

Pochard

Aythya ferina

Category A

Winter visitor and passage migrant.

A widespread breeding species across temperate Europe and Asia east to Lake Baikal and south to Iran. Northern populations migrate west and south-west to winter mainly in western Europe, whereas populations breeding in milder areas are resident or partially migratory (Snow & Perrins, 1998).

It is a regular but uncommon breeding species in Kent, also a passage migrant and winter visitor in large numbers.



Pochard at Seabrook (Brian Harper)

It was not included in Knight and Tolputt's "list of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood" (1871) and the first documented local record involved one seen at Nickolls Quarry by Brian Uden on the 13th September 1952, whilst Roger Norman noted up to two females there between the 16th and 31st January 1958, a drake on the 8th April 1958, a pair on the 15th February 1959, a pair on the 22nd November 1959 and three on the 16th March 1960.

Presumably as a result of fairly scant coverage in the 1960s and 1970s there were no further sightings until Dave Weaver saw five at Nickolls Quarry on the 11th January 1978, increasing to nine by the 24th January 1978, with three there in January 1979 and one in December 1979. More regular coverage during the 1980s produced fairly regular records at Nickolls Quarry, with a peak of 21 on the 20th January 1985. The first record away from the quarry involved a pair seen by Ian Roberts on the pond at Copt Point on the 1st January 1989.

It continued to be recorded with some frequency at Nickolls Quarry between 1990 and 2013, as figure 1 demonstrates by showing the annual maximum counts. The cold weather influxes in January/February 1996 and December 2010 are clearly demonstrated, with a peak count in the first event of 76 on the 8th February 1996 and in the second event of 104 on the 25th December 2010. The site has become less attractive to wildfowl in general in recent years due to backfilling of the pit, housing development and increased disturbance, and there were blank years in 2014 and 2017, with the species now irregular or even rare, although a cold weather event could lead to another influx.

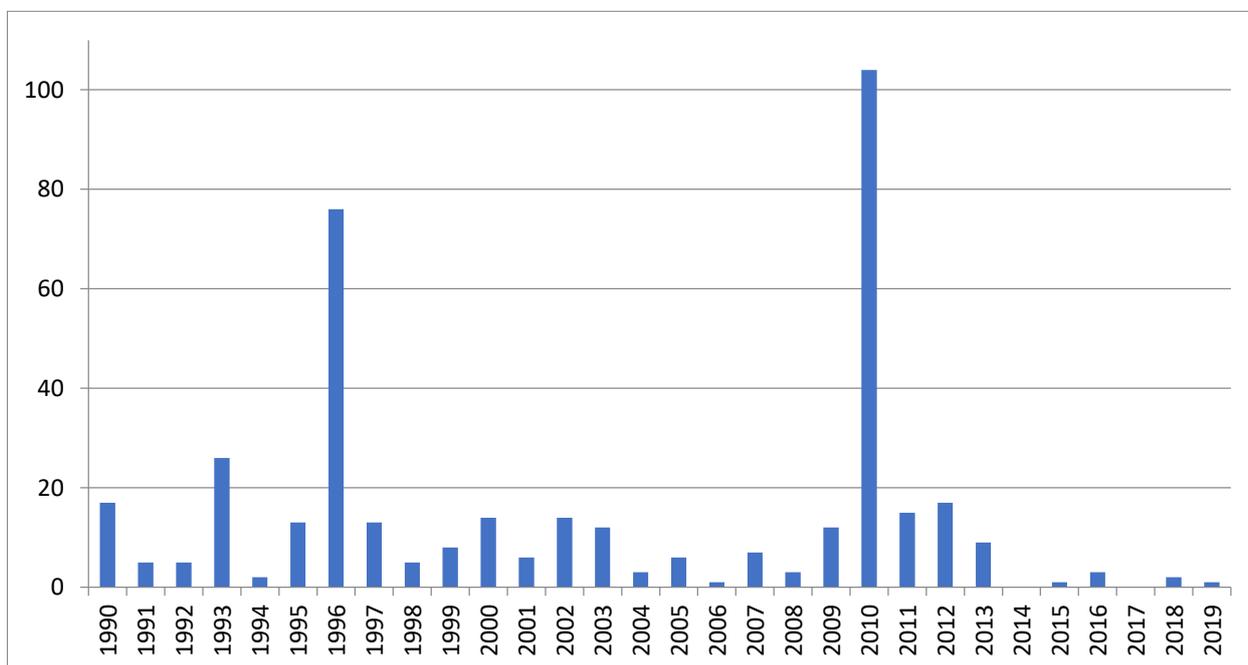


Figure 1: Annual maximum counts of Pochard at Nickolls Quarry since 1990

Away from Nickolls Quarry it has only been regularly recorded at two other sites. One of these is the lake at the former Folkestone Racecourse, near Westenhanger (TR13 I), where there were peaks of 15 in February 2006 and 17 in January 2007, but only single figure counts since. The other is Cock Ash Lake, near Sellindge (TR13 E), where up to four have been noted in recent winters. However the canal cutting south of Botolph's Bridge is occasionally visited by birds from Nickolls Quarry and also hosted a female that lingered between late March and mid-August 1998, the only local record of over-summering.

It is genuinely rare elsewhere, with just 41 records over the 30 years since 1990. Coastal records have usually been associated with cold weather and have included of counts of 20 flying west past Copt Point on the 3rd January 1997, 30 flying west past Hythe on the 2nd December 2010 and 12 flying east there the next day.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of Pochard by tetrad, with records in 12 tetrads (39%).



Figure 2: Distribution of all Pochard records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad



Pochard & Tufted Ducks at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)



Pochard on the canal at Seabrook (Nigel Webster)

References

Kent Bird Reports. Kent Ornithological Society

Knight, V. and Tolputt, F., 1871. List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood, *Folkestone Natural History Society Annual Report*, 1871

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](#).



Pochard at Folkestone Racecourse (Ian Roberts)



Pochard at Cock Ash Lake (Ian Roberts)



Pochard on the Royal Military canal at Seabrook (Brian Harper)