

## Review of bird sightings 2018



### January

The year began unsettled, mild and windy at times before there was a quieter and colder spell from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> with high pressure becoming more dominant. The remainder of the month however saw a return to unsettled conditions with westerly winds driving fronts across the country at regular intervals and it was generally mild.

The flock of 42 Mute Swans remained at Donkey Street from December and 42 Canada Geese were seen at the Willop Basin on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, whilst six Greylag Geese flew over Botolph's Bridge on the 26<sup>th</sup>. About 175 Brent Geese during the month, including counts of 18 flying east past Samphire Hoe on the 6<sup>th</sup>, 20 east there the next day, 37 flying west past Battery Point on the 8<sup>th</sup>, 30 flying east past Samphire Hoe on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 28 flying east past Hythe on the 21<sup>st</sup>. Small numbers of Shelduck were noted at the Willop Basin, Nickolls Quarry and Samphire, whilst at least five Mandarin were at Folks' Wood.

Two Gadwall and 8 Wigeon flew east past Samphire Hoe on the 8<sup>th</sup>, with a single Wigeon flying west there the next day and on the 12<sup>th</sup> there was a single Wigeon at Nickolls Quarry and three at the Willop Basin. Teal were noted from the Willop Basin (peak of 30) and Chesterfield Wood (peak of 60), whilst eight flew east past Samphire Hoe on the 13<sup>th</sup>. Nine Pintail flew west past Samphire Hoe on the 9<sup>th</sup>, with four flying west there on the 27<sup>th</sup> and a pair west the following day. A single Shoveler flew west over Beachborough Lakes on the 17<sup>th</sup> and the only Tufted Duck noted was at the Willop Basin on the 2<sup>nd</sup>. Common Scoter were present in low numbers, with a peak of 50 on the sea off the Willop Outfall on the 4<sup>th</sup>, whilst a Red-breasted Merganser flew east past Samphire Hoe on the 7<sup>th</sup>.

Red-throated Diver counts were modest, with a peak of 68 flying east past Samphire Hoe on the 13<sup>th</sup> and further counts of 43 flying east there the next day and 50 flying west on the 25<sup>th</sup>. There was a notable movement of 65 Fulmars east past Samphire Hoe on the 7<sup>th</sup>, with 29 east there the next day and several pairs were present on the cliffs at either end of the site, whilst Gannets were present in good numbers throughout with a peak of 350 off Samphire Hoe on the 8<sup>th</sup>.

There were some exceptional counts of Cormorants, with a peak of 3,445 flying east past Samphire Hoe on the 10<sup>th</sup> (which was more than double the previous record total). These birds originated from a roost site at Dungeness and were heading out into the Channel to feed, with some groups seen fishing off Folkestone Pier and Samphire Hoe, including a flock of 1,550 off the latter site on the 14<sup>th</sup>. Up to two Shags were seen at Samphire Hoe on several dates, with singles at Copt Point and Mill Point.

Little Egrets were present at West Hythe dam (2), Copt Point (2), Botolph's Bridge and Samphire Hoe and Little Grebes were reported from the Willop Basin, Botolph's Bridge, Nickolls Quarry and Beachborough Lakes. Great Crested Grebe counts peaked at just 12 off Folkestone Pier on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 12 flying east past Samphire Hoe on the 8<sup>th</sup>.

An immature **White-tailed Eagle** was seen on the cliff edge at Abbotscliffe on the 14<sup>th</sup> and a Red Kite flew south over Beachborough Lakes on the 11<sup>th</sup>. Up to two Marsh Harriers continued to be noted in the Donkey Street area during the month, whilst roosting at Nickolls Quarry overnight. Away from the cliffs Peregrines were seen at Donkey Street and Hythe. Water Rails were wintering at West Hythe, Nickolls Quarry (at least two) and Beachborough Lakes (2).

The peak Lapwing counts were just 50 at the Willop Basin on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 26 at Capel-le-Ferne on the 12<sup>th</sup>, whilst the Ringed Plover roost at Folkestone Beach held 14 birds on the 7<sup>th</sup>. Purple Sandpipers were noted at the Willop Outfall, Hythe Redoubt (3), Hythe (2) and Battery Point (2), and there were up to five Sanderling at the Willop Outfall, whilst four Dunlin flew east past Samphire Hoe on the 8<sup>th</sup>. Up to three Jack Snipe and 52 Snipe were counted at the Willop Basin and there were single Snipe at Samphire Hoe on the 17<sup>th</sup> and Beachborough Lakes on the 25<sup>th</sup>. There was a peak of six Woodcock at Kiln Wood on the 27<sup>th</sup> and a Curlew was seen on several dates at the Willop Basin whilst one flew west past Samphire Hoe on the 29<sup>th</sup>. Up to two Green Sandpipers remained in the Botolph's Bridge/Nickolls Quarry area and Redshank counts included six at Folkestone Harbour and 13 at the Willop Basin.

There was an excellent series of Great Skua sightings off Samphire Hoe including a record winter count of seven flying east there on the 7<sup>th</sup> and six heading east there the next day. Kittiwakes were also present in good numbers, with counts including 304 flying east past Samphire Hoe on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 103 flying east there on the 14<sup>th</sup>, whilst an adult Little Gull flew west there on the 25<sup>th</sup>. A juvenile **Glaucous Gull** flew west past Samphire Hoe on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and a 'Viking' Gull (Glaucous x Herring hybrid) was seen at the Willop Basin on the 4<sup>th</sup>. An unseasonable Sandwich Tern flew east past Samphire Hoe on the 13<sup>th</sup> and large auks were present in very good numbers, with counts including 830 Razorbills and 2,800 Guillemots flying east past Samphire Hoe on the 8<sup>th</sup>, 450 Razorbills flying east there on the 14<sup>th</sup>, 270 Guillemots and 2,000 Razorbills flying east there on the 27<sup>th</sup> and 715 Razorbills flying east there on the 28<sup>th</sup>.



Purple Sandpiper at Hythe (Phil Smith)



Razorbills at Samphire Hoe (Ian Roberts)

A Short-eared Owl flew over Samphire Hoe on the 15<sup>th</sup>, Firecrests were noted at Saltwood, Seabrook and Enbrook Park (4) and two **Bearded Tits** were seen at Nickolls Quarry on the 26<sup>th</sup>, whilst Marsh Tits were recorded from Bargrove Wood and Kiln Wood. Cetti's Warblers were noted at Botolph's Bridge and Nickolls Quarry (3). Chiffchaffs were wintering at Beachborough Lakes (2), Enbrook Park (2) and in a garden in Folkestone, whilst Blackcaps were noted at gardens in St. Hilda's Road and Lynton Road (2) in Hythe, in Brockhill Road and Quarry Road in Saltwood, at Seabrook and in East Cliff Gardens in Folkestone.



Black Redstart at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



Rock Pipit at Samphire Hoe (Ian Roberts)

A Fieldfare flew in off the sea at Samphire Hoe on the 6<sup>th</sup> but wintering numbers were low with peak counts of just 20 at Botolph's Bridge on the 17<sup>th</sup> and 15 at Kiln Wood on the 27<sup>th</sup>, whilst Redwings were also in scant supply with the notable exception of 300 at Beachborough Lakes on the 17<sup>th</sup>. A Black Redstart was seen at Samphire Hoe on several dates, with two there on the 17<sup>th</sup> and there were two at Folkestone Downs on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and one in a garden in Hythe on the 4<sup>th</sup>. Meadow Pipit counts included 57 at Botolph's Bridge and 20 at Samphire Hoe, whilst there were 22 Rock Pipits at the latter site. A Redpoll and up to 50 Siskins were seen at Kiln Wood, with a further five Siskins along the Hythe Canal.

## February

The first week of the month was generally cold with predominately northerly or easterly winds, whilst the middle fortnight was often milder, with westerly and south-westerly winds, and it turned changeable in the second week. A settled spell followed but then from the 26<sup>th</sup> a very cold easterly airflow brought some severe overnight frosts leading to the Royal Military Canal icing over, whilst daytime temperatures were barely above freezing and there was some significant snowfall.

Small numbers of Brent Geese were noted moving east during February, including 25 passing Princes Parade on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 24 passing at Seabrook on the 18<sup>th</sup>, whilst the breeding pair of Canada Geese had returned to Nickolls Quarry by the end of the month. Four Wigeon flew west at Samphire Hoe on the 1<sup>st</sup>, a drake Eider flew east there on the 5<sup>th</sup>, a Red-breasted Merganser flew east there on the 15<sup>th</sup>, two Wigeon flew east there on the 21<sup>st</sup> and six Pintail flew east on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. Elsewhere there were two Gadwall on the Willop Sewer on the 10<sup>th</sup>, a peak of 62 Teal at the Willop Basin on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and the Common Scoter flock in Hythe Bay increased to 105 by the 28<sup>th</sup>. The cold spell at end of the month displaced a few wildfowl, with two Wigeon and ten Pintail flying east past Samphire Hoe on the 26<sup>th</sup>, when two Wigeon were seen on the sea off Seabrook and six were at the Willop Basin, 20 Pintail flying east past Samphire Hoe on the 27<sup>th</sup> and a pair of Pochard, a pair of Teal and seven Tufted Ducks seen at Nickolls Quarry on the 28<sup>th</sup>.

Red-throated Diver counts included 40 flying west past the Willop Outfall on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 25 flying east past Samphire Hoe on the 6<sup>th</sup> and a total of 174 flying east past Seabrook on the 27<sup>th</sup>, whilst Gannets remained in abundance throughout, including 320 seen off Samphire Hoe on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 350 flying east there on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 200 seen off Princes Parade on the 26<sup>th</sup>. Exceptional numbers of Cormorants continued to be seen having left the roost at Dungeness, with peaks of 2,355 seen off Samphire Hoe on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and yet another new record count of 3,535 flying east past Seabrook on the 6<sup>th</sup>.



Cormorants passing Samphire Hoe (Ian Roberts)

A Shag was noted off Samphire Hoe on the 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> and single Little Egrets were seen at Beachborough Lakes, Botolph's Bridge and Samphire Hoe. Great Crested Grebe numbers increased during February, with peaks of 46 on the sea off Samphire Hoe, 55 off Folkestone Pier, 106 off Seabrook and 150 off the Willop Outfall. A Red Kite flew east over Samphire Hoe and Abbotscliffe on the 15<sup>th</sup>, up to two Marsh Harriers continued to frequent the Nickolls Quarry area and a Merlin was seen at Botolph's Bridge on the 10<sup>th</sup>. Water Rails were noted at their usual haunts with a peak count of four at Princes Parade on the 4<sup>th</sup>.

Lapwing numbers increased during the month, with 180 at the Willop Basin on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 150 near Bartholomew's Wood on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 207 at Hillhurst Farm the next day, whilst a flock of 39 Golden Plovers was also seen near Bartholomew's Wood on the 10<sup>th</sup> and at least 12 Ringed Plovers remained in the roost at Folkestone Beach, with a single at the Willop Outfall on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. The cold weather at the end of the month led to some displacement of waders with 14 Golden Plovers at Church Hougham on the 27<sup>th</sup>, a Lapwing at Samphire Hoe on the 28<sup>th</sup>, when two flew west along the beach at Hythe, and three Snipe at Samphire Hoe the same day.

Purple Sandpipers remained at Battery Point (2) and Hythe (at least 2), whilst up to 14 Sanderling were seen at the Willop Outfall, with up to two Curlew at the Willop Basin, a Woodcock at Scene Wood and up to two Green Sandpipers in the Botolph's Bridge/Nickolls Quarry area, whilst one flew west over Beachborough Lakes on the 15<sup>th</sup>. The excellent series of Great Skua sightings off Samphire Hoe continued, including three flying east there on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and four flying east on the 6<sup>th</sup>, whilst one lingered offshore between the 22<sup>nd</sup> and the 28<sup>th</sup>, and another was seen from Folkestone Pier on the 9<sup>th</sup>. Kittiwake counts included 100 flying east past Samphire Hoe on the 5<sup>th</sup>, 112 east there on the 6<sup>th</sup> and 100 east there on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. Large auk numbers dwindled during February but still included notable counts of 275 Guillemot and 500 Razorbills flying east past Samphire Hoe on the 6<sup>th</sup>.

A Barn Owl was seen at Donkey Street on the 10<sup>th</sup> and a pair of Ravens appear to be attempting to nest again at Samphire Hoe. Firecrests were noted at Mill Point, Paraker Wood, Hythe (2) and Enbrook Park (2), whilst two Chiffchaffs remained at the latter site and Blackcaps were frequenting gardens in Folkestone, Seabrook and Hythe (2). A flock of around 2,000 Starlings flew east over Hythe seafront shortly after dawn on the 21<sup>st</sup>. Fieldfare numbers increased to up to 32 at Church Hougham, 70 near Bartholomew's Wood and 175 at Botolph's Bridge, whilst cold weather at the end of the month produced singles at Abbotscliffe and Samphire Hoe, with seven in a garden in Hythe, but there were no notable counts of Redwings.



Cormorants passing Samphire Hoe Ian Roberts)



Fieldfare at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)

Single Black Redstarts were seen at Battery Point, Hythe Ranges and Samphire Hoe during the month, whilst a flock of seven Stonechats near the Willop Sewage Works on the 18<sup>th</sup> and a peak count of 172 Meadow Pipits at Botolph's Bridge on the 10<sup>th</sup> were noteworthy. Up to 22 Siskins were noted along the Seabrook Stream at Horn Street and a stubble field at Abbotscliffe attracted 40 Yellowhammers, 50 Chaffinches and 200 Linnets.