

Dark-eyed Junco

Junco hyemalis

Category A

Very rare vagrant

1 record

Breeds in Alaska and Canada to Newfoundland, and in north-east USA, also (in other forms in western USA). Winters over much of the USA and in southern Canada. Northern populations are largely migratory.

There had been 37 previous records in Britain and over a third had occurred in the last decade. Just over half have arrived in May.



Dark-eyed Junco at Folkestone (Susan Dixon)

The first British record was in Kent, at Dungeness, in 1960 (though there had been a previous record in Ireland in 1905) and the other Kent record was also at Dungeness, on 7th to 9th April 2008.

The only area record is as follows:

2010 Folkestone, probably adult male, 15th to 17th May, photographed (S. Dixon)



Dark-eyed Junco at Folkestone (Susan Dixon)

An account of the first area record is given below.

Dark-eyed Junco at Folkestone 15th to 17th May 2010

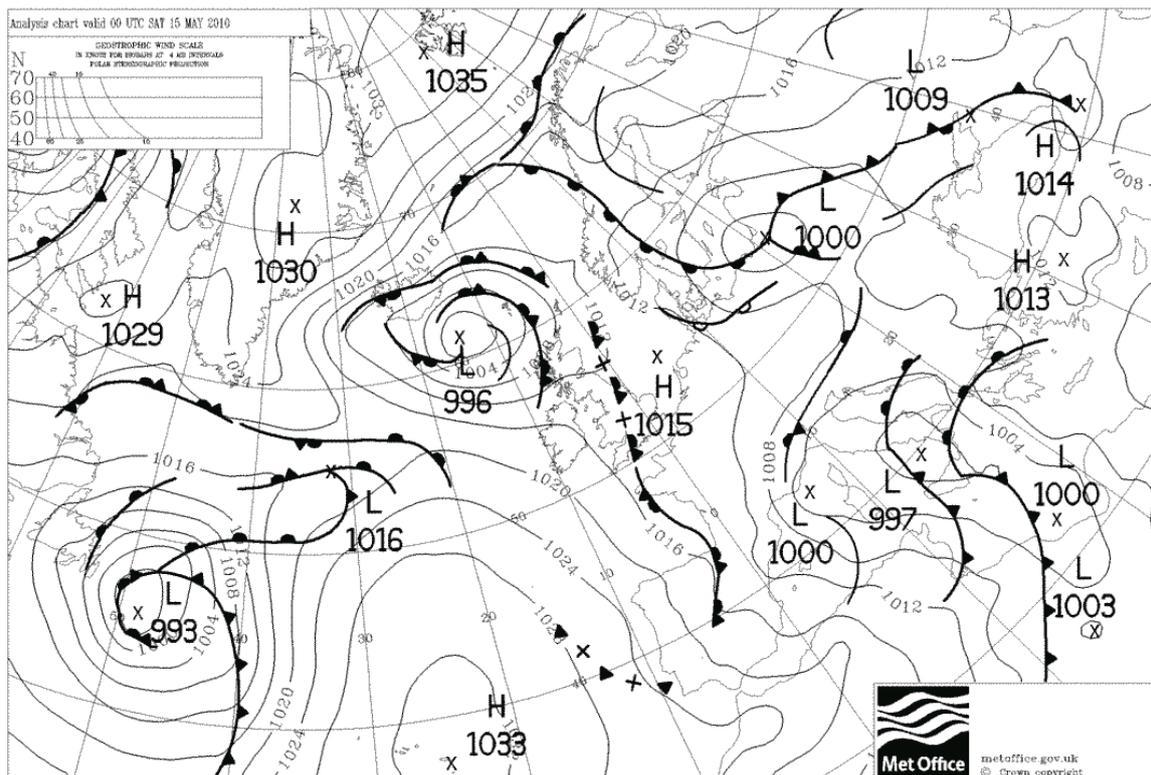
(Susan Dixon, documented by Ian A Roberts)

Weather conditions:

May 2010 saw an influx of 8 White-throated Sparrows, 2 Dark-eyed Juncos and the first House Finch into the UK. At the time these species were on the move north in North America a series of low pressure systems were moving up the eastern seaboard producing easterly winds which forced northbound passerines offshore. Some of these were known to have taken refuge on boats, with 5 White-throated Sparrows being seen aboard the Queen Mary II as she left New York on the 29th April. Four were still on board on 5th May before the ship passed Scilly, Cornwall and Devon in daylight hours but, when the ship docked in Southampton at 6.30 a.m. on 6th May only one was still on deck, with the other 3 presumably having departed to somewhere along the coast of South-west England.

The other Dark-eyed Junco landed on a boat in the North Sea on the 19th May and there were a further 2 White-throated Sparrows in the UK in June 2010.

The map shows the pressure chart on 15th May which shows an example of two of the low pressure systems active in the Atlantic at the time, though if the bird were ship-assisted (which seems likely) it would probably have left North America about a week before.



Circumstances of the find:

On 15th May 2010 Susan Dixon noticed an unusual bird visiting the feeders in her garden in Foreland Avenue, Folkestone. From the literature available she was able to identify it as a Dark-eyed Junco. Unfortunately due to some technical glitches with email it was not until the evening of the 18th (when the bird had departed) that the news reached anyone else. A search of the area on the 19th was unable to relocate it and there were no further sightings.

Description of the bird (from photographed):

Size, shape, jizz: A typically finch-shaped bird.

Head and upperparts: Slate grey, with greyish-blue edges and tips to coverts and remiges. Whitish outer-tail feathers.

Underparts: White belly sharply demarcated from grey breast.

Bare parts: Dark eye. Pale pink bill and legs.

Voice: It was not heard to call.

Age/sex: probably an adult male. A first-summer would generally show retained juvenile tertials, which are more worn and with browner edges than in the adult and generally show whitish tips to the outer webs. Sometimes there are also a few retained juvenile outer greater coverts, which are more worn and browner and with distinct buffish to whitish tips to the outer webs (indistinct paler tips can sometimes be seen in adult plumage). Also the alula and primary coverts are browner with less bluish-tinted edges.

Comments on the record:

This record was accepted by the BBRC and appears in their report for 2010. It is the first Nearctic passerine to be recorded locally.



Dark-eyed Junco at Folkestone (Susan Dixon)