

Baillon's Crake

Porzana pusilla

Category A

Very rare vagrant

2 records

Breeds mainly in southern Europe but the distribution is scattered and imperfectly known. Very scarce on the near continent. Main winter quarters probably in sub-Saharan Africa.

There had been 87 records in Britain to the end of 2015, the majority (72%) of which were recorded before 1950. Similarly there have been six records for Kent in the same period, but only two since 1950. Kent records are evenly split between late spring (May / June) and autumn (September / October).

The first area (and third county) record was documented in the *Zoologist* (1871, p.2,443): "last month Baillon's Crake, three Grey Phalaropes and the Common Cormorant were taken in the Hythe Canal by Mr. F. Young – *Charles Gordon; Museum, Dover, November 24, 1870*".

Ticehurst includes this occurrence in his *A History of the Birds of Kent* (1909) and he also mentions, though discredits, a claim that a coastguard took a clutch of two eggs of this species from Folkestone Warren in 1884: "at Stevens' Auction Rooms, in Covent Garden, was sold on April 24th, 1861, 'the superb and unique collection of British birds' eggs, belonging to the museum of a late celebrated physician.' Lot 374 comprised the following: – 'Baillon's Crake. Two, Warren, near Folkestone, taken by a coastguard in 1834, who kept the bird partially skinned'. These eggs were apparently purchased by the late Rev. R. Harvey, as they figure with the same history in Lot 211 of the sale of his collection in the same auction rooms on 9th December, 1869. The latter circumstance has been lately referred to in the *Natural History* columns of the *Field* (December 22nd, 1906) as evidence of Baillon's Crake having bred in Kent". "The editor was apparently unaware, however, of the source whence Harvey obtained the eggs, and though it is not inconceivable that this species may have bred in Kent, and Folkestone Warren is not an impossible location, the inclusion of these eggs in the collection sold in 1861 does not add to their authenticity, and of their supposed origin I do not believe a word"!

Almost 150 years after the first sighting one was seen at Beachborough Lakes by Steve Tomlinson on the 21st and 22nd March 2018.

Confirmation of the two area records is as follows:

1870 Hythe, one caught in the canal, October, exact date not known (F. Young)

2018 Beachborough Lakes, one, 21st to 22nd March 2018 (S. Tomlinson)