

## Great White Egret

*Ardea alba*

Category A

Rare migrant and winter visitor

22 records

The Great White Egret has been increasing its range, both breeding and wintering, and was removed from the list of species considered by the BBRC in 2005, after just over 300 occurrences (BBRC, 2020). It is now a regular breeding species as close as the Netherlands and winters widely in France (Snow & Perrins, 1998). It first bred successfully in the UK in 2012 in Somerset, following potential breeding behaviour in 2010 (Holt, 2013), and in 2017 at least 8 pairs, possibly as many as 12, nested in Britain (Holling *et al*, 2019).

In Kent it was a former vagrant, and is now a regular annual visitor, predominately during the winter months (KOS, 2020). There had only been nine records in the county before 2002 (KOS, 2020) but it has occurred annually since and by 2017 up to 20 could be seen at Dungeness during the autumn.



Great White Egret at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)

It was first recorded at Folkestone and Hythe in January 2010 when one was found by Charles and Tricia Keen at West Hythe during a period of very cold weather. It remained in the West Hythe/Botolph's Bridge area however when the weather improved and lingered for over seven weeks, though it wandered widely. The following November one, quite possibly the same returning individual, was seen in the same area for just over eight weeks. The following winter saw yet another sighting in the Botolph's Bridge area, which again arrived during a cold snap, though this time it did not stay for long, and there was another report there in 2013.

Elsewhere two were seen and photographed as they flew east past Samphire Hoe on the 5<sup>th</sup> July 2011, one was seen at Westenhanger on the 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2012 and three flew east distantly past Abbotscliffe on the 17<sup>th</sup> May 2014. Further singles have been recorded at Botolph's Bridge on the 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2015, the Willop Basin on the 13<sup>th</sup> October 2017, flying west at Mill Point on the 7<sup>th</sup> November 2017, West Hythe on the 5<sup>th</sup> March 2018 and Botolph's Bridge on the 15<sup>th</sup> April 2018.

One flew east over Donkey Street on the 18<sup>th</sup> November and up to two were present there between the 26<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> December 2018 with at least one remaining until the 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2019, and there were four further records in 2019. In 2020 one was seen at West Hythe on the 19<sup>th</sup> February, singles flew in off the sea at Capel-le-Ferne Gun Site on the 11<sup>th</sup> September and Abbotscliffe on the 12<sup>th</sup> October, whilst one was seen in the Aldergate Bridge/Donkey Street area from the 7<sup>th</sup> October.



Great White Egret at West Hythe (Dale Gibson)



Great White Egrets at Samphire Hoe (Colin Fisher)

With records in ten of the last 11 years, and with the species being seen with increasing frequency in the county, further occurrences seem highly likely and 2018 was the first year to produce four sightings.

The flock in 2014 was the largest multiple occurrence to date. Confirmation of the records by year is provided by figure 1. The records from West Hythe/Botolph's Bridge between 2010 and 2013 have been treated as separate individuals in the figures.

The records by year are shown in figure 1.

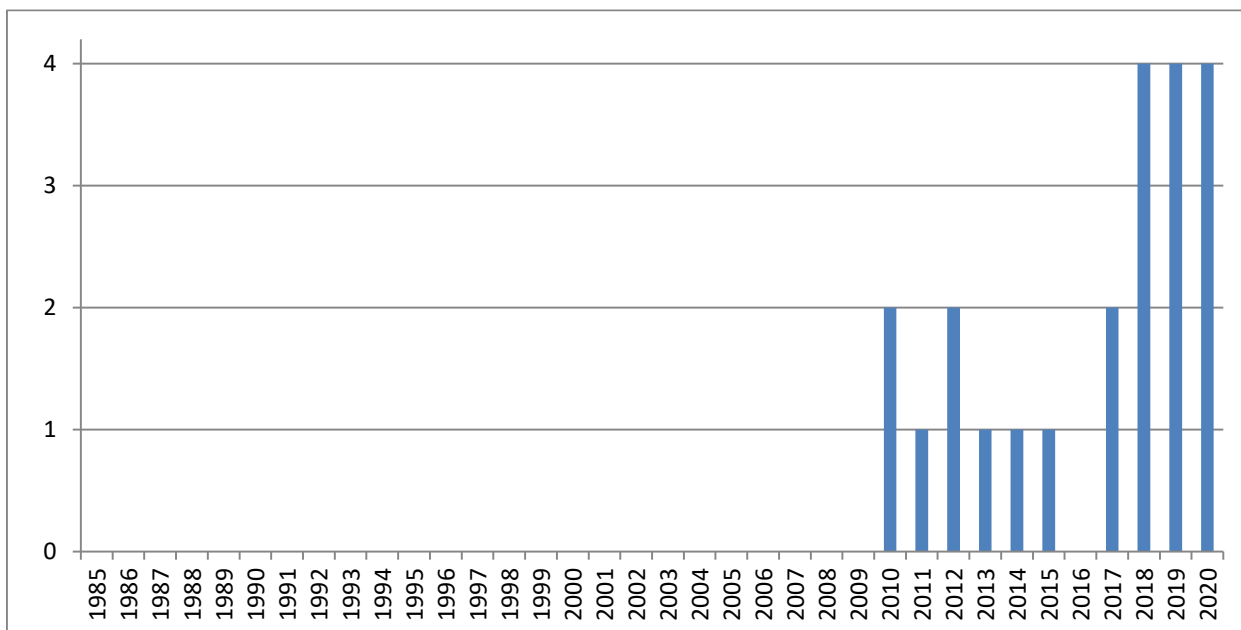


Figure 1: Great White Egret records at Folkestone and Hythe

The records by week are given in figure 2 and figure 3 shows the distribution of records by tetrad.

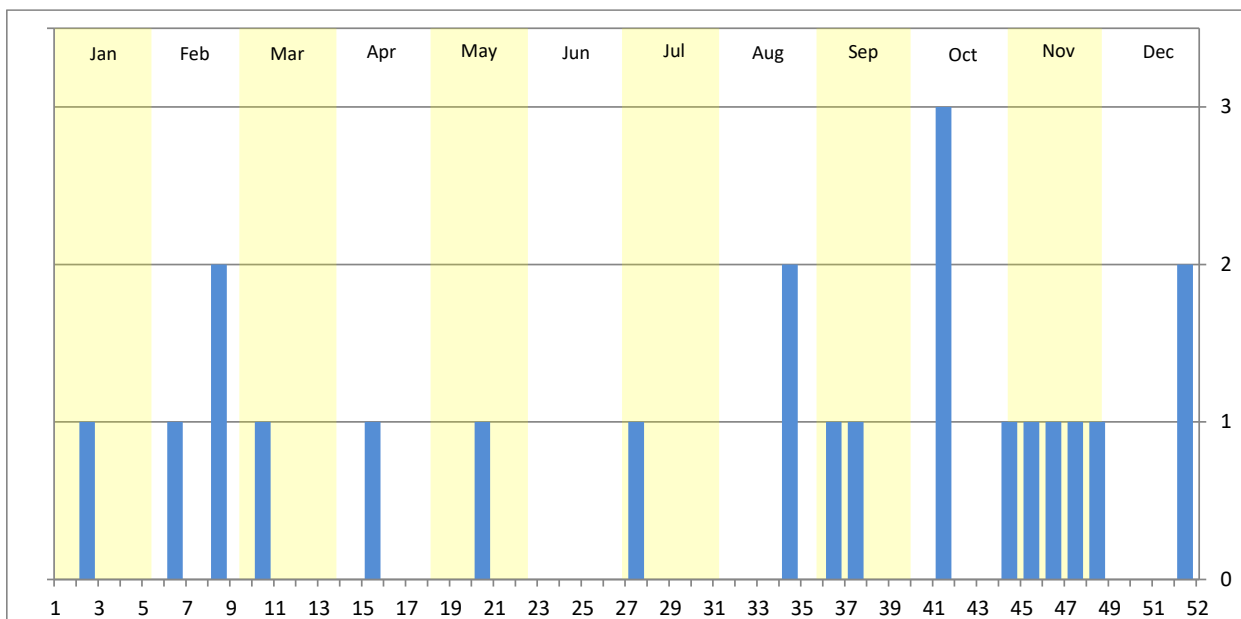


Figure 2: Great White Egret records at Folkestone and Hythe by week



Figure 3: Distribution of all Great White Egret records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The full list of records is as follows:

- 2010** Botolph's Bridge/West Hythe area, one, 10<sup>th</sup> January to 22<sup>nd</sup> March, photographed (C. & T. Keen, I. A. Roberts *et al*)
- 2010** Botolph's Bridge/West Hythe area, one, 27<sup>th</sup> November to 24<sup>th</sup> January 2011, photographed (B. & M. Harper, I. A. Roberts *et al*)
- 2011** Samphire Hoe, two flew east, 5<sup>th</sup> July, photographed (C. Fisher, P. Holt)
- 2012** Botolph's Bridge/West Hythe area, 7<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> February, one, photographed (I. A. Roberts *et al*), also reported at Nickolls Quarry on 27<sup>th</sup> January
- 2012** Westenhangar, one, 23<sup>rd</sup> August (D. Featherbe)
- 2013** Botolph's Bridge, one flew south, 25<sup>th</sup> February (B. Findlay)
- 2014** Abbotscliffe, three flew east, 17<sup>th</sup> May, photographed (I. A. Roberts)
- 2015** Botolph's Bridge, one, then flew west, 22<sup>nd</sup> November (I. A. Roberts)
- 2017** Willop Basin, one, 13<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> October, also seen at Nickolls Quarry on latter date (I. A. Roberts, B. Harper)
- 2017** Mill Point, one flew west, 7<sup>th</sup> November (I. A. Roberts)
- 2018** West Hythe dam, one, 5<sup>th</sup> March (I. A. Roberts)
- 2018** Botolph's Bridge, one, 15<sup>th</sup> April, photographed (B. Harper)
- 2018** Donkey Street, one flew east, 18<sup>th</sup> November, photographed (I. A. Roberts)
- 2018** Donkey Street, one, 26<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> December, with two present on 28<sup>th</sup> December and one from 1<sup>st</sup> January to 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2019, photographed (D. Brown, C. Gillard, B. Harper *et al*)
- 2019** Copt Point, two flew west, 26<sup>th</sup> August (M. Collins)
- 2019** Folkestone Warren, one, 6<sup>th</sup> September (M. Collins, P. Holt)
- 2019** Botolph's Bridge, one, 3<sup>rd</sup> November (B. Harper)
- 2019** Donkey Street, two, 27<sup>th</sup> December (B. Harper)
- 2020** West Hythe, one, 19<sup>th</sup> February (I. & M. Marshall)
- 2020** Capel-le-Ferne Gun Site, one flew in off the sea, 11<sup>th</sup> September (D. A. Gibson)
- 2020** Aldergate Bridge, one flew east, 7<sup>th</sup> October (B. Harper), presumed same Donkey Street, 10<sup>th</sup> October (also seen in intervening period just outside the area near Abbot's Court Farm)
- 2020** Abbotscliffe, one flew in off the sea, 12<sup>th</sup> October, photographed (I. A. Roberts, P. Edmondson)

An account of the first area record is given below.

**Great White Egret at West Hythe  
10th January to 22nd March 2010**

(Charles and Tricia Keen, Ian A Roberts et al)

**Weather conditions:**

The bird arrived in the midst of a period of very cold weather which had frozen a lot of the ditches across the marsh. The canal cutting in the Botolph's Bridge / West Hythe area however stayed clear and also attracted a concentration of around 12 Grey Herons and 2 Little Egrets. Conditions on the near continent were severe and caused an unprecedented influx of Woodcock, amongst other things, into the local area. It seems likely that the conditions led to the Great White Egret being forced out of another wintering area, perhaps elsewhere on Romney Marsh, or further afield.

**Circumstances of the find:**

Charles and Tricia Keen found a Great White Egret at West Hythe on 10th January 2010. They emailed me some photos that evening and I visited the site the next morning, but only got brief and distant flight views. There was no sign on the 12th or 13th-15th, however it was reported further west along the canal at Gigger's Green (near Bilsington).

Saturday 16th January was a foul day and I received a real soaking through checking Gigger's Green, the Aldergate Bridge area and Botolph's Bridge, but it was well worth it as I eventually re-found the bird at the latter site, where it showed well.

It was seen by several other observers on that day and the next, including Brian Harper and Dale Gibson who took more photos.

I saw it on several other dates until 22nd March which was the last reported sighting. It wandered to the west of West Hythe, often frequenting the Selby Farm area, and ranging as far as Tame Lane (Burmarsh) and Gigger's Green.

**Description of the bird:**

Size, shape, jizz: At least as large as Grey Heron but more elegant in appearance, with a finer bill, a longer, slimmer neck and thinner legs. It dwarfed the Little Egrets which were also present.

Head and upperparts: Pure white.

Underparts: Pure white.

Bare parts: Dark iris, yellow eye-ring. Yellowish bill. Greyish-black legs and feet.

Voice: It was not heard to call.

**Comments on the record:**

The record was accepted by KOS rarities committee.



Great White Egret with Grey Heron at West Hythe  
(Charles and Tricia Keen)

## References

BBRC statistics: <https://www.bbrc.org.uk/main-information/statistics> (accessed 2020)

Holling, M. & the Rare Breeding Birds Panel, 2019. Rare breeding birds in the UK in 2017. *British Birds*, 112: 706-758

Holt, C., 2013. The changing status of the Great White Egret in Britain. *British Birds*, 106: 246-257.

Kent Bird Reports. Kent Ornithological Society

KOS Kent list: <https://kentos.org.uk/kent-list> (accessed 2020)

Snow, D. & Perrins, C.M., 1998. *The Birds of the Western Palearctic*. Oxford University Press.

## Acknowledgements

The tetrad map images were produced from the Ordnance Survey [Get-a-map service](#) and are reproduced with kind permission of [Ordnance Survey](#).



Great White Egret with Grey Herons at West Hythe (Ian Roberts)