

Barnacle Goose

Branta leucopsis

Category A, C2, E

Rare migrant and winter visitor,
with feral birds also recorded.

37 records

Ticehurst describes the Barnacle Goose as a rare winter visitor to Kent but includes details of one in Folkestone Museum (shot off Hythe sometime prior to 1900).

Taylor *et al* (1980) considered it to be a scarce winter visitor, with nearly 80% of records occurring on the North Kent Marshes, few in east Kent and just one during their review period (1952-76) in south Kent (at Dungeness in November 1969).



Barnacle Goose at Nickolls Quarry (Ian Roberts)

All of the early Kent records occurred between October and April but from 1966 there were increasingly widespread reports of feral birds in all months of the year. Gibbons *et al* in the new breeding atlas (1993) stated that “although Kear (1990) notes that this species is now breeding ‘at large’ in Britain, birds are probably too scattered for there to be a self-sustaining population”. However by 2005 the British Ornithologist’s Union had admitted it to category C of the British List (Dudley, 2005).

The latest Bird Atlas (Balmer *et al*, 2013) stated that the birds wintering on the east coast of Britain are largely from the Svalbard population but the naturalised population accounts for many of the inland records, and that the latter population has expanded in range by 88% since the 1988-91 atlas and was thought to number approximately 900 pairs in the mid-2000s. A more recent estimate (Woodward *et al*, 2020) gave a figure of 1,450 breeding pairs for the naturalised population.

The most recent Kent Bird Report (2017) considered it to be scarce but increasing, mainly originating from a growing feral population here and on the near continent (Dudley (2005) notes that there is a substantial and increasing feral population in the Netherlands, with an estimated 1,100 pairs by 2000). It also acknowledges that some winter records may be of wild birds, especially in cold weather.

The specimen in Folkestone Museum (shot pre-1900) is certain to have related to a wild individual as feral birds were unknown in the country at this time. The first modern record was in 1989, since when it has been recorded with some regularity, though many records clearly relate to feral birds. Modern records by year are shown in figure 1.

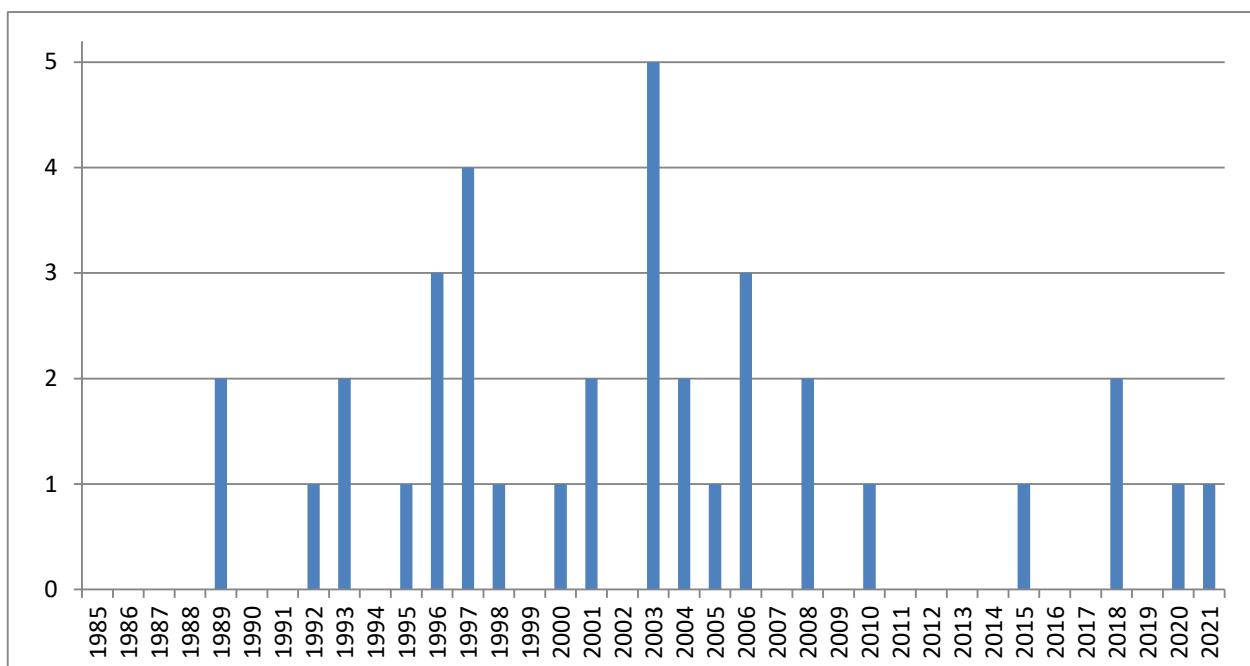


Figure 1: Barnacle Goose records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

Figure 2 shows the arrival dates by week. Those recorded between April and August seem most likely to originate from feral stock, though some of the December to March records might not be of wild origin either. Figure 3 shows the distribution of records by tetrad.

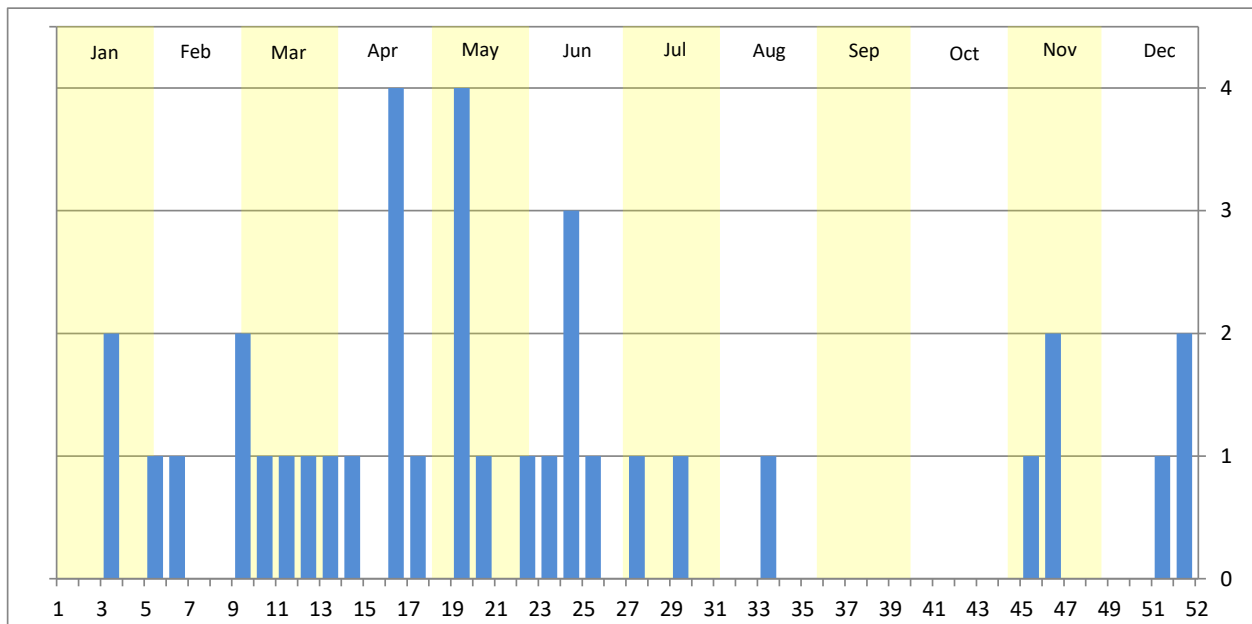


Figure 2: Barnacle Goose records at Folkestone and Hythe by week



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

The majority of other records are from Nickolls Quarry (18), with others at Samphire Hoe (4), Copt Point (2), and single sightings at nine other sites.

The records with the best credentials for perhaps being considered as wild birds are as follows (although it should be noted that birds thought to originate from the near continent during cold weather could be from feral stock there):

Pre-1900 Hythe, one in Folkestone Museum was shot off Hythe, pre-1900

- Certain to relate to a wild individual as feral birds have only been prevalent in Kent since the 1960s;

1989 Copt Point, one on golf course, 29th December (I. A. Roberts)

1989 Mill Point, one flew east, 30th December (J. P. Siddle)

- There was a small influx into the county in late 1989 which it was considered might have involved wild birds;

1993 Nickolls Quarry, 35 in field near sewage works, 3rd to 8th February (R. K. Norman, I. A. Roberts)

- This flock arrived during cold weather and were presumed to be wild birds;

2000 Folkestone, four flew north-east, 16th January (D. A. Gibson)

- These were seen at a similar time to a flock in the Swale which were considered to have originated in the Low Countries;

2006 Folkestone Racecourse lake (Westenhanger), three, 11th to 12th February (I. A. Roberts)

- These birds arrived with a flock of 14 White-fronted Geese which suggests that they originated from the Netherlands. Elsewhere in Kent a flock at Worth Marshes and an increase at Dungeness in February were also associated with arrivals of White-fronted Geese;

2010 Donkey Street, one, 22nd December 2010 (I. A. Roberts)

- This bird arrived, during a period of very severe weather, with flock of 180 White-fronted Geese which suggests that it originated from the Netherlands.



Barnacle Goose at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)

The list of other records is as follows:

1992 Nickolls Quarry, two, 11th May (reported)

1993 Capel-le-Ferne, 12 flew south, 27th March (I. A. Roberts)

1995 Nickolls Quarry, two, 11th May (R. K. Norman)

1996 Nickolls Quarry, one, 29th February (R. K. Norman)

1996 Nickolls Quarry, two, 10th to 22nd March (R. K. Norman)

1996 Nickolls Quarry, two to six birds, from 10th June to 1st September (R. K. Norman, I. A. Roberts)

1997 Nickolls Quarry, one, 13th to 22nd May (I. A. Roberts)

1997 Nickolls Quarry, one, 8th June (R. K. Norman)

1997 Nickolls Quarry, one, 21st June (R. K. Norman)

1997 Nickolls Quarry, one, 8th July (R. K. Norman)

1997 Nickolls Quarry, two, 16th to 18th August (R. K. Norman, I. A. Roberts)

1998 Nickolls Quarry, one, 22nd March (I. A. Roberts)

2001 Nickolls Quarry, 12 flew north, 7th May (R. K. Norman)

2001 Nickolls Quarry, ten flew south-west, 10th June (R. K. Norman)

2003 Samphire Hoe, one, 28th February to 25th March, photographed (I. A. Roberts)

2003 Nickolls Quarry, three, 17th April (R. K. Norman)

2003 Copt Point, three, 18th April (I. A. Roberts), possibly same as above

2003 Nickolls Quarry, one, 16th to 17th July (I. A. Roberts)

2003 Nickolls Quarry, four, 7th November (R. K. Norman)

2004 Nickolls Quarry, two regularly, 17th April to 11th August (R. K. Norman, I. A. Roberts)

2004 Nickolls Quarry, one, 13th November (R. K. Norman)

2005 Nickolls Quarry, one on eight dates between 19th April and 10th June, then two until 2nd August (R. K. Norman, I. A. Roberts)

2006 Samphire Hoe, 12 flew west, 16th May (I. A. Roberts)

2006 Nickolls Quarry, one on five dates between 11th June and 18th August (R. K. Norman, I. A. Roberts)

2008 Samphire Hoe, seven flew west, 24th April (I. A. Roberts)

2008 Samphire Hoe, two flew west, 31st May (I. A. Roberts)

2015 Nickolls Quarry, one, 5th April, photographed (B. Harper, I. A. Roberts)

2018 Willop Basin, three, then flew west, 17th March (B. Harper)

2018 Samphire Hoe, seven flew east, 11th June (per D. E. Smith)

2020 Hythe, nine flew west, 11th November (G. Tutton)

2021 Seabrook, six flew west, 21st January (P. Howe)



Barnacle Geese at Hythe (Glenn Tutton)

References

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Acknowledgements

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