

White-tailed Eagle

Haliaeetus albicilla

Category A/C

Very rare vagrant

3 records

Breeds along the Atlantic coast of Norway and around the Baltic coast of Sweden, Finland and Germany. Most adult pairs are resident but juveniles and immatures wander extensively in winter, mainly south to south-west, with some regular wintering areas in north-eastern France and the Netherlands. Following an earlier decline, recent increases have been reported from northern Europe. At the same time a reintroduction project has been gaining success in northern and western Scotland, with a total of 47-52 pairs fledging 46 young in 2010 – the most successful year yet of the scheme. The source of the records in Kent is uncertain.



White-tailed Eagle at Walland Marsh (Martin Casemore)

A very rare vagrant to Kent with 24 historic records up to 1932, but only five since: in 1988, 1990, 1998, 2012 and the most recent in 2018. The five modern records have all been seen in the autumn/winter months, with two in October and singles in November, January and February, and all appeared to relate to immature birds. Three of these were seen within the Folkestone and Hythe area.

The 1988 bird was first seen flying west over Shornecliffe Road in Folkestone by Hugh Coleman on the 15th November and was then found at Elmley on the Isle of Sheppey the next day, and remained in the North Kent area over the winter before it was sadly found dead having been poisoned.

The 2012 individual was first seen in a field by the railway crossing over Botolph’s Bridge road by Philip Sharp on the afternoon of the 14th February before it flew west. It was relocated on Walland Marsh two days later, where it was photographed, before it made a surprise reappearance in the Folkestone and Hythe area on the 19th: after first having headed south over Hawkinge it was then seen flying south-west over Saltwood by Paul Howe.

The most recent bird was seen on the cliff face at Abbotscliffe by Joseph Bowe on the early afternoon of the 14th January before it took flight. Confirmation of the three area records are provided in figure 1.

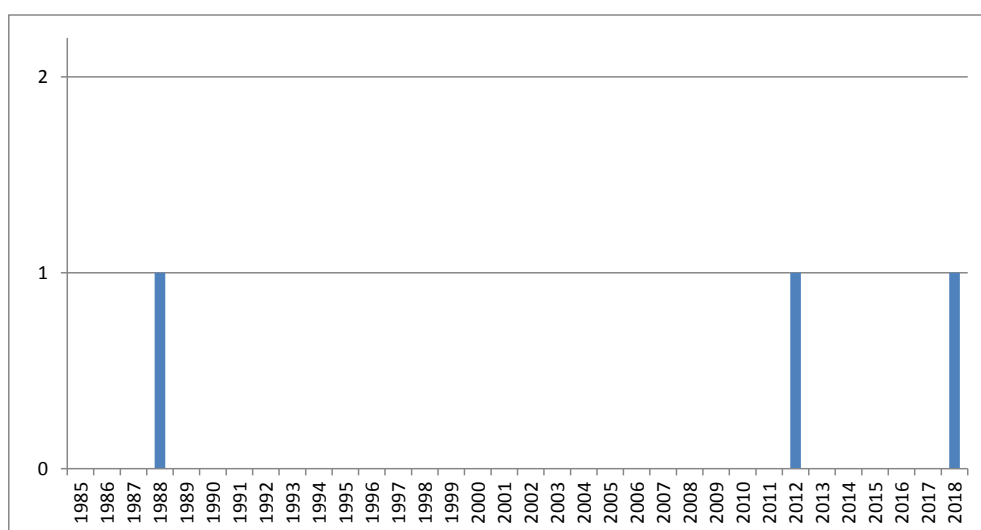


Figure 1: White-tailed Eagle records at Folkestone and Hythe

The three records occurred in January, February and November, as demonstrated in figure 2.

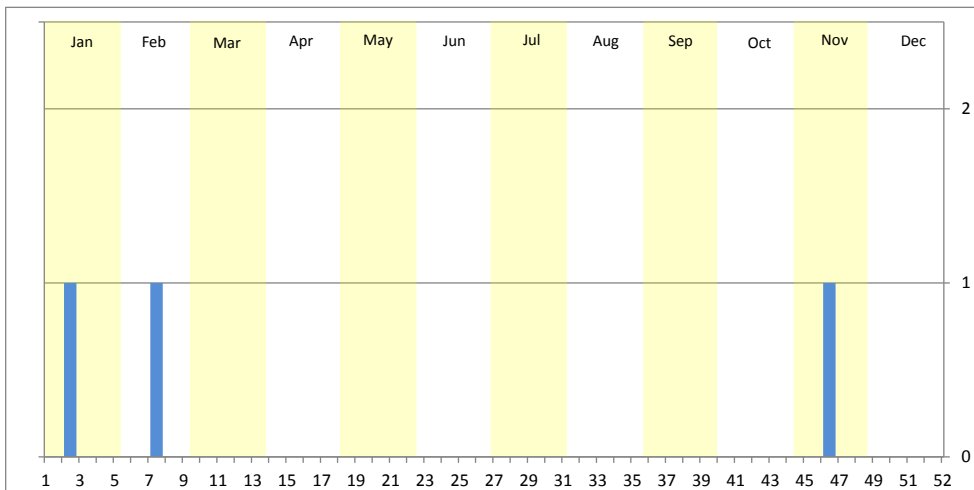


Figure 2: White-tailed Eagle records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

The distribution of winter records recorded in the BTO/KOS Atlas (2007 – 2012) is shown in figure 3. These records all relate to the one mobile individual.

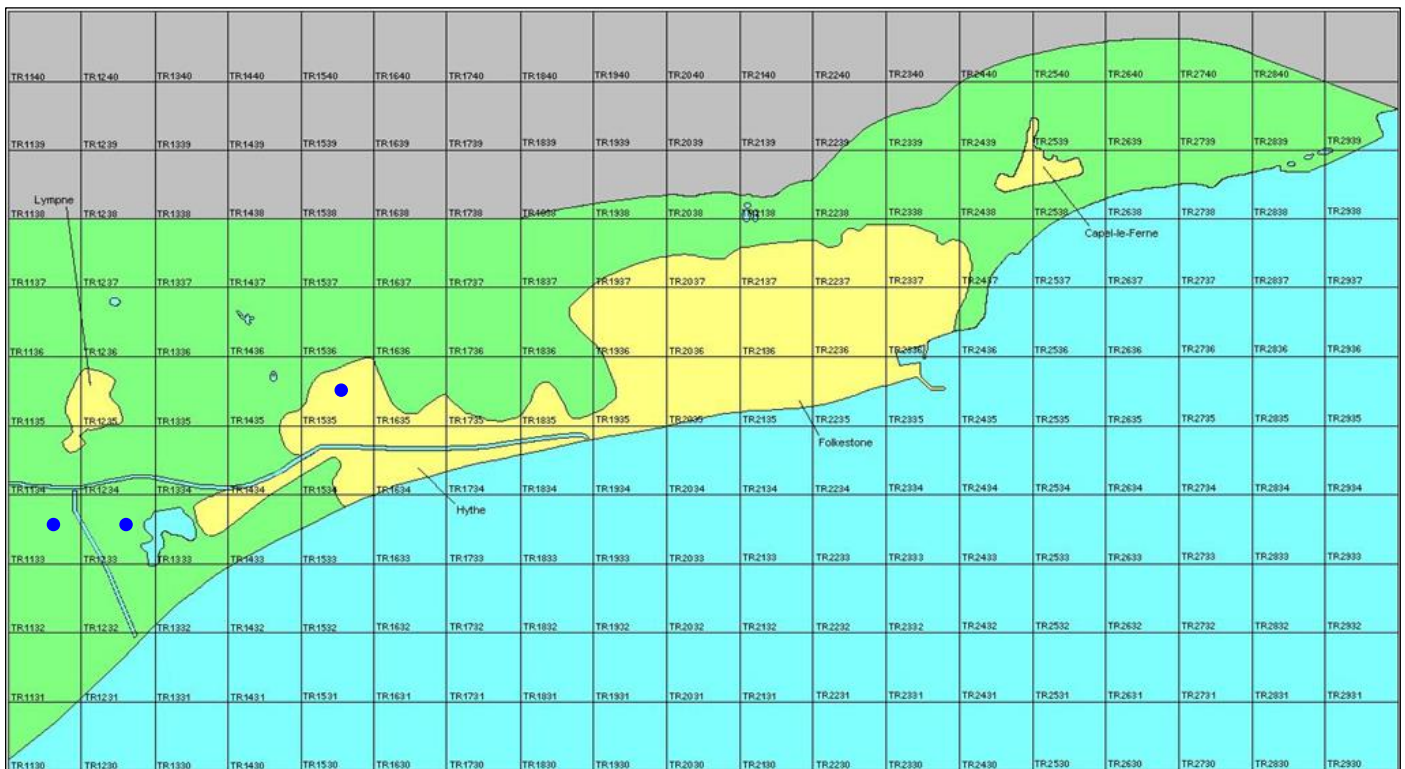


Figure 3: Wintering distribution of White-tailed Eagle at Folkestone and Hythe (2007 – 2012 BTO/KOS Atlas)

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1988** Folkestone, immature flew west, 15th November (H. Coleman)
- 2012** Botolph's Bridge, immature seen in field before flying west, 14th February (P. Sharp), presumed same flew south-west over Saltwood, 19th February (P. Howe)
- 2018** Abbotscliffe, immature, 14th January (J. Bowe)