



Review of bird sightings 2019

January

January started dry and settled but mostly cloudy with high pressure dominant, and it remained generally dry and often mild during the first half of the month. The second half became markedly cooler with overnight frosts and the last week saw a little precipitation, some which was occasionally wintry.

A **Bewick's Swan** drifted east at sea past Battery Point on the 6th and up to 33 Mute Swans remained at the Lower Wall, increasing to 39 by the 26th. A few Brent Geese were noted moving up-channel during the month, with a peak of 53 passing Seabrook on the 23rd and nine Shelduck were seen off the Willop Outfall on the 11th. Mandarin Ducks were noted at Chesterfield Wood (4) and Folks' Wood (4). Two Wigeon were at Botolph's Bridge on the 2nd and 3 Gadwall were noted at Folkestone Racecourse on the 13th. Counts of Teal included 12 at Nickolls Quarry and 35 at the Willop Basin on the 1st and 180 at Chesterfield Wood on the 5th, whilst 100 Mallards were at Botolph's Bridge on the 17th. Single Tufted Ducks were noted from Beachborough Lakes, Nickolls Quarry and West Hythe. A Velvet Scoter flew east past Seabrook on the 7th.

Red-throated Diver movements included 75 flying east past Mill Point on the 3rd and 50 flying east past the Willop Outfall on the 8th before a record total of 667 flew west past Seabrook on the 29th. Single Black-throated Divers were reported from Folkestone Harbour on the 6th and Hythe on the 29th and a **Great Northern Diver** was seen regularly between Mill Point and Sandgate between the 3rd and the 21st.

Exceptional numbers of Cormorants were again seen offshore with 1,186 flying east past Seabrook on the 4th, 2,320 off the Willop Outfall on the 8th, about 2,900 (including a flock of around 2,500) there on the 11th, up to 5,000 off Hythe between the 11th and 13th and 2,286 flying east past Seabrook on the 29th. Up to six Shags were fishing offshore between Mill Point and Sandgate between the 3rd and the 10th, with further sightings from Battery Point on the 15th, Mill Point (2) on the 18th and Samphire Hoe and Seabrook on the 29th.



Great Northern Diver at Sandgate (Ian Roberts)



Shag at Sandgate (Ian Roberts)

A **Great White Egret** (first seen in December 2018) remained in the Donkey Street area throughout and single Little Egrets were noted from Donkey Street, Botolph's Bridge, Seabrook, Mill Point, Folkestone Harbour, Copt Point and Samphire Hoe, with two at Nickolls Quarry on several dates. Great Crested Grebes reached a peak of c.450 off Hythe Ranges/Willop Outfall on the 6th. A Red Kite flew over Folkestone Downs on the 15th and single Marsh Harriers were seen at the Willop Sewage Works on the 1st and Nickolls Quarry on the 6th.

Water Rails were wintering at Beachborough Lakes, Nickolls Quarry (2) and West Hythe (2), whilst counts of Coot included 10 at Beachborough Lakes and 13 at Nickolls Quarry. A total of 14 Oystercatchers were counted between Hythe Redoubt and the Willop Outfall on the 25th, whilst up to 20 Ringed Plovers were present in the Folkestone Beach/Harbour area.

A Golden Plover flew over the Willop Sewage Works on the 1st and one was seen at Capel-le-Ferne on the 29th, whilst Lapwing flocks included 100 near Postling Wents, 163 at Capel-le-Ferne and 280 in the Willop Basin area. Up to four Purple Sandpipers were frequenting the rock groynes between Hythe and Battery Point, whilst at least four Sanderling were at the Willop Outfall and 15 Dunlin flew past Princes Parade on the 5th.



Great White Egret at Donkey Street (Ian Roberts)



Little Egret at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)

A single Jack Snipe was wintering at the Willop Basin and one was seen at Beachborough Lakes on the 24th, whilst there was a peak count of 71 Common Snipe at the former site and Woodcock were noted from Folks' Wood (2), Beachborough Park (3), Chesterfield Wood (3) and Kiln Wood (5). Two Curlew were wintering at the Willop Basin and up to two Green Sandpipers were frequenting the Botolph's Bridge/Nickolls Quarry area, with another at Kiln Wood on the 13th, whilst there was a peak of nine Redshank at Folkestone Harbour on the 24th, with singles at Botolph's Bridge and the Willop Basin.



Water Rail at West Hythe (Brian Harper)



Purple Sandpiper at Hythe (David Scott)

Single Great Skuas were seen from the Willop Outfall, Princes Parade, Mill Point, Folkestone Pier and Samphire Hoe, whilst 120 Kittiwakes were offshore from Seabrook on the 22nd and 205 Mediterranean Gulls were counted at Beachborough Park on the 7th. Two adult **Caspian Gulls** remained in the Nickolls Quarry area until the 3rd and another was seen in Folkestone Harbour on the 7th. Auk movements included around 350 flying east past Mill Point on the 3rd, 330 flying east there the next day, 300 (130 west, 170 east) there on the 18th and at least 475 flying west past Hythe/Seabrook on the 29th and those identified were primarily Guillemots with only a small proportion of Razorbills.

A **Ring-necked Parakeet** flew west over Seabrook on the 25th and a Barn Owl was seen at Abbotscliffe on the 6th, whilst a **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** was heard calling at Beachborough Park the following day.

Firecrests were wintering at Port Lympne, West Hythe (2), Enbrook Park and Mill Point, whilst Chiffchaffs were seen at Beachborough Park, Shorncliffe Military Cemetery, Enbrook Park (2) and Mill Point and Blackcaps were at Hythe, Seabrook (2), Cheriton and Folkestone (3). Up to 23 Song Thrushes and 50 Fieldfares were frequenting the Botolph's Bridge area, with up to 23 Song Thrushes, 30 Fieldfares and 120 Redwings at Beachborough Park. A Black Redstart was seen at Samphire Hoe on the 25th and Stonechats were wintering at the Willop Sewage Works (3), Botolph's Bridge, Hythe Roughs, Church Hougham and Samphire Hoe (where there was a peak count of 14). At least 50 Pied Wagtails and 100 Meadow Pipits were present in the Willop Sewage Works area and the **Water Pipit** (first seen in November) was again at nearby Donkey Street on the 1st, whilst 22 Rock Pipits were counted at Samphire Hoe on the 25th.



Stonechat at Willop Sewage Works (Ian Roberts)



Nuthatch at Beachborough Park (Steve Tomlinson)

Bramblings were seen at Beachborough Park on the 8th and 31st (2), whilst Goldfinches reached a peak of 200 there on the 14th, and 2 Redpolls and 61 Siskins flew north there on the 2nd. A single Corn Bunting was seen at the Willop Sewage Works on the 26th.

February

After a cold start to the month it was generally mild from the 5th onwards. It was unsettled until the 10th but very mild and sunny weather developed between the 13th and 15th and again between the 21st and 27th, with record-breaking daytime temperatures in the latter spell (in Kent temperatures approached 20°C and this was exceeded elsewhere in the UK for the first time in February). With clear skies it quickly became much cooler in the evenings and frost and fog developed on some nights.

A Greylag Goose was an unusual sight in Folkestone Harbour on the 6th and three Canada Geese had returned to Nickolls Quarry by the 14th. Two Shelduck flew west past Samphire Hoe on the 11th and two were at the Willop Basin on the 14th, whilst a male Mandarin Duck appeared on the canal in Hythe Town on the 12th to 13th. A Pochard was seen at Folkestone Racecourse on the 10th and four Gadwall were noted there on the 22nd, whilst counts of Teal included 35 at Donkey Street and 50 at the Willop Basin.

A total of 96 Red-throated Divers flew east past Samphire Hoe on the 11th and the **Great Northern Diver** was seen again at Sandgate on the 1st. Cormorants continued to be seen in good numbers and up to two Shags were present at Samphire Hoe throughout. The **Great White Egret** remained in the Donkey Street area as did Little Egrets at the usual sites.

A Marsh Harrier was seen at Botolph's Bridge on the 10th and there was some evidence of Buzzard migration, with a peak of 13 passing through Beachborough Park on the 11th and three flying east over Hythe on the 17th, whilst a Merlin flew east over the latter site on the 26th. The breeding pair of Oystercatchers had returned to Nickolls Quarry by the 14th and there was a peak of 150 Lapwings at the Willop Basin on the 17th. Up to four Purple Sandpipers remained between Hythe and Battery Point and one was seen at the Willop Outfall on the 13th, whilst a Jack Snipe was seen again at Beachborough Lakes on the 4th to 5th, and Curlews increased to three at the Willop Basin on the 16th.

At least one Green Sandpiper remained in the Botolph's Bridge/Nickolls Quarry area and at least seven Redshanks remained at Folkestone Harbour, whilst up to six were seen at the Willop Basin. Mediterranean Gulls peaked at 220 at Beachborough Park on the 20th and an increase in Lesser Black-backed Gulls was noted towards the end of the month as migrants began to arrive. Auk numbers were low with a peak of 3 Razorbills and 100 Guillemots off Samphire Hoe on the 2nd.



Mandarin at Hythe (Glenn Tutton)



Great White Egret at Donkey Street (Brian Harper)

A Firecrest was found at Samphire Hoe on the 3rd, whilst the wintering birds remained and at Enbrook Park there was an increase to two on the 26th. Additional Chiffchaffs were noted from Nickolls Quarry, Seabrook and Folkestone and further Blackcaps were discovered at Hythe (2), Folkestone and Samphire Hoe.

A flock of six **Waxwings** were seen briefly on aerials at Foord Road (Folkestone) on the 11th but were unfortunately not seen subsequently. Fieldfare counts included 76 at Haguelands Farm, 80 at Donkey Street and 177 at Beachborough Park and a Black Redstart was seen on two dates at Samphire Hoe.

There were signs of Meadow Pipit passage through Beachborough Park, where numbers increased to 66 on the 11th and 81 on the 20th, whilst 2 Redpolls and up to nine Siskins were noted there on several dates, with three Siskins at Cheriton Sports Centre on the 24th and three flying in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 27th, when a migrant Reed Bunting was also noted there and 15 Linnets flew west. Single Common Crossbills flew over Beachborough Park on the 26th and 27th.