

Green Heron

Butorides virescens

Category A

Very rare vagrant

1 record

Breeds in eastern North America from New Brunswick, Quebec and Ontario south to Gulf of Mexico and south-west USA, Mexico, West Indies and parts of Central America. Eastern North American birds migrate south to the Gulf of Mexico and northern South America, with the main passage through the USA in September to October. The recently-split southern counterpart, Green-backed Heron, breeds in South America, Africa, Asia and Australasia.



Green Heron at West Hythe (Tim Corke)

There had been seven British records to 2010, with all between late September and November. The West Hythe individual is the sole county record.

The only area record is as follows:

2008 West Hythe, first-winter, 25th October (possibly since 19th October) to 10th November, photographed (M. & P. Young, I. A. Roberts, P Trodd *et al*)



Green Heron at West Hythe (Nigel Jarman)

Confirmation of this record in the BTO/KOS Winter Atlas (2007 – 2012) is shown in figure 2.

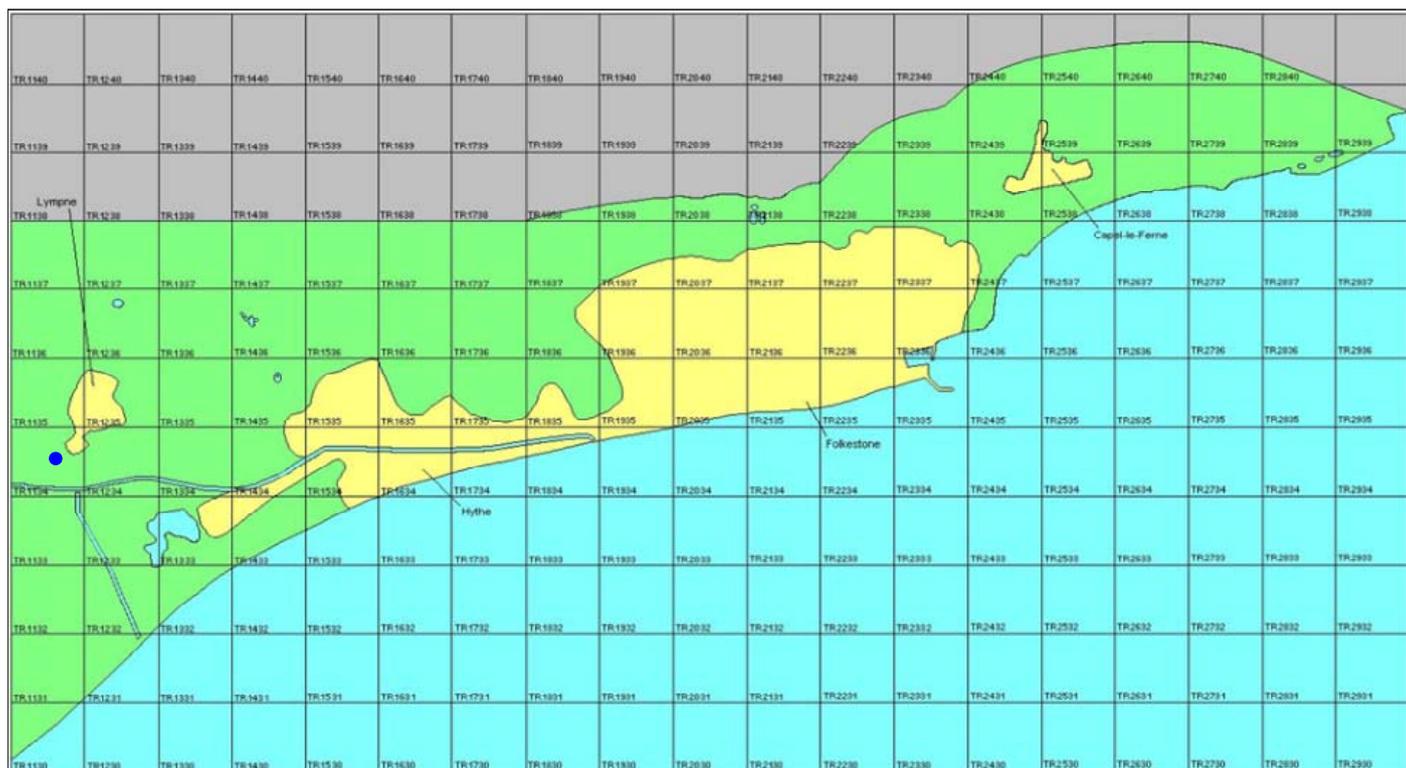


Figure 2: Wintering distribution of Green Heron at Folkestone and Hythe (2007 – 2012 BTO/KOS Atlas)

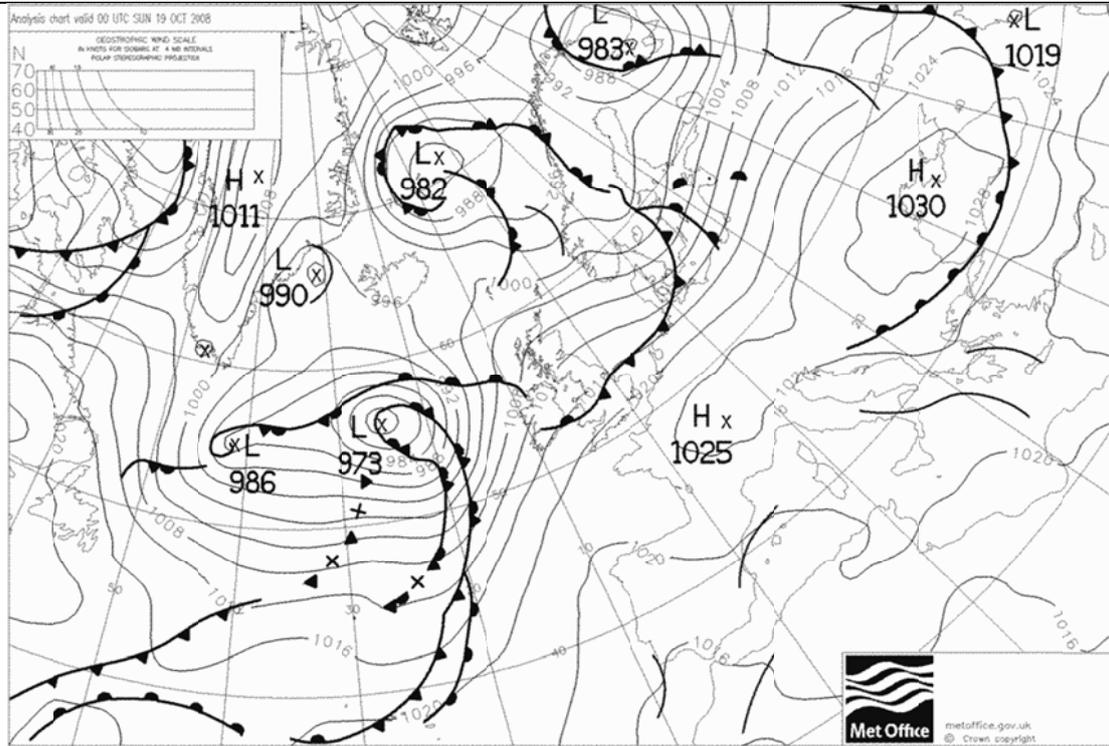
An account of the first area record is given below.

**Green Heron at West Hythe
25th October (possibly since 19th October) to 10th November 2008**

(M. & P. Young, I. A. Roberts, P Trodd *et al*)

Weather conditions:

It is difficult to be certain when the Green Heron arrived but the earliest possible sighting was the 19th October 2008. The chart below shows the synoptic position on that date, and shows just one of the complex, deep low pressure systems which steamed across the Atlantic during the month, bringing a number of Nearctic birds to these shores.



Circumstances of the find:

The first report goes back to Sunday 19th October, when Maureen & Peter Young rang the RSPB to report a small, dark heron at West Hythe, which they were informed was most likely to be a Bittern. They returned on Sunday 26th to see a crowd of people watching their "Bittern" and were told that it was a Green Heron - the same bird they are certain.

Then various dog-walkers began to see it from the 21st, but it wasn't until an angler saw it the next Saturday (25th) and rang a couple of his friends with an interest in birds that the news got out. These two birdwatchers saw the bird late on the Saturday afternoon, and rang Birdline South-east but by the time I got a call it was too late to get there that day.

I was on site before first light on the Sunday (26th), as were a lot of familiar faces and most of the Kent listers. After an anxious wait of an hour or so the bird showed very well, and continued to do so throughout the remainder of its stay, delighting many hundreds of grateful admirers.

I last saw it on the afternoon of Sunday 9th November but understand it was also reported on the Monday (10th) though it was a foul day and coverage would have been limited. To my knowledge there were no subsequent reports. It was quite readily seen when it was present so I presume it departed or died on the night of the 10th/11th.

Description of the bird:

Size, shape, jizz: A very small, compact and dark-looking heron.

Head and upperparts: Dark grey crown and mantle. Grey coverts with fresh white spots, and some chestnut fringing to the lesser coverts. Dark tertials and remiges. Dark grey rump and tail.

Underparts: Chestnut ear-coverts and neck. Chestnut chin and breast, streaked with white. Underwings and flanks ash-grey. Belly whitish.

Bare parts: Upper mandible dark, lower mandible mostly yellow, legs yellow. The yellow eye (black pupil) was joined to the bill by a yellow streak.

Voice: It was not heard to call.

Age/sex: The very fresh white spotted coverts and streaked neck confirm it as a first-winter.

Comments on the record:

This record was accepted by the BBRC and appears in their report for 2008. Green Heron is only the second Nearctic species to be confirmed locally (with the other being Ring-billed Gull, of which there are 2 records).

There had been just five previous British records, which were widely scattered, and none in Kent:

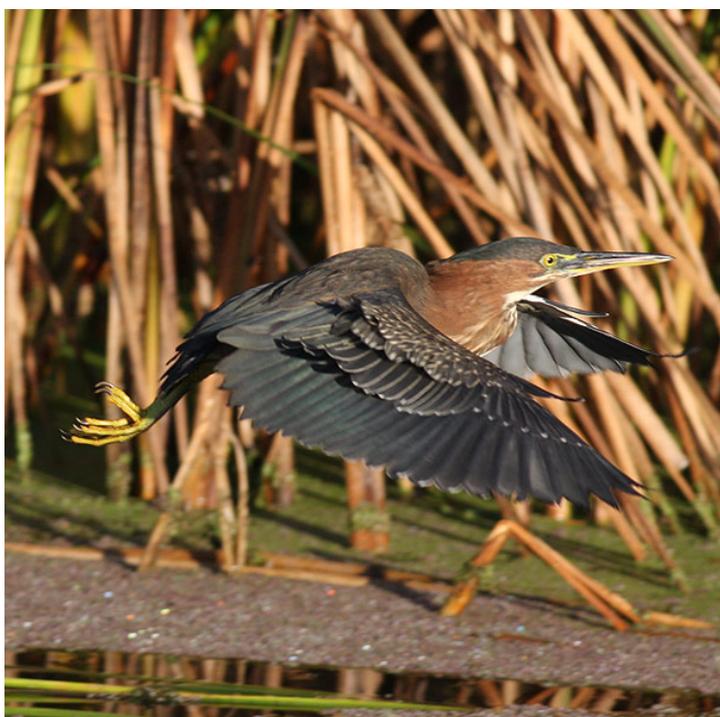
1889 Cornwall, 27th October

1982 Humberside, 27th November (possibly since 13th / 14th) to 6th December

1987 Lothian, 25th October

2001 Lincolnshire, 24th September to 2nd October

2005 Anglesey, 7th to 20th November (previously seen in Cork)



Green Heron at West Hythe (Brian Harper)