

## Black-winged Stilt

*Himantopus himantopus*

Category A

Very rare vagrant.

2 records

Fairly widespread across Europe primarily in more southerly latitudes, but breeds regularly as far north as the Netherlands and increasingly further north including Britain on occasion.

Winters mainly in Africa north of the Equator. Beyond Europe it has a widespread distribution across Asia, Australasia, Africa and the Americas (Snow & Perrins, 1998).



Black-winged Stilt at Nickolls Quarry (Dale Gibson)

It was formerly considered to be a national rarity to the end of 2017 when the British Birds Rarities Committee removed it from the list of species which it assessed (BBRC, 2020). There had been a total of 598 records in Britain to the end of 2018, with the annual mean having increased from 1 in the 1970s to 26 in the latest decade (White & Kehoe, 2019).

It is a rare but increasingly regular vagrant in Kent and successfully bred for the first time in 2017, and again in 2018. The county had contributed 108 (18%) of the British records to the end of 2018 (KOS, 2020), with most occurring in spring or early summer, particularly in May.

The first local record was at the site now known as Nickolls Quarry on the 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1965, seen by Bob Scott (then the warden of Dungeness Bird Observatory and RSPB reserve), C. H. Dean and others, which was the ninth county record and part of a record influx of 20 in the county that year. Over 30 years later, Ian Roberts found the second area record at the same locality on the 7<sup>th</sup> September 1997. A full account of that record is provided below.

The records by year are shown in figure 1.

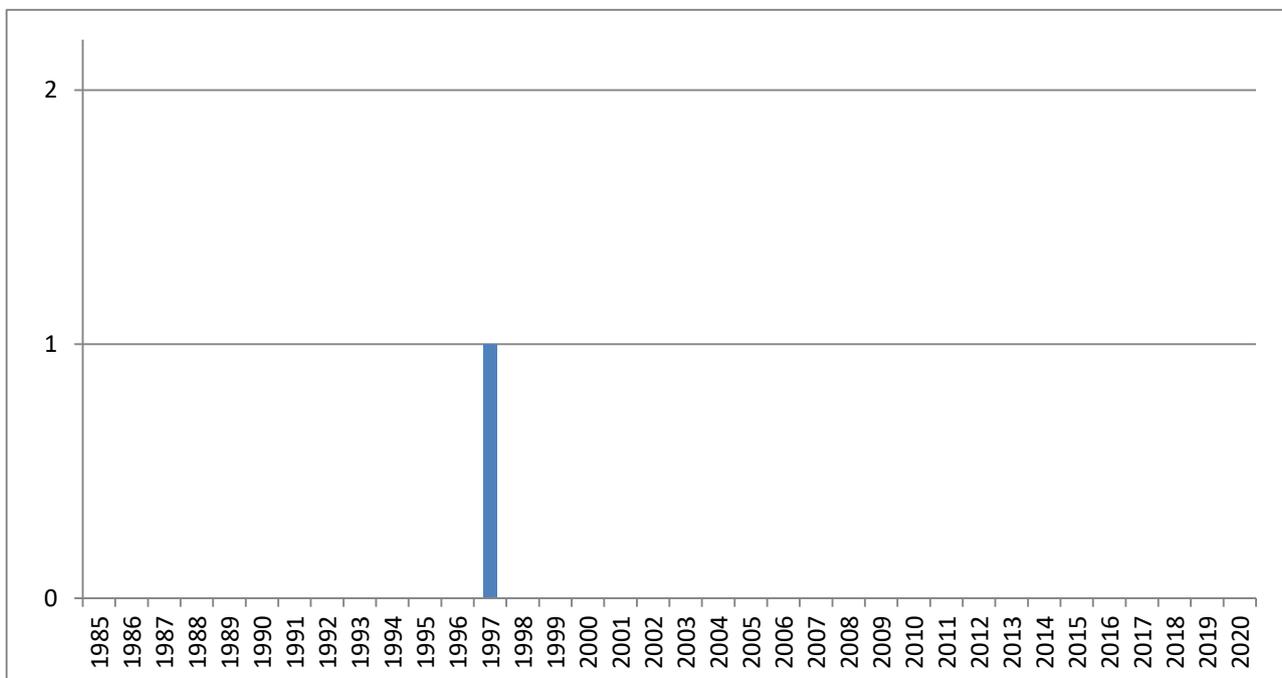


Figure 1: Black-winged Stilt records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

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

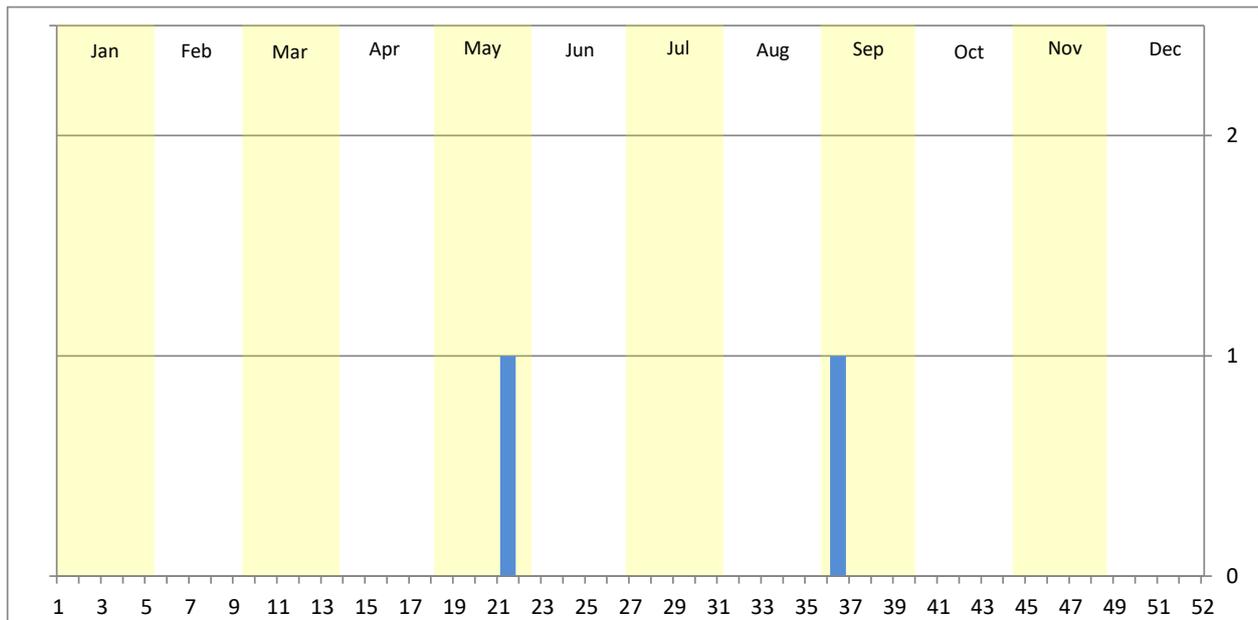


Figure 2: Black-winged Stilt records at Folkestone and Hythe by week



Figure 3: Distribution of all Black-winged Stilt records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1965** Palmarsh, 23<sup>rd</sup> May (C. H. Dean, R. E. Scott, Dungeness Bird Observatory *et al*)
- 1997** Nickolls Quarry, 7<sup>th</sup> September, photographed (I. A. Roberts, D. A. Gibson)

An account of the second area record is given below.

## **Black-winged Stilt at Nickolls Quarry**

**7<sup>th</sup> September 1997**

(Ian A Roberts, Dale A Gibson)

### **Weather conditions:**

Dry and warm, with about 5-7/8 cloud cover, a light north-westerly wind (force 1-2) and good visibility.

### **Circumstances of the find:**

At c.10:40 a.m. I was walking beside the newly excavated part of Nickolls Quarry. A flock of Lapwings which I had flushed were circling overhead, and I heard a Greenshank calling. I located it, quite high up, with the Lapwings and after a quick look I carried on.

A few moments later I looked upwards again and again saw a long-legged, tringa-type wader circling but was amazed quite how skinny and long-legged it appeared. When I raised my binoculars I realised why! It wasn't the Greenshank again, but was a Black-winged Stilt. It circled for a while then descended and landed on the old pit some distance away. As it came down, I could see against the background of the land, the white neck, underparts and 'V' on the back, the black wings and the long pink legs.

I went to the old pit (via the phone box to let Dale Gibson know) and found it feeding on the sandy area at the rear of the pit about 2-300 m away. I watched it and took some notes over 15 minutes or so, but was distracted by an Osprey passing over, and it had moved when I looked back. I waited for Dale to arrive, and we went back to the new pit where we soon re-located it on an island with Lapwings. It was closer than before, only about 100m away, and we took further notes over c.10 minutes before it flew off with the Lapwing flock. I returned to the site in the evening and it was feeding on the old pit again. Dale also went back later on and it was still in the same area, and he took some record shots.

It was not seen the next day although access is restricted on weekdays.

### **Description of the bird:**

Size, shape, jizz: An elegant, long-legged wader, with a long thin neck and a long, fine bill. The legs trailed in flight.

Head and upperparts: As a first-winter bird the general upperpart plumage was greyer and less contrasting than an adult. The crown was dull grey, with a paler neck with greyish mottling to the rear. The mantle was dark greyish or blackish and the coverts were blackish-brown with paler fringes. The tertials and primaries were blackish. In flight the secondaries and inner primaries showed a thin, white trailing edge. The back, rump and tail were white, producing a white 'V' on the back in flight.

Underparts: White.

Bare parts: Bill black, but possibly with a slightly paler base to the lower mandible. Legs dull pinkish.

### **Comments on the record:**

The record was accepted by the British Birds Rarities Committee and appeared slightly belatedly in their annual rarity report for 1998 (Rogers *et al*, 1999). There had been 21 previous records in Kent and 310 nationally.

This was the second record for the Folkestone and Hythe area, with one seen at the same site on the 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1965. There were only five other sightings, involving a total of at least three individuals, in Britain in 1997. The Nickolls Quarry bird was presumably the same as the one which was present at Rainham Marshes (Essex) on the 10<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> September 1997.

## **References**

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

Kent Bird Reports. Kent Ornithological Society

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

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

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## **Acknowledgements**

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