

Smew

Mergellus albellus

Category A

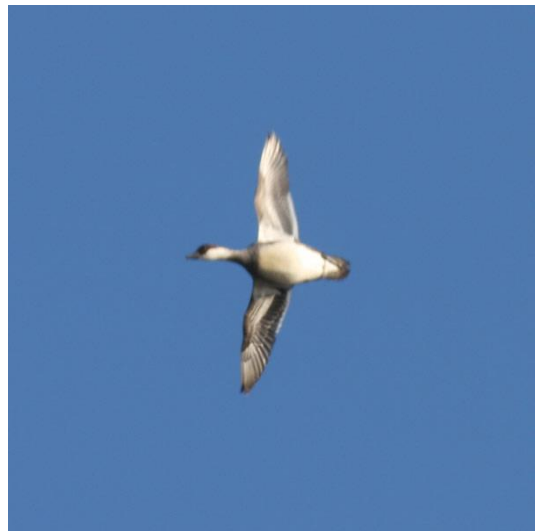
Rare migrant and winter visitor

18 records

Breeds eastwards from Norway, through Finland into northern Russia. Those from Fenno-Scandia (and some from north-west Russia) winter in Britain, the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark.

A scarce winter visitor to Kent, with occasional cold weather influxes.

First recorded at Folkestone and Hythe in 1955, but with only one further record until 1985, since when however it has occurred with some regularity, as shown in figure 1.



Smew at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)

There was a peak in sightings from the mid-1990s when it occurred in six out of seven years. At this time there was particularly suitable habitat at Nickoll's Quarry but since the deeper section was in-filled there have been only three records in the last decade, two at Botolph's Bridge and one flying past Hythe.

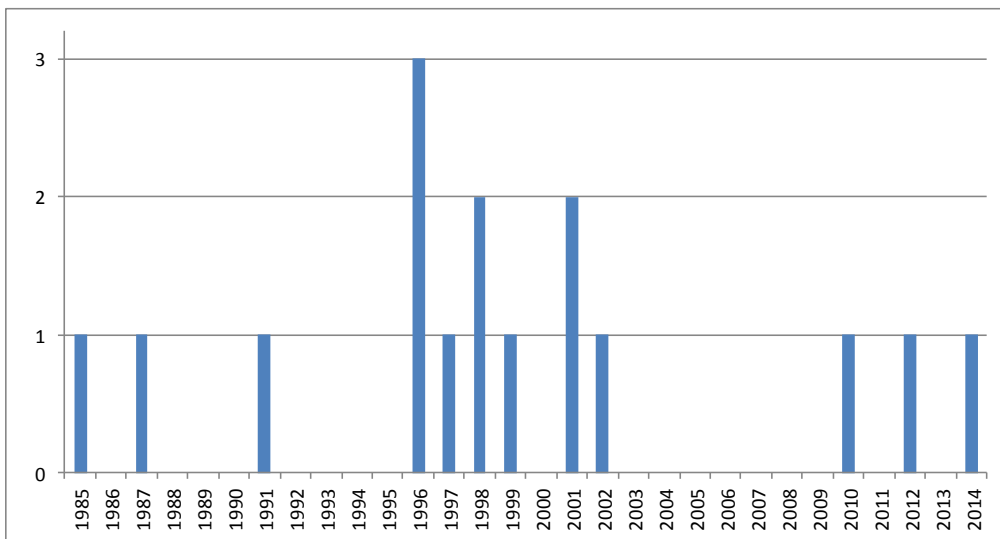


Figure 1: Smew records since 1985 at Folkestone and Hythe

Apart from a migrant which passed Copt Point on the 3rd November 2011, all have been recorded between the 24th November (week 47) and 26th February (week 9), with a peak arrival time of late January / early February, as shown in figure 2. The vast majority of records were associated with severe weather.



Figure 2: Smew 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. Almost all the earlier records were from Nickoll’s Quarry (12), apart from the first record on the Hythe Canal near West Hythe. The others, as mentioned above, were at Botolph’s Bridge (2, both in the southern section of the canal cutting between the railway bridge and the sluice gate) and Hythe, and Copt Point.

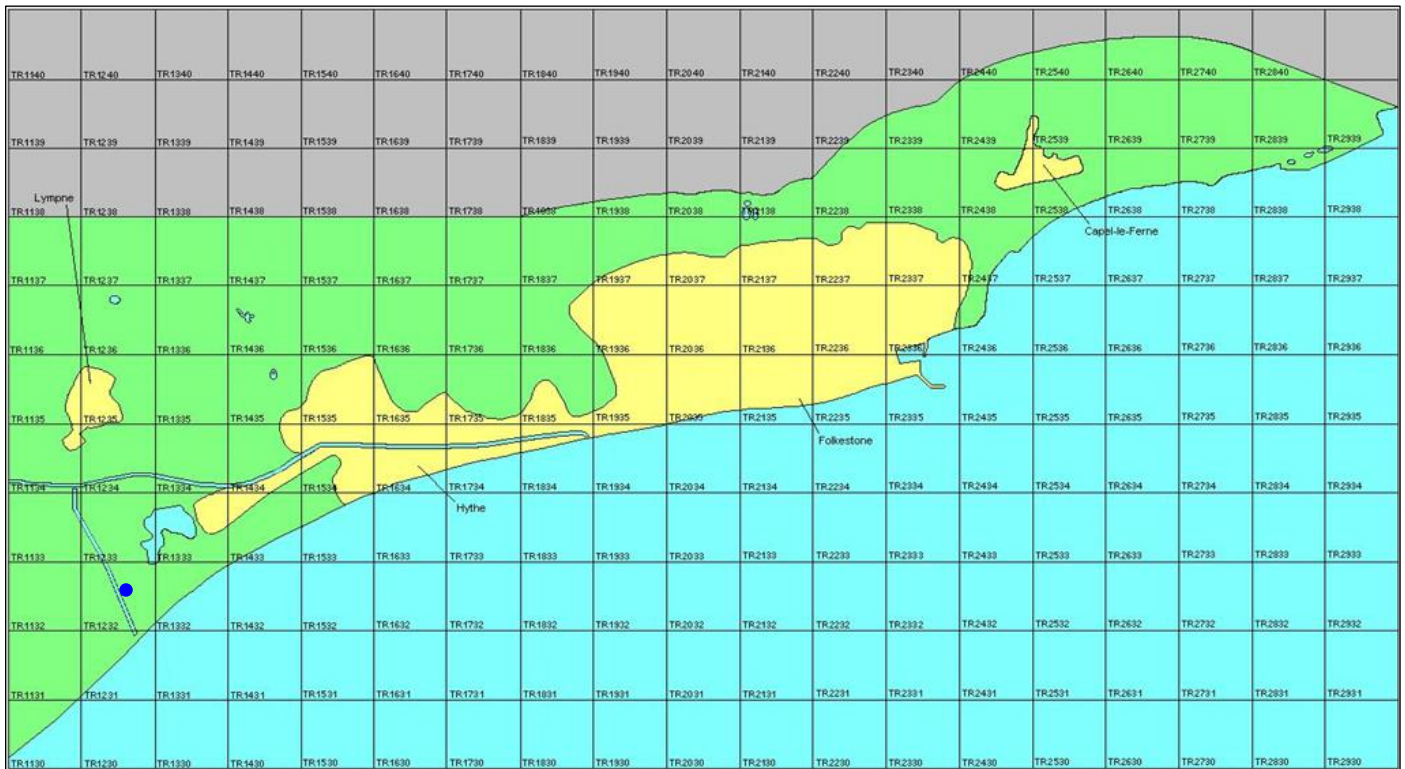


Figure 3: Wintering distribution of Smew at Folkestone and Hythe (2007 – 2012 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Where the age/sex of birds was given the vast majority were immature/females (‘redheads’) but adult drakes have occurred on at least two occasions.

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1955** Hythe Canal (between Burmarsh Estate and West Hythe), one shot, 26th February (B. Uden)
- 1963** Hythe, four, 26th January (G. F. A. Munns)
- 1985** Nickoll’s Quarry, recorded in cold weather period in winter 1985 (per R. K. Norman)
- 1987** Nickoll’s Quarry, four, 25th to 26th January (per R. K. Norman)
- 1991** Nickoll’s Quarry, present from 9th to 24th February, with a maximum of 13 (2 males) on the 13th (R. K. Norman)
- 1996** Nickoll’s Quarry, two to five redheads from 8th to 18th February (R. K. Norman)
- 1996** Nickoll’s Quarry, one to two redheads from 23rd February to 6th March (R. K. Norman)
- 1996** Nickoll’s Quarry, three redheads from 29th December, increasing to 8 on 1st January 1997 (R. K. Norman, I. A. Roberts, D. A. Gibson)
- 1997** Nickoll’s Quarry, four redheads, 25th January, with one to 26th (R. K. Norman)
- 1998** Copt Point, redhead flew west, 3rd November (D. A. Gibson)
- 1998** Nickoll’s Quarry, redhead, 24th November (R. K. Norman)
- 1999** Nickoll’s Quarry, redhead, 30th December (R. K. Norman)
- 2001** Nickoll’s Quarry, one male and two redheads, 20th January, with 2 redheads remaining until the 21st (R. K. Norman, I. A. Roberts)
- 2001** Nickoll’s Quarry, redhead, 16th December (R. K. Norman, I. A. Roberts)
- 2002** Nickoll’s Quarry, six seen briefly in flight, 12th December (R. K. Norman)
- 2010** Botolph’s Bridge, two redheads, 20th February, photographed (B. Harper)
- 2012** Botolph’s Bridge, redhead, 11th February, (B. & M. Harper, I. A. Roberts)
- 2014** Hythe, redhead flew west, 27th December (I. A. Roberts)