

Little Auk

Alle alle

Category A

Rare migrant and winter visitor

24 records

Breeds in large colonies in Spitsbergen (5-7 million pairs), with smaller numbers in extreme northern Russia (Franz Josef Land and Novaya Zemlya), also in Greenland and Siberian Arctic. Winters among broken pack-ice from Barents Sea westwards into Norwegian Sea, through Denmark Strait to Davis Strait, and south to Grand Banks of Newfoundland.

More or less regular in small numbers south to Scotland, occurring further south in wrecks. These wrecks are typically a feature of the southern parts of the winter range and are fairly frequent on a small scale, with large events occurring occasionally, involving hundreds or thousands of birds. While able to withstand storms at sea under normal conditions, prolonged gales may cause planktonic food to descend beyond reach; weakened birds then drift downwind, further south than normal, and become wrecked on meeting leeward coastline in continuing storms.



Little Auk at Hythe (Nigel Webster)

A scarce but regular late autumn passage migrant to Kent with occasional winter influxes.

Henry Ulyett in his *Rambles of a Naturalist Round Folkestone* (1880) includes this species in the list of those recorded in the neighbourhood of Folkestone, within a radius of six miles from the town hall. Assuming it was on the coast this would almost certainly fall within the current Folkestone and Hythe area.

In December 1955 one was seen close inshore off Folkestone Warren, with another some 35 years later off the Hythe Redoubt in December 1990. Since then however it has occurred with some regularity, with 21 records in the 22 years since 1995, though records tend to be clustered around influxes of the species into the southern North Sea, and there have been many years without any sightings, as shown in figure 1. The largest influxes to date were 1996 (with six records comprising 13 birds) and 2007 (with six records totalling 11 birds).

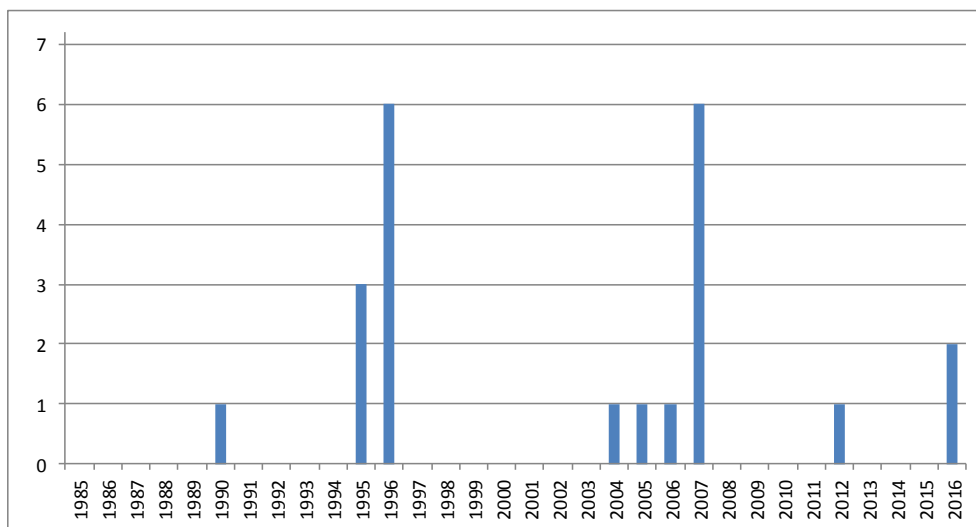


Figure 1: Little Auk records since 1985 at Folkestone and Hythe

The majority (74%) of records have occurred in November, with four records in the December and singles in January and February, as shown in figure 2.

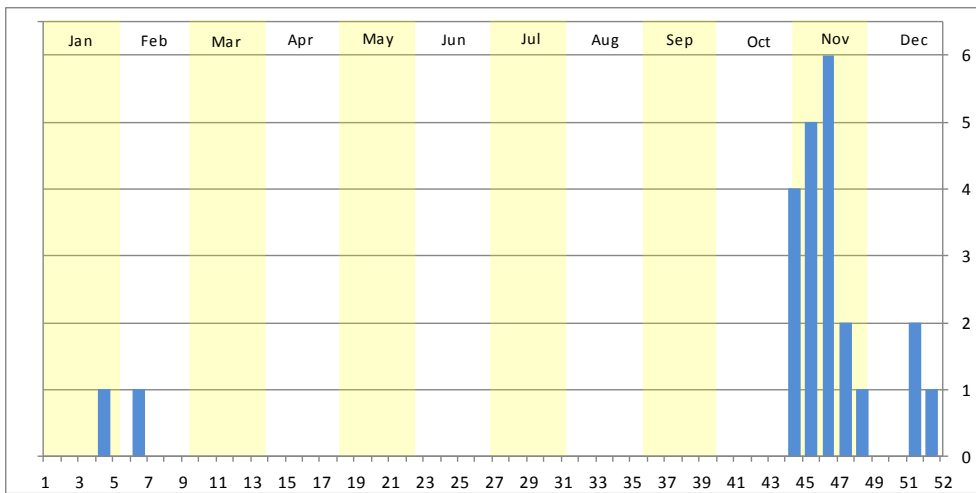


Figure 2: Little Auk records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

All records are from the coast between Hythe Redoubt and Samphire Hoe, apart from a storm-blown bird at Nickoll's Quarry from the 22nd to 25th November 1996. The distribution of winter records recorded in the BTO/KOS Atlas (2007 – 2012) is shown in figure 3.

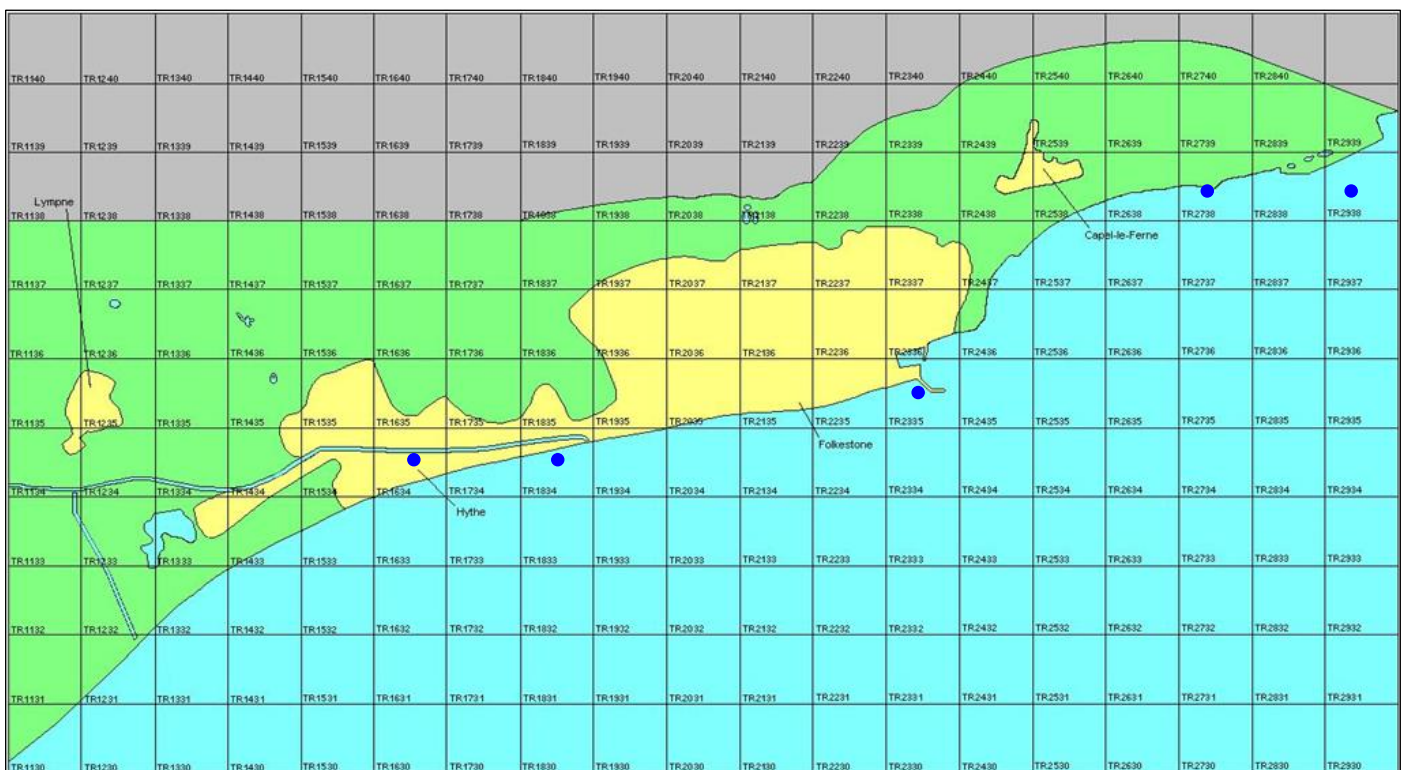


Figure 3: Wintering distribution of Little Auk at Folkestone and Hythe (2007 – 2012 BTO/KOS Atlas)

The full list of dated records is as follows:

- 1955** Folkestone Warren, one close inshore, 18th December (P. S. Redman)
- 1990** Hythe Redoubt, one close inshore, 30th December (R. K. Norman)
- 1995** Copt Point, three (one flew west, two flew east), 2nd November (D. A. Gibson)
- 1995** Folkestone Harbour, one, 3rd November (D. A. Gibson)
- 1995** Sandgate, one, 5th November (P. Howe)
- 1996** Copt Point, one flew west, 11th February (D. A. Gibson)
- 1996** Copt Point, seven flew east, 14th November (D. A. Gibson)
- 1996** Folkestone Harbour, one, 14th November (D. A. Gibson)
- 1996** Copt Point, two flew east, 15th November (D. A. Gibson)
- 1996** Nickoll's Quarry, one, 22nd to 25th November (R. K. Norman)
- 1996** Sandgate, one flew west, 1st December (P. Howe, H. G. Brown, R. Thorogood)

- 2004** Samphire Hoe, one flew west, 20th November (I. A. Roberts)
- 2005** Samphire Hoe, one, 23rd December (D. E. Smith, P. Holt)
- 2006** Mill Point, two (one flew east, one flew west), 2nd November (I. A. Roberts)
- 2007** Samphire Hoe, four (two groups of two) off seawall, 11th November (P. Holt)
- 2007** Folkestone Harbour, one flew west, 11th November (I. A. Roberts)
- 2007** Copt Point, three flew west, 11th November (I. A. Roberts)
- 2007** Samphire Hoe, one close inshore, 12th November (P. Holt)
- 2007** Battery Point (Seabrook), one close offshore, 12th November (M. Vandoen)
- 2007** Hythe, one flew east, 13th November, photographed (I. A. Roberts)
- 2012** Abbotscliffe, one offshore, 23rd January (P. Edmondson)
- 2016** Hythe, one offshore, 3rd November, photographed (N. Webster)
- 2016** Battery Point (Seabrook), one flew east, 6th November (B. Harper)



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Little Auk at Hythe (Ian Roberts)