

Bewick's Swan

Cygnus columbianus

Category A

Rare migrant and winter visitor

18 records

Breeds in northern Russia and winters in western Europe, with largest numbers in Britain and Ireland, and the Netherlands.

Formerly a rare visitor to Kent it became annual from the mid-1950s, with larger numbers from the 1970s. Now it is a regular passage migrant and winter visitor in varying numbers. Birds typically arrive from late October and continue to do so through December, even into January in colder weather. Birds tend to depart in February or early March, but passage migrants can occur into April.



Bewick's Swan at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)

The species was included in Knight and Tolputt's "List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood" published in the Folkestone Natural History Society's annual report for 1871. This list covered an area of six mile radius of Folkestone town hall. Whilst this range extends further inland than the current Folkestone and Hythe area, it is likely that the record would have been from the coast, and so would most probably have been within the modern boundary.

The first definitive, dated record of Bewick's Swan in the Folkestone and Hythe area, however, was in 1970, with further sightings in 1980 and 1982, and 15 since 1985 as shown in figure 1. Two years have produced multiple records – 1988 and 1995.

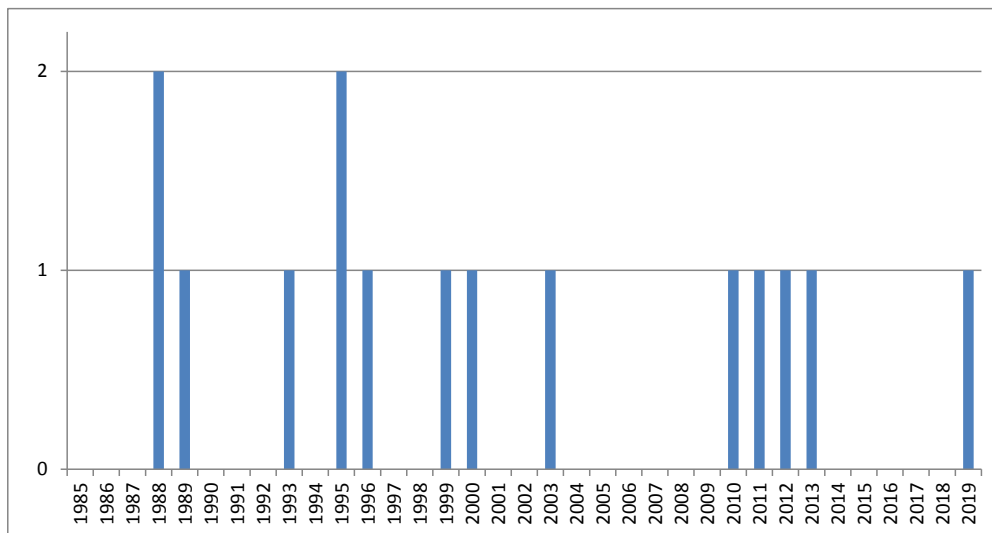


Figure 1: Bewick's Swan records since 1985 at Folkestone and Hythe

The earliest arrival was 30th October (in 1993 and 1995) and the latest record was a migrating flock on 8th March 2011. December has produced the most records, with five, three of which were in the last week of the month. The records by week are given in figure 2, though there are additional undated records from December and January.

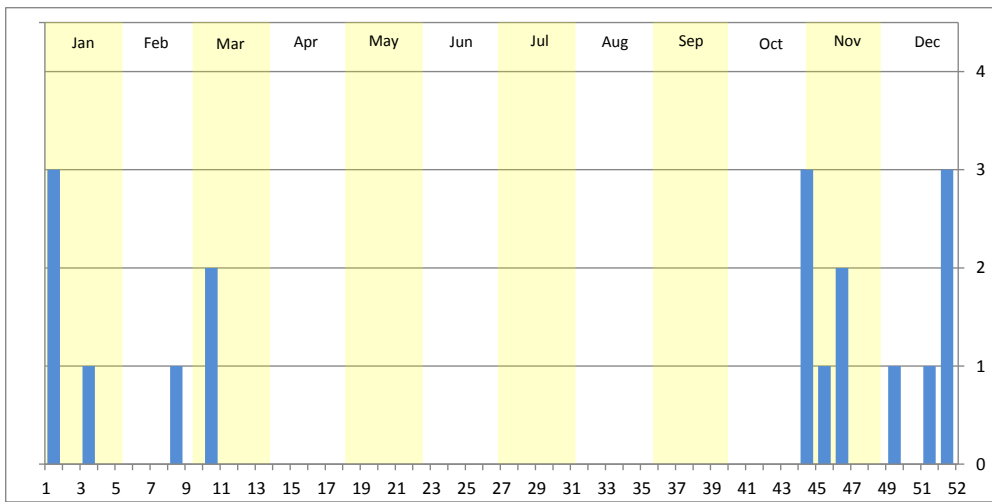


Figure 2: Bewick's Swan records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

The distribution of winter records recorded in the BTO/KOS Atlas (2007 – 2012) is shown in figure 3.

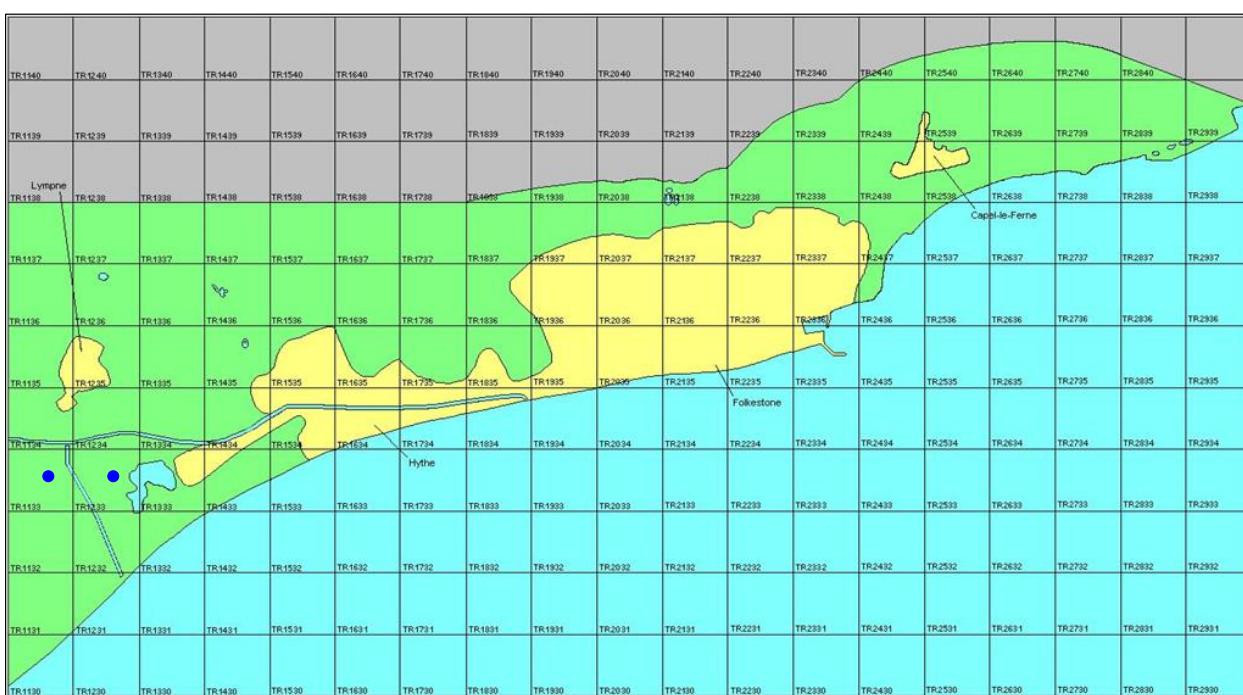
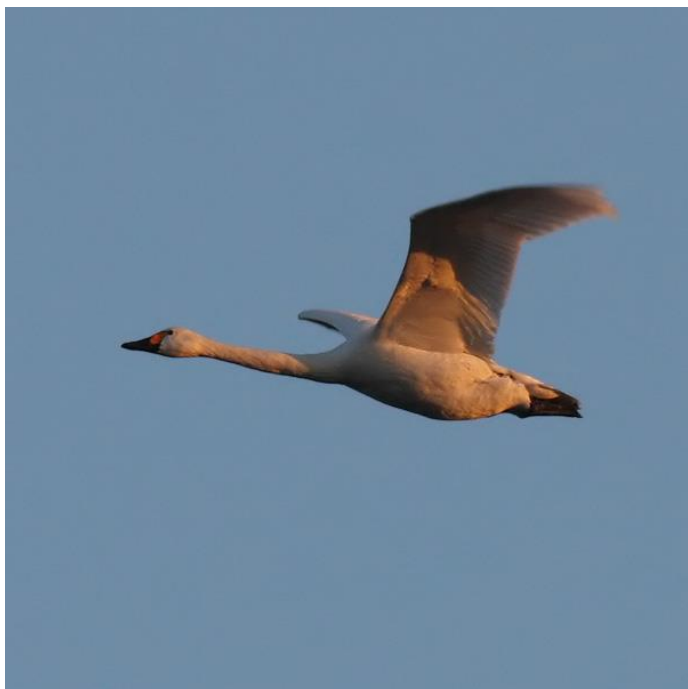


Figure 3: Wintering distribution of Bewick's Swan at Folkestone and Hythe (2007 – 2012 BTO/KOS Atlas)

The distribution of earlier records falls into two distinct categories. The first relates to sightings of migrants in the Cheriton / Folkestone area, with three records in late autumn (November / early December) and two in spring (March), including the largest flock recorded to date, of 61 birds. Records from two of the last three years suggest that there might be a small, previously undetected, up-channel passage in early March of departing birds, possibly from Romney Marsh.

The second relates to a combination of migrants and wandering winter birds in the Romney Marsh area, three of which were in late October / November, with the rest in December to February. Winter records have sometimes, though not always, been associated with cold weather.



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The full list of records is as follows:

- 1970** Nickoll's Quarry, seven, 17th January (G. F. A. Munns)
- 1980** Copt Point, two flew in off the sea, 9th November (reported)
- 1982** Nickoll's Quarry, 22 arrived at dusk, 21st February (D. Weaver)
- 1988** Nickoll's Quarry, 29, unknown date in January (R. & S. Philpott)
- 1988** Cheriton, one flew south, 5th December (J. P. Siddle)
- 1989** Mill Point, two flew west, 17th November (I. A. Roberts)
- 1993** Hythe Ranges, two flew in off the sea, 30th October (R. K. Norman)
- 1995** Nickoll's Quarry, three flew west, 30th October (R. K. Norman)
- 1995** Nickoll's Quarry, two, 30th December (R. K. Norman)
- 1996** Nickoll's Quarry, one, 18th December (R. K. Norman)
- 1999** Nickoll's Quarry, eight flew north-east, 14th November (R. K. Norman)
- 2000** Botolph's Bridge, two, 29th December (R. K. Norman)
- 2003** Nickoll's Quarry, 15 flew east, 3rd January (I. A. Roberts)
- 2010** Nickoll's Quarry, ten, 25th to 28th December, in fields by Botolph's Bridge by day and roosting at Nickoll's Quarry, photographed (D. Weller, B. Harper, I. A. Roberts)
- 2011** Mill Point, 61 flew east, 8th March (I. A. Roberts)
- 2012** Abbotscliffe, five flew west, 3rd November (I. A. Roberts)
- 2013** Samphire Hoe, 21 flew east, 6th March (I. A. Roberts)
- 2019** Battery Point, one drifted east at sea, 6th January (P. Howe)



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