

Smew

Mergellus albellus

Category A

Rare migrant and winter visitor

19 records

Breeds eastwards from Norway, through Finland into northern Russia. Those from Fenno-Scandia (and some from north-west Russia) winter in Britain, the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark (Snow & Perrins, 1998).

A scarce winter visitor to Kent, with occasional cold weather influxes (KOS, 2020).

The first occurrence was recorded by Roger Norman, who noted that Brian Uden had shot one along the Royal Military Canal between Palmarsh and West Hythe on the 26th February 1955. Some years later Geoffrey Munns noted four at Hythe on the 26th January 1963.



Smew at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)

There were no further records until 1985, however it has since occurred with some regularity, as shown in figure 1. One was seen at Nickolls Quarry during cold weather in the 1985/86 winter, with four present there on the 25th to 26th January 1987 and there was an exceptional influx at Nickolls Quarry during hard weather in February 1991: one on the 9th increased to four the next day, and then 13 (a drake and 12 'redheads') were seen on the 13th, decreasing to six the following day before increasing again to 11 (two drakes, 9 redheads) on the 16th, with ten remaining until the 18th and two to the 24th.

The first coastal record involved a redhead flying west past Copt Point on the 3rd November 1998 and from 1996 it became almost annual in occurrence at Nickolls Quarry, being seen in six out of seven years to 2002, but then the deeper section of the pit was in-filled and there have been no records there since. The only subsequent sightings were at Botolph's Bridge in February 2010 and 2012, one flying west past Hythe in December 2014 and one flying past the Willop Outfall (with presumably the same individual later at Nickolls Quarry).

The records by year are shown in figure 1.

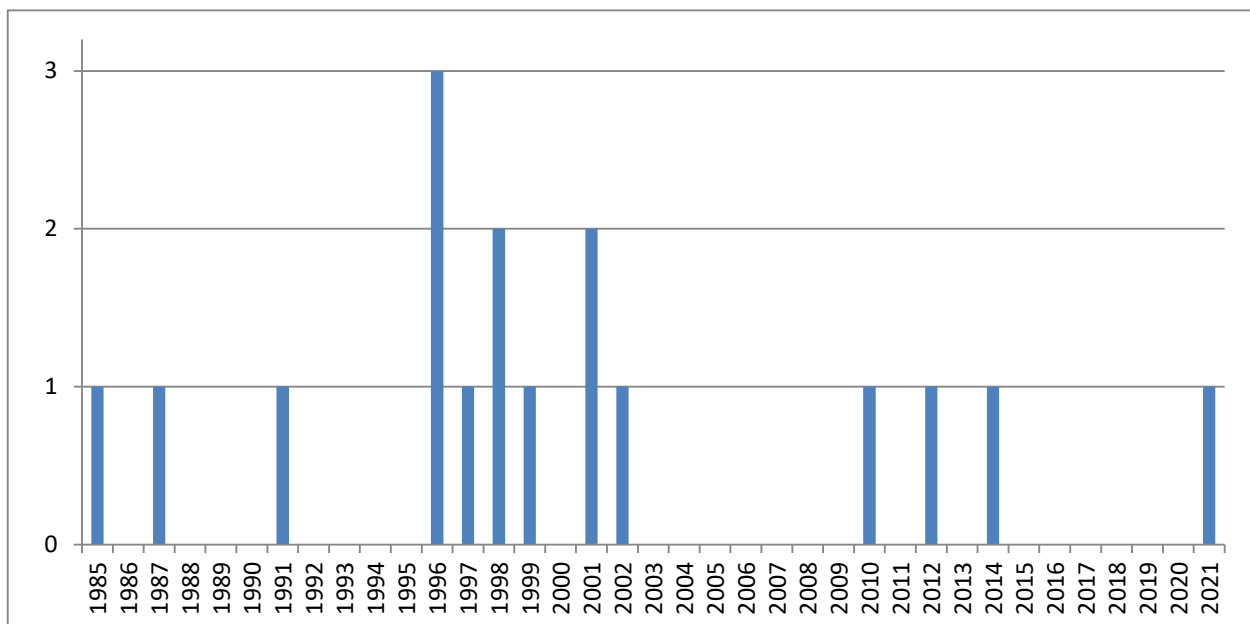


Figure 1: Smew records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

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

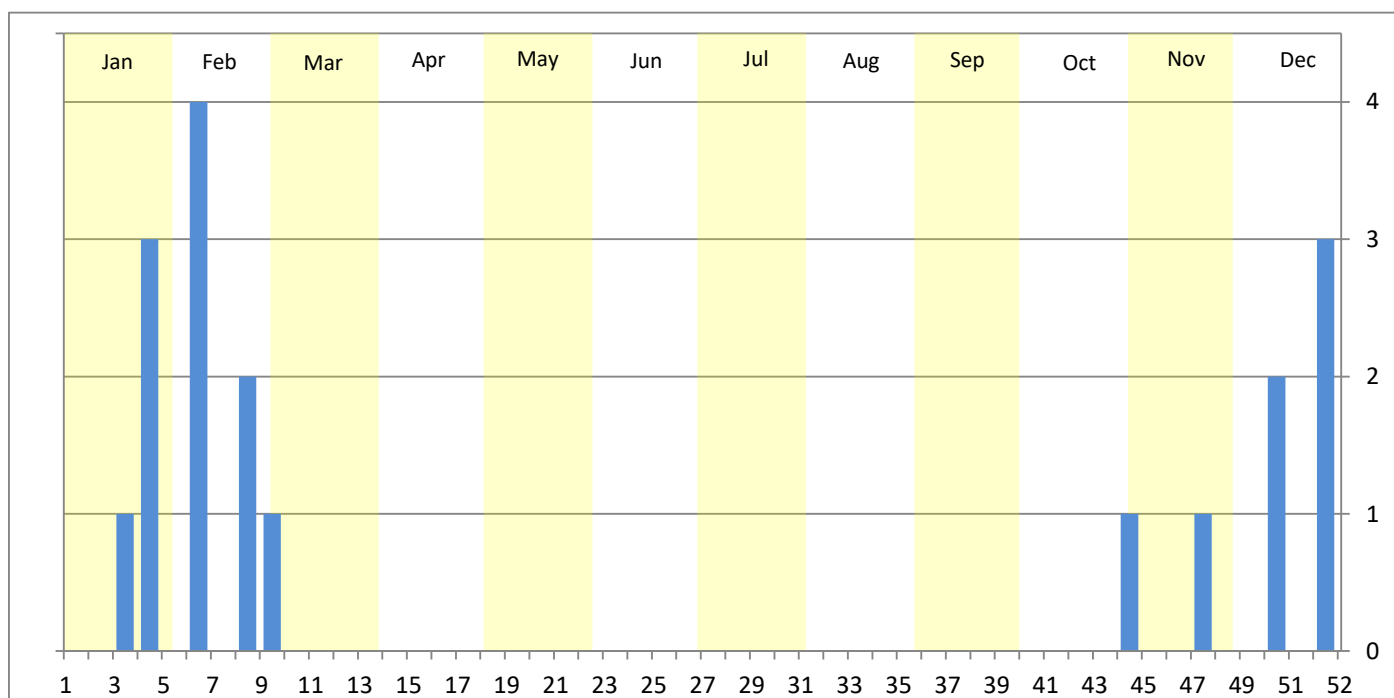


Figure 2: Smew records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Apart from a migrant which passed Copt Point on the 3rd November, all have been recorded between the 24th November (week 47) and 26th February (week 9), with a peak arrival time of late January/early February, as shown in figure 2. The vast majority of records were associated with severe weather.



Figure 3: Distribution of all Smew records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Almost all records have been from Nickolls Quarry or Botolph's Bridge (TR13 G), apart from the first which was along the canal and three coastal records.

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1955** Hythe Canal (between Palmmarsh and West Hythe), one shot, 26th February (B. Uden, per R. K. Norman)
- 1963** Hythe, four, 26th January (G. F. A. Munns)
- 1985** Nickolls Quarry, recorded in cold weather period in winter 1985 (per R. K. Norman)
- 1987** Nickolls Quarry, four, 25th to 26th January (per R. K. Norman)

- 1991** Nickolls Quarry, present from 9th to 24th February, with a maximum of 13 (2 males) on the 13th (R. K. Norman)
- 1996** Nickolls Quarry, two to five redheads from 8th to 18th February (R. K. Norman)
- 1996** Nickolls Quarry, one to two redheads from 23rd February to 6th March (R. K. Norman)
- 1996** Nickolls Quarry, three redheads from 29th December, increasing to 8 on 1st January 1997 (R. K. Norman, I. A. Roberts, D. A. Gibson)
- 1997** Nickolls Quarry, four redheads, 25th January, with one to 26th (R. K. Norman)
- 1998** Copt Point, redhead flew west, 3rd November (D. A. Gibson)
- 1998** Nickolls Quarry, redhead, 24th November (R. K. Norman)
- 1999** Nickolls Quarry, redhead, 30th December (R. K. Norman)
- 2001** Nickolls Quarry, one male and two redheads, 20th January, with 2 redheads remaining until the 21st (R. K. Norman, I. A. Roberts)
- 2001** Nickolls Quarry, redhead, 16th December (R. K. Norman, I. A. Roberts)
- 2002** Nickolls Quarry, six seen briefly in flight, 12th December (R. K. Norman)
- 2010** Botolph's Bridge, two redheads, 20th February, photographed (B. Harper)
- 2012** Botolph's Bridge, redhead, 11th February, (B. & M. Harper, I. A. Roberts)
- 2014** Hythe, redhead flew west, 27th December (I. A. Roberts)
- 2021** Willop Outfall, redhead flew east, February, photographed (B. Harper)
- 2021** Nickolls Quarry, redhead, 8th February, photographed (B. Harper, I. A. Roberts), presumed same as above

References

Kent Bird Reports. Kent Ornithological Society

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

Acknowledgements

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