R. Heading, J. Headley, A. Hindle, C. Hindle, M. Hindle, G. Hollamby, M. Hollingworth, P. Holt, P. Howe, J. Hunter, M. Kennett, S. Kennett, J. King, G. Lee, O. Leyshon, A. Lipczynski, M. Longdon, K. Lord, R. Mace, A. Malone, J. Massey, P. Maton, N. McCanch, S. McMinn, S. Message, S. Mills, S. Mount, R. O'Reilly, M. Orchard, J. Partridge, A. Pavey, K. Privett, C. Powell, M. Puxley, R. Rackliffe, B. Ring, M. Roser, K. Ross, B. Ryan, Samphire Hoe (per P. Holt and P. Smith), SBBO (per A. Lipczynski and S. Walton), I. Searle, Sevenoaks WR, I. Shepherd, D. Smith, P. Smith, R. Smith, W. Stoneham, M. Sutherland, Swale NNR (per R. Smith, D. Faulkner, I. Davidson), A. Swandale, P. Trodd, C. Turley, J. Turner-Moss, D. Tutt, J. Warne, M. Watts, C. White, M. Wilson, T. Wilson, J. Woolgar, B. Woolhouse, D. Wrathall, B. Wright, M. Wright and J. Young.

Please send records for this review to Chris Hindle at [christopherhindle@hotmail.com](mailto:christopherhindle@hotmail.com)

Records sent to me may not all be used for this report as I try to extract the more interesting sightings, however all records are equally important and I forward them to the appropriate Area Recorders and they are then entered onto the KOS database.

**Please also send to me any descriptions or photos of rare birds so that they may be assessed by the relevant committee.**

The following 2022 KOS Rarities have recently been accepted by the KOS Rarities Panel based on published photos or from descriptions submitted.

2022

Black Kite (flying W)

Ash

June 8th

## Fifty Years Ago

### Rough-legged Buzzard



*Rough-legged Buzzard by Archibald Thorburn (PDI)*

The peak of records was reached in November with up to five birds recorded all month at Windmill Creek (DLD, BH, CEW et al) up to three at Shellness (AJH, B'H, RVW et al), with two at Queenborough on Nov. 8th(BH) and two at Harty on Nov. 14th (TEB, LFW).

At Stodmarsh a single bird was observed on six occasions during November (JNH, RHL, DBR, et al) with one bird at Westbere on the 13th (JCH)and one at Etchinghill on 17th (PM).

**KBR 1973**

## ***Meet the Member – André Farrar***



### ***Tell us about the role you play in the KOS and describe what it involves.***

I chair the Executive Committee and I also sit on the Conservation and Survey Committee, which was my first direct involvement with KOS. On retiring from the RSPB, I was keen to help having been a member of KOS on and off for a number of years. Volunteer-gathered data is the life blood of conservation generally and for birds in particular. Birds have a unique popularity that means studying them and enjoying them is a great way to engage more people. We have a central role to play in encouraging everyone to make the most of their records.

Wanting to contribute often starts with just the simple enjoyment of birds and opportunities to learn about them – KOS through our website, walks and talks can help but we want to go further and work with conservation organisations, as well as private landowners to highlight some of the great work going on around the county but also to make the case for more and well managed access and appropriate facilities.

The KOS needs to be for everyone, and we've work to do to make that a reality. Age, gender, ethnicity or background brings a wealth of experiences and new ways of understanding how important birds are to us all. We all approach birding in our own way – bird finders, patch workers, survey enthusiasts, ringers and increasingly photographers all contribute to our knowledge of birds in Kent.

I'm looking forward to writing more for the KOS website in 2024 and we'll be starting a regular blog – I'll be looking for good stories to tell so ideas welcome!

### ***What first drew you into the world of birds?***

I was keen on all animals – wild ones, pets, farm animals (I even have a PhD in magnesium metabolism in sheep to prove it!). The realisation that I needed glasses (at age 11) opened up a new world as suddenly I could see birds in detail. I was encouraged by my parents and my biology teacher at school and my early focus was on birds around home and those we encountered on family holidays. The world of rare birds was a mystery to me and sadly I didn't connect with other birdwatchers until much later. I joined the RSPB at a film show in the Marlowe in Canterbury but only started actively volunteering when I was at University in Leeds, joining the Leeds Birdwatchers at the same time.

### ***How are you involved with birds in Kent?***

I've been involved in surveys for many years, site-based surveys helping to build the case for site designations are particularly satisfying. I've been involved with the Breeding Bird Survey since 2001 and have more recently joined the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) team on the Swale. I'm delighted to be able to contribute to a survey the results of which I regularly used in my time involved with coastal conservation in Northwest England. I particularly enjoy the single species surveys as they involve exploring areas where I'd be unlikely to visit in other circumstances.

Of course, the vast majority of the records that go into my notebook (still old school) aren't part of formal surveys. I've always kept complete lists when out and about and they make their way onto BirdTrack (run by the BTO in partnership with the RSPB, BirdWatch Ireland, Scottish Ornithologist's Club and the Welsh Ornithological Society). BirdTrack ensures that my records find their way into the data behind the Kent Bird Report. Other databases such as eBird are also available!

### ***What has been your biggest birding blunder?***

My Dad lent me a pair of Kershaw binoculars he rescued from a tank he lost in the war – they had seen better times. However, the glimpse of olive and gold could only be a female Golden Oriole. I was chuffed. Sadly, as I crept closer the unmistakable outline of a daffodil came into focus. Years later my first Houbara bustard had to be chalked off as it turned into a bin bag.

### ***What's your top tip for people who are interested in learning more about birds or getting more involved?***

Identification field guides have been a vital part of birding for decades and coupled with a pair of binoculars a start can be made. Optics don't have to cost a fortune but always try before you buy. There is such a wealth of resources online that can really help whatever your level of expertise. Spending time getting familiar with birds locally really helps build an understanding of their lives throughout the year. Nothing beats spending time with people who know their stuff – KOS is a great place to start but of course there are two bird observatories at Sandwich Bay and Dungeness as well as RSPB local groups and a variety of local clubs.

### ***What is the bit of kit that you take with you when out and about birding?***

I travel as light as possible binoculars, telescope with a carbon fibre tripod and my notebook. I find too much photography gets in the way of looking so I try to get others to take the pictures especially my son Jack.

### ***How do you feel we can improve the future for birds in Kent and birdlife on a larger scale?***

Count and monitor, add your voice and state the case for birds (and other wildlife). Support the wildlife NGOs, be a critical friend, when necessary, but get behind them. 2024 is likely to be an election year – we can all press parties clamouring for our vote to demand nature positive policies, the climate and biodiversity crises are real and as birders we see the changes first hand, it is a story we can and must tell. Get active – at KOS we always looking for new volunteers to take the Society forward.

### ***Tell us about a species, place or project that interests you.***

It's going to be fascinating to see how the new and developing sites in Kent perform – RSPB's Worth Marshes is already delivering rarities (the Eleonora's Falcon for example) and providing habitat for species on the move such as the Black-winged Stilts that nested this spring. Closer to home downland restoration is now literally over our garden hedge and the efforts of local farmers and landowners are clear to see. As I type this a Red Kite is bouncing about in some grassland reversion indicating a good population of small mammals.

In the face of the generally dreadful environmental news that assails us daily I find focussing locally is a way to stay positive. For KOS we've set a target of growing to over 1000 members and we're making good progress. Improving the website, updating our data handling and progressing the online Birds of Kent are all fundamental to the future of the Society and building our strengths by continually improving the already excellent Kent Bird Report. I'm keen to see us developing stronger partnerships around the county and plans are just starting to develop a migration theme festival along the coast next autumn ... watch this space!