

Pintail

Anas acuta

Category A

Winter visitor and passage migrant.

Breeds mainly in northern and eastern Europe, with sporadic breeding over large areas of the southern and western edges of its range, with occasional breeding well to the south. Also present across northern Asia and North America (Snow & Perrins, 1998). Ticehurst (1909) considered it to be an annual visitor in small numbers to the estuaries of the Thames and Medway (where flocks of 30 were noteworthy) but in east and south-east Kent it was apparently less regular and mostly noted during hard weather.



Pintails at Chesterfield Wood (Ian Roberts)

It undoubtedly increased during the twentieth century as Harrison (1953) was recording flocks of 300 on the Thames marshes by the late 1940s and even noted a few records of breeding (including the first English occurrence in 1910: at Fairfield on the Romney Marsh), whilst Taylor *et al* (1981) were able to report on a count of 1,400 in the 1960s, though both authors considered it to be relatively scarce in the east and south-east of the county.

It is currently a passage migrant and winter visitor to coastal wetlands in Kent (KOS, 2020), with small numbers breeding: Clements *et al* (2015) reported a recent average of four pairs per year observed during the breeding season on the north Kent marshes, which is one of only two regular nesting sites in England.

It was not included within Knight & Tolputt's "List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood" (1871) and the first local sightings were not recorded until Roger Norman began watching the area now known as Nickolls Quarry in the 1950s. Although it may have been overlooked prior to this, it would appear to have been a rather scarce species in south-east Kent in the first half of the twentieth century.

The first record involved a pair at Nickolls Quarry on the 16th January 1955, with two pairs there on the 22nd April 1958 and a pair there on the 31st January 1959, all seen by Roger Norman. There were no further records until 1985, when the same observer saw two at the same site on the 20th January, a gap which seems very likely to reflect a paucity of coverage during the intervening period as there have been annual records since 1991.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of all records of Pintail by tetrad, with records in 13 tetrads (42%).

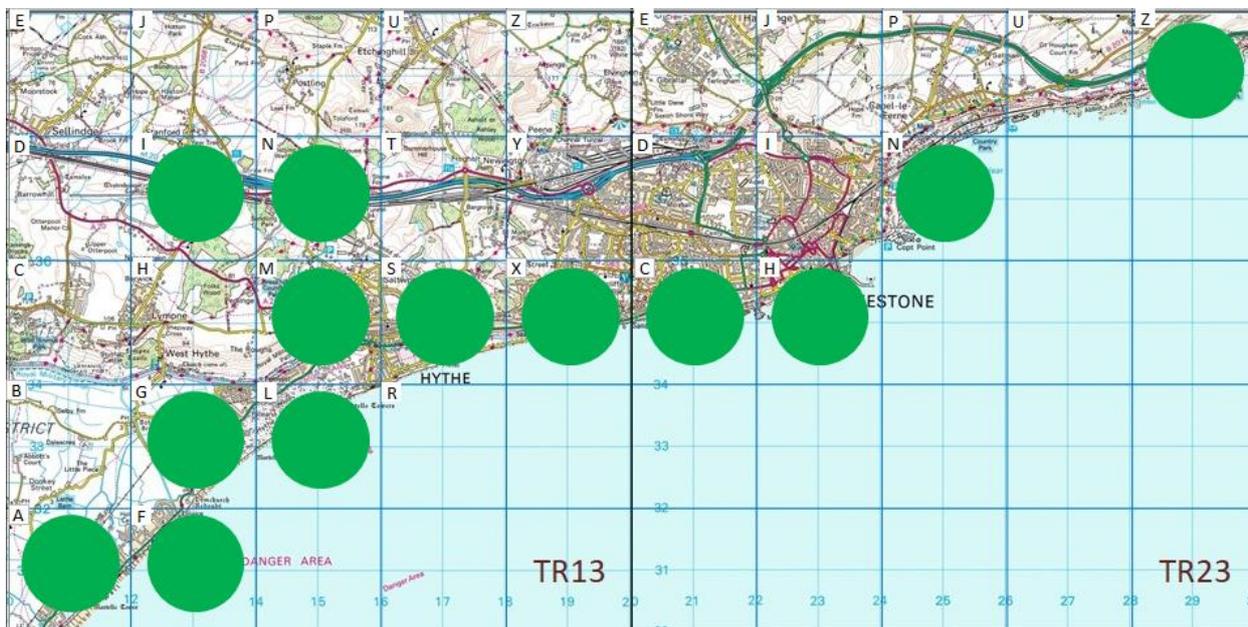


Figure 1: Distribution of all Pintail records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The first post-breeding or “autumn” sighting was as early as the 10th July 2005, when five were at Nickolls Quarry, but records in this month are rare, with one at the same site on the 22nd July 2001 and a notably large count of 21 there on the 23rd July 2005, whilst three there a few days later on the 2nd August 2005 is the only record in that month.

The first coastal migrants may be noted in September, with the earliest involving three flying west past Copt Point on the 9th September 1998, but there have been only four other records in that month and it more typically occurs in October or November. Double-figure counts have involved 11 west past Copt Point on the 6th November, 11 west past Samphire Hoe on the 2nd November 2004, 12 east past Samphire Hoe on the 1st October 2007, 16 west past Copt Point on the 7th October 1999, 25 off the Hythe Redoubt on the 9th November 2001, about 25 (in a mixed flock of 50 duck that appeared to be mostly Pintail and Gadwall) west past Mill Point on the 12th November 2016 and 27 (in two groups of 9 and 18) west past Copt Point on the 6th October 2001. Passage may continue into early December, including 17 passing Copt Point on the 8th December 2000.

There is no regular wintering population and it is most often recorded during periods of cold weather. Winter counts have included 12 at Chesterfield Wood on the 3rd January 2009, 12 at Nickolls Quarry on the 26th December 2010 and 12 flying east past Copt Point on the 23rd February 1994, 15 flying east past Samphire Hoe on the 2nd January 2004, 17 west past Copt Point on the 8th December 2000, 20 east past Samphire Hoe on the 20th February 2013 and the 27th February 2018, and up to 40 at Chesterfield Wood in January and February 2003.

Spring passage can be noted from early March (or perhaps even late February) but the overall totals for this season vary considerably and in the last twenty years there have been two blanks years (2007 and 2010) compared to a peak of 81 in 2005, with a mean of 24 birds. Spring can produce the largest counts, with counts of over twenty noted on eight occasions, all in March:

20 east past Samphire Hoe on the 23rd March 2013
23 east past Copt Point on the 8th March 1993
26 east past Mill Point on the 9th March 2016
27 east past Mill Point on the 22nd March 2017
31 east past Mill Point on the 15th March 2003
49 east past Mill Point on the 20th March 2005
54 east past Folkestone on the 10th March 1995
63 east past Samphire Hoe on the 15th March 2006

The only double-figure count in April involved 11 flying east past Samphire Hoe on the 1st April 2013 but smaller numbers can occur into May, with the latest involving one flying east with Common Scoters past Mill Point on the 14th May 1992.

References

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Acknowledgements

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Pintail at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)