

Baillon's Crake

Porzana pusilla

Category A

Very rare vagrant.

2 records

A scarce breeding species across central and southern Europe, but the distribution is scattered and imperfectly known. The main winter quarters are thought probably to be in sub-Saharan Africa (Snow & Perrins, 1998)

There had been 89 records in Britain to the end of 2018, the majority (71%) of which were recorded before 1950 (BBBRC, 2020). There had been eight records in Kent to the end of the same period, with half prior to 1950 and the other half since 1999. Five of the county records have occurred in spring or early summer and three in autumn.

Charles Gordon (1871) documented the first area (and third county) record in the Zoologist: "last month [October 1870] Baillon's Crake, three Grey Phalaropes and the Common Cormorant were taken in the Hythe Canal by Mr. F. Young" and this is no doubt the reason for its inclusion in Knight & Tolputt's list (1871).

Ticehurst (1909) includes this occurrence and he also mentions, though discredits, a claim that a coastguard took a clutch of two eggs of this species from Folkestone Warren in 1884: "at Stevens' Auction Rooms, in Covent Garden, was sold on April 24th, 1861, 'the superb and unique collection of British birds' eggs, belonging to the museum of a late celebrated physician.' Lot 374 comprised the following: – 'Baillon's Crake. Two, Warren, near Folkestone, taken by a coastguard in 1834, who kept the bird partially skinned'. These eggs were apparently purchased by the late Rev. R. Harvey, as they figure with the same history in Lot 211 of the sale of his collection in the same auction rooms on 9th December, 1869. The latter circumstance has been lately referred to in the Natural History columns of the *Field* (December 22nd, 1906) as evidence of Baillon's Crake having bred in Kent". "The editor was apparently unaware, however, of the source whence Harvey obtained the eggs, and though it is not inconceivable that this species may have bred in Kent, and Folkestone Warren is not an impossible location, the inclusion of these eggs in the collection sold in 1861 does not add to their authenticity, and of their supposed origin I do not believe a word"!

Almost 150 years after the first sighting one was seen at Beachborough Lakes by Steve Tomlinson on the 21st and 22nd March 2018.

The records by year are shown in figure 1.

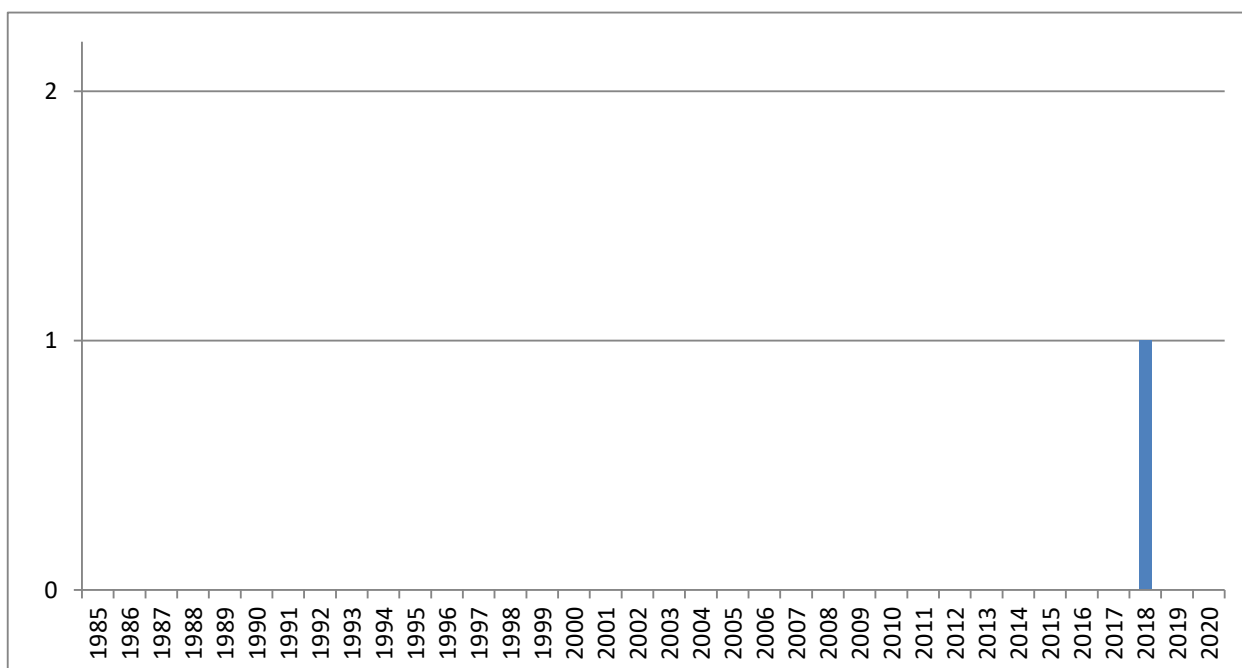


Figure 1: Baillon's Crake records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

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

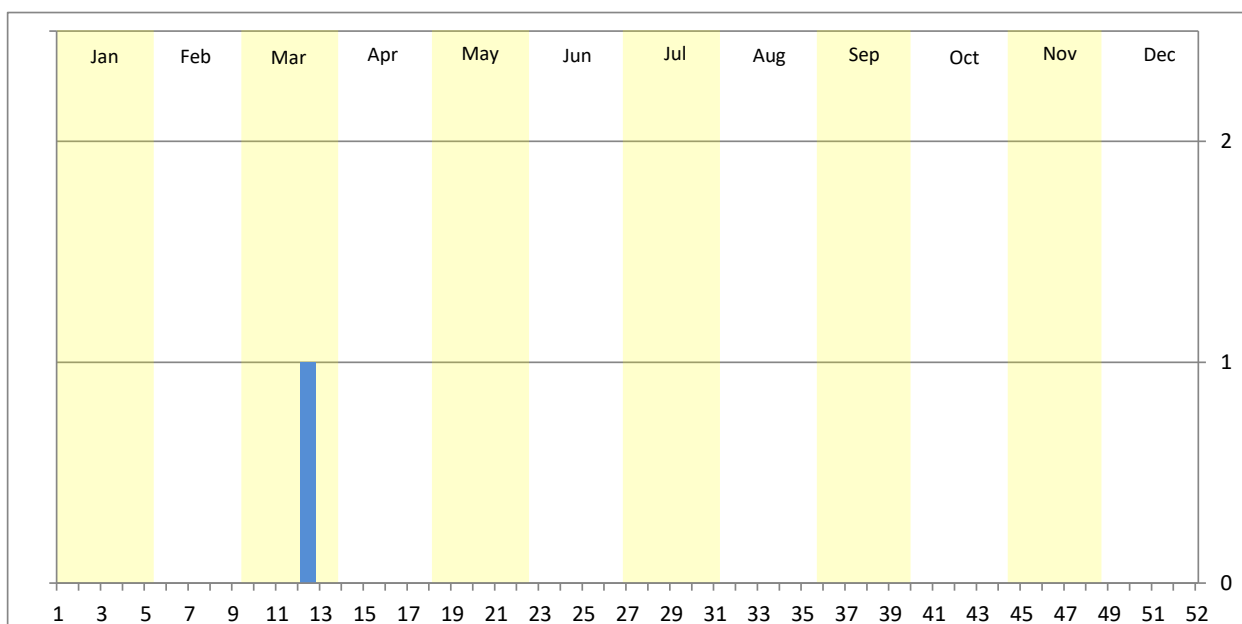


Figure 2: Baillon's Crake records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

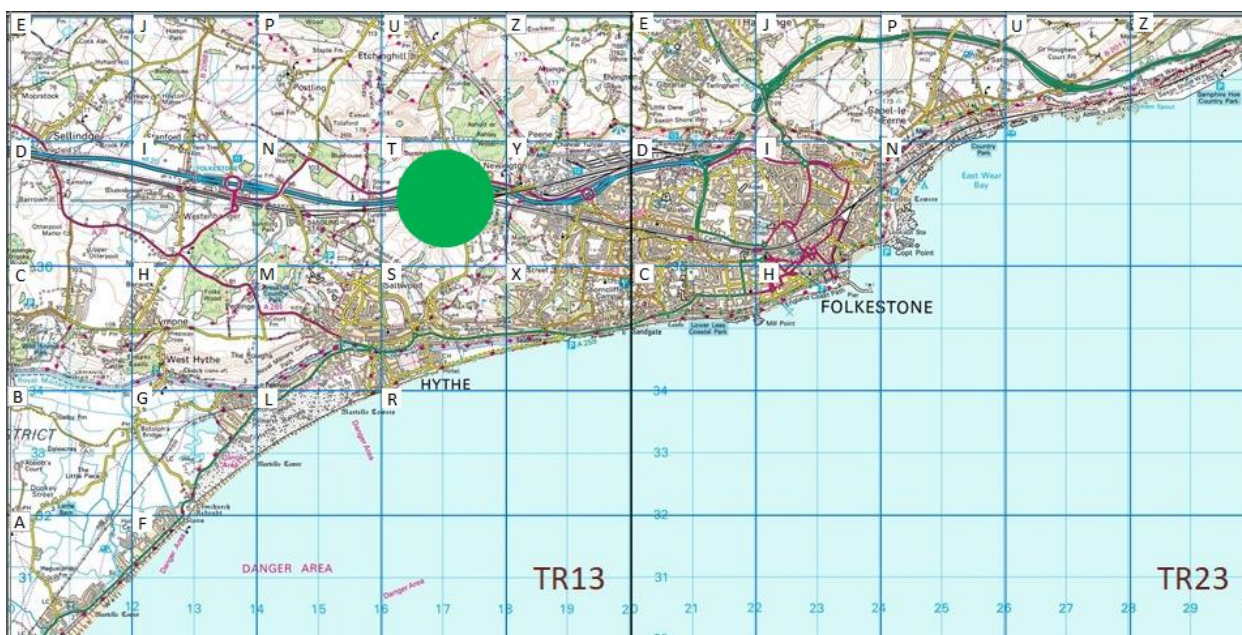


Figure 3: Distribution of all Baillon's Crake records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1870** Hythe, one caught in the canal, October, exact date not known (F. Young)
- 2018** Beachborough Lakes, one, 21st to 22nd March 2018 (S. Tomlinson)

References

BBRC statistics: <https://www.bbrc.org.uk/main-information/statistics> (accessed 2020)

Gordon, C. 1871. Little Auk, &c., near Dover. *The Zoologist*, 6: 2443.

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

KOS Kent list: <https://kentos.org.uk/kent-list> (accessed 2020)

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

Ticehurst, N. F. 1909. *A History of the Birds of Kent*. Witherby, London.

Acknowledgements

The tetrad map images were produced from the Ordnance Survey [Get-a-map service](#) and are reproduced with kind permission of [Ordnance Survey](#).