

Hoopoe

Upupa epops

Category A

Formerly regular, bred on one occasion. Now a very rare vagrant 23 records (11 recent)

Since the late nineteenth century there has been a decrease in the population in Europe, particularly in the more northern and western parts of its range. Having bred in Britain in a number of occasions it is now absent as a breeding species, as it is from Fenno-Scandia and the Low Countries. However it remains a widespread breeding species across most of continental Europe. Most cross the Sahara to winter in Africa but a few remain in the Mediterranean Basin.

Ticehurst in his *A History of the Birds of Kent* (1909) gave several instances of probable breeding in Kent, but considered that conclusive proof was lacking. Harrison, however, in his *The Birds of Kent* (1953) recorded successful breeding at Hythe in 1948.



Hoopoe at Hythe (Brian Harper)

Harrison recorded that the occurrences during the latter half of the eighteenth century were more voluminous than in the first half of the twentieth, but remained hopeful that “we may perhaps look forward to a time when it may become established as a summer resident, even if only a scarce one”.

The contraction in its European range is doubtless the main cause for a decrease in Kentish records which was observed over the last century. It is now a scarce but regular passage migrant to Kent.

Henry Ulyett in his *Rambles of a Naturalist Round Folkestone* (1880) includes the Hoopoe in the list of species recorded in the neighbourhood of Folkestone, within a radius of six miles from the town hall. Whilst this range extends further inland than the current Folkestone and Hythe area, so is not conclusive evidence of occurrence here, it does suggest that the species was present locally in the days when it was more regular in the county. Ticehurst (1909) mentions Hythe as one locality where it has been recorded.

The first dated occurrence in the Folkestone and Hythe area was in 1948, when a pair bred at Hythe, successfully raising four young. This remarkable event is the only confirmed breeding record in the county. A pair were seen again the following year but failed to breed. The details were given to Harrison (1953) by W. S. Nevin, and were described to him as follows: “Mr W. S. Nevin informs me a pair nested successfully, bringing off a brood of four, in the summer of 1948, near Hythe. The birds were afforded every protection. In a further letter he informed me that he received repeated messages about Hoopoes near Hythe in the spring of 1949, but that as he was situated he could not investigate personally. The birds had returned to the same large walled-garden where they had previously nested. The property, now a convent, could not be visited. The gate-keeper gardener, however, informed him that the Hoopoes had again nested that summer, but that the tree where they had built their nest was felled. He had rescued the four eggs, which he placed on top of the wall surrounding the garden, where they remained for weeks, finally disintegrating and disappearing entirely”.

The site where the Hoopoes nested was presumably the Marist Sister’s convent at 53-55 Seabrook Road in Hythe, though this cannot be proven beyond doubt.

There were further records from Hythe in five years during the 1950s, some of which might have related to the same returning pair, or perhaps even their progeny. There were also sightings in the same decade from Folkestone in three years, Lympne (1952) and West Hythe (1957), though details are scant. Following the first modern record at Hougham in 1980, there have been a further ten since 1985, including six in the last nine years, as shown in figure 1.

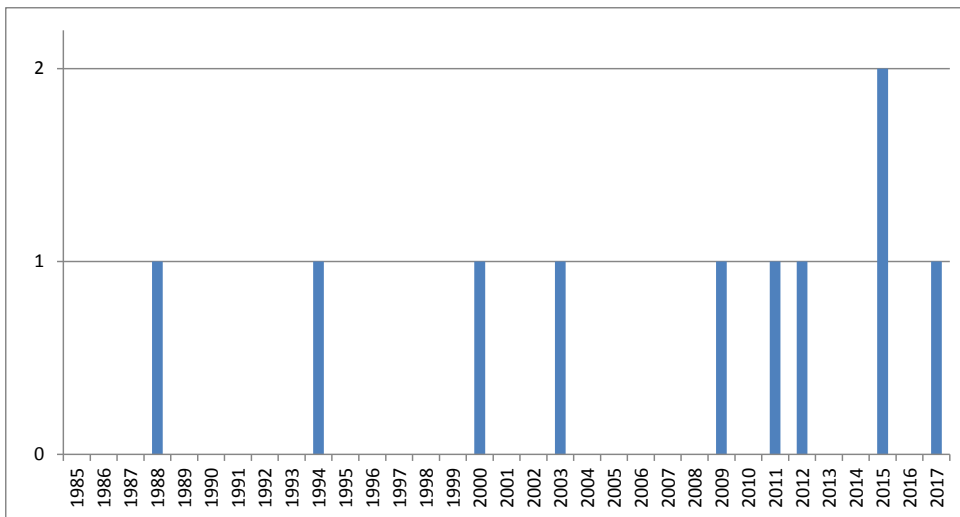


Figure 1: Hoopoe records since 1985 at Folkestone and Hythe

Two-thirds of arrivals have occurred between the 5th April (week 14) and 10th May (week 19), with a peak in week 16, and with single records in June and July in the 1950s. One was seen in late August 2009, with the other autumn records also dating from the 1950s, including a particularly late bird on the 10th November 1955. The records by week are given in figure 2.

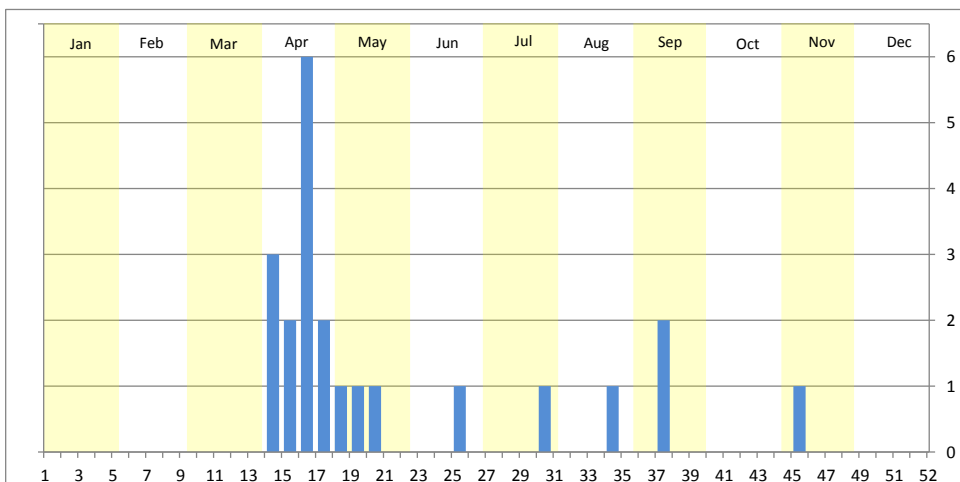


Figure 2: Hoopoe records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Whilst older records are primarily from the Hythe area, modern records are more widely scattered, although there are three from Hythe, and singles from Saltwood, Seabrook, Cheriton, Folkestone, Mill Point, Capel-le-Ferne, Church Hougham and Samphire Hoe.

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1948** Hythe, pair bred and raised four young (W. S. Nevin)
- 1949** Hythe, pair seen again but failed to breed (per W. S. Nevin)
- 1952** Hythe, one, 7th to 9th April (W. S. Nevin, H. M. Rowland)
- 1952** Lympne, one, 3rd May (reported)
- 1953** Hythe, one, 27th July (K. Comyn)
- 1954** Folkestone, one, 5th April (W. S. Nevin, D. Kesby)
- 1955** Hythe, one found shot, 26th April (H. Schreiber)
- 1955** Folkestone, one, 10th November (reported)
- 1956** Folkestone, one, 10th to 15th September (M. Jeaffreson)
- 1957** West Hythe, two, 24th June (W. S. Nevin)
- 1958** Hythe, one, 11th to 14th September (W. S. Nevin *et al*)
- 1959** Hythe, one, 8th April (per Kent Bird Report)
- 1980** Church Hougham, one, 16th April (M. P. Sutherland, I. P. Hodgson)

- 1988** Mill Point, one flew west, 5th May (I. A. Roberts)
1994 Capel-le-Ferne Gun Site, one, 22nd April (D. A. Gibson)
2000 Cheriton, one flew west over “Cheriton Sports Ground” at midday, 8th April (reported)
2003 Seabrook, one, 10th May (reported)
2009 Samphire Hoe, one, 25th August, photographed (P. Smith, P. Holt, D. Smith, I. A. Roberts *et al*)
2011 Saltwood, one, approximately 18th April (reported on local news)
2012 Hythe, one on Imperial Golf Course, 19th April, photographed (B. Harper, M. Harper, I. A. Roberts, M. Whybrow)
2015 Hythe, one at Range Road, 18th April, photographed (I. A. Roberts, J. Tomsett, B. Harper, S. McMinn *et al*)
2015 Hythe, one at Ferguson Close, 16th May, with it or another near Waitrose at around the same time (per J. Tomsett)
2017 Folkestone, 29th April, one in the Dixwell Road / Turketel Road area (per B. Harper)



Hoopoe at Hythe (Brian Harper)



Hoopoe at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)