

White-tailed Eagle

Haliaeetus albicilla

Category A / C

Very rare vagrant

2 records

Breeds along the Atlantic coast of Norway and around the Baltic coast of Sweden, Finland and Germany. Most adult pairs are resident but juveniles and immatures wander extensively in winter, mainly south to south-west, with some regular wintering areas in north-eastern France and the Netherlands. Following an earlier decline, recent increases have been reported from northern Europe. At the same time a reintroduction project has been gaining success in northern and western Scotland, with a total of 47-52 pairs fledging 46 young in 2010 – the most successful year yet of the scheme. The source of the records in Kent is uncertain.



White-tailed Eagle at Walland Marsh (Martin Casemore)

A very rare vagrant to Kent with 24 historic records up to 1932, but only three since: in 1988, 1990 and 1998, before the most recent in 2012. The three previous modern records were in October (2) and November, and all related to immature birds. The 1988 bird, first seen over Folkestone, was seen at Elmley the following day and remained in the Sheppey and North Kent area into 1989, when it was sadly poisoned. The 1990 bird was seen flying north over St. Margaret's Bay and the 1998 individual was at Graveney for two days.

There have been two area records. The first was seen flying west over Shornecliffe Road in Folkestone by Hugh Coleman on the 15th November 1988 and was then found on the Isle of Sheppey the next day, where it overwintered before meeting an unfortunate end (as detailed above). The second was seen in a field by the railway crossing over Botolph's Bridge road by Philip Sharp for five minutes from 14:15 on the 14th February 2012 when it flew west. It was relocated on Walland Marsh two days later, where it was photographed, before it made a surprise reappearance in the Folkestone and Hythe area on the 19th: after first having headed south over Hawkinge it was then seen flying south-west over Saltwood by Paul Howe at 11:20.

The records by year are shown in Figure 1.

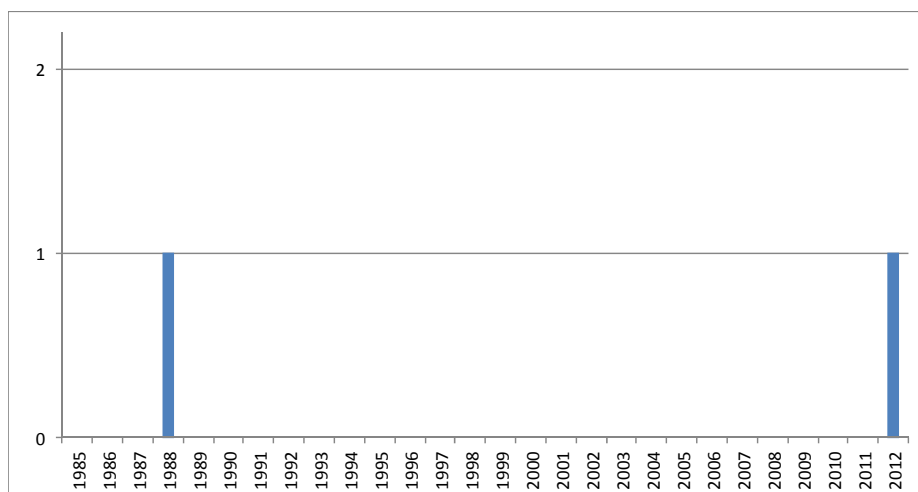


Figure 1: White-tailed Eagle records at Folkestone and Hythe

The two records occurred in February and November, as demonstrated in figure 2.

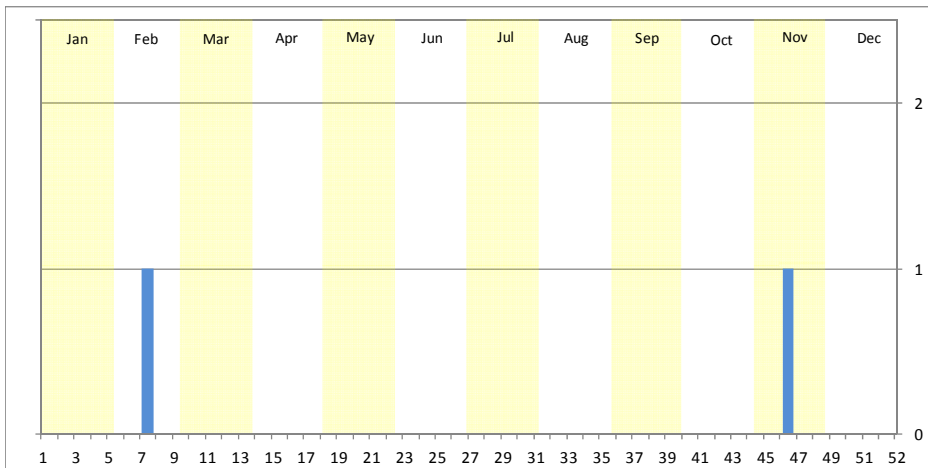


Figure 2: White-tailed Eagle records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

The distribution of winter records recorded in the BTO/KOS Atlas (2007 – 2012) is shown in figure 3. These records all relate to the one mobile individual.

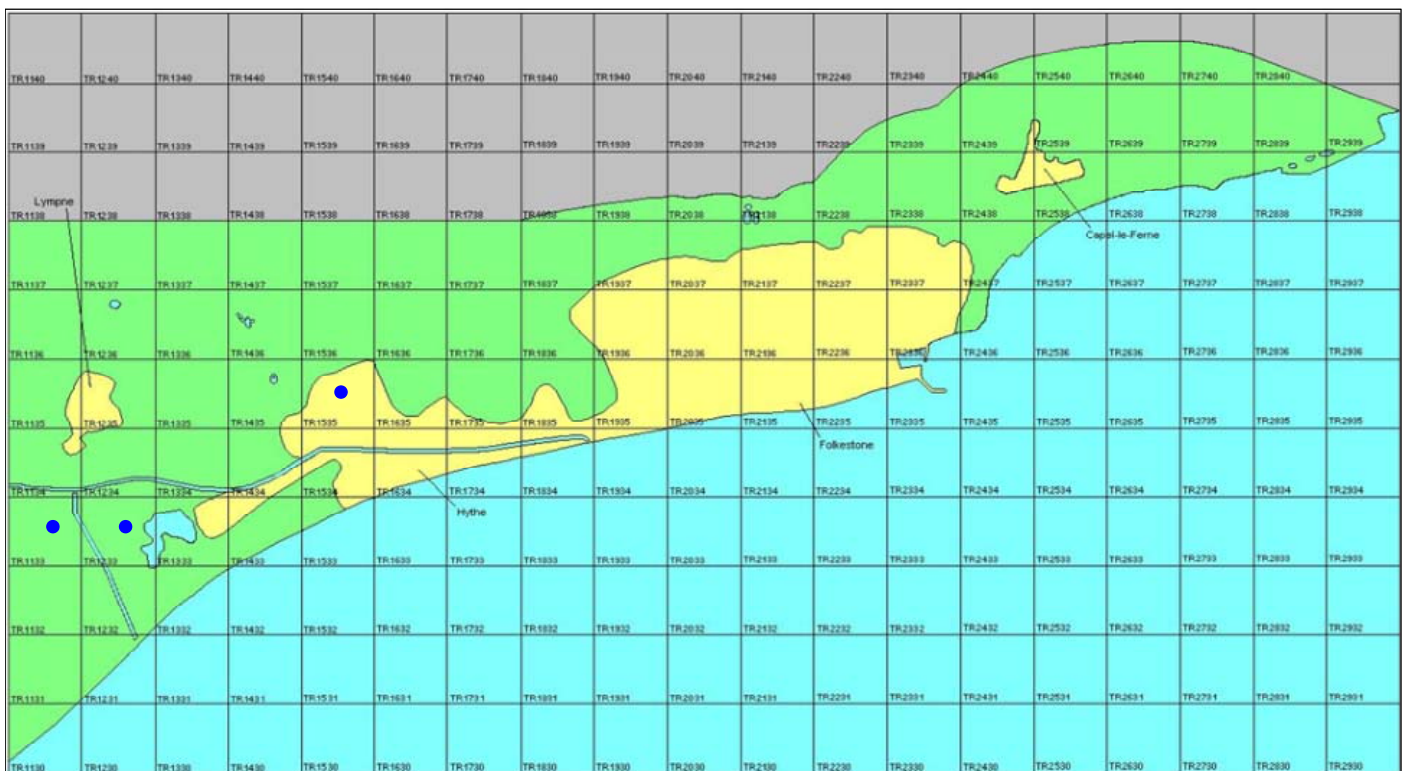


Figure 3: Wintering distribution of White-tailed Eagle at Folkestone and Hythe (2007 – 2012 BTO/KOS Atlas)

The full list of records is as follows:

1988 Folkestone, immature flew west, 15th November (H. Coleman)

2012 Botolph's Bridge, immature seen in field before flying west, 14th February (P. Sharp), presumed same flew south-west over Saltwood, 19th February (P. Howe)