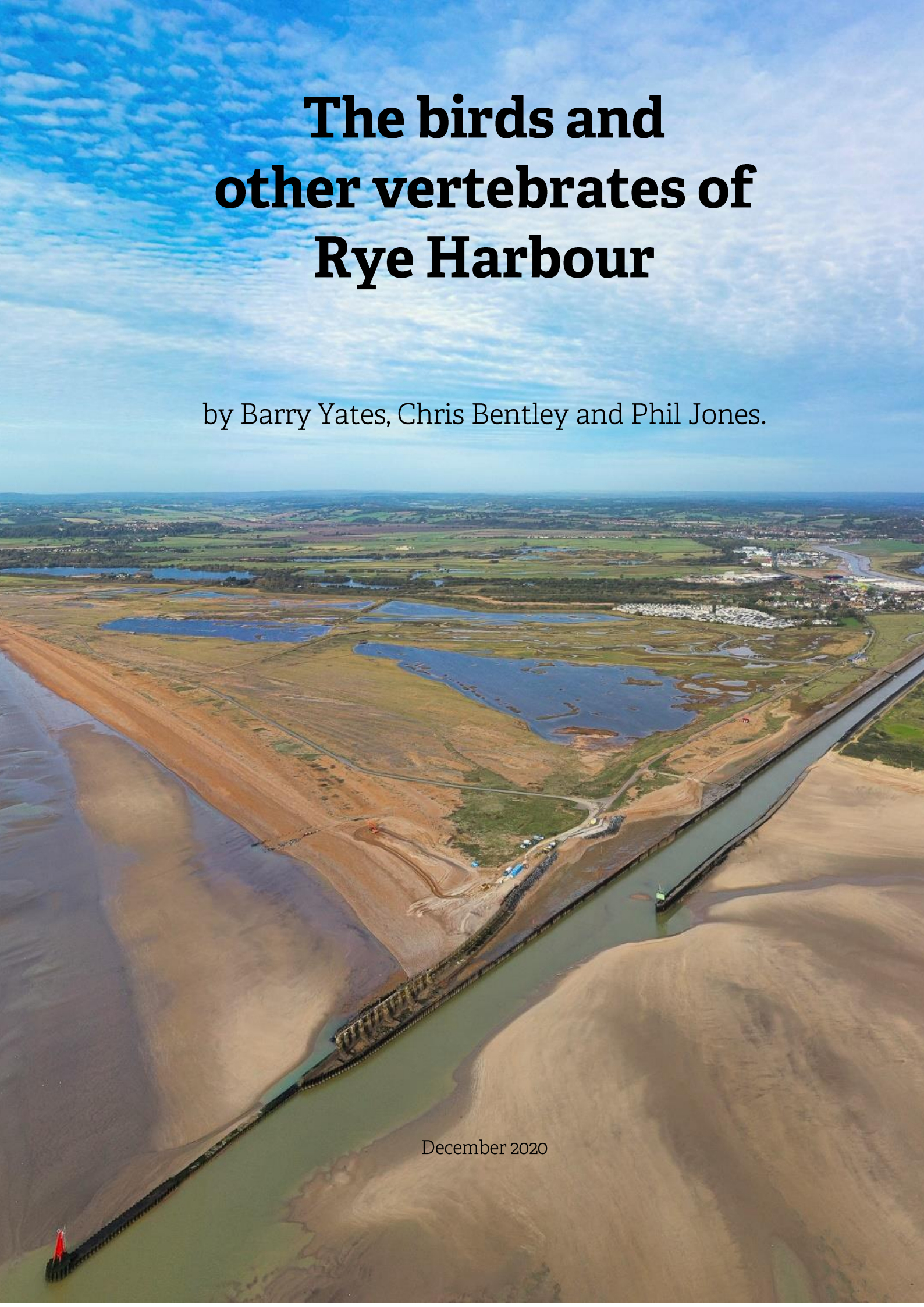


# **The birds and other vertebrates of Rye Harbour**

by Barry Yates, Chris Bentley and Phil Jones.

December 2020



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Cover photo – River Mouth looking west October 2020 by Stuart Conway

Castle Water October 2020 by Stuart Conway



# Introduction

The nature reserve at Rye Harbour was established in March 1970 and this report summarises the natural history of the larger animals, the ones with backbones. This first version will contain errors and omissions and we would welcome any comments that you have, please let us know at [rhroffice@sussexwt.org.uk](mailto:rhroffice@sussexwt.org.uk)

The nature reserve is a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and part of a much larger Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a Special Protection Area, a Special area of Conservation and a Ramsar wetland which covers large parts of the Romney Marshes, Dungeness and Rye Bay.

In 1965 **East Sussex County Council** (ESCC) published a report on the future development of the East Sussex Coast which included proposals to encourage the establishment of a nature reserve over the whole of the Rye Harbour SSSI. In 1970 the shingle beach owned by the **Environment Agency** (EA) was declared a LNR by ESCC, who also appointed a Management Committee to administer it. This was the beginning of Rye Harbour Nature Reserve. Since then further land has been added by agreement with neighbouring landowners and by purchase of land by the **Sussex Wildlife Trust** (SWT) with the help of the **Friends of Rye Harbour Nature Reserve** (The Friends). It is hoped that further areas of the SSSI will become part of the nature reserve and so this report covers the whole area. In 2011 the management responsibilities were transferred to SWT.

The nature reserve is in two parts. The southern part - owned by EA includes the seaward shingle ridges extending inland to, and including, the gravel pit known as Ternery Pool, behind this is the strip of former arable land called Rye Harbour Farm that was purchased in 2002 to create a flood bank to provide improved flood defence. The northern part is Castle Water (a large gravel pit and surrounding land purchased by Sussex Wildlife Trust in 1995) and Castle Farm, a large area of meadow land and shingle ridges around Camber Castle (owned by Langrish Farmers). See the two maps on the following pages.

Rye Harbour is most famous for its bird life and in particular the 100 species that have nested. The other vertebrates include 16 species of fish, six amphibians, four reptiles and 40 mammals. However, most of the 4,355 species recorded on the reserve are the invertebrates and plants and you will find more details of those on the website below. More than 300 species are considered rare or endangered and these are the focus of the management.

We hope that this report will encourage you to discover for yourself *The birds and other vertebrates of Rye Harbour* and inspire you to participate in its management by reporting your sightings and participating in the work of the nature reserve –see Appendix 1.

Access to the nature reserve is free, but restricted to the network of public and permissive footpaths, with good wheelchair access on the southern part. To avoid disturbance to wildlife all visitors are particularly requested not to enter any fenced areas within the nature reserve or any of our neighbours' land. There are five bird watching hides which are always open to the public.

To find out more visit our website [www.sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/ryeharbour](http://www.sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/ryeharbour)

welcome to...

# Rye Harbour



**Sussex**  
Wildlife Trust



# Rye Harbour Nature Reserve

## Key

1 Kilometre

N

- boundary of reserve
- footpaths
- ditches
- bund or ridge
- shingle
- vegetated shingle
- car park
- WC

The nature reserve extends to 445 hectares (or 1100 acres) and includes five special habitats: vegetated shingle, saltmarsh, saline lagoons, coastal grazing marsh and reedbed.

It has the wildlife designations of Site of Special Scientific Interest, Special Protection Area, Special Area of Conservation and a Ramsar wetland. It was also voted as Britain's Favourite Nature Reserve in 2016 by the LandLove magazine poll.

It is home to 4,275 plants and animals of which about 300 are considered nationally rare.

About 90 different types of bird nest each year and in winter it is home to thousands of ducks and wading birds.

More than 500 flowering plants have been found here and a bird, a spider and a beetle were new to Britain and one, a fly, was new to science.

300,000 visitors a year explore the network of footpaths and five birdwatching hides that are wheelchair friendly. The nature reserve runs more than 70 events each year.

Follow us at [www.facebook.com/RyeHarbourNR](https://www.facebook.com/RyeHarbourNR)



The nature reserve was established here in 1970 and is managed by the Sussex Wildlife Trust with the support from its partners - Environment Agency, Langrish Farmers, East Sussex County Council, Rother District Council, Icklesham Parish Council, Rye Town Council, British Association of Shooting and Conservation and Sussex Ornithological Society.

Much of the nature reserve's work has only been possible with the financial and voluntary support of about 2,000 Friends of Rye Harbour Nature Reserve and 30,000 members of the Sussex Wildlife Trust.

### CAN YOU SPOT THESE DETAILS?

- cormorant drying wings
- kingfisher
- swallow
- avocet
- kestrel

### PLEASE JOIN US AT

[www.rhnrfriends.co.uk](http://www.rhnrfriends.co.uk)



[www.sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk](http://www.sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk)



See [www.RyeHarbour.net](http://www.RyeHarbour.net) for old photos and memories of Rye Harbour village

- cuckoo
- bittern
- ram
- horse
- badger
- cow
- swan
- green woodpecker
- fox
- badger
- cow
- kingfisher
- swallow
- avocet
- kestrel

RHNK truck

bird photographer

# Birds

## **RED-THROATED DIVER** *Gavia stellata*

### **Fairly common winter visitor**

Recorded mainly between October and April, but especially from December to March. Usually seen offshore and generally in small numbers, but Rye Bay can hold large numbers in winter such as 700 on 14 January 2002. They used to be a regular sight on the deep pits, normally singly, although five were noted at Long Pit in January 1985. Such birds frequently show some oiled plumage, but it's good to report that oiled seabirds are now rarely seen



Red-throated Divers on the sea showing their typical bill up profile 6 January 2018

## **BLACK-THROATED DIVER** *Gavia arctica*

### **Scarce winter visitor and spring migrant**

Recorded in 19 years since 1970, with most records between late November and February, and during the first half of May. The earliest record concerned one offshore on 12 October 2003 and the latest was one, in full breeding plumage, at Narrow Pit from 11-17 June 1988. All records relate to singletons apart from reports of 13 on 8 January 1977, three on 4 May 1985 and two on three occasions.

## **GREAT NORTHERN DIVER** *Gavia immer*

### **Rare visitor**

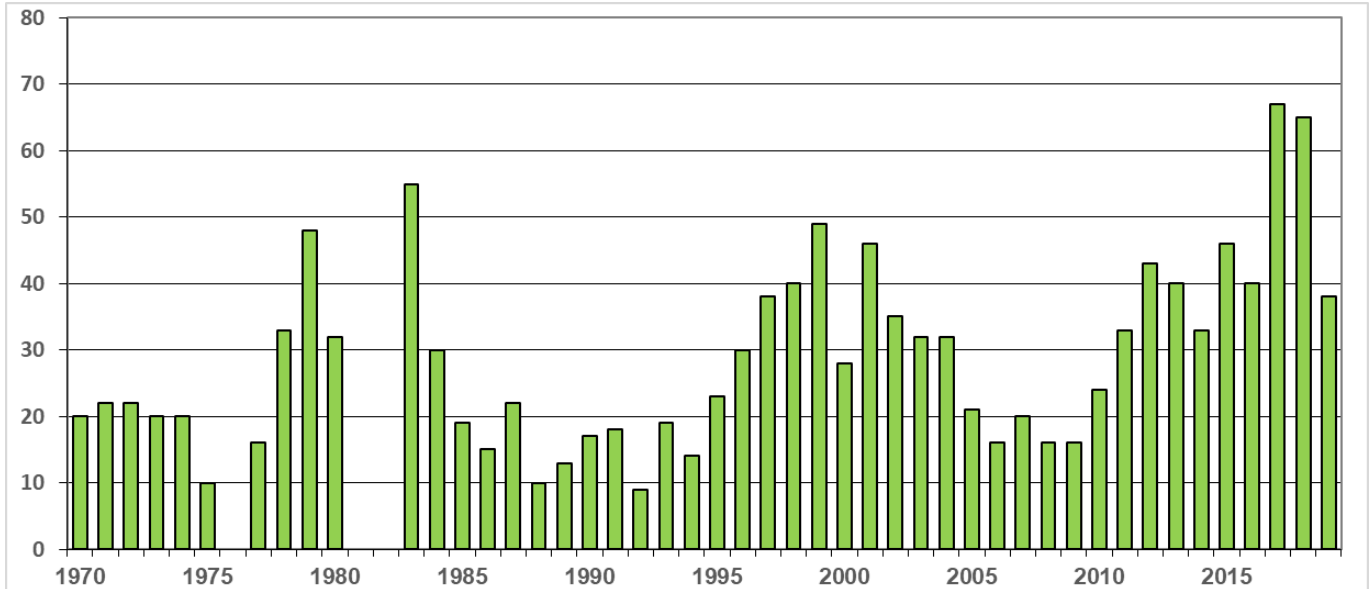
Recorded between early November and early May on eight occasions as follows:

- 1973: one offshore on 15 Apr.
- 1979: one at Long Pit on 18 Dec.
- 1981: five offshore on 25 Jan.
- 1982: one at Long Pit on 25 Nov.
- 1985: one at sea on 4 May.
- 1996: immature on Long Pit, 1 Nov.
- 1999: one at the river mouth, 10 Mar.
- 2014: one at the river mouth, 25 Dec.

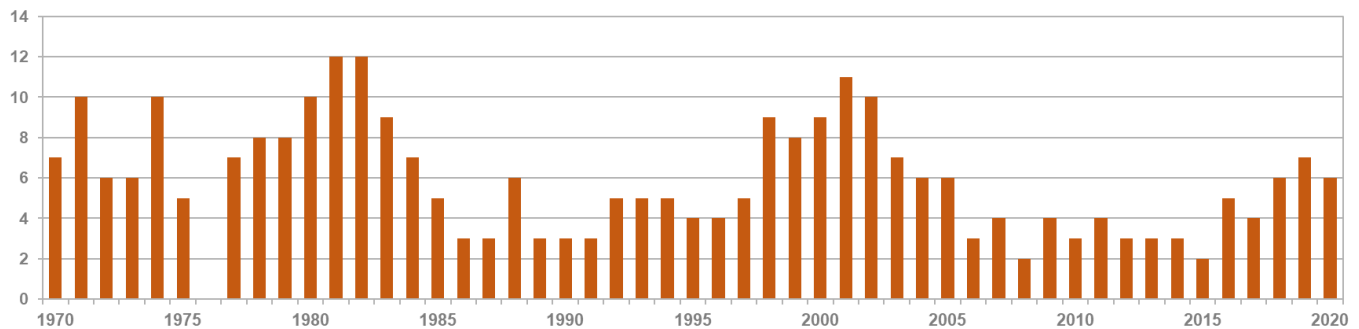
**LITTLE GREBE** *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

**Common breeding resident**

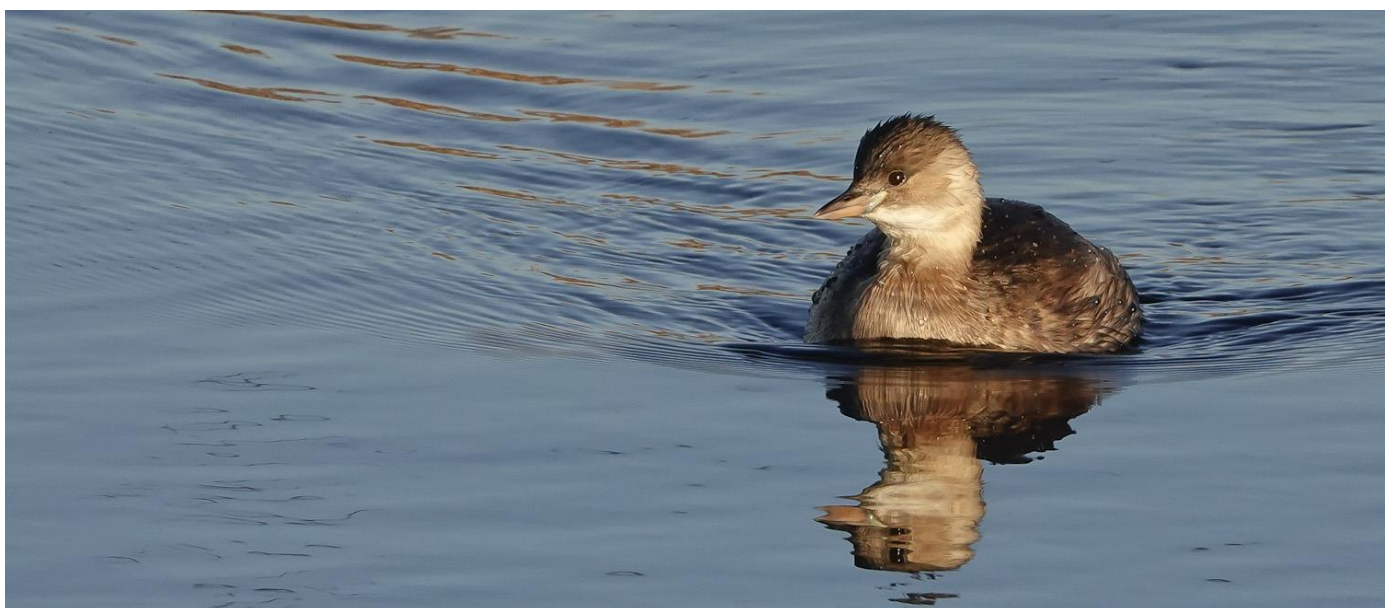
Between three and 12 pairs have bred annually, with typically six pairs in recent years, but they can be secretive. Peak numbers are generally present between August and November, with the majority on the saline lagoons of the south part of the reserve. The highest counts concern 67 on 19 November 2018 and 55 on 20 November 1983. Lowest numbers are generally during the breeding season.



Little Grebe peak counts 1991-2019 pairs at Rye Harbour



Little Grebe breeding pairs at Rye Harbour

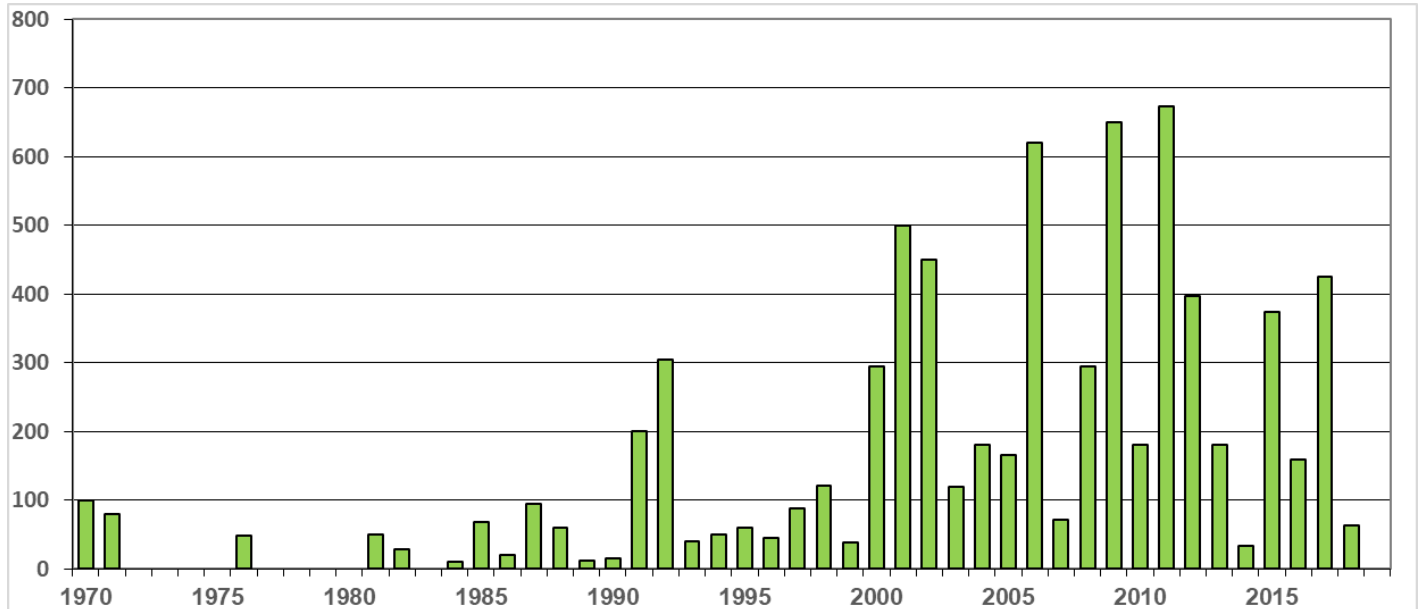


Little Grebe in December

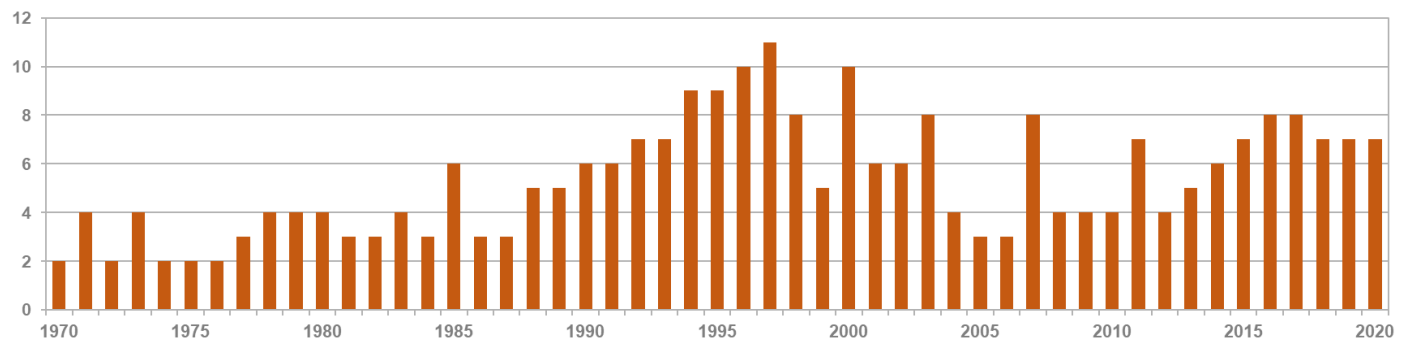
**GREAT CRESTED GREBE** *Podiceps cristatus*

**Fairly common breeding resident, numbers increase in winter**

Annual numbers of breeding pairs within the SSSI have risen from an average of 3 pairs during the 1970s to 8 during the 1990s, with a peak of 11 pairs in 1997. Since then, numbers have fallen slightly, with an average breeding population of 6 pairs. Numbers increase during the winter months, especially between December and February when large numbers may gather offshore. Peak counts have included 674 in January 2011, 500 on 31 December 2001 and 450 on 5 January 2002.



Great Crested Grebe peak counts 1991-2019 pairs at Rye Harbour



Great Crested Grebe breeding pairs at Rye Harbour

**RED-NECKED GREBE** *Podiceps grisegena*

**Scarce winter visitor**

Recorded in 19 years since 1970, mostly between October and April, and on occasions some have stayed for long periods. The best year was 1979 when records included three at Long Pit from 28 January into February following freezing conditions with one remaining until at least 29 April and one on 5 May, the latest ever. All other sightings have involved single birds apart from two on the sea off Winchelsea Beach on 15 April 1996, when another was also at Castle Water, and there were two at Castle Water on 14 and 15 February 2000. Records of birds between late March and late April probably indicate a small spring passage. The earliest autumn records involved one from 25 September to 2 October 2002 and one from 4 to 6 October 1975.

**SLAVONIAN GREBE** *Podiceps auritus*

**Regular, but scarce winter and spring visitor**

Has occurred offshore and on shingle pits in 33 years since 1970, between mid September and early May. In some years there is evidence of a spring passage. The majority of records involve single birds, although there are several records of two and peak counts involve nine offshore on 1 May 1978, five on the following day, up to five on Long Pit in February 1979 (see also Red-necked Grebe), five on the sea on 14 and 21 March 1999 and three on dates in 1974, 2009, 2011 and 2013. The earliest winter record was one on 17 September 1988 whilst the latest spring record were two on 27 April 1974.

**BLACK-NECKED GREBE** *Podiceps nigricollis*

**Regular, but scarce visitor**

Recorded in 31 years since 1970. Records are well spread throughout the year with occurrences in all months. Most records are of single birds although there are several records of two birds and peak counts involve eight flying east offshore on 14 March 1999 and three seen during the winter in 1999, 2009, 2011 and 2013. A pair at Castle Water from 4 April 1993 were observed nest building on 8<sup>th</sup>, but were not seen after 10<sup>th</sup>.



Black-necked Grebe in winter plumage 28 November 2016 (left) and in breeding plumage 25 March 2019 (right)

**FULMAR** *Fulmarus glacialis*

**Uncommon visitor offshore**

Regular offshore throughout the year except October and November. Numbers are generally very low, but they nest nearby on the sandstone cliffs of Fairlight. The highest counts were 34 on 25 April 2000, 11 on 15 January 1999 and ten on 26 August 1993. Occasionally noted over the nature reserve between April and September, as far inland as Camber Castle. One ringed as a nestling on Fair Isle in 1982 was found dead at Rye Harbour in January 1983.

**SOOTY SHEARWATER** *Puffinus griseus*

**Rare migrant offshore**

Recorded on three occasions offshore:

1976: One flying east on 16 Jun.

2000: Two or three heading south-west on 8 Sep.

2009: One on 4 Dec.

**MANX SHEARWATER** *Puffinus puffinus*

**Rare offshore**

The first four records are as follows:

1974: two on 12 May.

1997: one on 27 Aug.

1998: three on 8 Sep.

2001: four on 18 Jul.

There are further records of two in May 2006, three in May 2007 and one in 2011.

**BALEARIC SHEARWATER** *Puffinus mauretanicus*

**Rare offshore**

There are five reports as follows:

2002: one in Jul.

2007: one on 3 Aug.

2009: four on 2 Sep.

2011: three on 6 Aug and one on 17 Sep.

**GANNET** *Morus bassana*

**Regular visitor offshore**

Present at sea throughout the year, although usually far out in Rye Bay. Numbers are generally highest between May and October with a drop in activity in June and July. Few are generally seen between November and February. The highest numbers noted were 250 during strong winds on 5 August 1984, 155 mostly flying east on 25 April 2000 and 150 feeding distantly offshore on 24 July 1998. There are just two records of live birds from the SSSI: an adult at Ternery Pool on 27 June 1991 and a sick individual at the Beach Reserve on 22 October 1986 which had been ringed as a nestling on Bass Rock, Scotland the year before. Another ringing recovery was of a chick of 1990 from the nearest breeding colony, on Alderney found dead on the shore in March 1998.

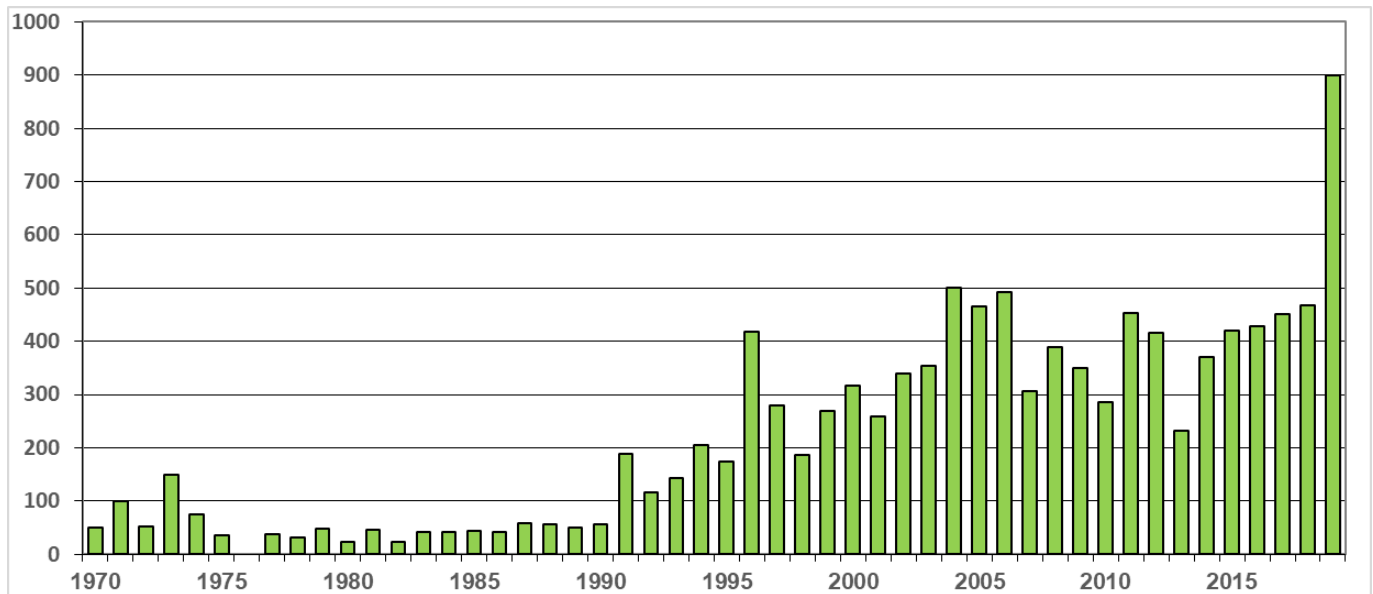


Gannets feeding close inshore 29 November 2020

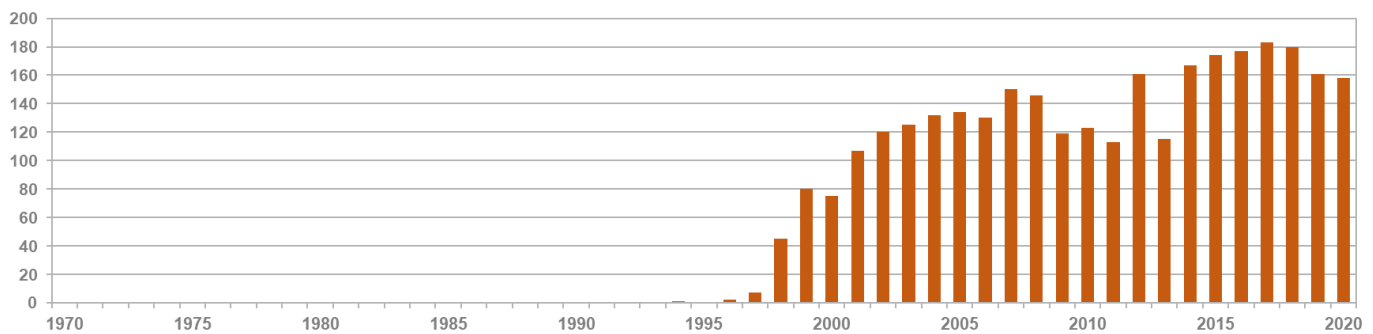
**CORMORANT** *Phalacrocorax carbo*

**Common resident, breeding annually since 1996**

Numbers have shown a marked increase in recent years, mainly from 1991 onwards. Peak annual counts since 1970 have varied between 23 in 1982 and 900 in December 2019. Nest building activity was noted from two sub-adults in 1986 and by several adults in 1988. In 1991 further nest building activity was noted with one pair possibly incubating for a few days, although the first confirmed breeding involved a pair at Ternery Pool in 1994 with two pairs there in 1996. In 1997 about six pairs nested on a wooded island at Castle Water. This colony has since increased rapidly – see graph below. The Ternery Pool birds did not fledge young, but success at Castle Water has been high. The breeding birds are thought to be mostly of the white-headed continental form *sinensis*. There are many ringing recoveries of this species because of the ease of reading the numbered colour rings with a telescope. The birds were all ringed as nestlings and came from the following areas; Essex 20, Wales 11, Denmark 4, France 3, Ireland 2, Scotland 1, Netherlands 1 and Kent 1. There are many cases of multiple sightings over several years, but the most interesting was of “left red UX” ringed on 23 June 1985 at St. Margaret’s Isle, Dyfed, Wales. It was first seen at Rye Harbour later that year on 10 November and in May and June of the following year. In June 1988 it was breeding back at St Margaret’s Isle, and it remained an annual visitor to Ternery Pool until the last sighting in September 1993.



Cormorant annual peak counts at Rye Harbour



Cormorant breeding pairs at Rye Harbour

**SHAG** *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*

**Rare winter visitor**

Recorded in twelve years since 1970, mostly between late November and March:

1970: one at Narrow Pit on 21-24 Mar.

1971: one within the SSSI on 14 Mar.

1977: one found dead on the shore in Mar.

1984: adult on the Rother on 5 Feb; immature at Ternery Pool on 24 Nov; one flying along the shore in December.

1985: immature at the river mouth on 28 Nov.

1986: one offshore on 12 Jan.

1988: singles offshore on 10 Jan and 26 Nov.

1990: in January one offshore on 1<sup>st</sup> and one dead along shore on 7<sup>th</sup>; in December one offshore on 17<sup>th</sup> and one dead along shore on 19<sup>th</sup>.

1996: one offshore on 24 Sep.

2005: two offshore on 1 May.

2006: immature at river mouth 9 Dec.

2009: four offshore on 13 Jun.

There are three ringing recoveries and all were ringed as nestlings on the Isle of May, Fife and found dead at Rye Harbour from December to March.



Immature Shag at river mouth 9 December 2006

**BITTERN** *Botaurus stellaris*

**Present all year, but additional birds during the winter.**

This is a conservation success story in Britain. Bitterns were on the brink of extinction by 1997 when numbers dropped to just 11 males, but since then two EU funded projects, have enabled reedbed improvements and creation, including here at Castle Water carried out in 2003 and 2005. It was a scarce visitor prior to the 1990s but increasingly regular in recent years, and recorded annually since 1991. Recorded mainly from reedbeds fringing Narrow Pit and Castle Water, but occasionally from other pits. Two at Castle Water on 21 January

1997 provided the first record of more than one, although since then records of two or more have been regular. Peak counts have included seven during February 2000, and six in February and December 2010 and February 2011. In earlier years the first were not noted until late November, although in 1999 one was present from 28 August and two were seen on 19 October. Spring departure takes place during March, when vocal birds have been seen circling up before flying off high to the east or south-east at dusk, particularly on calm, clear evenings. Birds began to stay for the summer from 2009 when booming was first heard. Booming birds have been heard every years since, with two in 2015, but no confirmed breeding yet.



A rare multiple sighting of Bittern at the Castle Water hide 8 January 2010

**LITTLE BITTERN** *Ixobrychus minutus*

**Very rare vagrant**

There is just one confirmed record: a juvenile at Ternery Pool from 19 to 27 August 1977 which was joined by a second on 23<sup>rd</sup>. There is also a record of an immature, probably of this species, near the Wood on 17 October 1987.

**NIGHT HERON** *Nycticorax nycticorax*

**Rare vagrant**

Recorded in seven years:

1975: adult at the Beach Reserve, 2-4 Sep.

1990: adult at Long & Narrow Pits, 27 Apr, two 2 May and an adult at Long Pit on 23 Jun.

1993: adult at Castle Water on 10 Sep.

1996: immature at Narrow Pit/Long Pit/Watch Cottage Pools, 1-19 May.

1997: one in flight at dusk at Castle Water, 20 Mar.

2000: an adult/sub-adult flushed from a willow on the southwest side of the wood on 15 Apr.

2010: one flushed from willows at Carters Pit on 20 Apr.

**CATTLE EGRET** *Bubulcus ibis*

**Rare vagrant but records increasing**

First recorded at Castle Water on 24 and 26 April 1998. In mid May 2000 one was reported on three occasions flying into roost. There were further records at Castle Water with two in October 2008, a single in April 2009, a single on 15 April 2014 and up to two in October 2018. After the three birds in 2018, records increased in 2019. Four were seen on 20 January, two on 19 February, 4 on 3 March and a single on 10 April. Most records were from Castle Water and the immediate area. This is a candidate for a future breeding species here.

**GREAT WHITE EGRET** *Ardea alba*

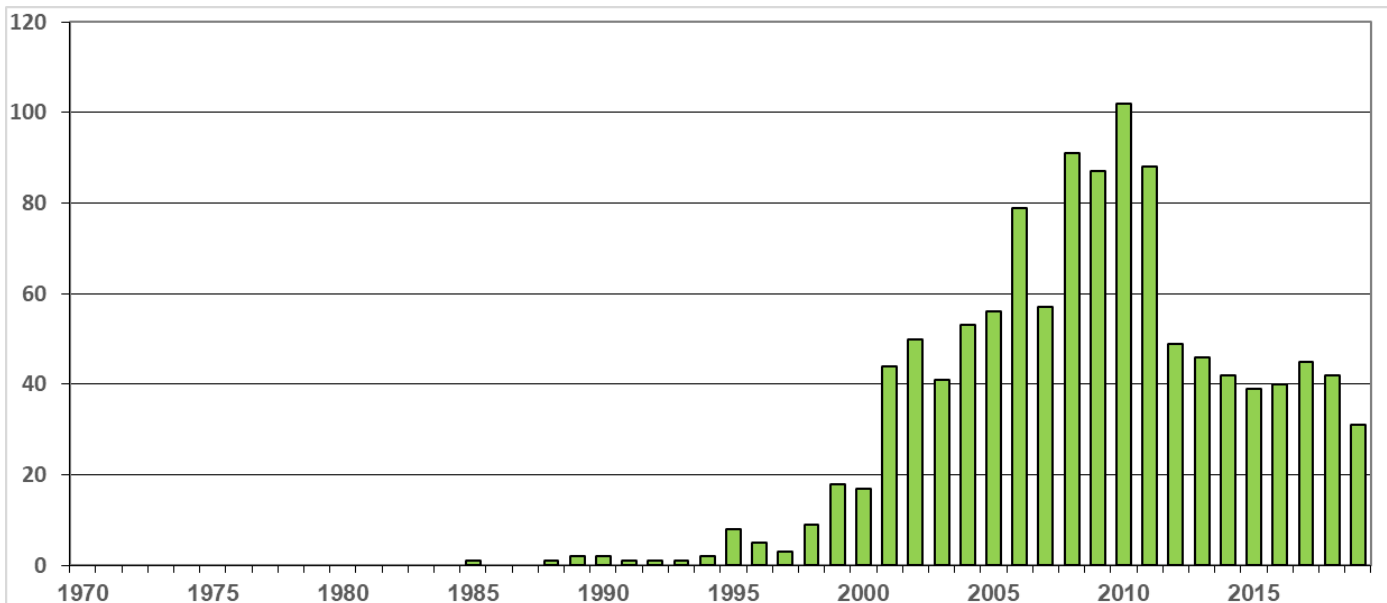
**Formerly rare, but now regular in small numbers.**

First recorded in 2003 at Castle Water on 23 August, and again at Long Pit on 26 August. Sightings of birds were then reported in all years up until the present, except 2007 and 2011. Until 2017 most records were of single birds although there were seven on 7 February 2013. 2018 was the first year that birds were observed in all months of the year and it's possible that within the next decade they will nest here. A ringed bird was present at Castle Water and Long Pit between 26 September and 12 October. This individual (CA64927) was ringed at Lac du Grand Lieu, Loire-Atlantique, France as a nestling on 15 May 2004. Before arriving at the reserve it had been seen in South Yorkshire and Kent. The record count is eight on 19 November 2017. A pair summered in 2019 but did not breed.

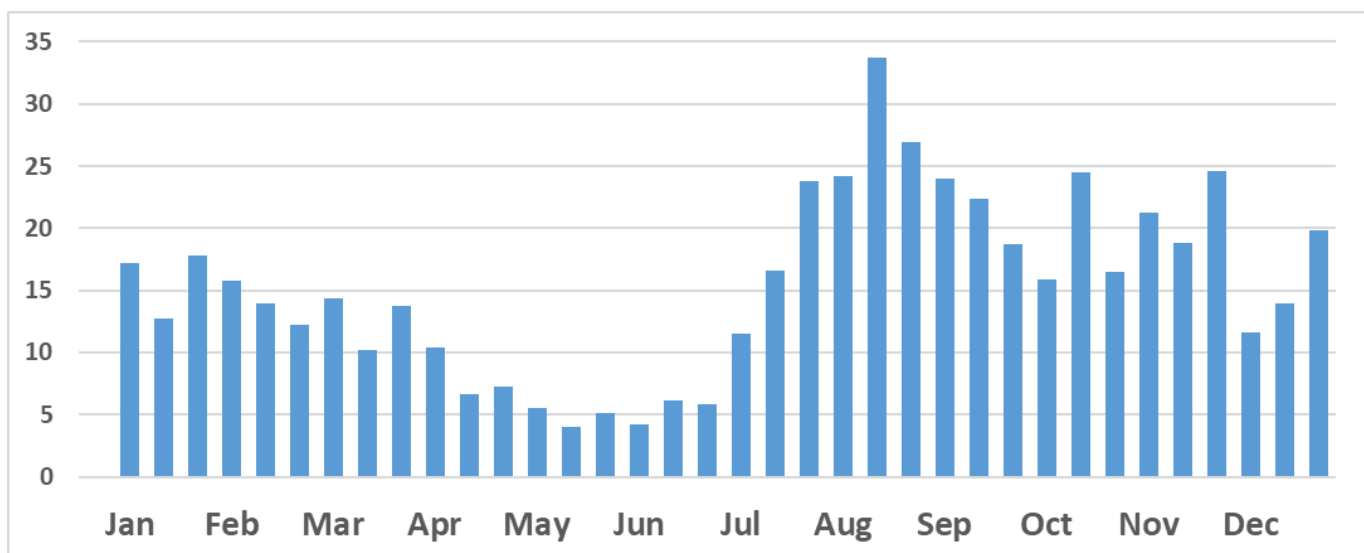
**LITTLE EGRET** *Egretta garzetta*

**Formerly rare, but now resident and breeds annually**

A remarkable increase of what was an extremely rare British bird. First recorded in 1985 when one was reported near the river mouth on 18 April. The next was in 1988, when one frequented Narrow Pit from 16 to 18 May. Recorded annually since then, although it was not until 1995 that sightings became frequent. From late July of that year up to eight were present, peaking in early August and using Ternery Pool as an overnight roost site. The main overnight roost site is at Castle Water, although Narrow Pit is also used to a lesser extent. Most birds tend to disperse to the intertidal River Rother and beyond during the day time. Peak counts are all of birds leaving their roost and have included 102 on 17 August 2010, 91 on 23 August 2008 and 88 on 29 July 2011. Numbers have reduced since this period (perhaps lack of counting of roost?) and are now more often in the thirties and forties. The first confirmed breeding was in 2019, with one pair raising two young and at least two pairs nested in 2020.



Little Egret annual peak counts at Rye Harbour



Little Egret 10 day period mean peak counts 1991-2019 at Rye Harbour

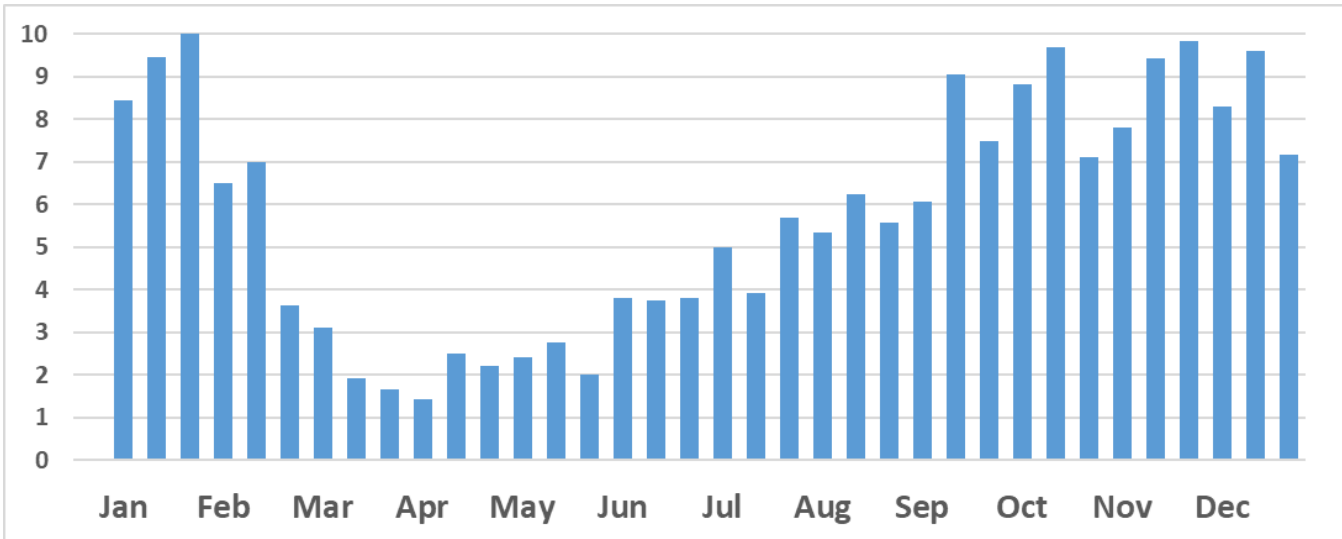


23 Little Egret with Black-headed Gulls at the Salt Pool 26 July 2018

**GREY HERON** *Ardea cinerea*

**Fairly common resident, bred in 1986 and 1987**

In recent years numbers have been generally low between March and May and highest around September, October and January. Peak annual counts since 1970 were as low as eight in 1970 and 1972, but reached 91 in 2008 and 102 in 2010. The average annual peak count is 23. There have been two nesting records: in 1986 a pair raised two or three young in a willow at the south end of Castle Water and in 1987 a pair successfully raised three young at Long Pit. There is a large heronry near Rye. One found dead at Rye Harbour in December 1999 had been ringed as a nestling in 1979 in Belgium.



Grey Heron 10 day period mean peak counts 1991-2019 at Rye Harbour

**PURPLE HERON** *Ardea purpurea*

**Rare passage migrant**

Recorded in the following years:

1987: an immature watched at Icklesham flew away over the nature reserve on 18 May.

1993: one at Castle Water on 9 and 10 Sep.

1996: one flew west from Castle Water at on 20 May.

1998: an adult initially at Narrow Pit, then at Castle Water from 26 to 28 Apr and again at Castle Water on 4 May.

1999: a first year bird found at the northeast section of Castle Water on 9 July followed on from a previous report at the same site. The same bird (presumably) was regularly seen again from 31 July until 10 August.

2000: records of one on several dates from 10 to 17 May and from 10 to 14 Jun probably relate to the same individual, which was perhaps present but unseen during the intervening period. It was often seen going to roost in a reedbed at Castle Water, but was also seen at Narrow Pit.

2006: one seen at Carter's Pit on 5 May.

2011: one at Castle Water on 27 April.

2015: single bird at Harbour Farm on 13 May.

**WHITE STORK** *Ciconia ciconia*

**Rare vagrant**

Recorded in the following years:

1977: one circling over Ternery Pool on 21 Aug.

1978: one flew east over Rye Harbour Village on 13 Jun; one circled over Castle Farm and the river Rother before descending to meadows east of Rye on 22 Sep.

1999: one on 9 September was initially seen at Icklesham at 1415 hrs, then heading over Winchelsea Beach before flying up the Brede Valley. In the evening it was reported with a second bird briefly, heading low to the northeast over Harbour Road prior to being located feeding in a field near Northpoint Pit. It returned there the following morning after reports had suggested it roosted overnight on Rye fire station!

2004: one recorded flying east over Narrow Pit on 6 Mar.

2005: one seen flying west over the Beach Reserve on 8 May.

2017: one was at Rye Harbour farm on 19 Sep, but was from the Knepp introduction.



White Stork 19 September 2017

**GLOSSY IBIS** *Plegadis falcinellus*

**Rare vagrant**

There are five records:

1986: one was seen flying over Winchelsea Beach before landing somewhere near Castle Water on 19 Sep.

1994: two were watched feeding at Castle Water in front of the new hide site on 6 Oct. After a couple of minutes they flew off high to the west.

1995: one was present along a recently excavated ditch at Castle Water from 24 to 27 Oct.

2005: a bird was briefly present at Castle Water before flying off east on 9 Jul.

2020: one was seen on several occasions during March. It spent quite a bit of its time feeding in a chicken pen in a back garden adjacent to the reserve.

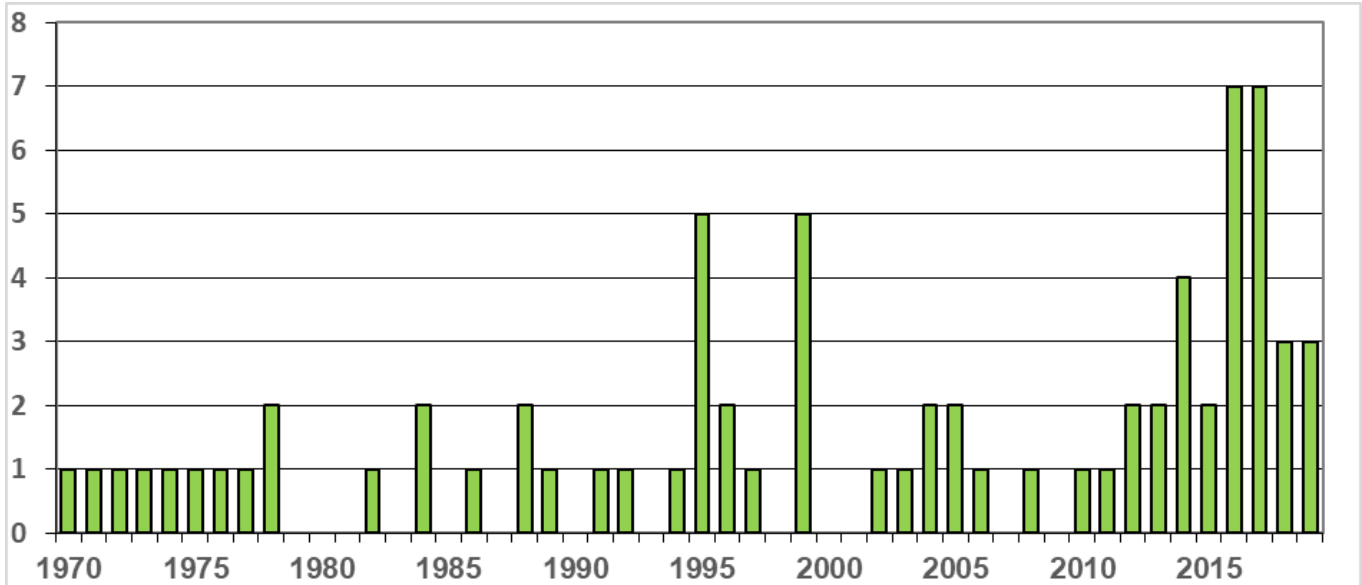


Glossy Ibis at Castle Farm March 2020

**SPOONBILL** *Platalea leucorodia*

**Scarce, but increasing visitor**

It has become an increasingly regular visitor since it was first recorded in 1970. Most records concern single birds, with peak counts of seven in June 2016 and September and October 2017. By 2018 there were records in ten of the twelve months of that year and it's possible that within the next decade they will nest here. In 1989 a Dutch-ringed immature was regularly present, mainly at Ternery Pool, between 7 October and 3 January 1990.



Spoonbill annual peak counts at Rye Harbour

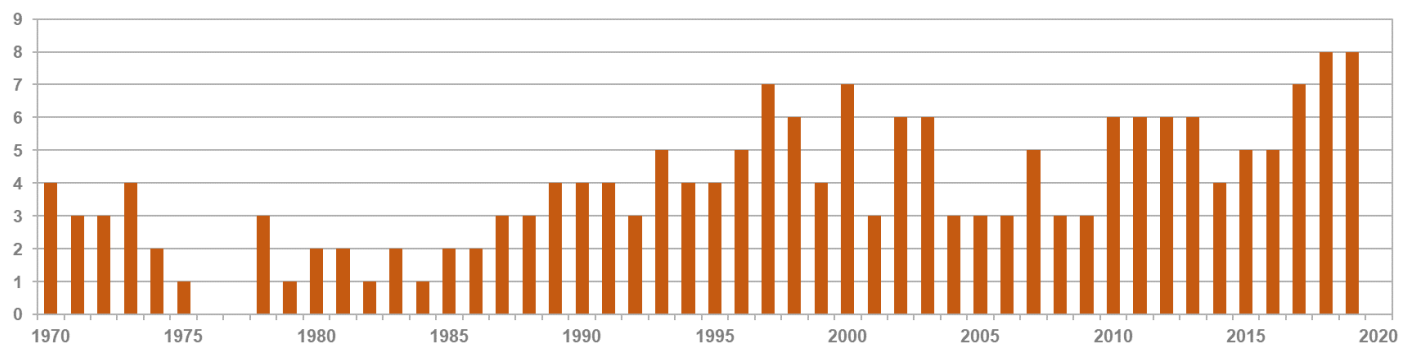


Two Spoonbill feeding in the Salt Pool 25 November 2018

**MUTE SWAN** *Cygnus olor*

**Common breeding resident**

The peak counts in recent years have occurred between February and August, with the lowest numbers between October and December. Numbers have been higher in recent years. The annual peak count has averaged 54, and ranged between 11 in 1976 and 141 on 17 Jan 2002, mostly at Castle Water. The next highest count involved 137 there on 16 Dec 2010. Since 1970 the annual number of pairs breeding within the SSSI has averaged three, but an increase in recent years has resulted in a maximum of eight pairs nesting.



Mute Swan breeding pairs at Rye Harbour

**BEWICK'S SWAN** *Cygnus columbianus*

**Scarce winter visitor**

Recorded in 15 years since 1970. Records fall between 16 October (26 over the Beach Reserve in 1977) and 5 February (26 at sea in 1956). Many records relate to small flocks. Peak counts involve 180 over the SSSI in three flocks on 18 January 1984, 81 heading east on 31 Dec 2010 and 28 at Long Pit on 16 December 1976. Has become scarcer in recent years with only two singles recorded since 2010 on 11 Nov 2016 and 2 Jan 2017.

**WHOOPEE SWAN** *Cygnus cygnus*

**Very scarce winter visitor**

- 1975: one at Rye Harbour from 14 Dec to the end of the year.
- 1979: a flock of seven at Long Pit on 27 Jan and three adults at Ternery Pool on 18 Feb.
- 1990: an immature at Long Pit on 27 Oct and at Ternery Pool the following day.
- 1991: one at Harbour Farm on 11 Feb; single adults flying east on 16 & 21 Nov.
- 1995: adult at sea on 18 Nov.
- 2006: eight flying west over Castle Water on 3 Jan.
- 2016: three on 11 Nov at Flat Beach.
- 2017: single on 6 Oct at Rye Harbour Farm.

**BLACK SWAN** *Cygnus atratus*

**Rare feral visitor**

First recorded on 1 October 2006. A bird remained from 12 March until 17 July 2011. There are only two other sightings, one on 5 July 2013 and two on 20 January 2019.

**BEAN GOOSE** *Anser fabalis*

**Very rare winter visitor**

The only confirmed record concerns a flock of 12 which flew east over Ternery Pool on 27 February 1979. These were part of a record influx to the county. There is a report of four of the *rossicus* race at the Beach Reserve, on Flat Beach, then over Ternery Pool, on 29 December 1999, although not all observers agree on the identity.

**PINK-FOOTED GOOSE** *Anser brachyrhynchus*

**Rare winter visitor**

Recorded in 21 years since 1970. Unseasonal singletons on 3 and 16 May 1971, 30 May 1986 (with Canada Geese) and 17 September 1980 (a ringed bird with Canada Geese) probably all relate to birds of captive origin. All other records fall between 7 November (six flying east at the river mouth in 1992) and 1 April (one over Ternery Pool with Canada Geese in 1990). All records involve singles or small groups of up to seven apart from 18 at Rye Harbour on 13 February 1972 and 40-50 heading west over Ternery Pool on 17 November 1991.

**WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE** *Anser albifrons*

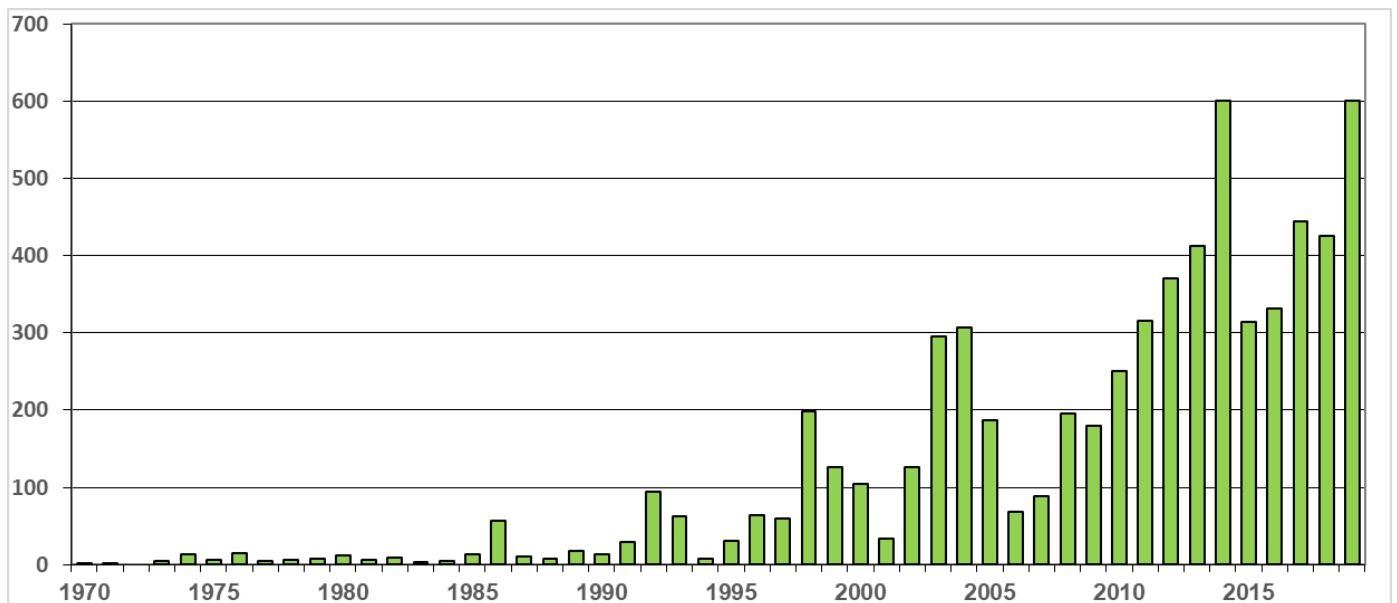
**Scarce winter visitor**

Recorded in 37 years since 1970 and annually since 1987 except in 2005 and 2014. Records of singles on 28 August 1970 and 12 September 1998 probably relate to birds of captive or feral origin. There are two autumn records: three at Long Pit on 17 October 1992 and five flying south at Castle Water on 20 October 1994. All other records span the period 4 November (37 over the Beach Reserve, 2008) to 1 April (one at Harbour Farm, 1994). Many records involve flocks overhead. The largest number were a flock of about 400 at Castle Water on 5 March 1979, 360 at Castle Meadows on 31 Dec 2010 and 120+ heading east over Beach Reserve on 16 Jan 2008.

**GREYLAG GOOSE** *Anser anser*

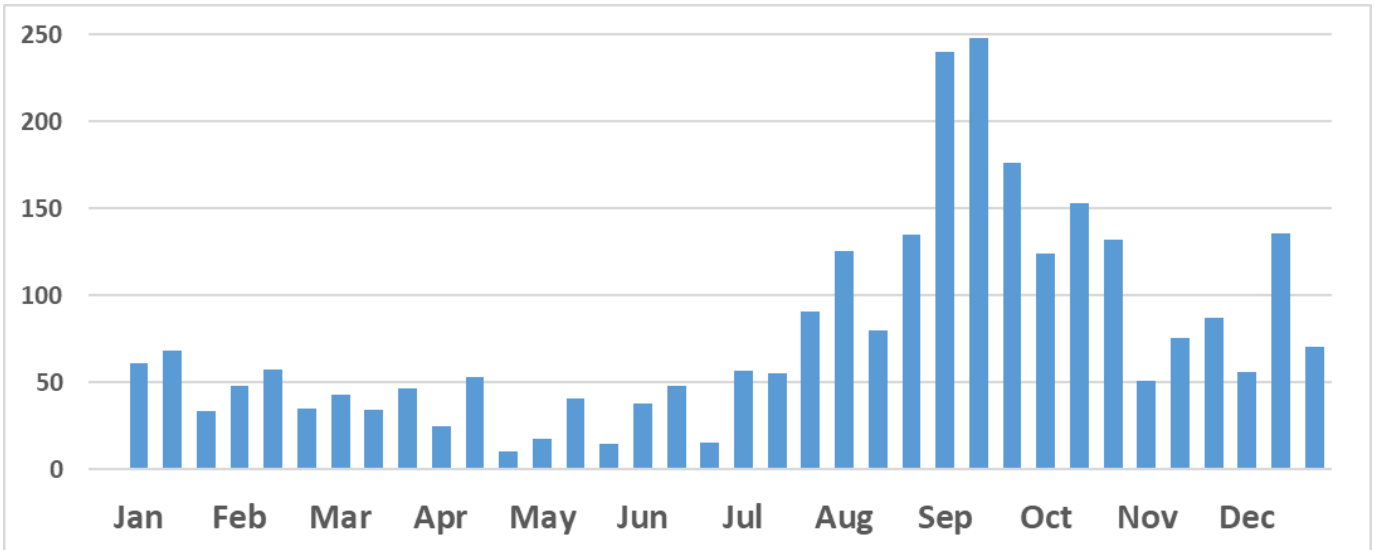
**Resident feral population.**

Originally introduced to the area for wildfowling from Scottish eggs in the 1960s. This species has seen a very large increase in numbers from the 1990s onwards. Prior to 1991, only one year had seen numbers above 17 (57 in 1986). Highest counts were 600 at Castle Pit on 13 September 2014, 500+ there in December 2012 and 500+ at Castle Water on 18 Sep 2019. Numbers are generally highest between August and October when flocks arrive to feed in crop fields following the harvest. Lowest numbers are present between May and July. Up to 16 pairs have nested since 1989, and only one year since then (1997) has not produced any breeding records.

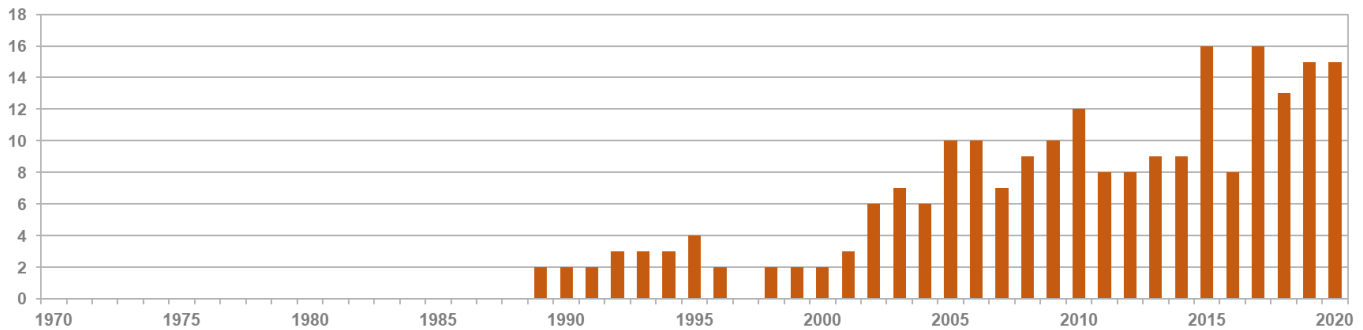


Greylag Goose annual peak counts at Rye Harbour





Greylag Goose 10 day period mean peak counts 1991-2019 at Rye Harbour

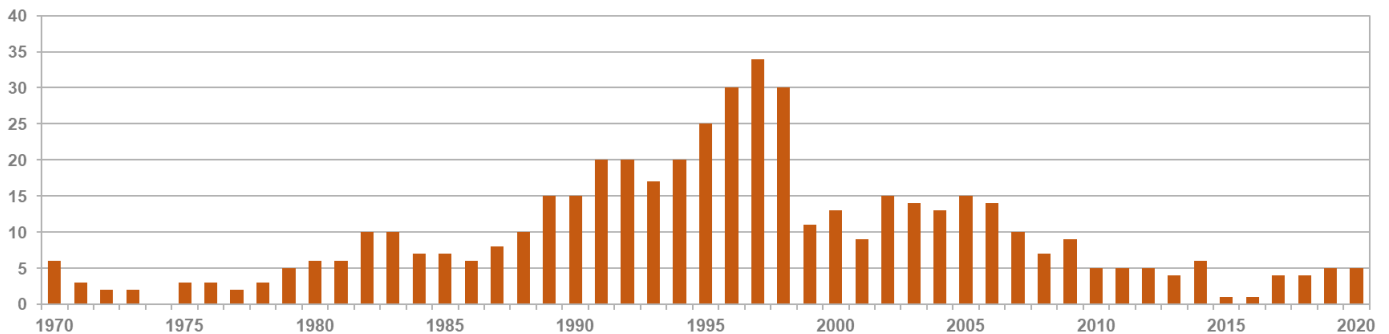


Greylag Goose breeding pairs at Rye Harbour

**CANADA GOOSE** *Branta canadensis*

**Common introduced resident**

Numbers of this species have undergone a rapid increase over the last 30 years. During the 1970s the annual peak count averaged 37, whereas the equivalent figure for the 1990s was 249. This figure has subsequently decreased with an average of only 173 in the 2010's. In 2017 the maximum count was only 50, this could be due to local shooting with Canada Geese being a popular quarry species. Highest numbers generally occur in August and September when flocks are attracted to freshly harvested arable fields, and June has produced the lowest figures. The highest counts are 520 at Harbour Farm on 19 September 1997, 380 at Castle Water on 14 September 2000 and 350 at Ternery Pool on 17 September 1992. Breeding numbers have also risen dramatically. Between two and six pairs bred annually during the 1970s and the population has since increased, especially since the late 1980s, to reach a peak of 34 pairs in 1997. Thirty pairs bred in 1998, but only 11 pairs the following year – it looks like the increase of Greylag Geese has caused the decline in the Canada Geese breeding population.



Canada Goose breeding pairs at Rye Harbour

**BARNACLE GOOSE** *Branta leucopsis*

**Very scarce winter visitor and uncommon feral resident**

A rather confusing picture surrounds the status of this species, owing to the presence of feral birds in the local area. Records are spread throughout the year, with noticeable peaks in February and March, September, and early December. The late winter peak in particular may be partly due to wild birds, although the September peak is likely to involve feral birds moving in with feral Greylag and Canada Geese following the crop harvest at Harbour Farm. Wild birds typically turn up in late winter during influxes from the continent prompted by cold weather. The best candidates for wild birds are listed below:

1981: 28 flew over the SSSI on 17 Feb before settling at Pett Level.

1985: five on 3 Feb; a flock of 56 at Castle Farm, 17-19 Feb; five at Castle Water between 17 Feb and 14 Mar; a flock of 22 grazing with Brent Geese at Harbour Farm on 22 and 23 Nov.

1991: a flock of 18 on 11 Feb which increased to 21 birds by 14 Feb

The flocks in 1981 and early 1985 were associated with significant influxes to the county. The largest flocks of probable feral birds were up to 18 between 26 August 2001 and 16 January 2002, 14 at Ternery Pool on 12 September 1999 and up to 14 between 25 August and 16 September 2000. The only breeding records concern a nest at Narrow Pit in 1973 which produced three young which did not survive long, and one which paired with a Canada Goose in 2000, which again was unsuccessful.

**RED-BREASTED GOOSE** *Branta ruficollis*

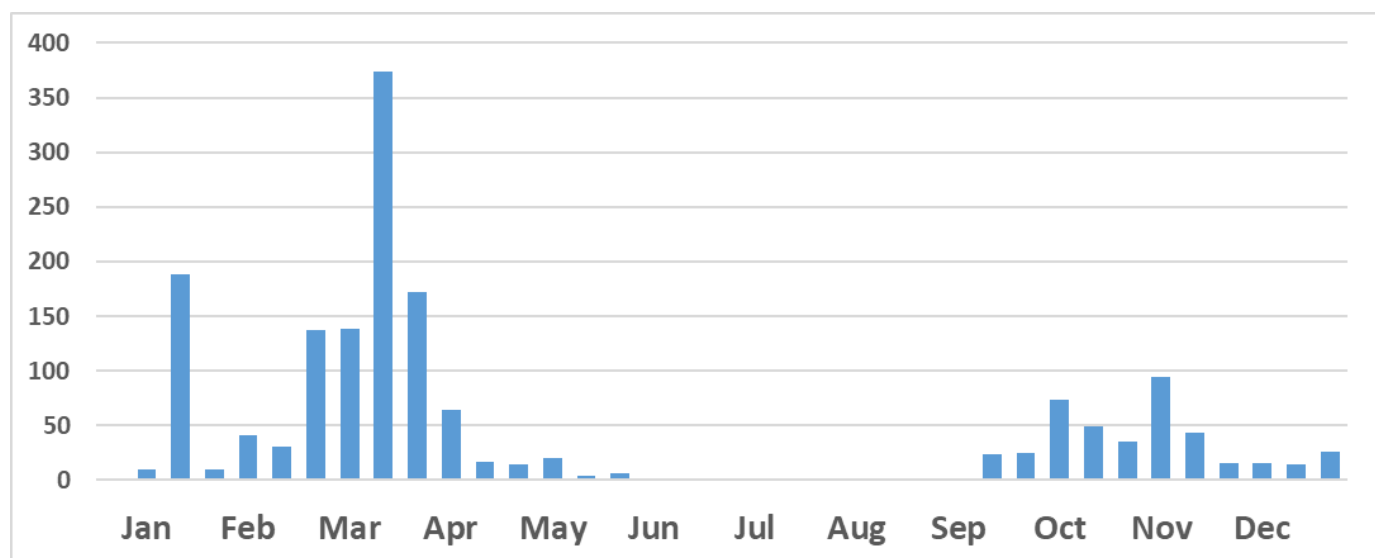
**Feral visitor**

Two were seen at Castle Water 2 September 2013

**BRENT GOOSE** *Branta bernicla*

**Common passage migrant and fairly common winter visitor**

Occurs mainly between late September and late May, but especially during the passage periods. The largest numbers pass through during the spring migration when large flocks can be seen offshore heading east up Channel, mainly from late February to early April. Autumn migrants are most numerous between late September and early November. In the summer one was present at the Beach Reserve from 11 to 18 July 1998, one was at Flat Beach on 29 July 2007, a single was seen on 24 June 2012 and two were present on 12 and 13 July 2014. Peak counts have included 1000+ on 04 March 1979, 1000+ on 04 April 1987 and 1000 on 13 March 1997. A colour ringed bird at Rye Harbour in 17 February 1991 had been ringed in the Netherlands during 1986 and was back at the ringing site on 3 February and 29 April 1991. There is one record of the pale bellied race 'hrota': two birds at Ternery Pool from 6 to 16 March 1987.



Brent Goose 10 day period mean peak counts 1991-2019 at Rye Harbour

**EGYPTIAN GOOSE** *Alopochen aegyptiacus*

**Fairly common resident**

The species was first recorded in November 1980 with two at Castle Farm on 23<sup>rd</sup> and at Ternery Pool on 29<sup>th</sup>, and in 1996 two adults were at Castle Water on 1 May. Birds were recorded in four years in the 2000's before becoming annual from 2013. It is now resident on the reserve with a peak counts of 25 at Castle Farm on 1 February 2018. Breeding was first noted in 2013 and rose to 6 pairs by 2019. As a non-native species it does compete for feeding habitat with Shelduck, Redshank and Lapwing, so this increase is not good.

**RUDDY SHELDUCK** *Tadorna ferruginea*

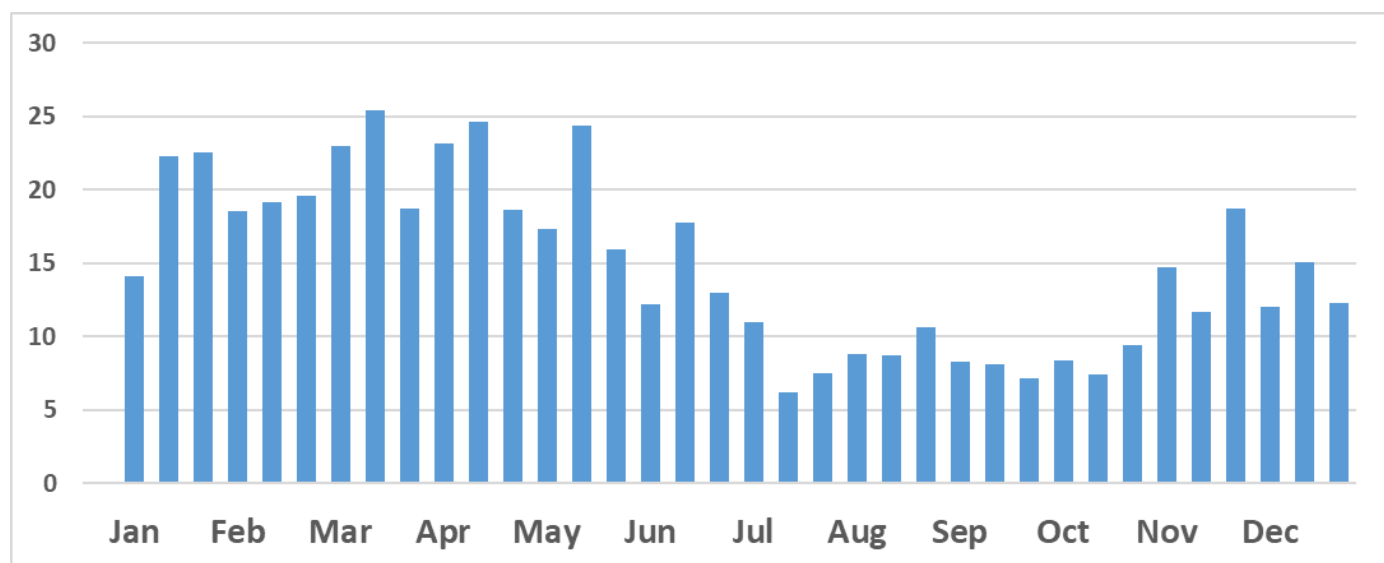
**Very rare vagrant and rare feral visitor**

There are records of presumed feral birds from six years since 1970, mostly between June and October, the maximum count being 12 over the shore on 12 October 1980. The only record of birds considered to be genuine wild vagrants concerns six shot during August and September 1940.

**SHELDUCK** *Tadorna tadorna*

**Fairly common resident**

The majority of birds are found along the tidal River Rother and adjacent saltings, and at times the Shelduck can be scarce within the SSSI. Breeding numbers within the SSSI, although difficult to monitor, have varied between one pair in 2005 and a maximum of 20 pairs in 1990, although numbers have increased since 1989. Numbers of fledged young since 1970 have varied between zero and a maximum of 80 in 1989, with an average of 21. In recent years, annual peak counts have occurred in January and April to May, and numbers are generally lowest between July and October when most adults head for moulting grounds in northern Germany. Peak counts have included 110 at Ternery Pool on 16 March 2014, 108 at Flat Beach on 17 January 2014 and 65 at Flat Beach on 13 March 2010. A juvenile ringed at Rye Harbour in July 1983 was recovered at Ostfriesische, Germany (53° 35'N 06° 40'E) on 6 July 1985.



Shelduck 10 day period mean peak counts 1991-2019 at Rye Harbour

**MANDARIN DUCK** *Aix galericulata*

**Rare feral visitor**

Recorded on nine occasions as follow

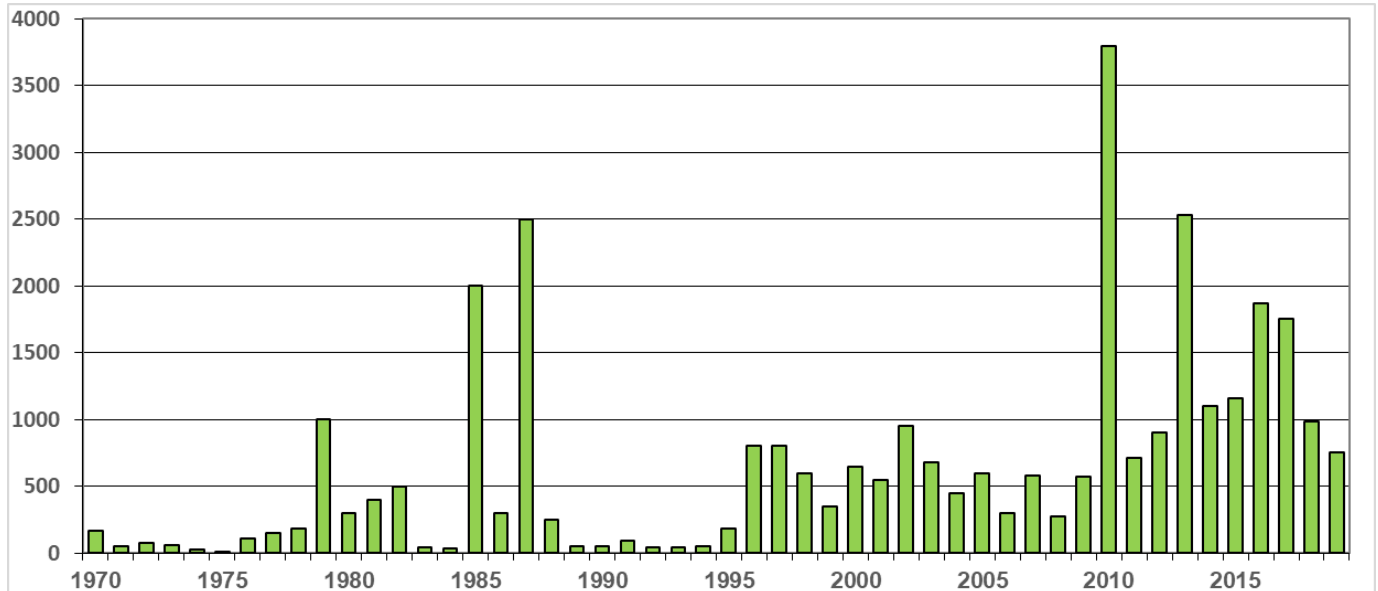
- 1976: a male was on the river Rother on 10 May.
- 1981: one drake at Ternery Pool on 11 Nov.
- 1988: a female/imm. at Ternery Pool, 27-28 Aug.
- 1990: male at Ternery Pool on 11 Apr.
- 1997: male Ternery Pool on 26 Oct.

- 2006: male Castle Water on 5 Nov.
- 2008: a pair on river Brede 29 Nov.
- 2009: a pair on river Brede 31 Oct.
- 2015: one at Castle Pit on 21 Dec.

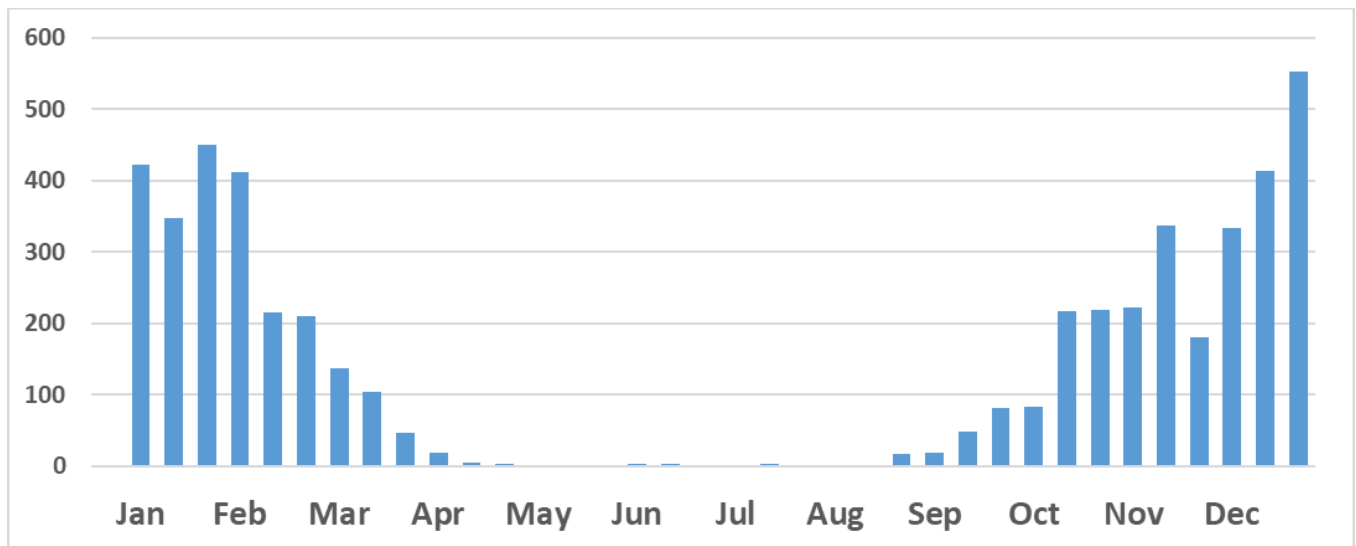
**WIGEON** *Anas penelope*

**Common winter visitor, occasional in summer**

Absent or very scarce between May and July and there has been no indication of breeding. Small numbers start to arrive during August, although it is not until later in September or October that they arrive in numbers. Highest numbers are present between December and February. A steady dispersal takes place during March and few, if any, generally remain in to April. Peak annual counts since 1970 reached maxima of 2,535 on 21 January 2013 at Castle Pit, 2,500 on the sea on 10 January 1987, 2000 around Castle Water in late February 1985, 3,800 at Castle Water on 25 December 2010 and 2,500 at Castle Water on 21 January 2013.



Wigeon annual peak counts at Rye Harbour



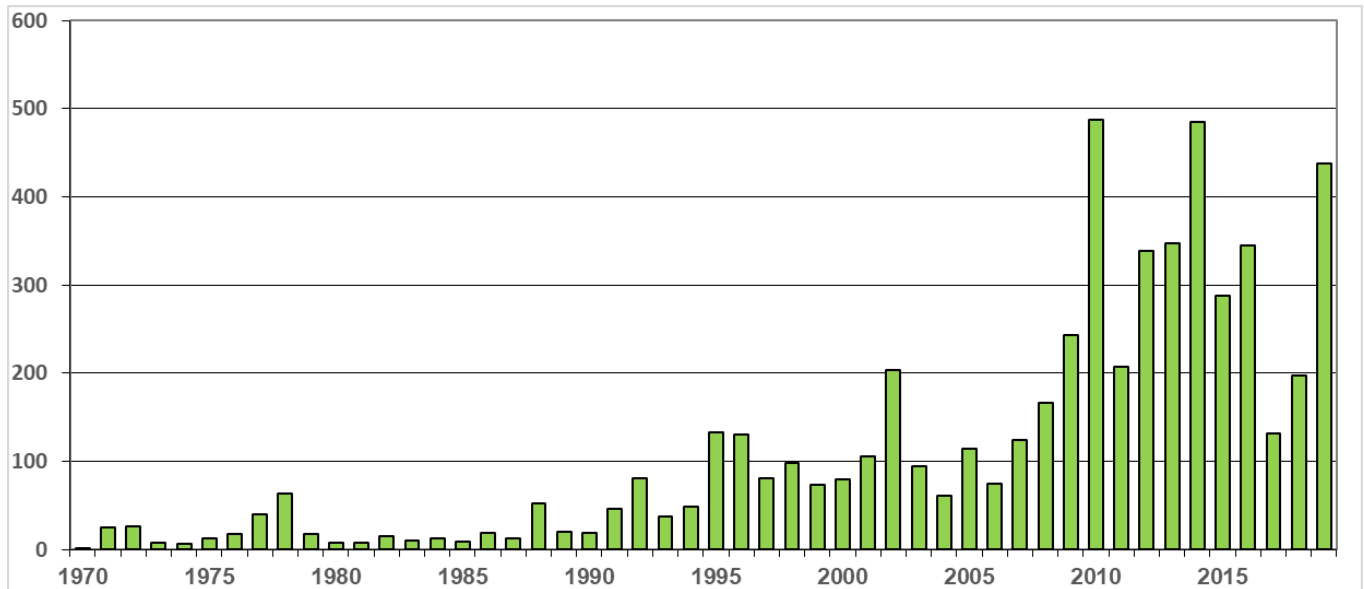
Wigeon 10 day period mean peak counts 1991-2019 at Rye Harbour



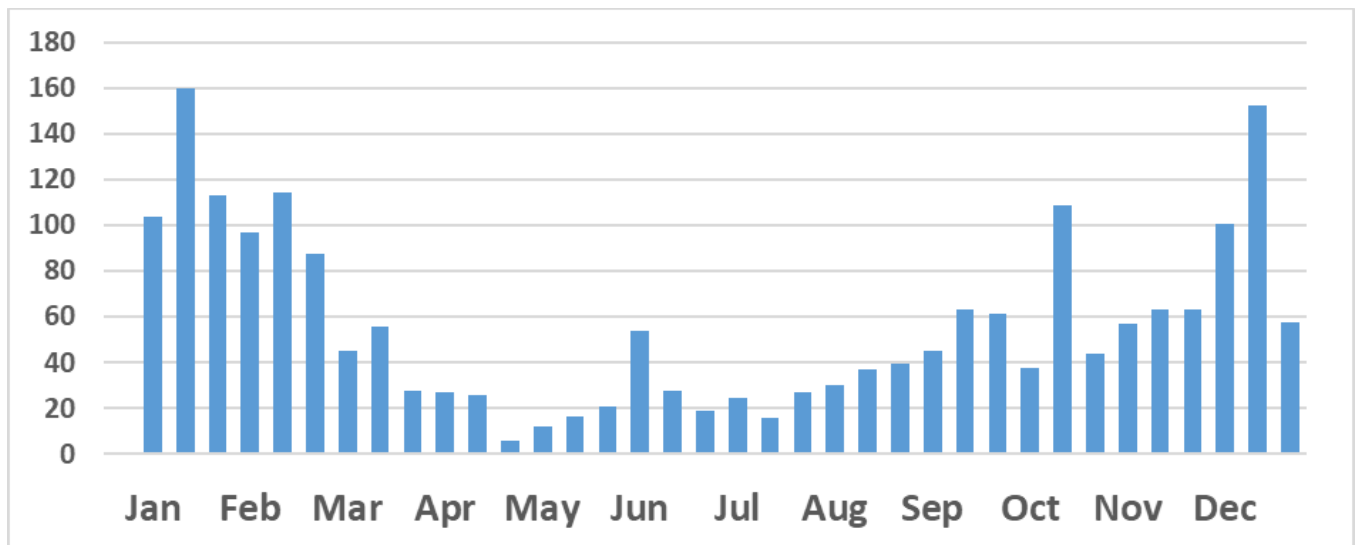
**GADWALL** *Anas strepera*

**Common winter visitor, scarce in summer, sometimes breeding.**

Numbers are generally highest between August and April, reaching a peak during November and December. A few generally remain for much of the summer, and since 1992 single pairs have bred in several years and three pairs nested in 1996. Since 1991 a significant increase has occurred, leading to peak counts of 485 on 18 January 2014, 406 on 19 January 2019 and 345 on 05 January 2010. Castle Water is the favoured locality and the increase coincides with it becoming part of the nature reserve (with less disturbance and better habitat).



Gadwall annual peak counts at Rye Harbour



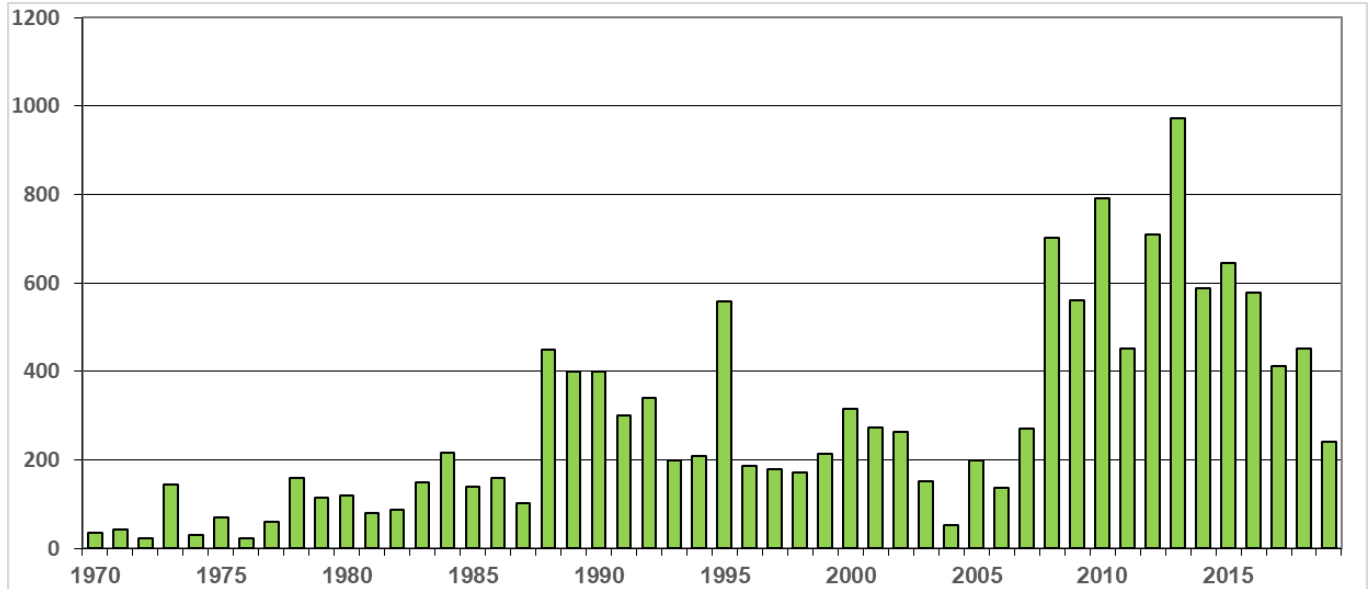
Gadwall 10 day period mean peak counts 1991-2019 at Rye Harbour



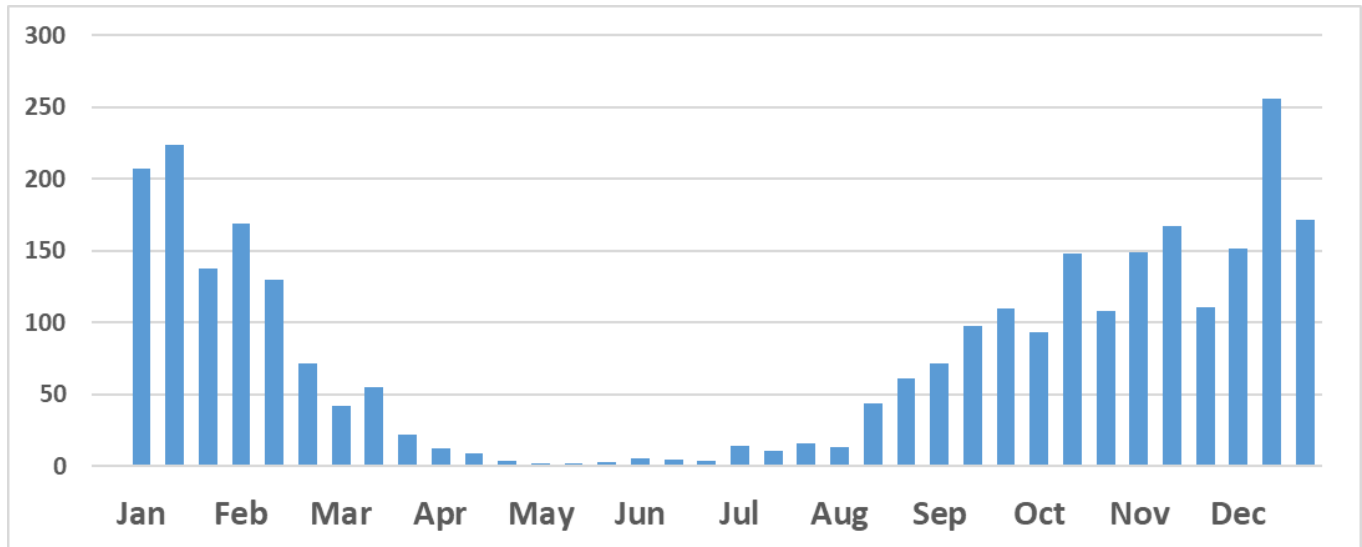
**TEAL** *Anas crecca*

**Common winter visitor, scarce in spring, but may have bred**

Numbers are generally lowest during May and June and rise to a peak between November and January. Peak annual counts since 1970 have averaged 179, but have been generally higher in later years with peak counts, mainly from Ternery Pool, of 792 on 5 January 2010, 709 on 16 December 2012 and 703 on 30 December 2008. Winter numbers have decreased since 2017.



Teal annual peak counts at Rye Harbour



Teal 10 day period mean peak counts 1991-2019 at Rye Harbour



**MALLARD** *Anas platyrhynchos*

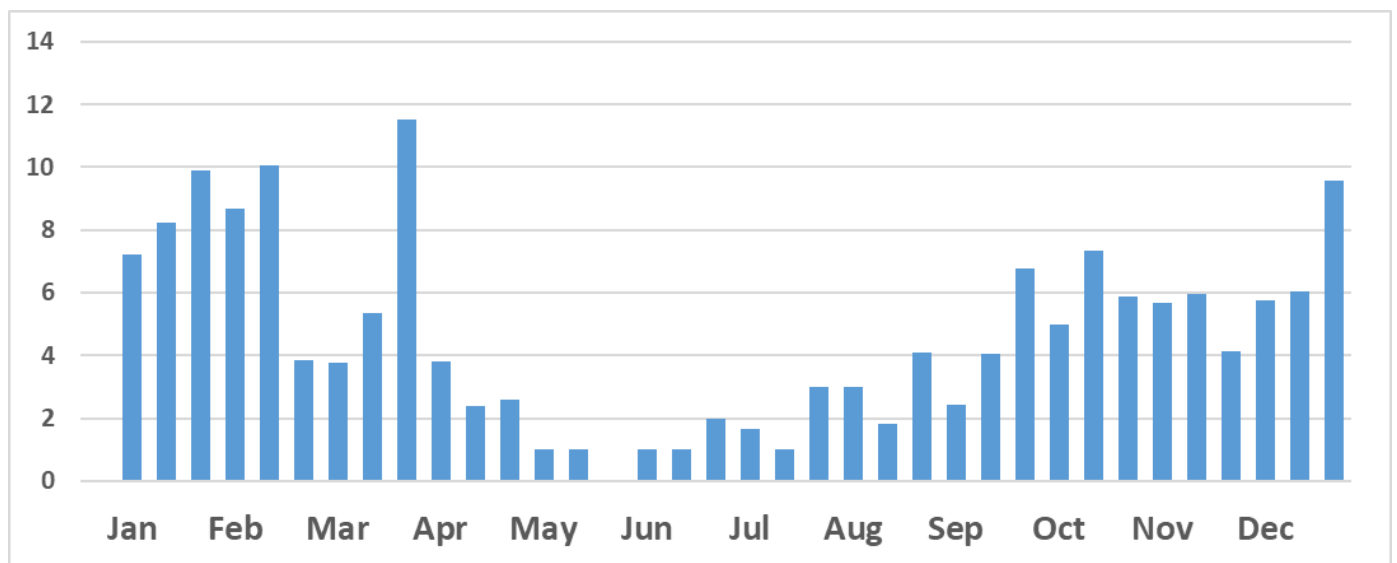
**Common resident**

Numbers are generally lowest between April and June, but numbers build up at the end of the breeding season to reach a peak in late August or October, though this peak is sometimes exceeded during December and January. Fairly common as a breeding bird, but numbers are difficult to monitor, although a population of up to 80 pairs has been suggested from the number of males in the area. The annual peak count since 1970 has averaged 377, with maxima of 800 at Ternery Pool on 1 September 1988, 611 on 19 January 2014 and 600 at Ternery Pool on 5 September 1987.

**PINTAIL** *Anas acuta*

**Uncommon but increasing visitor, mainly in autumn and winter**

Usually absent during April and May. Occasionally appears in small numbers during June and July, but more regular thereafter, with peak numbers typically occurring in September. Often only occasional for much of the winter but numbers have increased during the last ten years. The highest counts have been 49 on Flat Beach on 21 January 2018, 44 on March 2003 and 23 March 2004 and 37 flying east over the shore on 4 February 1996.



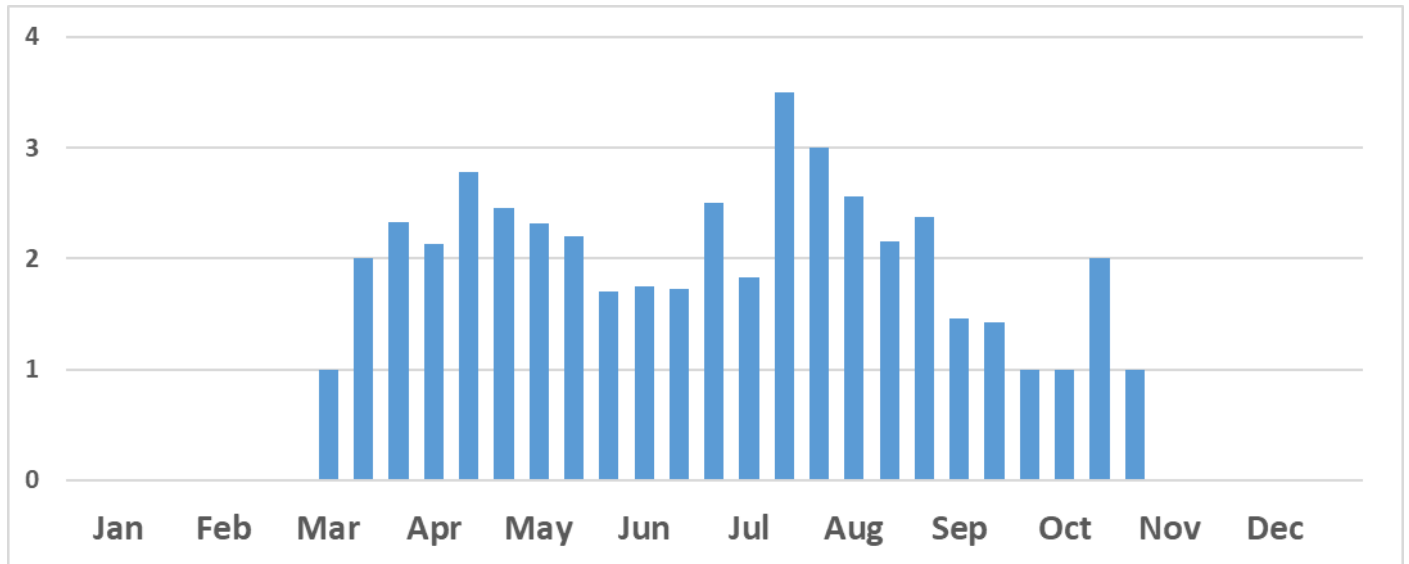
Pintail 10 day period mean peak counts 1991-2019 at Rye Harbour



**GARGANEY** *Anas querquedula*

**Scarce passage migrant, occasionally breeds**

Occurs annually, with most records during the periods late March to early June (peak mid April to early May) and mid July to mid September (peak late July to late August). Single pairs were suspected of breeding in 1983, 1987 and 2000, although this has never been confirmed. The peak count is 22 at Ternery Pool on 19 August 1983. The earliest spring arrival was a female at Narrow Pit on 5 March 1999 and the latest record was one at Ternery Pool on 15 November 1986.



Garganey 10 day period mean peak counts 1991-2019 at Rye Harbour

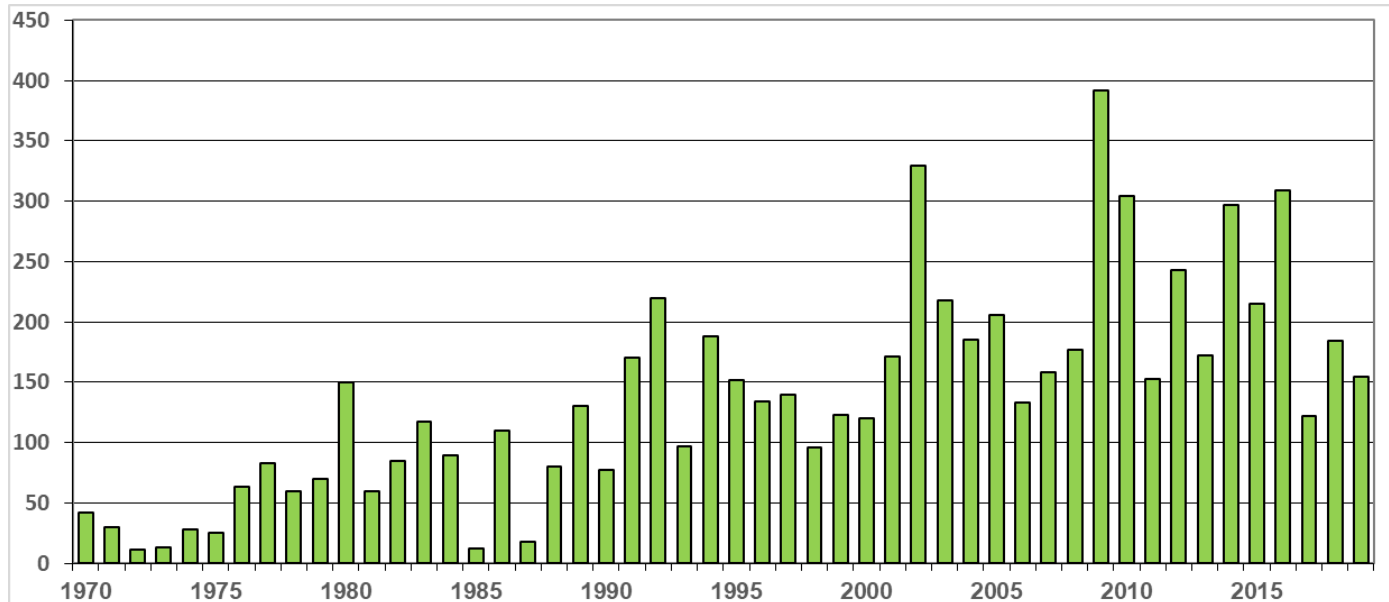
Garganey pair on a shallow pool 19 April 2017



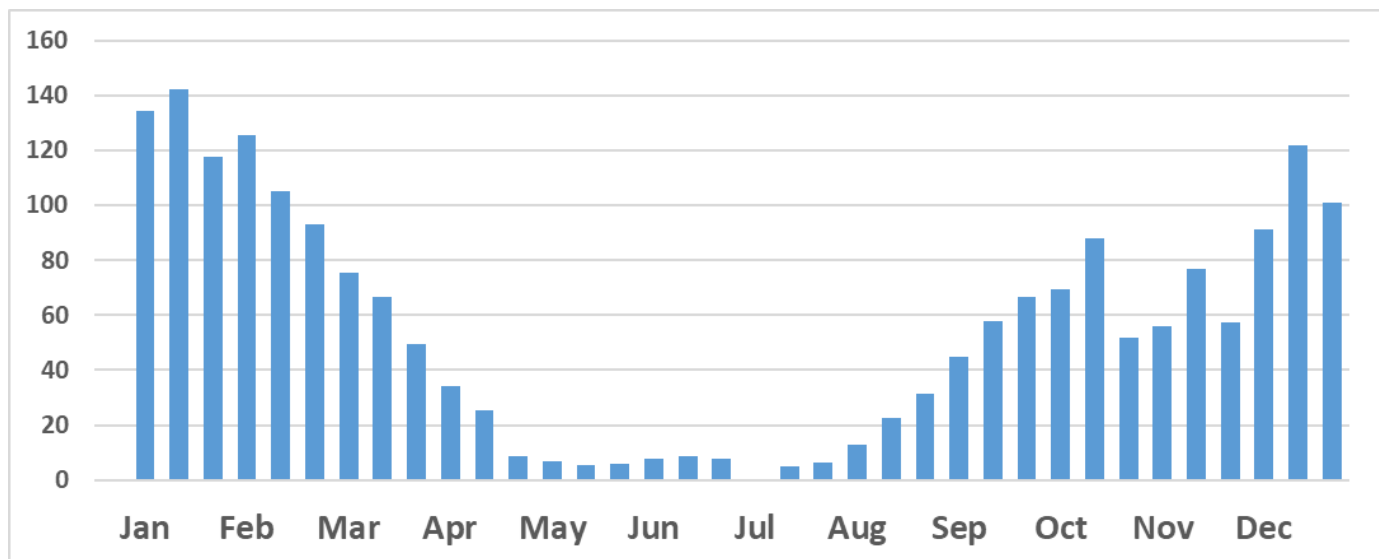
**SHOVELER** *Anas clypeata*

**Present all year, common in winter, regularly breeds**

Lowest numbers are generally present during May and June, sometimes increasing during July, typically peaking in January, but occasionally earlier in the winter. Peak counts in the last ten years have averaged 227, whilst in the 1970's and 1980's the average count was only 90. The highest counts were 392 on 4 January 2009, 309 on 17 January 2016 and 304 on 5 January 2010.



Shoveler annual peak counts at Rye Harbour



Shoveler 10 day period mean peak counts 1991-2019 at Rye Harbour



**RED-CRESTED POCHARD** *Netta rufina*

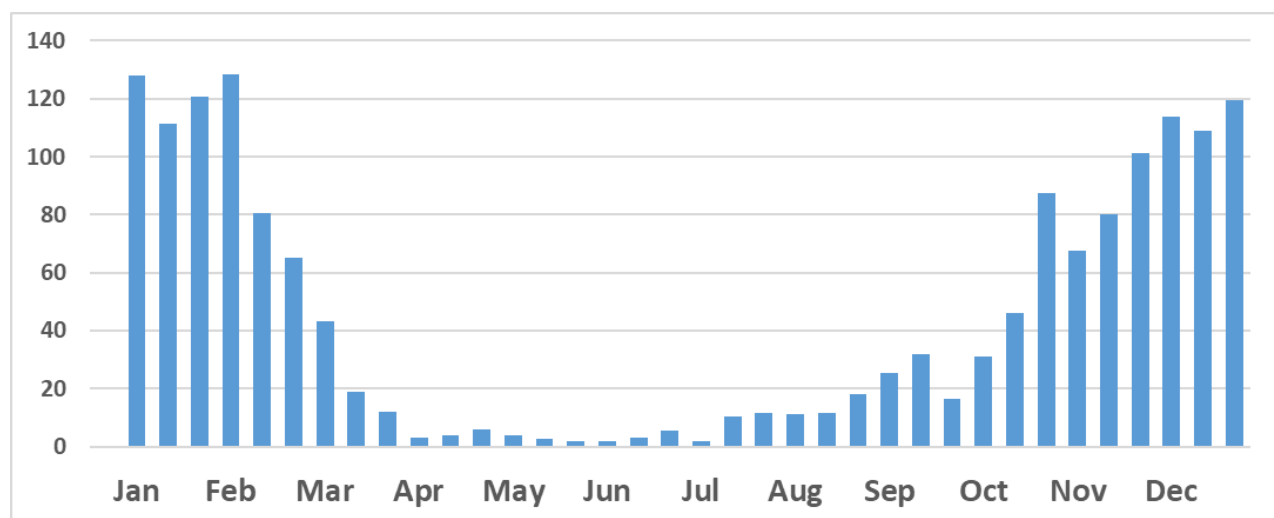
**Very scarce visitor**

Recorded in 22 years since 1970, with records falling between 5 August and 27 May. The most productive months have been February and from August to October. All records relate to one or two birds except three at Castle Pit on 12 February 2006 and three at Castle Water on 12 January 2012. The majority probably involve escapes from captivity.

**POCHARD** *Aythya ferina*

**Present all year, common in winter and now breeds most years**

The bird is predominantly a winter visitor with the largest numbers recorded between October and March. The highest counts have been 535 in December 1968 and 450 on 18 November 1973. Numbers have been lower in recent years as the milder winters have led to many birds staying on the continent to winter. Single broods were seen in 1977, 1980, 1981, 2012, 2018 and 2019, with two broods seen at Castle Water in 2013 and 2014.



Pochard 10 day period mean peak counts 1991-2019 at Rye Harbour

**RING-NECKED DUCK** *Aythya collaris*

**Rare vagrant**

Recorded on three occasions: in 1997 a drake was at Ternery Pool from 14 to 24 June, a drake was at Long Pit and Narrow Pit from 24 to 26 November 2000, and a drake stayed at Castle Water from 27 March to 9 April 2019.

**FERRUGINOUS DUCK** *Aythya nyroca*

**Rare visitor**

At least five individuals recorded in six years between September and February, as follows:

1977: drake at Long Pit, 11 Sep; drake at the Beach Reserve during late Dec.

1978: drake at Castle Water, 12 Feb.

1980: one at Long Pit, 26 Jan, probably a female.

1985: a female/immature at Long Pit on 14 Dec.

1988: drake at Ternery Pool on 21, 27 and 28 Oct and at Long Pit on 29<sup>th</sup>.

2000: a drake at Castle Water on 1 Nov then, presumably the same bird, favouring Narrow Pit from 26 Nov until at least 3 Jan 2001.

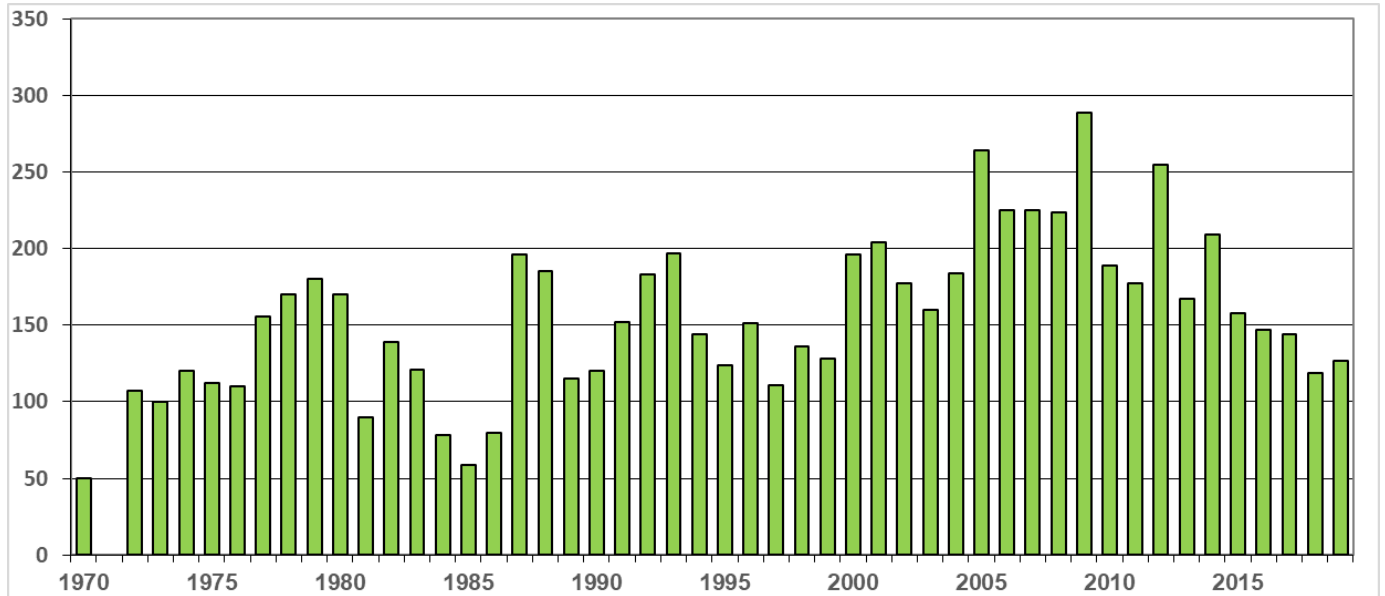
2008: one at Long Pit 5 Jan – in photo below its 15<sup>th</sup> bird from left.



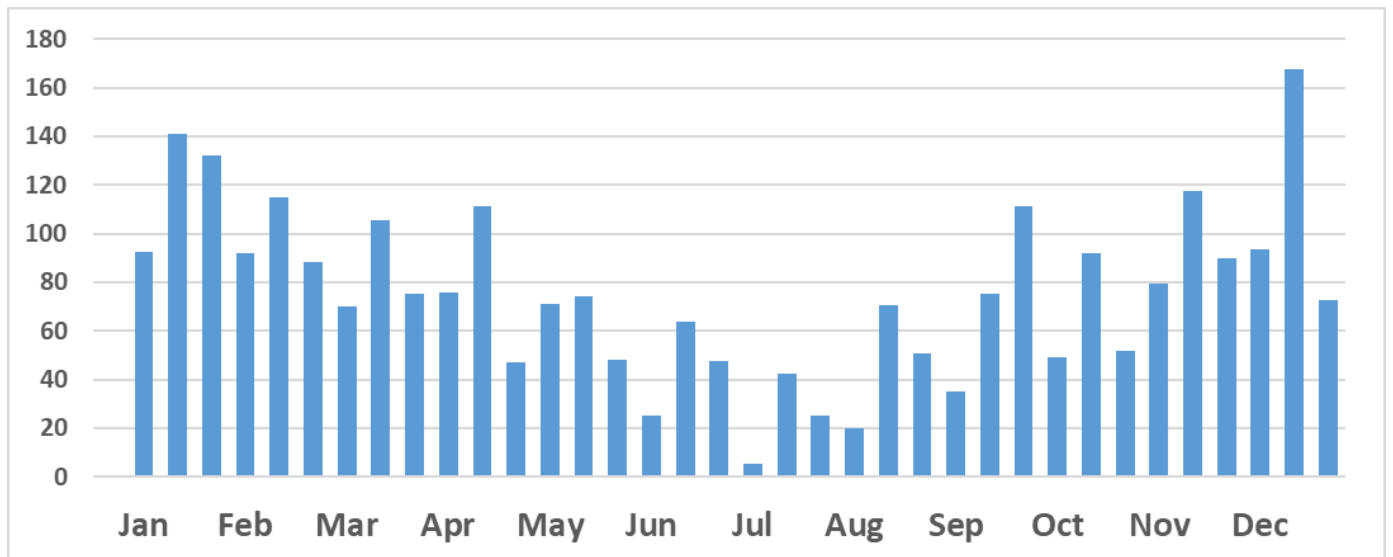
**TUFTED DUCK** *Aythya fuligula*

**Present all year, common in winter and breeds annually**

Numbers are generally lowest around June, and typically reach a peak between January and March. Peak counts have been 289 on 7 January 2009, 264 on 12 December 2005 and 255 on 12 February 2012. Like Pochard this species now winters in lower numbers as many birds now stay on the near Continent. Two winter ringing recoveries indicate the origins of the large winter numbers. The birds had been ringed in the summer in Lithuania and Finland. Estimates of the numbers of breeding pairs have ranged between 12 and 20 pairs but there is great difficulty in counting them.



Tufted Duck annual peak counts at Rye Harbour



Tufted Duck 10 day period mean peak counts 1991-2019 at Rye Harbour

**SCAUP** *Aythya marila*

**Scarce and declining visitor, mainly in winter**

Occurs mainly between November and March, although recorded in all months of the year. Numbers vary considerably from year to year, with large flocks occurring occasionally. The highest counts concern flocks offshore: 350 in February 1956, 215 on 10 January 1997 and 150 in February 1987. The largest number recorded within the SSSI was 37 at Long Pit during December 1988, although records of up to 58 between 1950 and 1971 may also relate to the SSSI. The species has now experienced a rapid decline with only one record of more than two: 17 on Harbour Farm on 10 November 2016. There were no records at all in 2017 and 2018.

**EIDER** *Somateria mollissima*

**Uncommon, now rare visitor, mainly in winter**

Occurs offshore or at the river mouth mainly between early October and late March, although small numbers may occur during spring until late May and during September. Normally absent during the summer months, although not unrecorded, e.g. in 1996 an immature male summered from late May to late September. Numbers vary considerably from year to year, with flocks appearing in some winters, when peak numbers normally occur between late December and early March. Peak counts concern 65 on 22 January 2000, a flock of up to 55 from early October 1998 to late January 1999 (max. on 26 December) and 50 flying west on 20 January 1985. Noted within the nature reserve on three occasions: one was at Ternery Pool on 22 January 1985, one or two were there regularly between 8 February and 30 April 1988 and four were on the Wader Pool at high tide on 24 December 1999. The species has undergone a rapid decline with only two records of single birds since January 2014, these were seen on 1 January and 5 June 2014.

**KING EIDER** *Somateria spectabilis*

**Rare vagrant**

The only one was a drake present in Rye Bay from 11 to 18 January 2009. It was seen offshore at Rye Harbour on 17 and then at Camber on 18 January. Photo by Martin Casemore



**LONG-TAILED DUCK** *Clangula hyemalis*

**Very scarce visitor, mainly in winter**

Recorded in 30 years since 1970, mainly between late October and late April, although recorded in all months except September. Many records involve birds which remain for some time, mainly at Ternery Pool or Long Pit, usually arriving between October and departing any time between December and mid May. Wandering individuals or small groups are more often seen at sea and have occurred between October and January and from March to May. Exceptionally, a first-summer female was present from 27 May to 16 August 1985, initially at Long Pit, then at Ternery Pool. The peak count was 13 offshore on 30 January 1989.

**COMMON SCOTER** *Melanitta nigra*

**Present offshore all year; common at times**

Numbers are very variable, although normally highest between November and May. Large flocks have occurred in all months except August and September, since 1993 very few have been noted in June. Some of the larger counts during the spring relate to migrants heading up Channel. Peak counts are 5000+ flying east on 8 April 1979, 4000 in December 1951 and 3000 on 15 July 1956. Small numbers occasionally occur on the pits within the SSSI, especially Ternery Pool, but these are probably sick or oiled birds. This species has experienced a decline since early 2009 with the largest counts being 350 in both November 2013 and November 2016 and 200 in December 2010. An oiled bird picked up on the beach and cleaned by the RSPCA and released on 15 February 2002 was shot 5050 kms away in Russia on 29 September 2019.

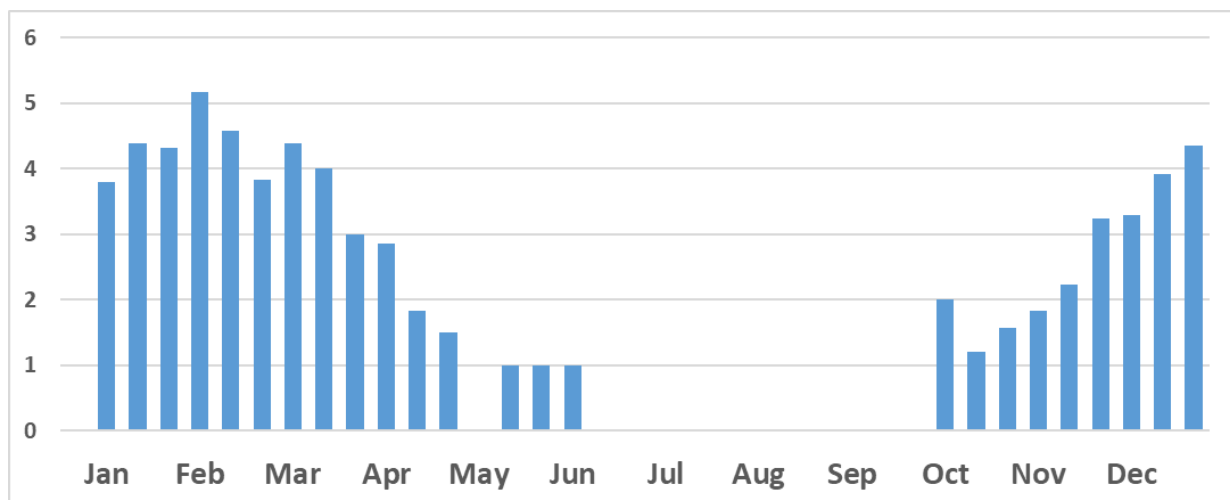
**VELVET SCOTER** *Melanitta fusca*

**Scarce winter visitor and passage migrant offshore**

Probably an annual visitor, although largely overlooked and hence recorded less than annually (29 years since 1970). Recorded throughout the period October to May, with the majority between October and January. The vast majority have occurred at sea, although there are a few records from Ternery Pool and Long Pit. The peak count is a 100 on the sea on 23 February 1974.

**GOLDENEYE** *Bucephala clangula***Winter visitor in small numbers**

Occurs annually during the winter months, mainly on the pits, with 4-12 usually remaining throughout the winter. The favourite location is on the pool closest to Harbour Farm Barns. The first birds normally arrive in late October or November and usually remain until March or April, with peak numbers present any time between November and February. Scarce on occasions, e.g. unrecorded in 1973, and only two during the 1996/97 winter. The peak count is 13 in January 1980. There are three summer records of singles on 5 July 1971, 16 July 1982 and 31 July 1959.



Goldeneye 10 day period mean peak counts 1991-2019 at Rye Harbour

**SMEW** *Mergus albellus***Uncommon winter visitor**

First recorded in 1974 (female on 6 March). Recorded in most winters since then, although scarce prior to 1985, arriving mainly in December and often remaining until mid March, with peak numbers between December and February. The earliest autumn record is one on 22 October 2010, the latest of the spring being one on 23 April 1977. Numbers vary considerably from year to year and in some years are absent. The peak count was 19 on 20 January 1991 when six drakes were present in the flock. This century it has become an uncommon species with only singles recorded since 2013

**RED-BREASTED MERGANSER** *Mergus serrator***Scarce winter visitor and spring migrant, mainly offshore**

Occurs annually in small numbers, mainly between November and April, although recorded in all months. There is often evidence of a small passage during late March and April, when birds can be seen heading east up the Channel, with late April yielding the highest numbers in recent years. Noted on ten occasions during the summer including a male that arrived on 22 August 2017 and was last seen on 7 August 2018. Occasional birds turn up on pits within the SSSI, especially Ternery Pool and Long Pit. The peak count all involve movements offshore with a maximum of 32 on 8 April 1979. The earliest winter arrival was a single on 2 October 2008 with the latest staying until 25 May 1986.

**GOOSANDER** *Mergus merganser***Scarce winter visitor**

Recorded in 30 years since the first in April 1972, mainly between November and March. The highest numbers occurred in early 1996 when 22 (four drakes) were at Long Pit on 2 January and 17 (three drakes) were there on 3 February. The only other counts to exceed seven was 13 (three drakes) at Long Pit and Castle Water between 6 and 8 January 1979, associated with freezing conditions and 14 flying over on 11 February 2012. In recent years sightings have reduced with only two records since the February 2012 sighting with a single on 11 February 2018 and four on 26 January 2020. The earliest winter arrival was a single on 5 November 1989 and the last remained until 26 April 1972.

**RUDDY DUCK** *Oxyura jamaicensis*

**Fairly common feral breeding resident, now extinct**

A male from 27 July to 20 August 1971 was the first record. The next was in 1979, since when it became a regular visitor, although for several years it remained scarce and occurred less than annually. Since November 1992 however it has been present most of the time and breeding has been evident in most years since the first two pairs nested in 1993. Usually present in low numbers, sometimes absent, between November and January, then numbers typically build up to a peak around April or May. Juveniles at Ternery Pool sometimes account for another peak around September. The highest counts concern 17 at Castle Water on 22 August 2004 and at Ternery Pool on 23 August 2005. Breeding numbers have averaged four pairs although there was a maximum of 10 pairs nesting in 2005. A government led eradication programme resulted in a rapid reduction in numbers with only singles recorded after April 2010. The final observation was one on 14 October 2012.

**HONEY BUZZARD** *Pernis apivorus*

**Very scarce passage migrant**

There are four spring records between 1 May and 4 June, and eight during the return passage between 16 August and 3 October, with five of these in mid/late August. Records are as follows:

1971: singles over the Beach Reserve on 16 and 24 Aug.

1993: one over Winchelsea Beach on 19 Aug.

1996: one flew east over Castle Water on 1 May and another headed inland over the river Rother on 4 Jun.

1998: one was circling over the sea off the river mouth at 9am on 3 Oct before it drifted south over the Channel.

1999: one flew from the direction of the sea over the Beach Reserve at 10am on 15 May before circling and heading off NW; another flew NE with a Buzzard around 10am on 29 Aug.

2000: one over the Beach Reserve on 6 May; two heading NE together over Castle Water on 31 Aug; singles overhead on 10 and 27 Sep.

2008: one over the reserve at 3pm on 14 Sep.

2010: two drifted over Beach Reserve at 11am before heading out to sea on 22 Sep.

2014: one over Castle Farm 31 May.

**BLACK KITE** *Milvus migrans*

**Rare vagrant**

Three confirmed reports as follows:

1988: one was feeding on an Oystercatcher carcass at the Beach Reserve on 14 May.

1994: one flew low over the Beach Reserve on 5 Jun.

2016: one over the reserve on 17 May.

**RED KITE** *Milvus milvus*

**Rare but increasing visitor or passage migrant**

The first record was one that flew over Harbour Road towards Brede Valley on 4 December 1978. There were only four records in total up until 2000 with further singles in 2007 and 2010. From 2013 the species became annual, usually singles, in every year except 2015. Since then sightings have become more frequent and all year round, including small groups of birds gliding across the reserve in May – who would have imagined this a few decades ago?

**MARSH HARRIER** *Circus aeruginosus*

**Common breeding resident**

Increasingly regular, this species has been recorded annually since 1979, but not recorded with certainty prior to 1974. Whilst the earlier records were all migrants, the species began to breed on the reserve in 2011 at Castle Water after the reedbed creation project there. 1-2 pairs nest there each year now. Small numbers appear to move through in autumn, although it is difficult to be certain how many pass through on a given day and how many are just mobile individuals. However, as many as four may have been seen on 27 September 1999, and up to five were seen on 11 September 2000. In recent years there are many counts of five with a maximum of six in June 2012.

**HEN HARRIER** *Circus cyaneus*

**Scarce and declining winter visitor**

This was a regular winter visitor, but is now rare. Occurs mainly between October and April, although there are five May records, and two in June, the latest being on 10<sup>th</sup> (1995). There are three summer records: a ringtail on 20 July 1981, an immature male on 6 August 1981 and a ringtail on 18 August 1999. Early autumn records concern four in mid/late September, with the earliest on 12<sup>th</sup> (2000), then no records until mid October. Normally seen singly, although three were seen together in January 1979 and at least five were present in the local area on 20 January 1985, with up to three regularly during January and February. In recent years there has been a marked decline in observations with no records at all in 2012 and 2018. A wing tagged bird on 1 February 2000 was identified as a first-winter male, marked the previous summer at a nest in Dumfries-shire as part of the long-term study into birds of prey and Red Grouse on the Langholm Estate. The movement, one of the longest reported for this population, was 530 km south-east.

**MONTAGU'S HARRIER** *Circus pygargus*

**Very scarce passage migrant**

Recorded in 1972, 1977, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1997, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2004, but none since!. A very early male was hunting at Harbour Farm on 30 March 1991, but all other spring records span the period 29 April (1994) to 26 June (1992). There are five return passage records, one on 4 October 2002 and the rest in mid/late August: 21<sup>st</sup> 1972, 16<sup>th</sup> 1996 and 28<sup>th</sup> 1999. All records involve singletons, and few have remained for more than a day, except in 2000 when an immature female hunted the Beach Reserve on at least nine dates between 8 May and 13 June.

**GOSHAWK** *Accipiter gentilis*

**Rare winter visitor**

Unrecorded prior to 1991, but noted in ten years since, although there are no sightings since 2010. All records span the period 12 October to 29 April, but especially in November, December and April:

1991: a male heading east on 29 Apr; one over Wader Pool on 9 Nov; adult female there on 12 Nov.

1992: one wintering locally was seen over the reserve on 26 Feb, 26 Mar and 23 Apr; a male was at Harbour Farm on 11 Dec.

1993: female at Harbour Farm on 22 Nov.

1995: one chasing a Sparrowhawk at Narrow Pit on 12 Oct; one chasing Lapwings over Castle Water on 7 Dec.

1996: male at Castle Water on 15 and 16 Apr.

1998: male at Long Pit on 16 Jan.

1999: female at Castle Water on 5 Dec.

2001: male at Castle Water on 31 Dec.

2002: male at Castle Water on 24 Apr.

2010: male at Castle Pit on 21 Nov being mobbed by Carrion Crows.

**SPARROWHAWK** *Accipiter nisus*

**Uncommon resident**

Although not recorded prior to 1972, this species has since undergone a considerable increase, and has been seen annually since 1981 and seen almost daily during 1990s. Noted nest building adjacent to the SSSI in 1999 and an adult and two juveniles were at the same site in August 2000. Has bred successfully at Castle Water from 2016. Numbers are boosted in the autumn by migrants.

**BUZZARD** *Buteo buteo*

**Fairly common resident and now breeds**

Only noted in nine years since 1970 until 2005. A very slow increase was then detected with the number of records increasing from 2013 onwards. By 2017 it was being seen in every month of the year. Maximum counts have been four seen on 22 September 2012 and 18 April 2016. Whilst most of the sightings nowadays are of local birds there is often a light passage of birds over the reserve at peak spring and autumn migration times. A pair prospected a nesting site in 2019 and nested in 2020 for the first time.

**ROUGH-LEGGED BUZZARD** *Buteo lagopus*

**Rare visitor**

Recorded in three years as follows:

1971: one flew NW over the Beach Reserve and Camber Castle on 1 Apr.

1974: one, probably a female, was seen on four dates in Oct from 9<sup>th</sup>.

1979: one on 6 and 7 Jan.

**OSPREY** *Pandion haliaetus*

**Very scarce passage migrant**

Recorded in 30 years since 1970, and almost annually since 1989, with only 2000, 2005, 2012 and 2015 yielding no records. Spring birds are seen between late April and June. Return passage has spanned the period 10 August to 2 October, with most in September. All records involve singles apart from an unconfirmed report of two on 7 June 1991.

**KESTREL** *Falco tinnunculus*

**Fairly common breeding resident**

Up to three pairs breed in most years within and adjacent to the SSSI, with others visiting from breeding sites nearby. Numbers remain fairly even throughout the year. During the breeding season some males regularly visit the Beach Reserve to catch the young of waders and Little Terns. In 1998 a breeding male nesting within 1km of the Beach Reserve was wing tagged as part of study to investigate the problem. He was not seen to hunt on the Beach Reserve and could be regularly found for the next two years within just 600m. of the nest site!

**RED-FOOTED FALCON** *Falco vespertinus*

**Rare vagrant**

Noted in six years, mostly in spring between in and June, but with two records in August:

1971: male overhead on 11 Aug.

1989: immature at the river mouth on 3 Jun.

1990: adult female at Flat Beach on 18 Apr.

1992: female from 13 to 15 Jun.

1993: male over Ternery Pool on 10 Aug.

1995: female hawking insects on 8 May; female along Harbour Road on 10 Jun.

**MERLIN** *Falco columbarius*

**Uncommon winter visitor**

Formerly less common than in recent years. Generally present for much of the period August to April, using all parts of the area. Most records involve singles, although two have been seen together on a number of occasions and three were seen towards dusk at Castle Water on 4 December 1990. The earliest was a juvenile on 7 August 1988 with the last bird to depart being seen on 3 June 1994.

**HOBBY** *Falco subbuteo*

**Regular non-breeding summer visitor and passage migrant**

Present for much of the period late April to early October, although there are generally fewer records during July/early August. Formerly rather scarce compared with recent years. Records of two or three are regular, and peak counts concern nine at Castle Water on 1 May 2018, eight at Castle Water on 15 June 1997 with up to six on other dates that month, six on 4 May 1996 and at Castle Water on 9 June 2001. The earliest record was one on 26 March 2003 with the latest recorded on 25 October 2012.

**PEREGRINE** *Falco peregrinus*

**Common year-round and now breeding some years.**

Formerly rare, but now a regular visitor appearing at any time of year. Not recorded until 1984, but has been seen annually since, with the exception of 1987. Since 1988 there have been several records annually, increasing to over 40 in 2004. In the last decade it was recorded on most days. Most records involve singles

though sightings of two birds have become common. Prey items have included Oystercatcher, Lapwing, Golden Plover, Black-headed Gull, Sandwich Tern, Starling and Great Spotted Woodpecker.

**RED-LEGGED PARTRIDGE** *Alectoris rufa*

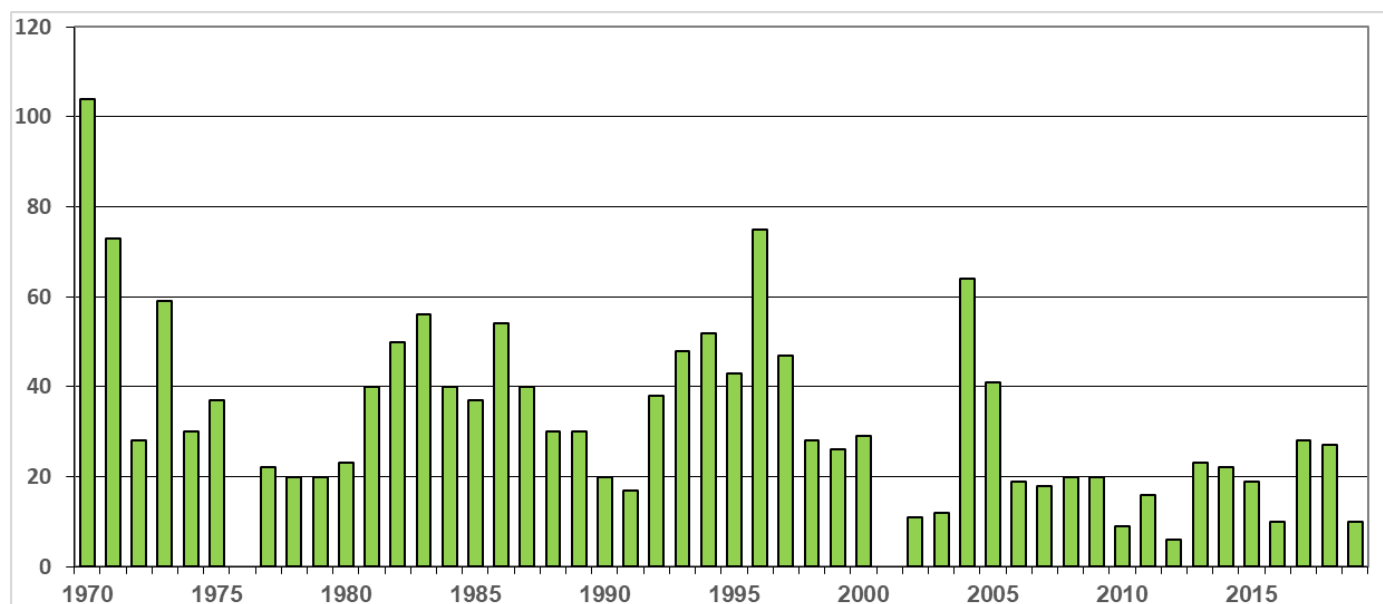
**Scarce introduced visitor that occasionally breeds**

First noted in 1977, then annually until 1993, but only on two occasions between this date and 2001. Recorded annually in small numbers since then. The species was present mostly around the Beach Reserve/Harbour Farm with one or two pairs breeding annually between 1979 and 1984, but by 1989 it had become scarce. Peak counts involve coveys of 12 in January 1984, 11 in January 1981 and 10+ in October 1982. In recent years there has been a decline with no counts of over eight.

**GREY PARTRIDGE** *Perdix perdix*

**Fairly common breeding resident**

Present all year with breeding numbers in decline, e.g. about 33 pairs in 1997 but only 2-5 pairs in recent years. Occurs throughout the SSSI, but especially around the Beach Reserve/Harbour Farm. The highest counts were 75 at Harbour Farm on 7 December 1996 and 52 there on 21 November 1994. Since 2010 the maximum counts have included 28 on 8 August 2017 and 27 on 4 August 2018.



Grey Partridge annual peak counts at Rye Harbour

**QUAIL** *Coturnix coturnix*

**Rare passage migrant/summer visitor**

Recorded in ten years since 1970, with most records of singing males between in May and June, but a few have been noted until 31 October. It is possible that breeding has occurred although there has been no confirmation this. Records are as follows:

1983: one calling at the river mouth at dusk on 15 Jun.

1987: present at Castle Farm from 2 May with two calling by 6<sup>th</sup> and three by 7<sup>th</sup>; one or two regularly heard until 23<sup>rd</sup>.

1988: one reported at Harbour Farm on 19 Aug.

1993: one singing at Harbour Farm on 31 May.

1994: male at Harbour Farm on 20 May.

1996: one singing at Ternery Pool/Harbour Farm between 7 and 13 Jun and again on 16 Jul; two reported with Grey Partridges at Harbour Farm on 14 and 16 Sep.

1997: one in song at Harbour Farm on 26 May.

1999: one flushed adjacent to the Quarry on 31 Oct.

2003: one calling at Harbour Farm on 14 June.

2007: one flushed behind Ternery Pool on 10 May.

**PHEASANT** *Phasianus colchicus*

**Fairly common introduced resident**

This is a much under recorded species. Occurs all year, possibly breeding in some years, although confirmed breeding has seldom been recorded. Generally present in small numbers, but the local population is influenced by releases of captive bred birds.

**WATER RAIL** *Rallus aquaticus*

**Fairly common winter visitor, uncommon at other times of year, occasionally breeds**

Recorded all year, but numbers increase during the winter with arrivals from Europe. Although there have been no records of more than ten individuals, it is likely that the wintering population of this secretive species is typically around 30-40 individuals, with reedbeds at Rye Harbour Farm, Narrow Pit and Castle Water being the favoured localities. With the reedbed creation at Castle Water and Rye Harbour Farm it is now a regular breeder, but numbers and success are unknown.

**SPOTTED CRAKE** *Porzana porzana*

**Rare passage migrant**

There are just four records:

1975: one at Ternery Pool on 10 Aug.

1999: one at Ternery Pool on 21 Sep.

2000: one at Castle Water on 12 & 19 Sep.

2003: one at Castle Water on 5 Sep.

**CORNCRAKE** *Crex crex*

**Rare passage migrant**

Two records as follows:

1975: one at the Beach Reserve on 12 Sep.

1999: one at Harbour Farm on 2 Oct after a night of strong westerlies.

**MOORHEN** *Gallinula chloropus*

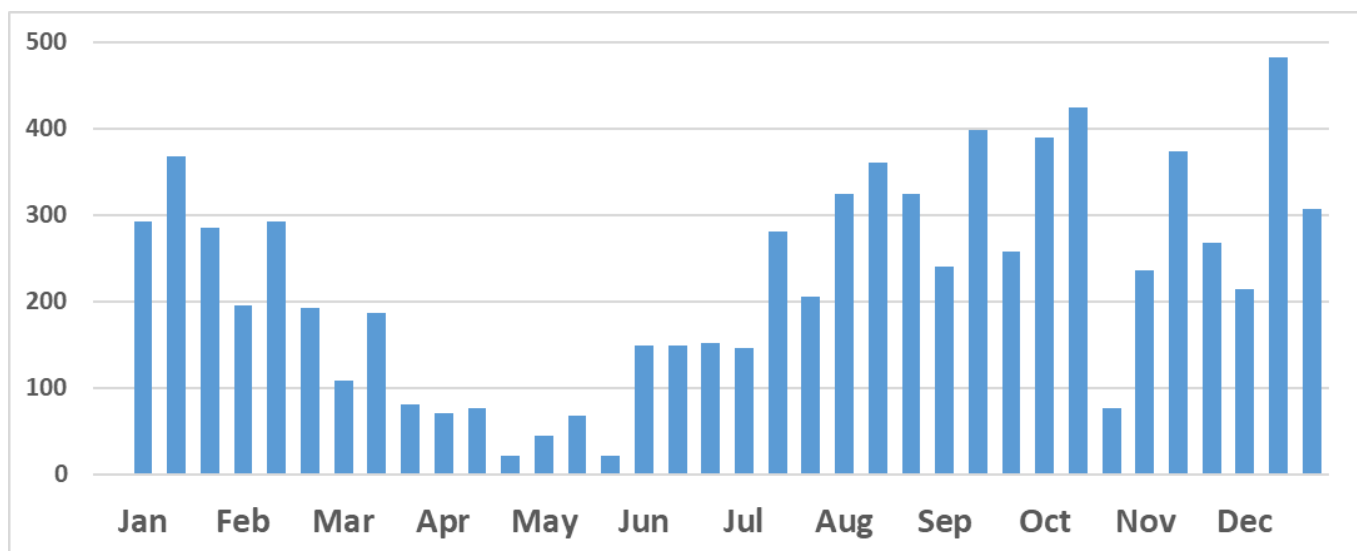
**Common breeding resident**

Highest numbers are generally recorded between September and January with lowest numbers during June. There is, however, some bias towards when birds are most visible, i.e. many are hidden in drainage channels, reedbeds, etc. during the breeding season when birds may also become more secretive. Gatherings on open ground used to be frequent, but less so now as the Marsh Harriers now hunt over the wetland. Peak counts have been 99 in both November 1984 and January 1991, although estimates of up to c.150 have been made. The population shows a downward trend in recent years. The breeding population is probably within the range 50-60 pairs in a typical year.

**COOT** *Fulica atra*

**Common breeding resident, numbers increase in winter**

Breeding numbers probably vary between 25 and 50 pairs. Numbers build up from late summer to reach a peak normally between November and February. Peak counts concern a maximum of 1900 recorded for the years 1966 to 1976, 1500 at Castle Farm during cold weather in February 1985 and c.1260 in February 1982, mostly at Castle Water. In recent years the wintering birds have formed large dense flocks, which may be a reaction to the hunting pressure from harriers and large gulls. The origin of the large number of wintering birds is indicated by a ringed bird found dead at Rye Harbour in February 1963 which had been ringed in Holland in March 1958, while another found dead at Castle Water in August 2003 had been ringed in France in January 2000.



Coot 10 day period mean peak counts 1991-2019 at Rye Harbour

**COMMON CRANE** *Grus grus*

**Very rare vagrant**

Four records as follows:

1975: one at the Beach Reserve on 12 Sep.

1999: one at Harbour Farm on 2 Oct after a night of strong westerlies.

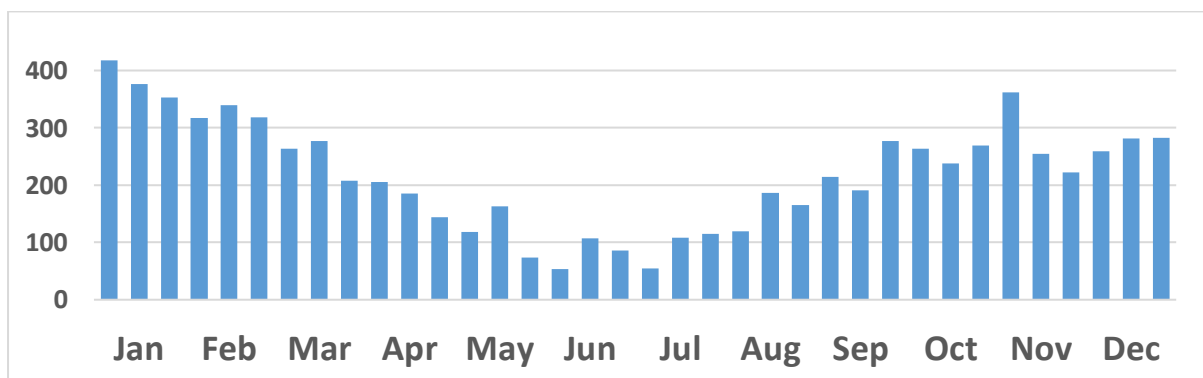
2009: one flying over Castle Farm on 11 May.

2011: two flying over Castle Pit on 13 Oct.

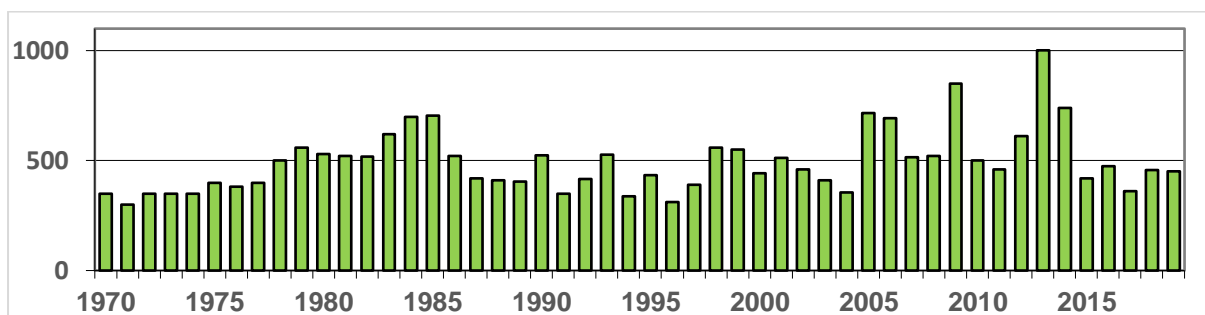
**OYSTERCATCHER** *Haematopus ostralegus*

**Common breeding resident, passage migrant and winter visitor**

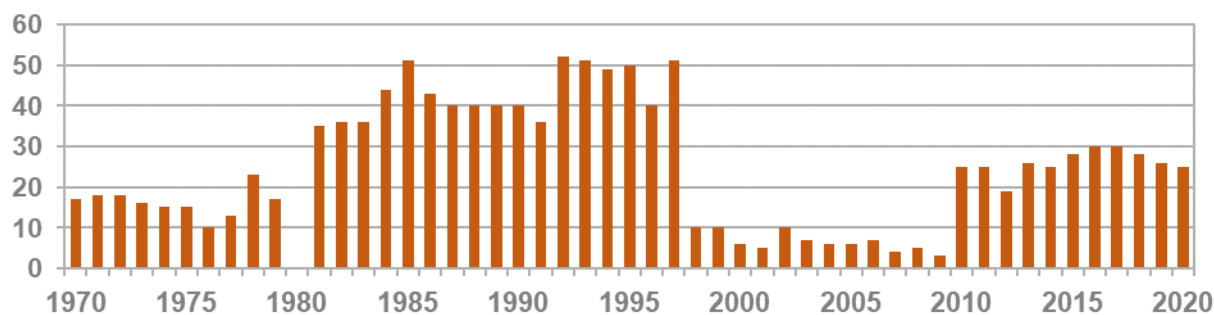
A small breeding population during the 1970s declined to just one pair in 1975, but has since seen a strong recovery, especially from 1982 onwards, with most years seeing at least 20 pairs nesting, reaching a maximum of 40 pairs in 2018. Most of these are at the Beach Reserve, although a few nest at inland sites. Breeding success is generally low, with very few young being raised. A population of about 100 non-breeding birds also remains during the summer months, which is supplemented by incoming migrants during the autumn and winter, reaching a peak typically in January or February. Most of these depart by May. The average annual peak count since 1970 has been 456, with peaks of 1000 on 11 February 2013, 850 roosting at the Shore Ridges on 29 January 2009 and 715 on 15 December 2005. The population utilises the whole of Rye Bay. Many feed along the shore at low tide and the rising tide pushes them up to various roosting sites where large concentrations may be found. When disturbed from these they move to the fenced areas at Ternery Pool and Flat Beach.



Oystercatcher 10 day period mean peak counts 1991-2019 at Rye Harbour



Oystercatcher annual peak counts at Rye Harbour



Oystercatcher breeding pairs at Rye Harbour

**BLACK-WINGED STILT** *Himantopus himantopus*

**Very rare vagrant**

Seven confirmed records with increasing numbers in the last couple of years:

1949: three on 9 May 1949.

1978: male at Ternery Pool from dawn on 11 June to 0630 on 12<sup>th</sup>.

2017: one on 2 June at Rye Harbour Farm.

2018: Two from 8 to 10 April – photo below - followed by three on 25 and 28 May.

2019: Two from 17 to 19 April on Rye Harbour Farm.

2020: One at Castle Water 11 June

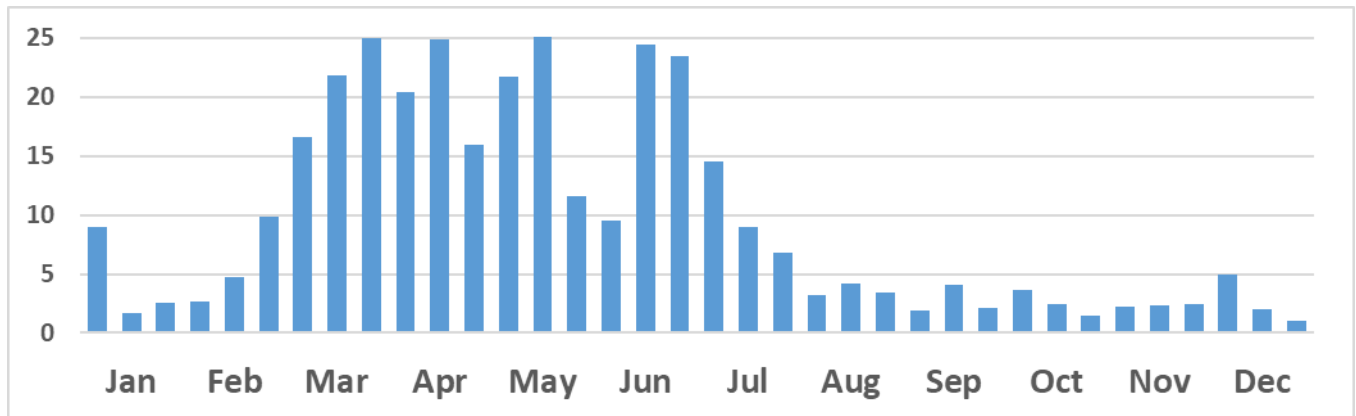


Pair of Black-winged Stilt at Rye Harbour Farm 8<sup>th</sup> April 2018

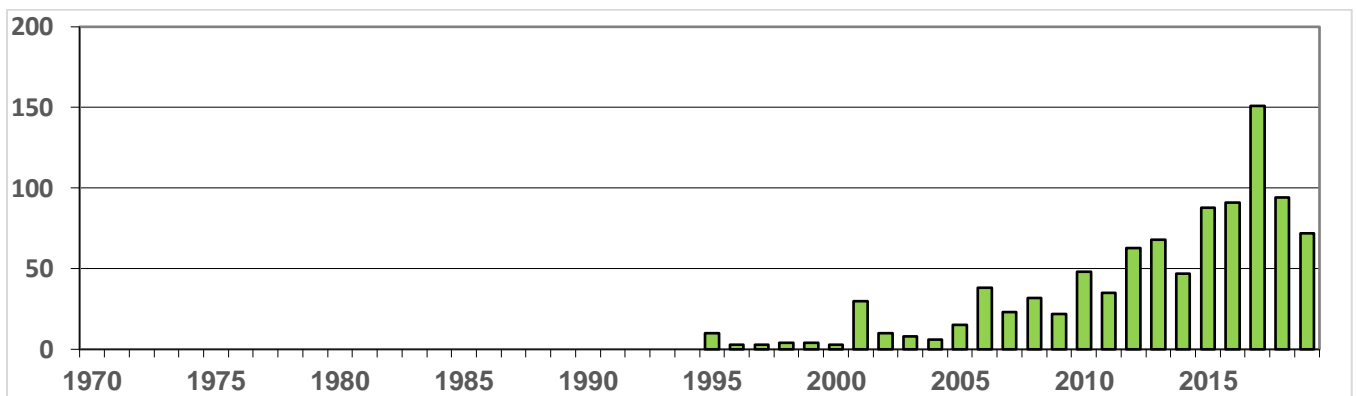
**AVOCET** *Recurvirostra avosetta*

**Common passage migrant and breeder**

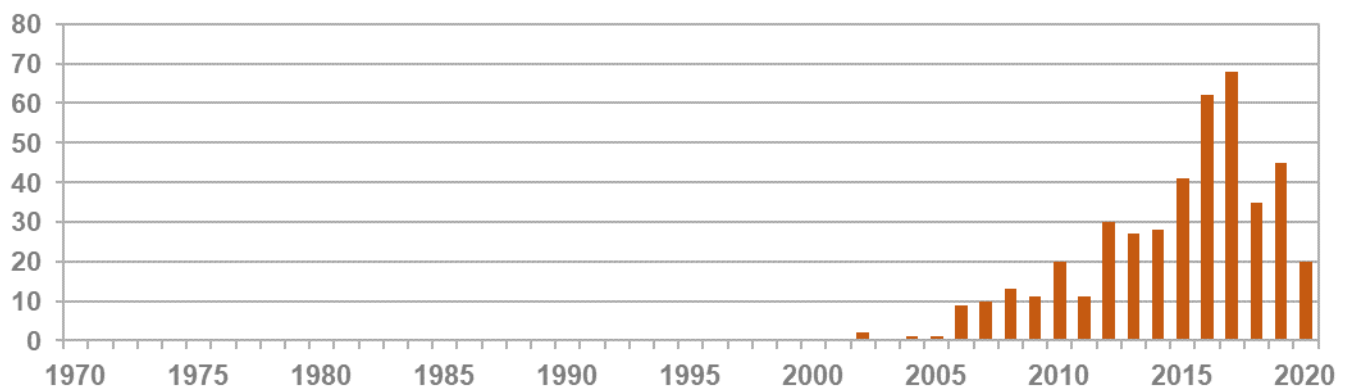
An increasingly common visitor with the smallest numbers during the winter months. Few are seen during the period September to January. The largest flocks were 151 on 17 June 2017, 89 on 17 June 2018 and 83 on 24 June 2016. During spring passage individuals or small flocks may be seen heading up the Channel, or pausing to feed or rest, typically at the Beach Reserve or along the shore. Breeding first occurred in 1994 at the Wader Pool, then not again until 2002. Since then it has increased rapidly here following the creation of the new saline lagoons (2005) and saltmarsh (2011). A colour ringed youngster marked in France on 20 June 2007 has been seen as a breeding bird here in 2010, 2014, 2017 and 2019.



Avocet 10 day period mean peak counts 1991-2019



Avocet annual peak counts at Rye Harbour



Avocet breeding pairs at Rye Harbour

Photo on next page is of two well grown Avocet chicks on new saltmarsh 4 June 2009



**STONE-CURLEW**     *Burhinus oediconemus*

**Rare passage migrant**

Five confirmed records up to 2000:

1981: one calling over the Beach Reserve/Harbour Farm at 0130 hrs on 15 Jun.

1990: one at Castle Farm on 3 Nov.

1991: one at Wader Pool at dusk on 20 Jun.

1996: one or two were at Castle Farm for two days in mid Jul.

2000: one was at the Beach Reserve on 26 Jul.

In the last twenty years there has been an increase in sightings and singles have been seen in 13 of these years.



Stone Curlew on Beach Reserve 1 June 2018

**COLLARED PRATINCOLE**     *Glareola pratincola*

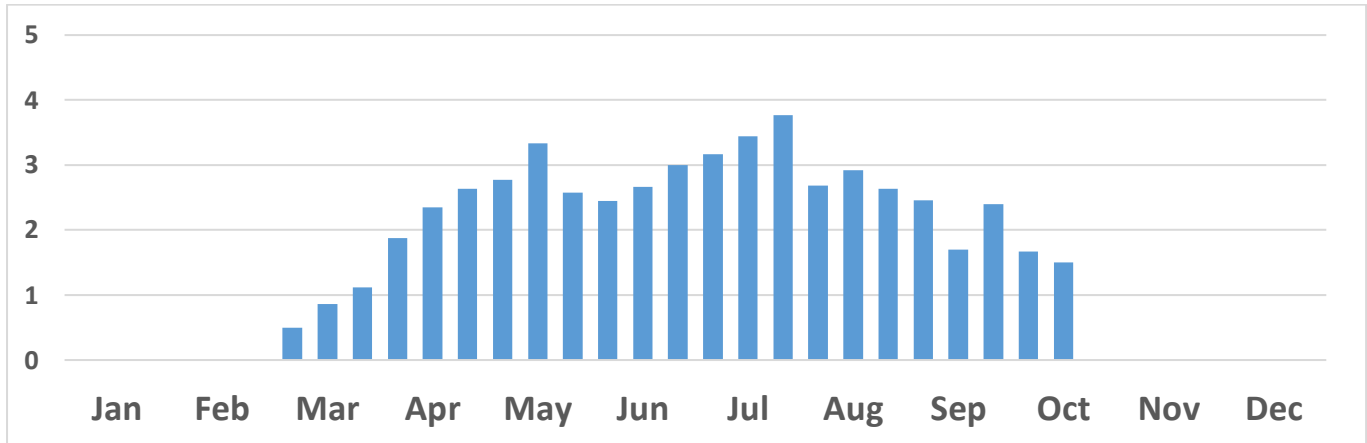
**Very rare vagrant**

The sole record concerns one at Ternery Pool from dawn on 8 June 1978 to dusk the following day, constantly hawking insects throughout its stay.

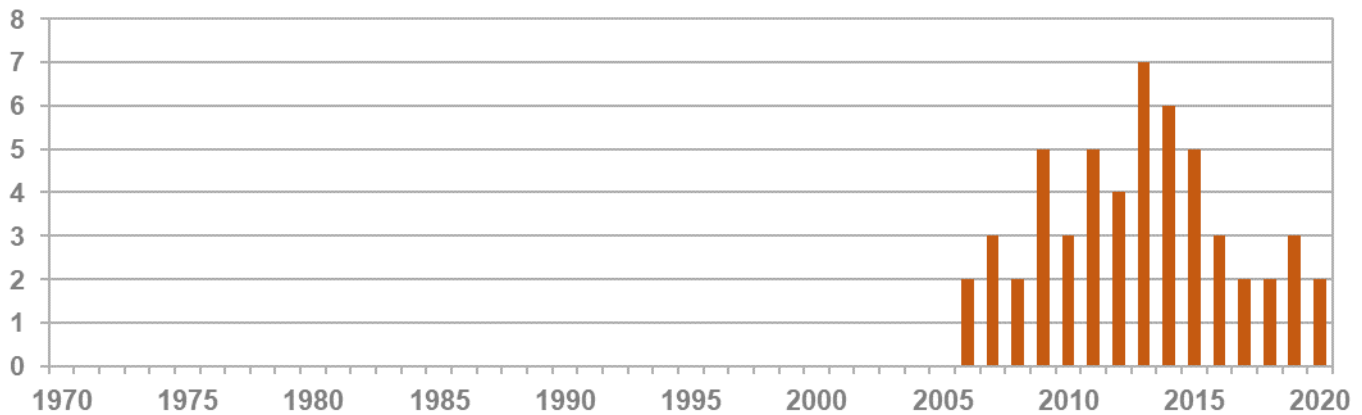
**LITTLE RINGED PLOVER** *Charadrius dubius*

**Regular passage migrant and breeder**

Can occur at any time between March and October. Spring migrants usually appear in ones or twos between late March and early May. Numbers are declining as the extensive bare margins on the margins of new wetlands have become vegetated. They avoid the areas occupied by the breeding Ringed Plovers as they are aggressive towards them. The return passage is usually stronger with most birds appearing between late June and early September, with a peak of activity typically around early August. The peak count is 16 at Castle Water on 18 August 2011 and 12 at Castle Pit on 26 July 2013. The earliest arrival was one on 13 March 2003 with the latest record being three on 13 October 2019.



Little Ringed Plover 10 day period peak counts 1991-2019



Little Ringed Plover breeding pairs at Rye Harbour

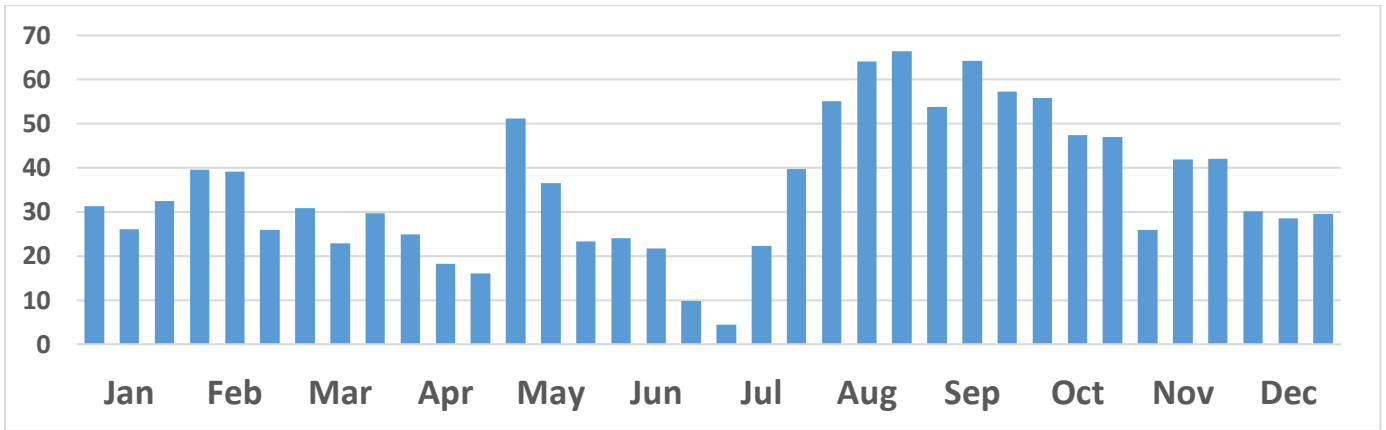


Adult Little Ringed Plover at Ternery Pool 22 June 2020

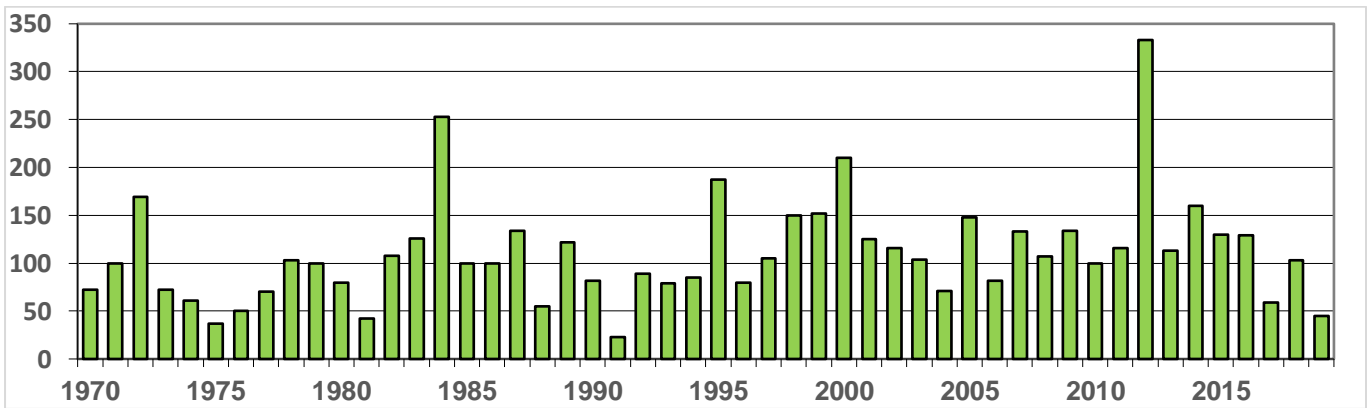
**RINGED PLOVER** *Charadrius hiaticula*

**Common breeding resident, scarcer in winter**

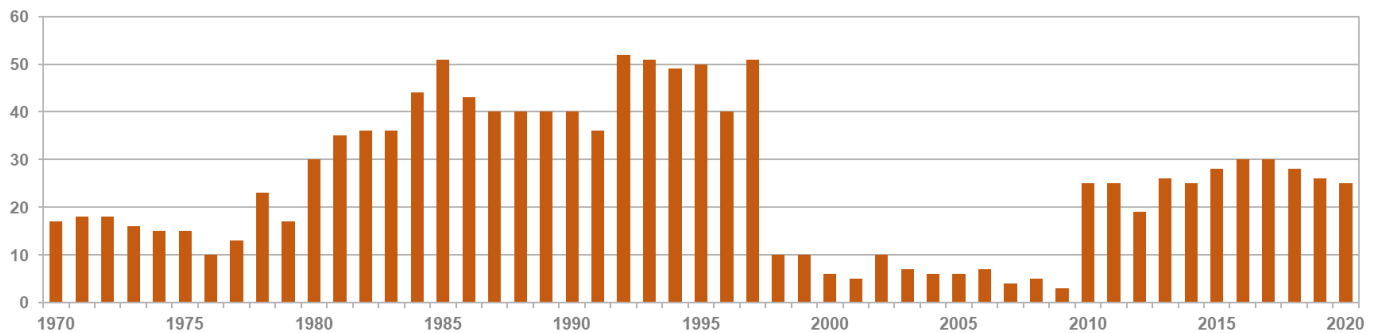
The breeding population has seen a significant increase since the 1970s, following work to protect ground nesting birds. The annual totals during the 1970s ranged from ten to 20 pairs whereas during the 1990s between 36 and 52 pairs were estimated each year, almost exclusively along the Beach Reserve. The largest gatherings mostly involve high tide roosts along the sea bank during August and September before numbers drop off to leave a smaller wintering population. The highest counts all relate to flocks roosting on the sea bank: 210 on 19 August 2000, 152 on 29 August 1999 and 150 on 7 September 1998. Breeding birds may start to return as early as late January, and males can be seen in display flights on fine days from then on. A colour marked male present during the breeding season of 1997 had been marked the previous October at Canvey Island in Essex and a bird seen on 29 April 2012 had been colour marked at Hayling Island, Hampshire on 22 September 2011. Here is a link to a video of one incubating <https://youtu.be/j7MrxDDzXyg>



Ringed Plover 10 day period mean peak counts 1991-2019



Ringed Plover annual peak counts at Rye Harbour



Ringed Plover breeding pairs at Rye Harbour

**KENTISH PLOVER** *Charadrius alexandrinus*

**Very scarce passage migrant**

Recorded in 17 years since 1970, with 14 individuals on spring passage and nine on return passage. Spring birds have appeared between 31 March (1992) and 6 May (1986), especially late April, apart from a male at Wader Pool on 30 May 1994. The return passage has spanned the period 1 July (1971) to 9 October (1993), late July being the most productive period with three records. All records involve singles on one date only apart from a juvenile on 26 August 1975 and again from 8 to 15 September. Rye Harbour was the last regular nesting site in Britain of this species. The last recorded breeding was in 1956 when there was a much more extensive intertidal area at what is now the Rye Golf Club. One of the two birds present on Flat Beach from 25 March until 6 April 2013 had been colour ringed as an adult in Schleswig-Holstein, Germany on 25 May 2009.



Kentish Plover March 2013 – photo by Martin Casemore

**DOTTEREL** *Charadrius morinellus*

**Rare passage migrant, one winter record**

Recorded in nine years as follows:

1974: one on 8 and 9 Sep.

1978: a flock of five, including three in complete summer plumage, flew in off the sea and headed NE over the Beach Reserve on 29 Apr; one at the Beach Reserve on 10-15 Aug.

1987: a female near Crittall Hide in late afternoon on 26 Apr.

1992: one at Harbour Farm between 27 Jan and 2 Feb and again on 22 Feb.

2003: a female roosted on shingle ridges 27 Apr

2007: one with Golden Plover on Flat Beach on 8 and 9 Oct.

2008: one with Golden Plover on Flat Beach on 13 Sep.

2012: single near Watch Cottage on 11 Apr.

2013: one seen with the Golden Plover flock on 10 to the 12 Oct.



Dotterel female 27 April 2003

**PACIFIC GOLDEN PLOVER**    *Pluvialis fulva*

**Rare Vagrant**

A single bird was present on Flat Beach with the Golden Plover flock from 1 to 9 April 2003.



Pacific Golden Plover April 2003 – photo by Paul Troake

**AMERICAN GOLDEN PLOVER**    *Pluvialis dominica*

**Rare vagrant**

A single adult on Flat Beach associated with the Golden Plover flock from 3 to 5 June 2016.

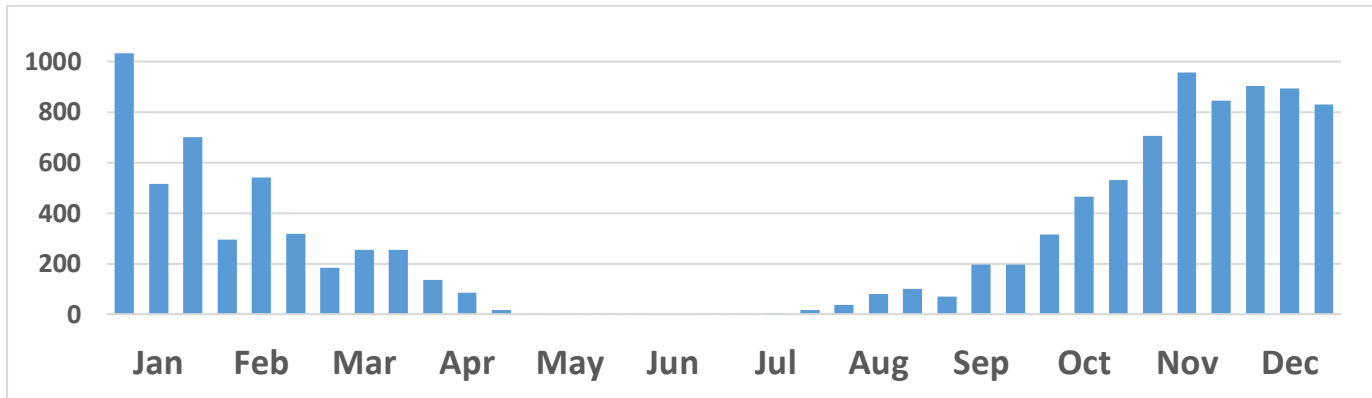


American Golden Plover June 2016

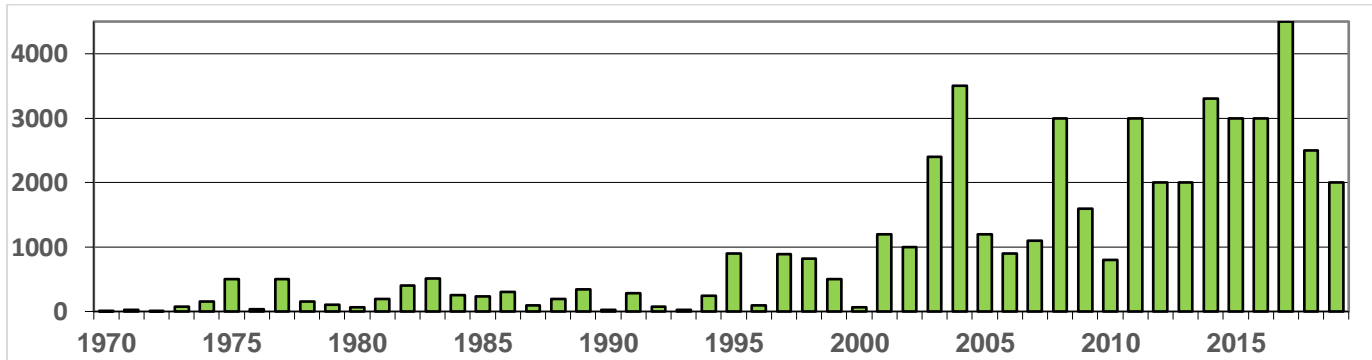
**GOLDEN PLOVER** *Pluvialis apricaria*

**Common winter visitor**

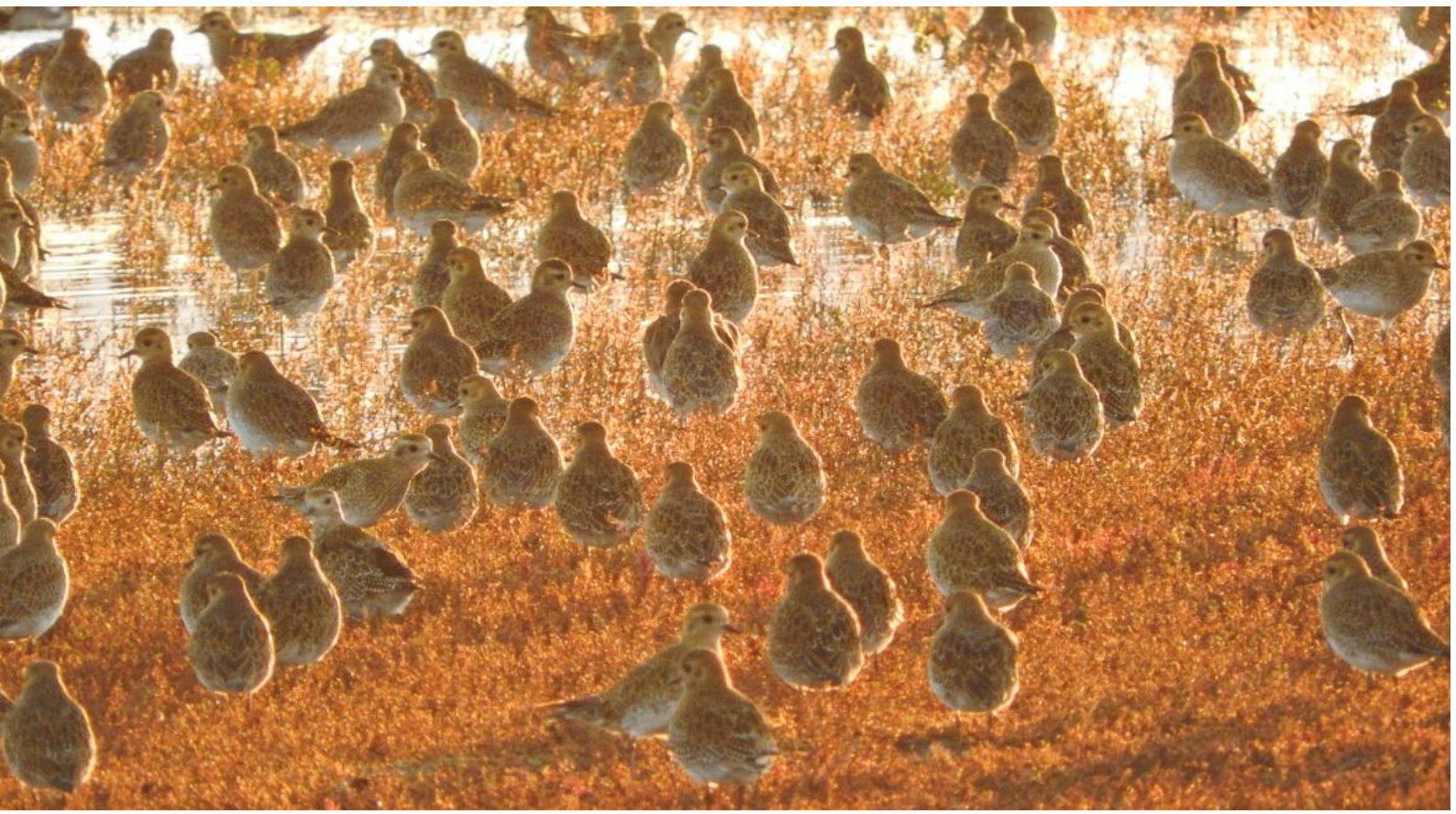
Recorded most frequently between August and March, with peak counts occurring any time between mid October and mid January. With the electric fences at Flat Beach providing a safe roosting area the number of birds has increased in recent years with flocks of 3000 being counted in 2008, 2011, 2014, 2016 and 2017. The first returning birds can be seen any time after mid July. In recent years flocks numbering several hundred have been present throughout March and as late as mid May, when some are in their summer plumage. The earliest autumn arrival was one on 2 July 1994 and the latest spring record was 4 June 2013.



Golden Plover 10 day period peak counts 1991-2019



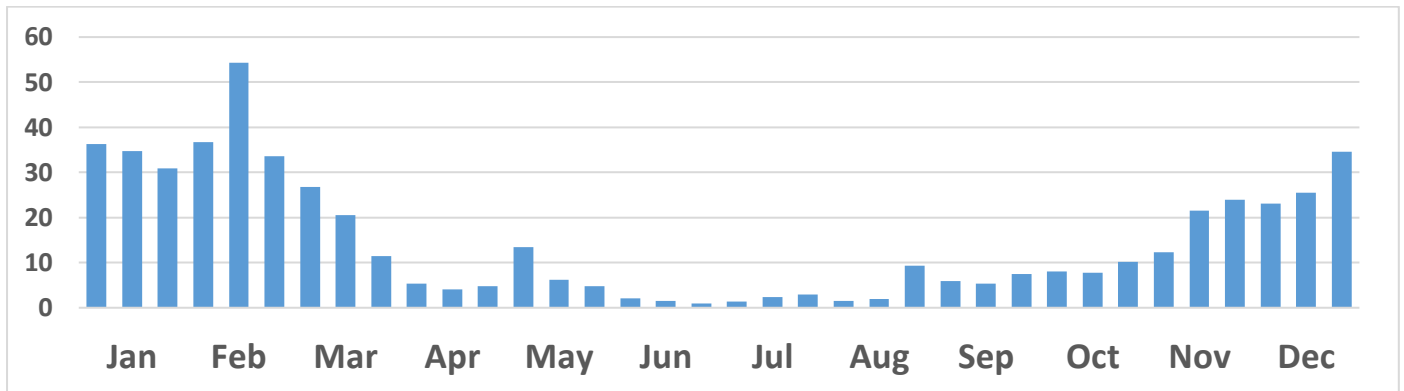
Golden Plover annual peak counts at Rye Harbour



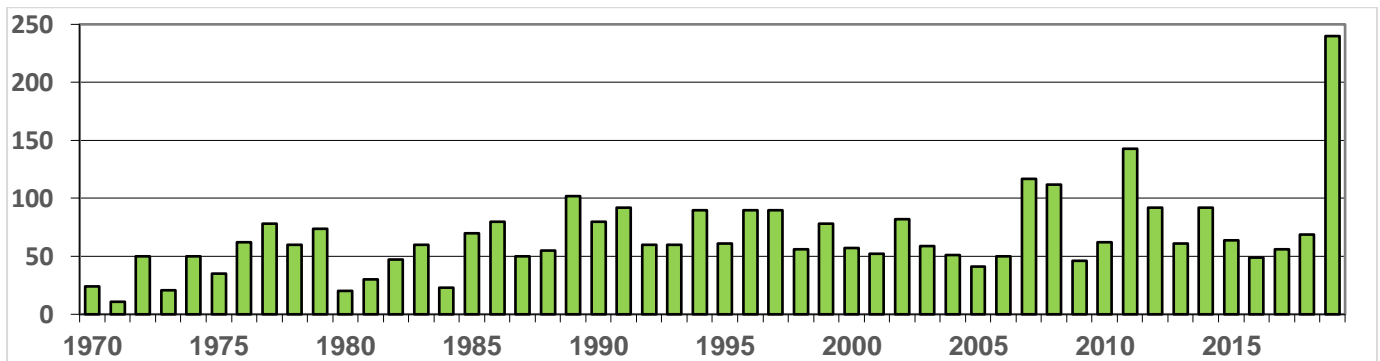
**GREY PLOVER** *Pluvialis squatarola*

**Fairly common winter visitor and spring migrant, scarce in summer**

Most are seen along the shore at low tide or roosting along the sea bank at high tide and only occasionally seen inland. Usually scarce from June to August. The main return typically begins in late August, but in some years numbers remain low until winter. The highest numbers are normally present between November and March. Spring passage produces a small increase in May. Annual peak counts since 1970 have averaged 59, but have been generally higher since the mid 1980s. Prior to 1986 all counts were below 80, but counts higher than this have come from several years since, with peaks of 143 on 21 February 2011, 117 on 26 November 2007 and 92 in January 1991.



Grey Plover 10 day period peak counts 1991-2019



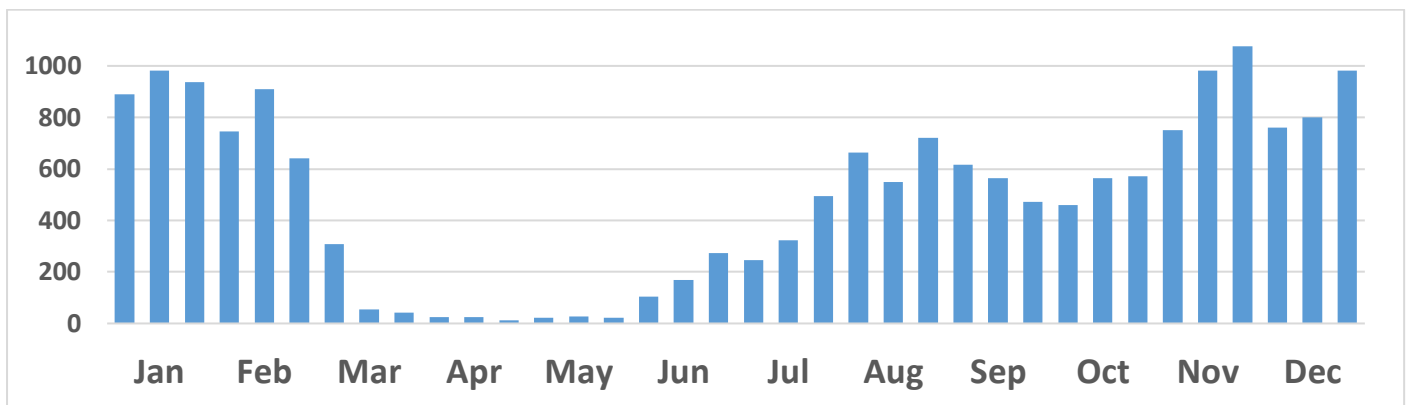
Grey Plover annual peak counts at Rye Harbour



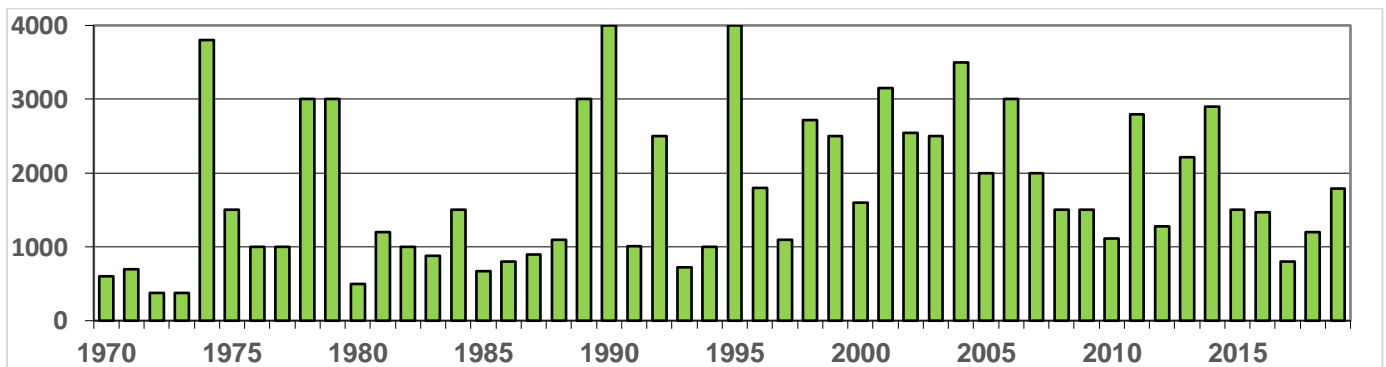
**LAPWING** *Vanellus vanellus*

**Fairly common breeding resident, numbers increase outside breeding season**

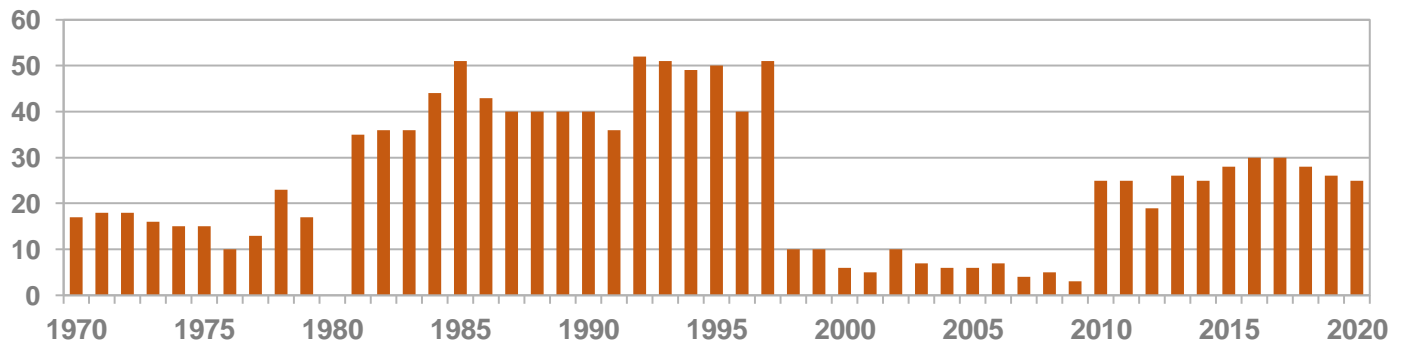
Breeding numbers have been subject to considerable variation. Seventy pairs bred in 1970 but numbers fell to just six pairs in 1975. By 1983 the breeding population had built up to 80 pairs, but a decline followed, leading to relatively stable figures since 1986 to 2002 with between nine and 22 pairs nesting annually. This decline is thought to be due to the increase in numbers of Fox and Badger throughout the area. Since then numbers have increased due to improved protection with electric fencing with 35 pairs in 2003. Breeding is now concentrated on islands and within electric fenced areas where the pressure from ground predators is lower. A post breeding influx is normally apparent from June, as birds arrive for their annual moult. Numbers can exceed 1000 any time from August to February, although they are subject to considerable variation during the course of the autumn/winter period. Fluctuations in numbers are due to the suitability of feeding and roosting sites throughout the local area and cold weather movements. The main departure occurs after February. Peak counts are 4500 at Castle Farm on 16 November 1995, 4000 at Castle Water on 13 January 1990 and 3800 on 17 November 1974.



Lapwing 10 day period peak counts 1991-2019



Lapwing annual peak counts at Rye Harbour

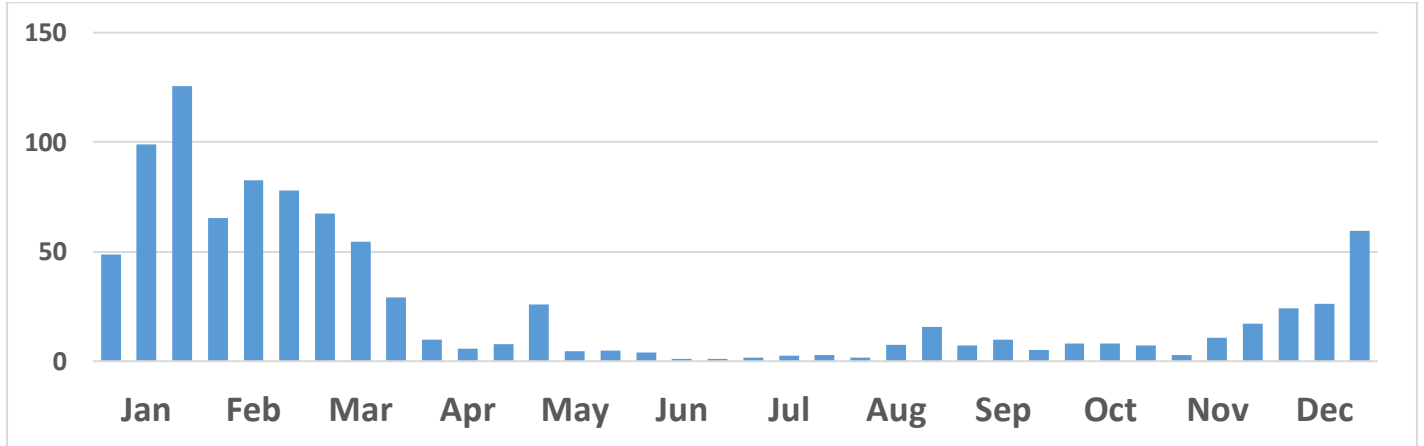


Lapwing breeding pairs at Rye Harbour

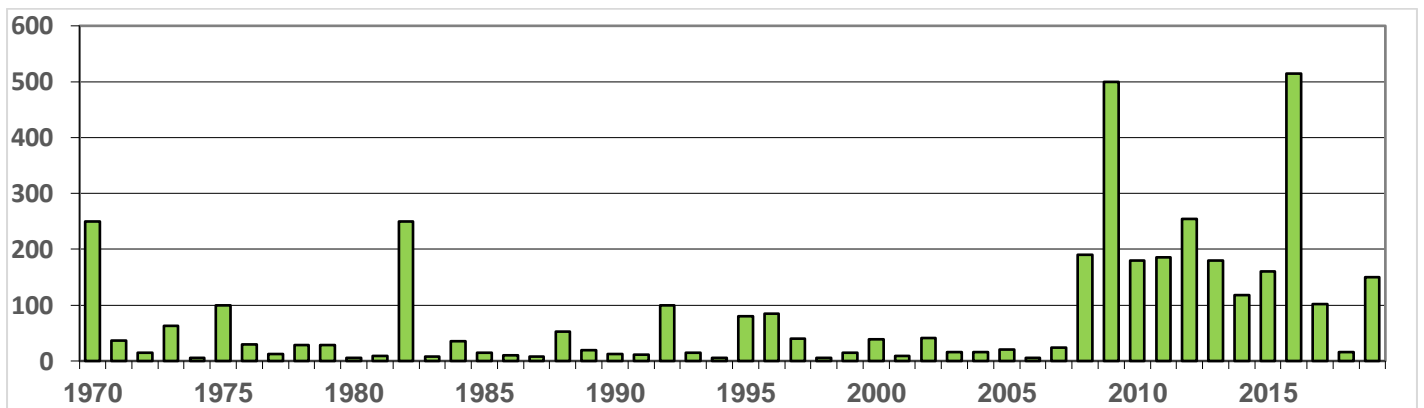
**KNOT** *Calidris canutus*

**Regular winter visitor and passage migrant, occasional in summer**

Knot can occur at any time of year and in recent years winter numbers have increased, perhaps linked to the saltmarsh creation and the creation of more safe roosting islands. Winter used to only produce short staying flocks, but these now stay for longer. Peak counts include 500 on Rye Harbour shore on 12 to 28 February 2009, 254 on 3 May 2012 and 250 flying south west on 19 August 1970.



Knot 10 day period peak counts 1991-2019



Knot 10 day period peak counts 1991-2019

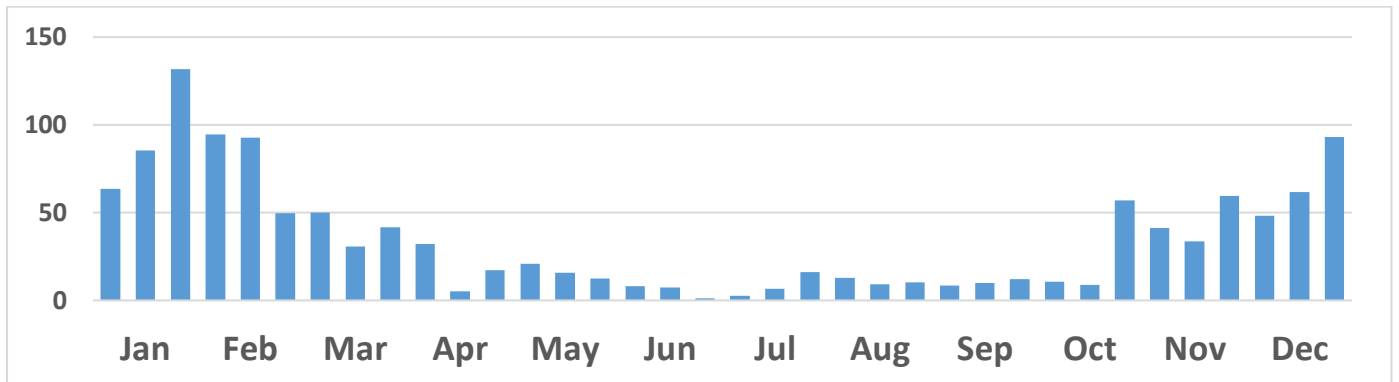


Knot in breeding plumage 24th May 2018

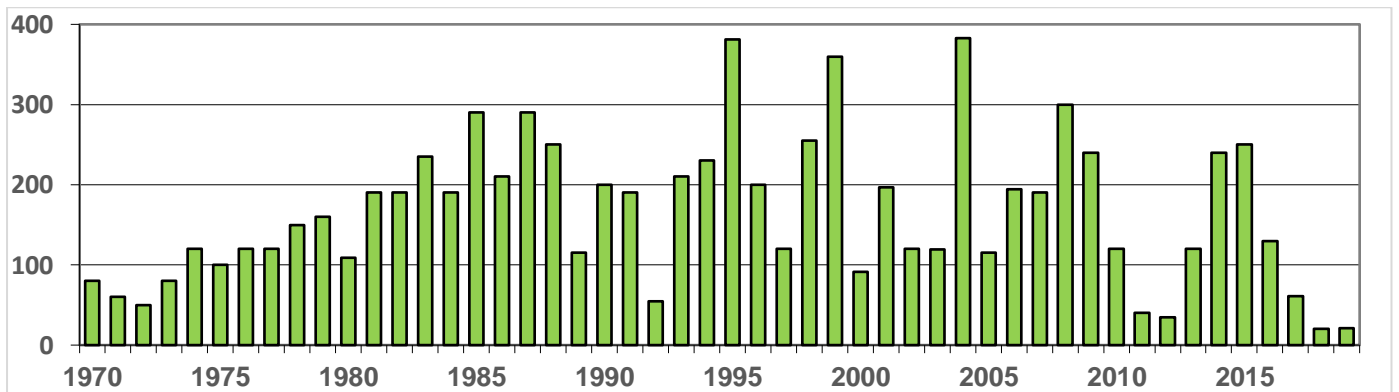
**SANDERLING** *Calidris alba*

**Common winter visitor and passage migrant, scarce in early summer**

Usually seen along the shore, but also occasionally on Flat Beach. Often absent in June and early July before returning birds appear from July. There is usually no significant increase until late October, numbers then build up to a winter peak. By April most of the wintering population has departed, but a spring passage is evident between late April and early June when most are in their very different summer plumage. The population has shown a slow but steady increase since the early 1970s, but in some years there have been only low counts, especially since 2016. Peak counts concern 383 on 30 October 2004, and 360 along Rye Harbour shore on 27 December 1999.



Sanderling 10 day period peak counts 1991-2019



Sanderling annual peak counts at Rye Harbour



Sanderling showing the dark wing with white wing bar

**SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER** *Calidris pusilla*

**Very rare vagrant**

Recorded on two occasions:

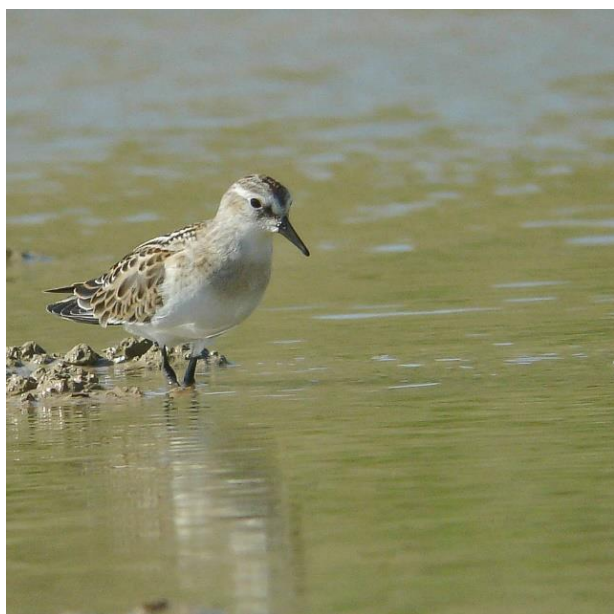
1986: adult at Ternery Pool, 2 to 4 Aug.

2000: adult at Ternery Pool, 11 to 29 Aug.

**LITTLE STINT** *Calidris minuta*

**Uncommon passage migrant, principally in autumn, and rare winter visitor**

Most years produce a small number of records, invariably of singletons during May and June. There are several June records up until 24<sup>th</sup> (1989) which are probably late spring birds. Returning migrants are more plentiful, with returning birds noted from 6 July (three years) until October. Small numbers have been present during the winter months, although the November records possibly involve late migrants. The maximum counts have been 13 on 5 October 2007 and 11 on 21 September 2006.



Little Stint 21 September 2006



Temminck's Stint 26 May 2013

**TEMMINCK'S STINT** *Calidris temminckii*

**Rare passage migrant**

Recorded in 22 years since 1970. Spring birds have occurred in ten years from 14 April (1993), with the majority during May. One at Wader Pool on 14 & 15 June 1994 was perhaps the latest spring bird whereas ones on the shore on 26 June 1977 could have been a late spring bird or an early returning one, and one on 5 July 1952 was more likely to have been an early returning individual. All other return passage records span the period late July to late September, with records in eight years. The latest was at Watch Cottage pools from 25 to 29 September 1989. The best year was 1987 when during May three were at Wader Pool on 6<sup>th</sup> followed by singles on seven dates and three or possibly four at Wader Pool on 23<sup>rd</sup>. All other records relate to singles apart from three on 26 May 2013 and twos on four other dates.

**WHITE RUMPED SANDPIPER** *Calidris fuscicollis*

**Very rare migrant**

One, thought to be an adult, was at Castle Water on 29 August 2010.

**BAIRD'S SANDPIPER** *Calidris bairdii*

**Very rare vagrant**

The only record concerns a summer plumage adult at Long Pit on 23 July 1978.

**PECTORAL SANDPIPER** *Calidris melanotos*

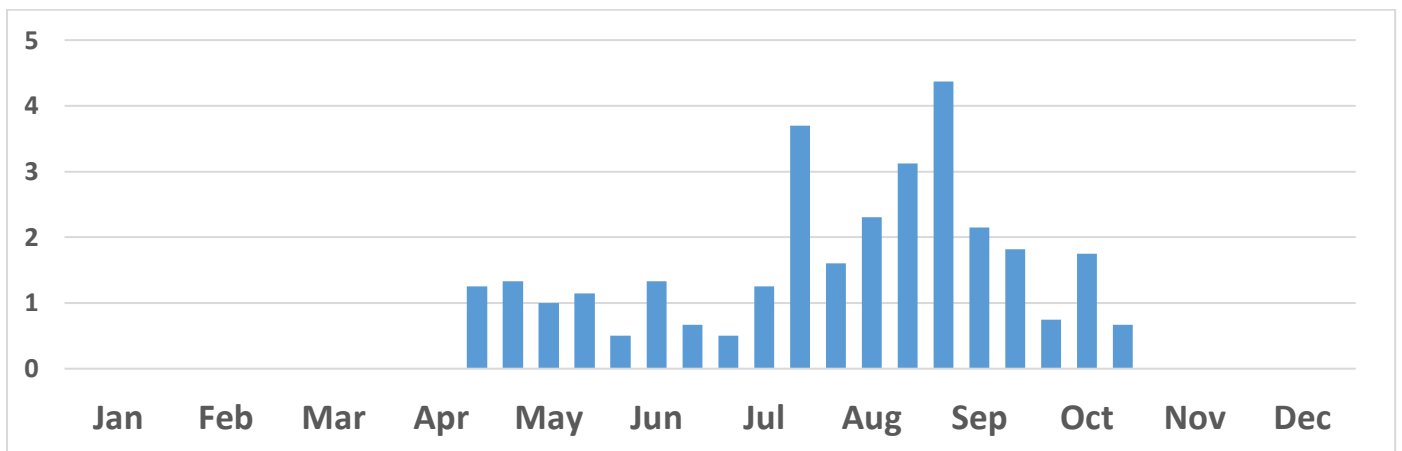
**Rare passage migrant**

Singles have been recorded in ten years, with one in early June and the remainder between 23 July and 24 September. All records have been of single birds. The last record is one at the Beach Reserve and Castle Water on 16 to 29 September 2001.

**CURLEW SANDPIPER** *Calidris ferruginea*

**Uncommon, but regular passage migrant, mainly late summer/autumn**

Most records fall within the periods May to September. Those from late June may be returning birds and there are just two records from the first half of July. Spring passage produces records in most years, with just one or two normally involved, whereas the return passage is stronger. Most records involve adults until mid August, with juveniles accounting for the majority thereafter. The two largest flocks were found after heavy rain with 56 adults at Ternery Pool on 14 August 1985 and 22 at the Bittern Excavation on 27 July 2005. The earliest spring record was one on 19 April 1979 with the latest being a single on 26 October 2001.



Curlew Sandpiper 10 day period peak counts 1991-2019



A moulting adult Curlew Sandpiper 23 July 2008

**PURPLE SANDPIPER** *Calidris maritima*

**Very scarce passage migrant and winter visitor**

Recorded in 18 years since 1970. Ten have been recorded on spring passage in March and April, the latest being one at Ternery Pool with Turnstones on 15 and 16 April 1983 and one at Flat Beach between 12 and 16 April 2015. About 18 have been noted on the return passage, all between late September and mid November, apart from an early one at the river mouth on 26 August 1989. There are just four winter records: one at the river mouth on 6 January 1979 and one there on 2 February 1985, the third stayed the winter and was regularly seen on Flat Beach from 9 November 2014 until 1 January 2015 and was possibly the bird in the photo below in April. All records involve singles apart from three on 12 October 1975, two on 13 and 14 October 1984 and two on 23 September 1999.

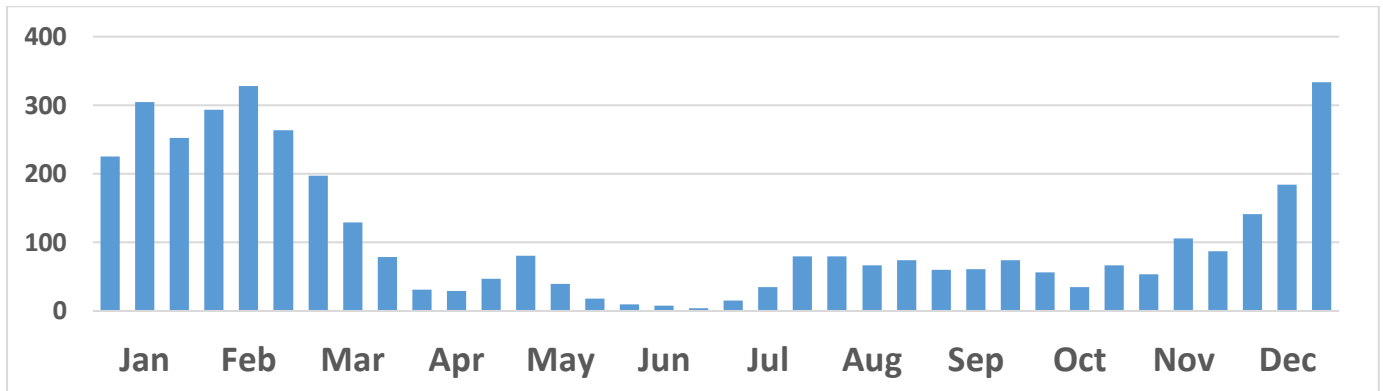


Purple Sandpiper moulting into breeding plumage at Denny hide 16 April 2015

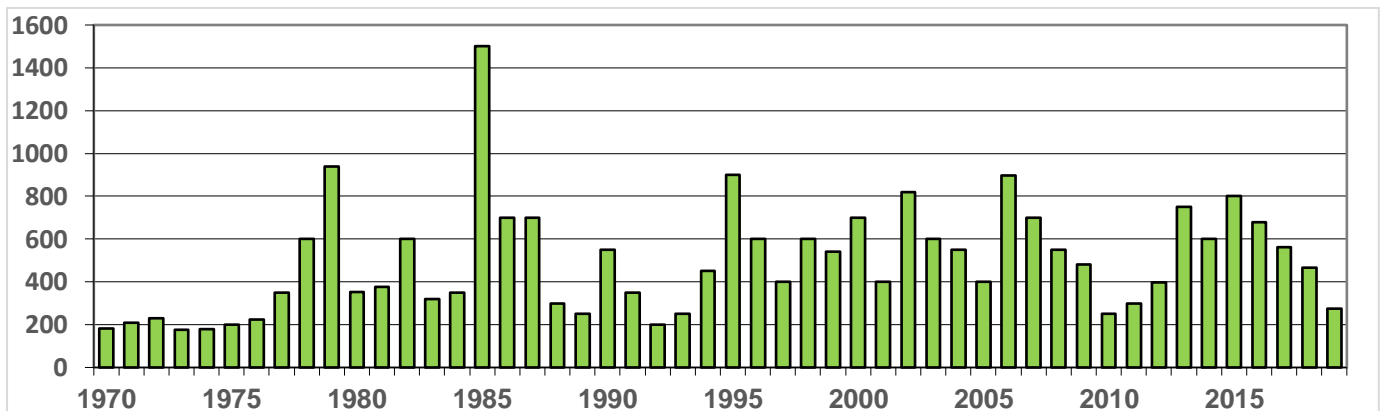
**DUNLIN** *Calidris alpina*

**Common winter visitor, scarce in mid-summer**

During the winter months a population of several hundred, feeding along the shore or the tidal Rother at low water and often congregating in large roosts along the sea bank at high tide. Birds also regularly feed around the pits and pools in the south part of the nature reserve. The population usually reaches a peak in January or February, to leave just a few occasional birds during June. Return migration starts in late July, although it is not until December that most wintering birds have arrived. Peak counts concern 1500-2000 on 15 January 1985, 940 roosting by the river in January 1979 and 900 roosting on the sea bank on 12 February 1995. The only ringing information is of an adult caught at Rye Harbour on 13 August 1991 which was recovered the next day 86km. south east at Baie D'Authie, France and a colour marked bird seen at Rye Harbour in March 1997 had been marked the previous October at Canvey Island in Essex.



Dunlin 10 day period peak counts 1991-2019



Dunlin annual peak counts at Rye Harbour



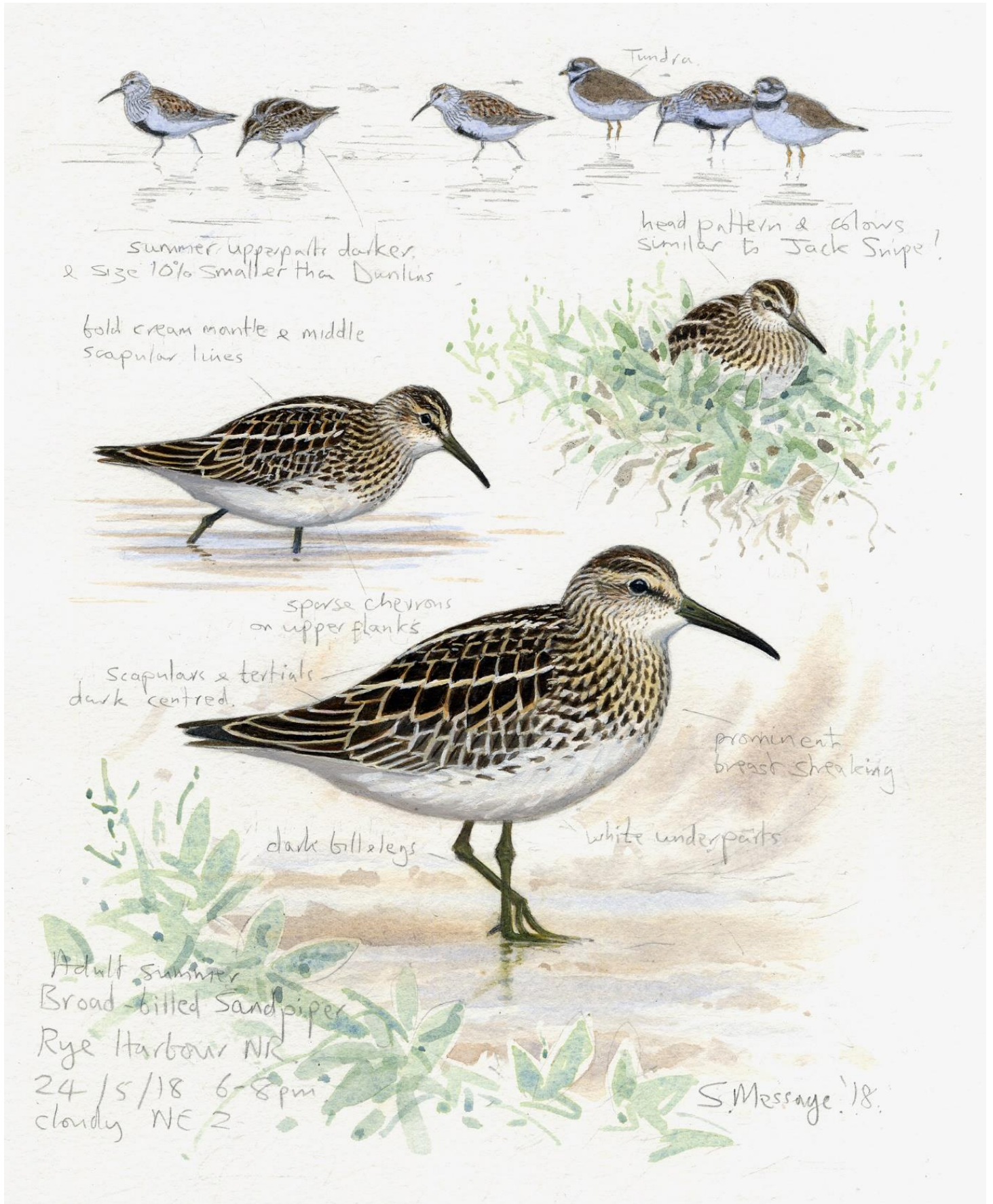
Dunlin in breeding plumage 1 May 2016

**BROAD-BILLED SANDPIPER** *Limicola falcinellus*

**Very rare vagrant**

There are several old records of birds shot at Rye Harbour, one on 13 August 1887 and several that have been discredited as part of the "Hastings Rarities" and just two recent records. One was in summer plumage at Ternery Pool, 13-16 June 1982.

The most recent was found by Stephen Message [www.message-wildlife-art.co.uk](http://www.message-wildlife-art.co.uk) who produced the lovely image below - an adult in summer plumage on the new saltmarsh in the evening of 24 May 2018.



**BUFF-BREASTED SANDPIPER** *Tryngites subruficollis*

**Very rare vagrant**

An old record was of a male shot at Rye Harbour on 21 August 1934. There have been three recent records. The first was a first year at Ternery Pool on 14 October 1989. In 2006 a bird stayed from 7 to 24 October, usually on Flat Beach. The final bird was found at Rye Harbour Farm on 8 September 2011 before relocating to Flat Beach until 12 September.

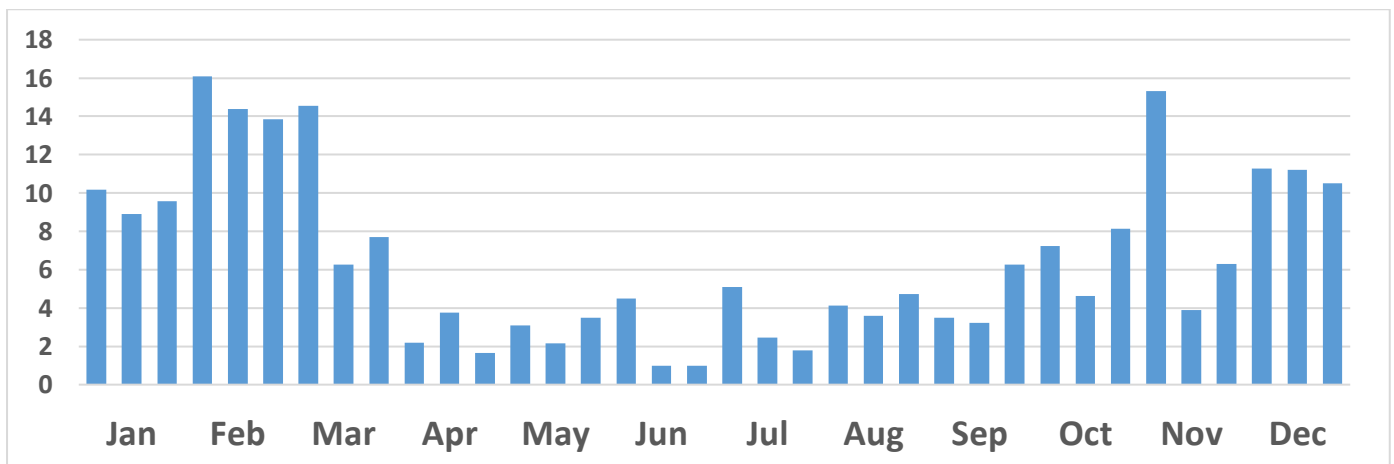


Buff-breasted Sandpiper (left) with a Dunlin 8 September 2011

**RUFF** *Philomachus pugnax*

**Uncommon passage migrant, regular winter visitor**

Most common during the winter in the north of the reserve, often roosting with Lapwing at Castle Water. During the passage periods March to May most sightings are from the south of the reserve and occasionally feature birds in breeding plumage. Peak counts were 72 at Castle Meadows on 5 November 2013, 56 at Rye Harbour Farm on 2 March 2017 and 46 at Castle Farm on 3 February 2010.



Ruff 10 day period mean peak counts 1991-2019

**JACK SNIPE** *Lymnocyptes minimus*

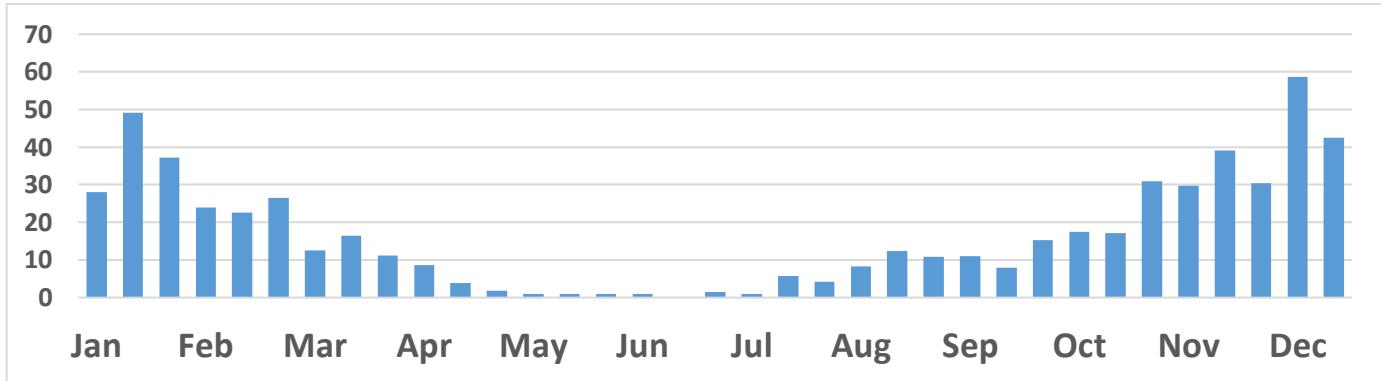
**Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant**

Recorded from many areas, but especially on the marshy grassland of Rye Harbour Farm. They are very much under-recorded because of their extremely elusive nature. Peak counts has been 18 on Harbour Farm on 27 February 2015 and 14 at the Wader Pool in early December 1990 and 9 November 1990. The latest spring record was one on 6 May 1971 and the earliest returning migrant was a single on 11 August 2017.

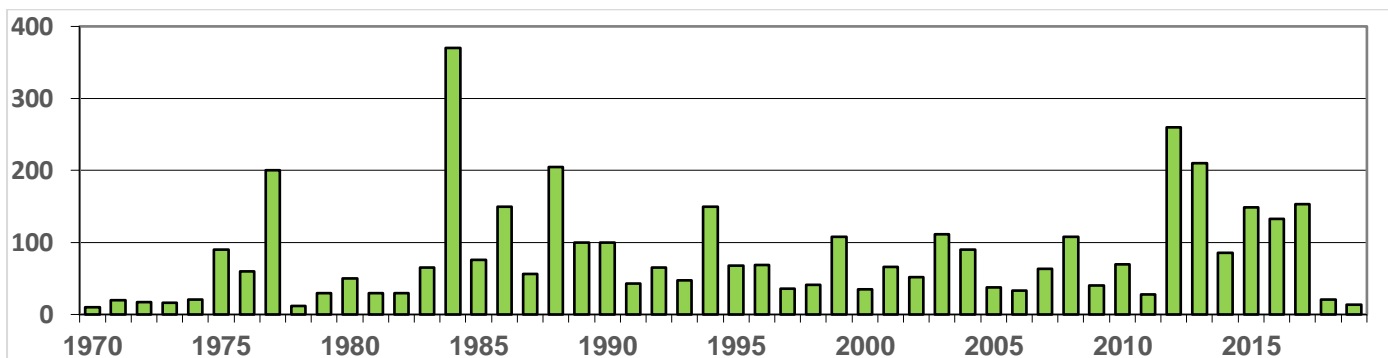
**SNIPE** *Gallinago gallinago*

**Fairly common winter visitor and passage migrant, occasional in summer, bred in 1996**

A very difficult bird to see and count. Their favoured feeding habitat is the marshy areas of Rye Harbour Farm, but birds roost by day on the bare shingle and on small islands where they have good visibility of approaching danger. Often absent during May and June, although there is one breeding record involving a nest at Castle Water on 21 May 1996. Numbers start to increase in late July and rise to a winter peak, with a few remaining until April. Peak counts concern 370 at Ternery Pool on 15 November 1984, 260 flushed from Rye Harbour Farm on 11 December 2012 and 205 on 14 November 1988 mostly at Ternery Pool. The lack of recent large groups might be due to the increase of Marsh Harriers.



Snipe 10 day period mean peak counts 1991-2019



Snipe annual peak counts at Rye Harbour

**WOODCOCK** *Scolopax rusticola*

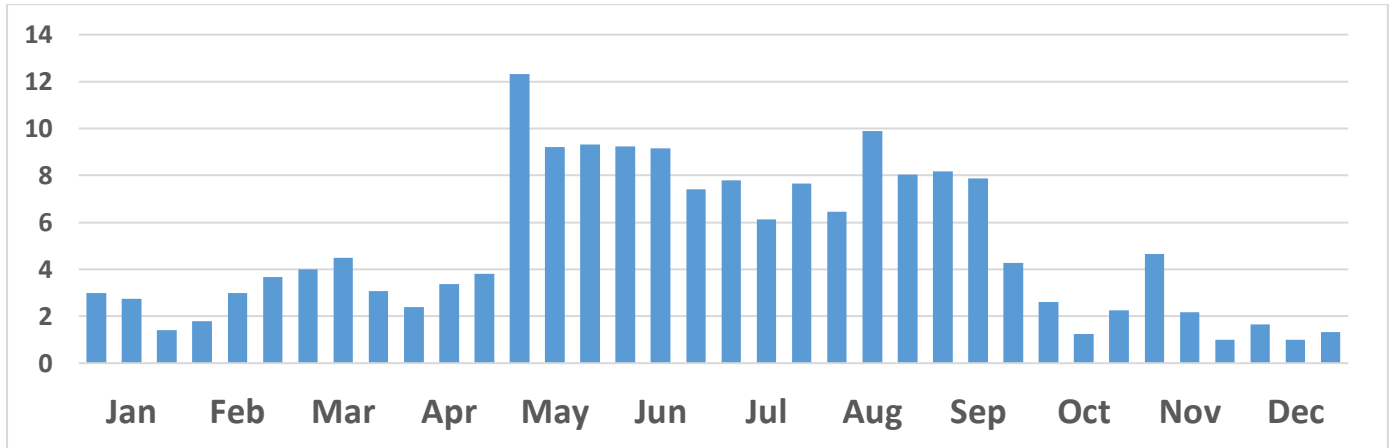
**Scarce winter visitor**

Recorded less than annually with no records since February 2014. This mainly nocturnal species is very easily overlooked however, spending the day well camouflaged among cover on the ground, and is doubtless more common than the records suggest. Records fall mainly between November and March, especially around December and January when hard weather may account for influxes. The Wood is probably the favoured locality, although scrubby areas throughout the SSSI are used for roosting, and birds have been noted using field edges at dusk. The peak count was 14 on 6 December 2003. The earliest winter record was one on 13 November 1994 with the latest remaining until 5 April 1996.

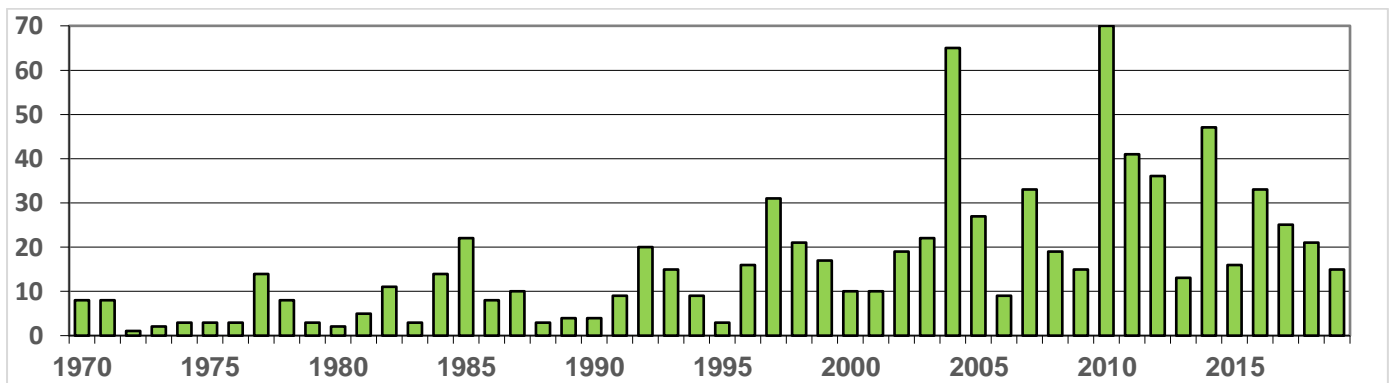
**BLACK-TAILED GODWIT** *Limosa limosa*

**Fairly common passage migrant and summer visitor, scarce in winter**

The majority are recorded between early March and late October, but especially May to September. The peak counts are typically around in May to August, although small numbers have been noted during the winter months. The largest groups were 70+ at Rye Harbour Farm on 21 May 2010, 47 at Rye Harbour Farm, on 14 May 2014 and 41 at Castle Water on 8 June 2011.



Black-tailed Godwit 10 day period mean peak counts 1991-2019



Black-tailed Godwit annual peak counts at Rye Harbour

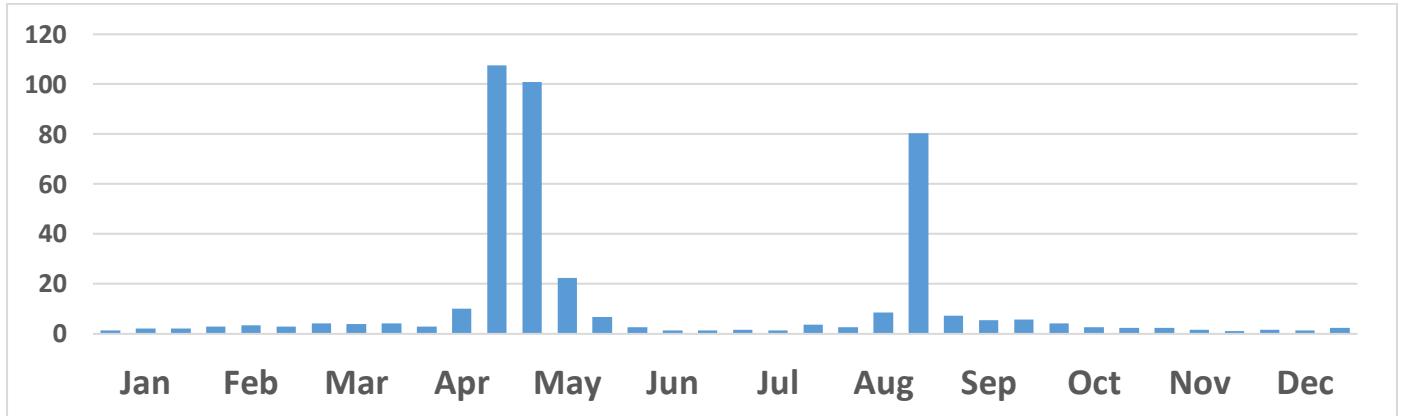


Black-tailed Godwit in breeding plumage 10 April 2020

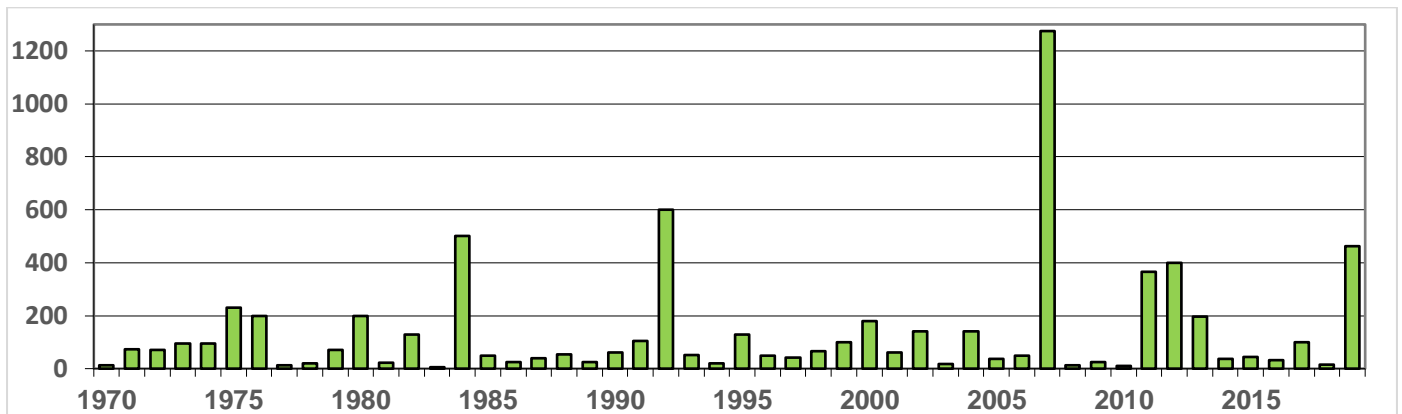
**BAR-TAILED GODWIT** *Limosa lapponica*

**Fairly common passage migrant, mainly in spring, scarce in winter**

The majority of birds pass through during a concentrated passage in late April and early May –similar to Whimbrel. At this time, large flocks are sometimes seen passing up Channel, or stopping to roost on the Beach Reserve or feed in fields at Castle Water. The return passage is usually smaller with peak activity around late August to mid September. Small numbers are often noted during the winter months and mixing with the Oystercatcher roost. Peak counts are 1274 on 30 April 2007 most of which headed east with 646 going in the same direction on the following day and 580 heading east in one and a half hours on 26 April 1971.



Bar-tailed Godwit 10 day period mean peak counts 1991-2019



Bar-tailed Godwit annual peak counts at Rye Harbour

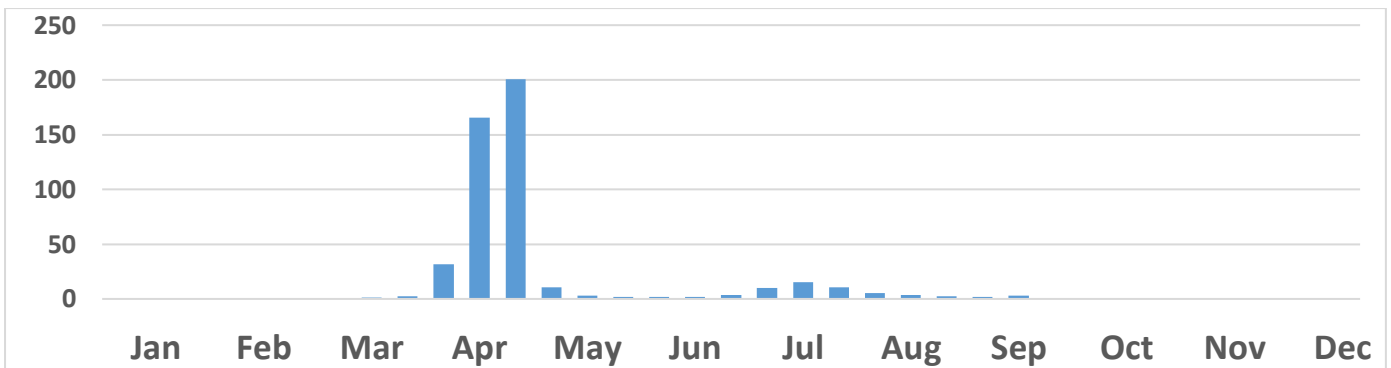


Bar-tailed Godwit pair in breeding plumage (male is smaller and red) 18 May 2019

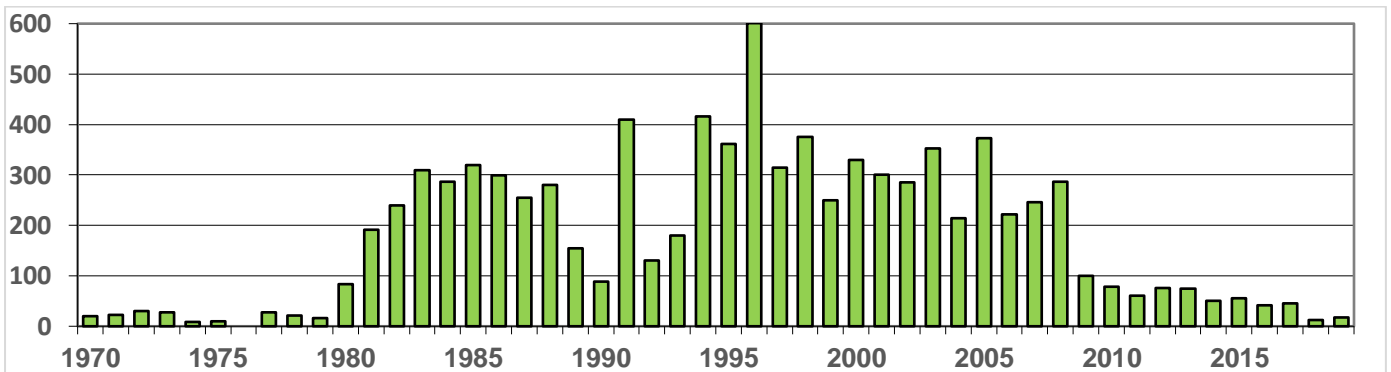
**WHIMBREL** *Numenius phaeopus*

**Common passage migrant, mainly in spring**

Occurs mainly between April and September, the higher counts are night roosts with birds coming together from the wider Rye Bay area, but some birds do stay all day on the grassland and saltmarsh of the reserve. Ternery Pool and the Quarry were the favoured roost sites, but there is now more choice on the pools of Rye Harbour Farm. In autumn they roost with the Curlew. This was one of the largest spring roosts in the country as birds stopped off on their northward, but despite increased suitable habitat the numbers have declined dramatically. Between 2000 and 2005 peak spring counts varied between 214 and 373, but since 2008 numbers have been less than one hundred. The peak count was 601 on 4 May 1996. Most move on by mid May and few are normally recorded during June, then numbers build up to a smaller peak around mid/late July. Note how the numbers are complimentary to the Curlew below - they share similar food, so perhaps this is a way of reducing competition. The earliest record was one on 29 March 1999 with the latest recorded on 23 October 2019.



Whimbrel 10 day period mean peak counts 1991-2019.



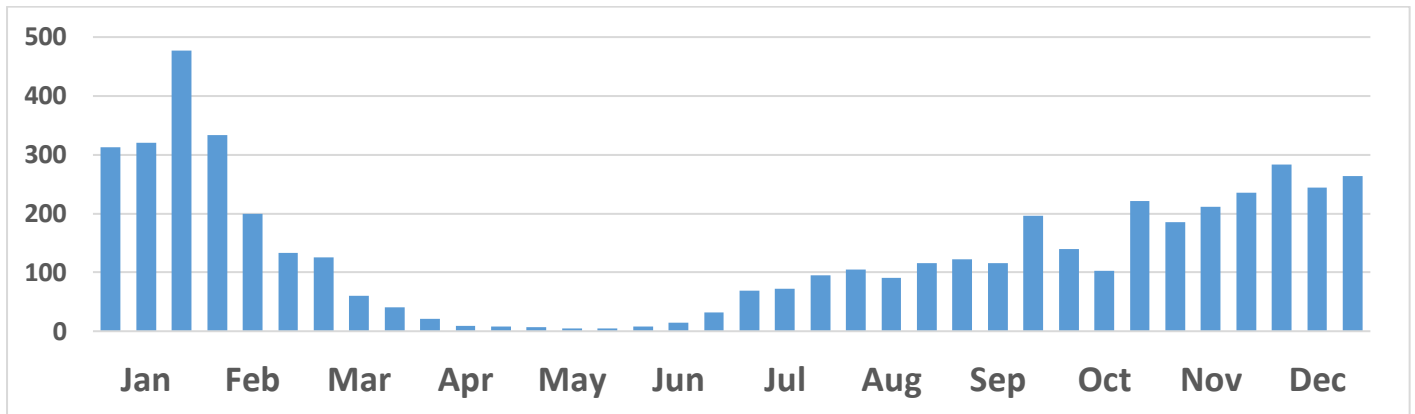
Whimbrel annual peak counts at Rye Harbour



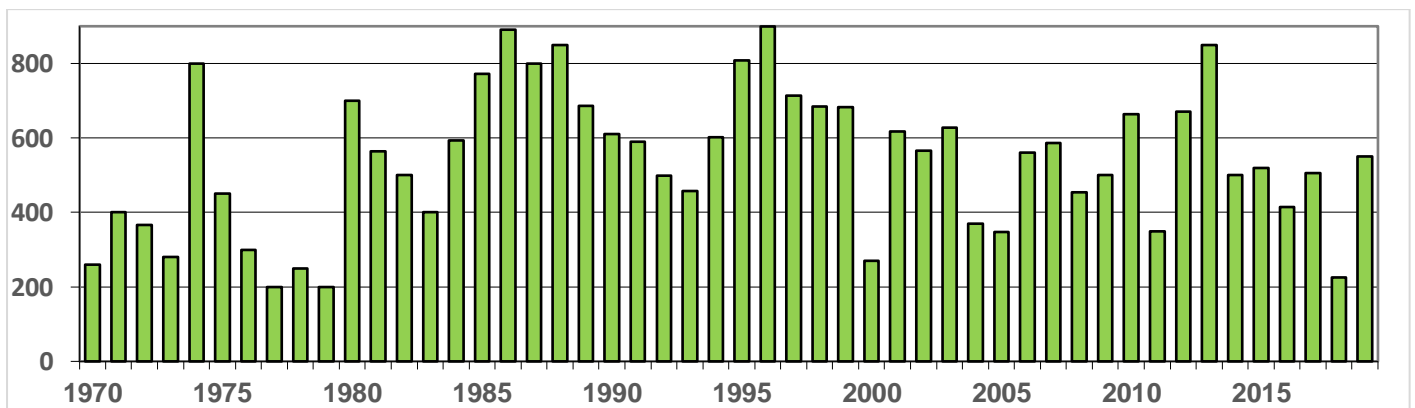
**CURLEW** *Numenius arquata*

**Common winter visitor and autumn migrant, less common in spring and summer**

Numbers are generally lowest during May before increasing during July as birds return to moult their flight feathers here. The highest numbers are present during the winter months, usually peaking between November and January. In the past, the population often assembled along the shore at dusk to roost overnight, but in recent years with more disturbance, the new saltmarsh and the pools of Rye Harbour Farm have been used most regularly. At dawn these birds disperse to feed on local sheep-grazed fields, especially at Camber and Pett Level. The dusk roost accounts for the highest counts: 899 on 15 January 1996, 890 on 12 January 1986 and 850 on 21 December 1988 and 21 January 2013.



Curlew 10 day period mean peak counts 1991-2019



Curlew annual peak counts at Rye Harbour



**SPOTTED REDSHANK** *Tringa erythropus*

**Uncommon passage migrant and scarce winter visitor**

Can occur at any time of year, although generally scarce during the spring and most regular during August and September. Sometimes overwinters, with two or three birds remaining during recent winters at least, favouring the River Rother and adjacent areas and using the SSSI on occasions. Peak counts involve 14 at Ternery Pool on 19 August 1986, eight on 27 August 1974 and seven on 18 September 1973.

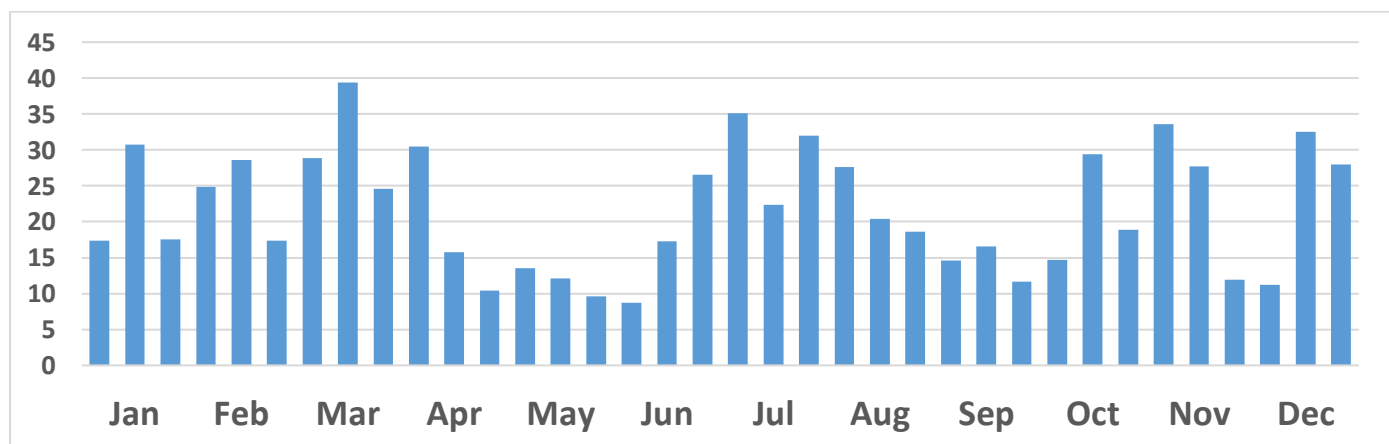


Spotted Redshank (left) with Redshank 25 November 2013

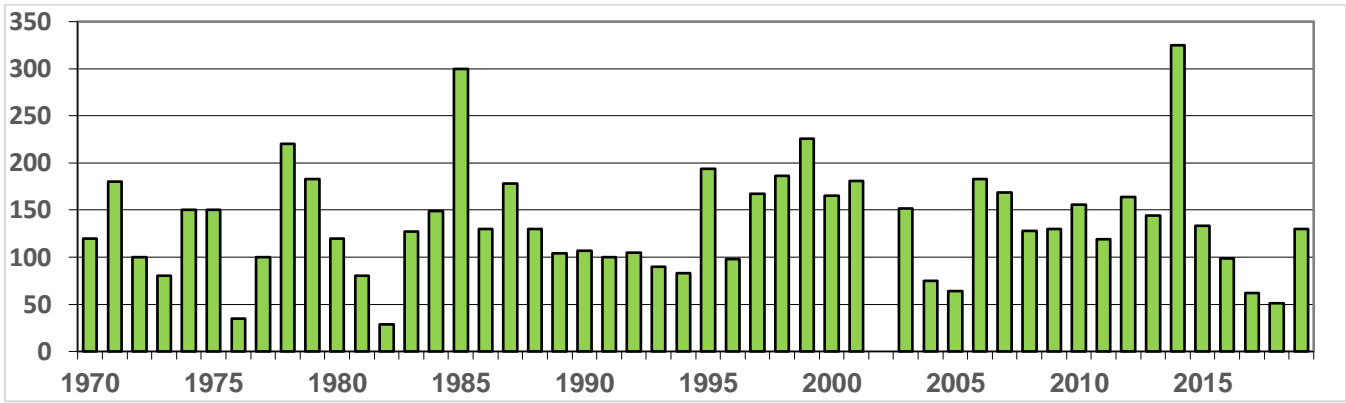
**REDSHANK** *Tringa totanus*

**Common breeding, wintering and a passage migrant**

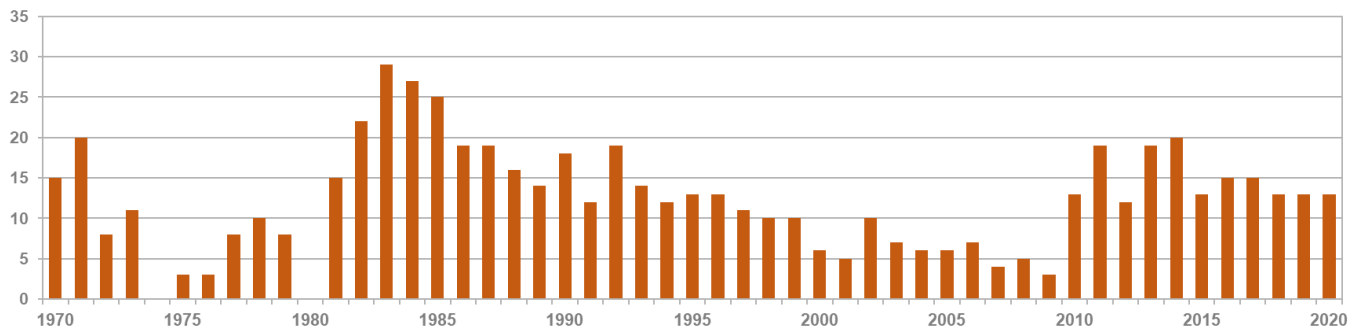
Since 1970 an average of 14 pairs have been recorded nesting. The breeding population reached a peak in 1983 when 29 pairs nested. This compares with figures ranging from nine to 19 pairs during the 1990s, with three to six pairs at Wader Pool raising many young. Numbers increase outside the breeding season, with over 100 birds normally present from August to March. At this time the tidal River Rother is the favoured locality, and flocks gather to roost at high tide on Rye saltings, adjacent to the river. Smaller numbers are often present on the SSSI throughout the winter. The peak counts relate mainly to birds in the high tide roost: 340 on 15 January 1985, 225 on 27 December 1999 and 220 in August 1978.



Redshank 10 day period mean peak counts 1991-2019 (includes counts from the estuary)



Redshank annual peak counts at Rye Harbour



Redshank breeding pairs at Rye Harbour



Redshank in its spotty breeding plumage, alarming with chicks nearby

**MARSH SANDPIPER** *Tringa stagnatilis*

**Rare vagrant**

There are two records:

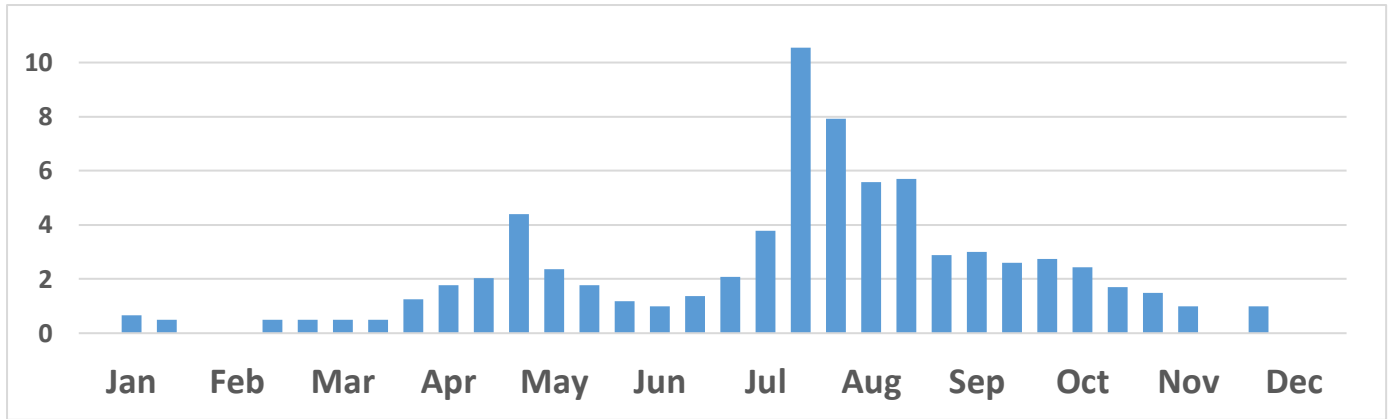
1992: an adult at Ternery Pool on the evening of 4 Jul.

2000: one at Castle Water on 19 Sep.

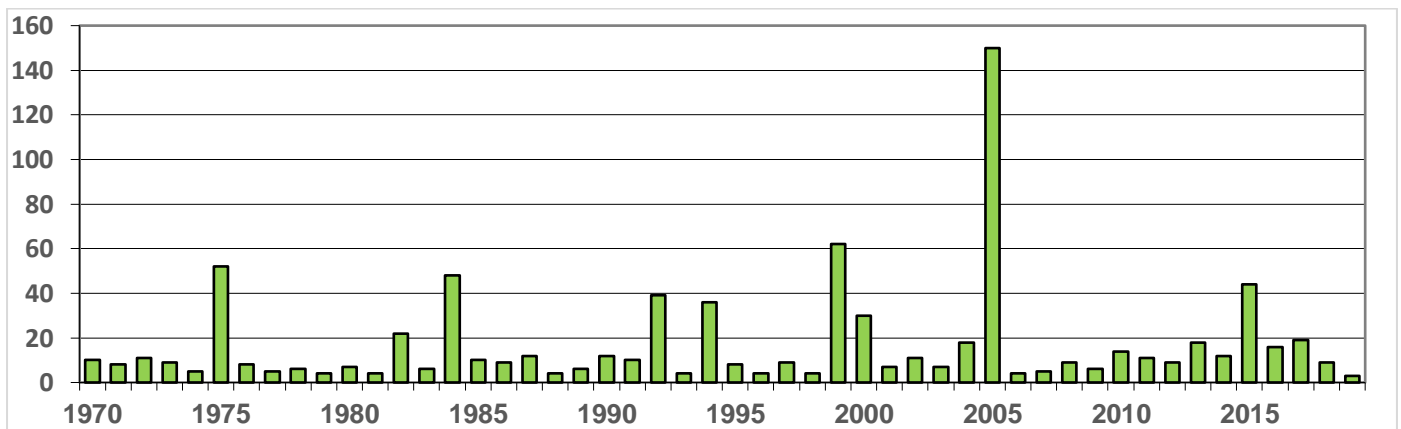
**GREENSHANK** *Tringa nebularia*

**Fairly common passage migrant**

Spring migrants are seen mainly between mid April and late May with peak activity typically around early May. The return passage is usually stronger, with most birds appearing between late June and late October, especially July to mid September. There have been eight records during the winter period. The annual peak count has been as low as three in 2019, although the average since 1970 has been 14. On 27 July 2005 there were 150+ present on Flat Beach in fog.



Greenshank: 10 day period mean peak counts 1991-2019



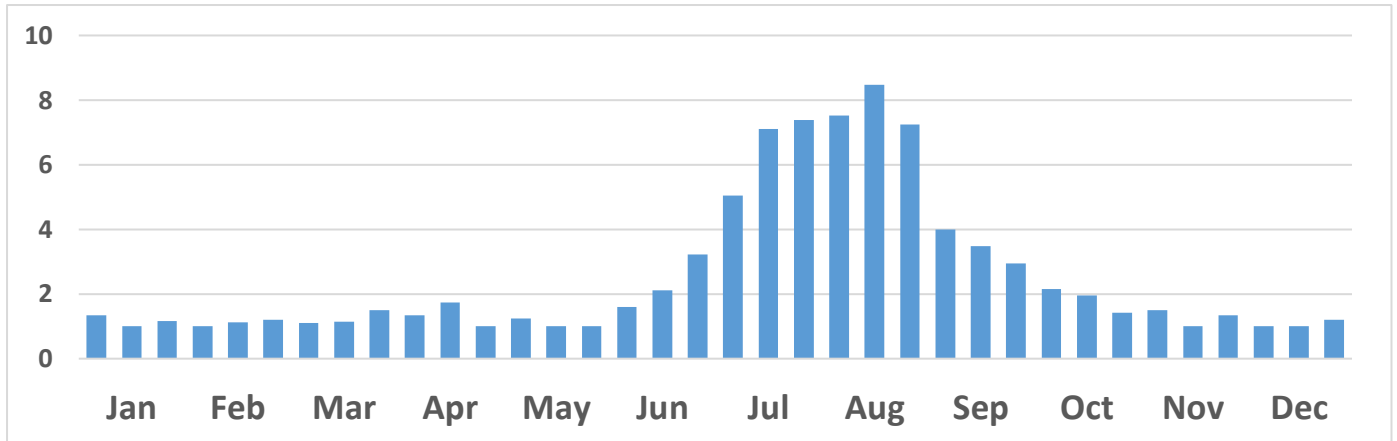
Greenshank annual peak counts at Rye Harbour



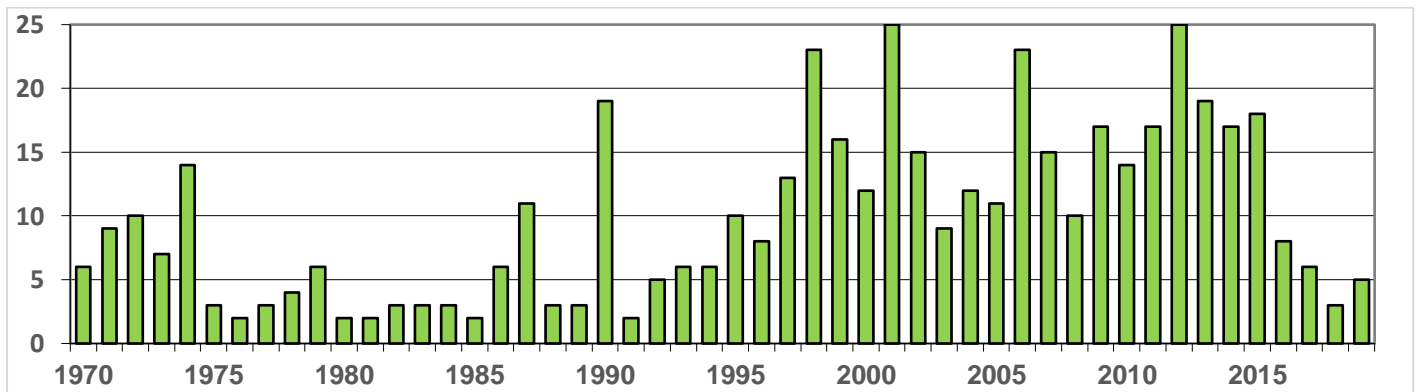
**GREEN SANDPIPER** *Tringa ochropus*

**Fairly common passage migrant and occasional winter visitor**

Can be seen all year round, but mainly during the passage periods, with largest numbers July to September. It sometimes occurs during the winter months, usually singly. The average annual peak count since 1970 has been seven, although numbers have been higher since the mid 1990s this is probably due to the wetland improvements at Castle Water and Rye Harbour Farm. Peak counts have been 25 on 18 August 2012 and 5 August 2001 and 23 on 29 July 2006 and 20 July 1998.



Green Sandpiper: 10 day period mean peak counts 1991-2019



Green Sandpiper annual peak counts at Rye Harbour

**WOOD SANDPIPER** *Tringa glareola*

**Scarce passage migrant**

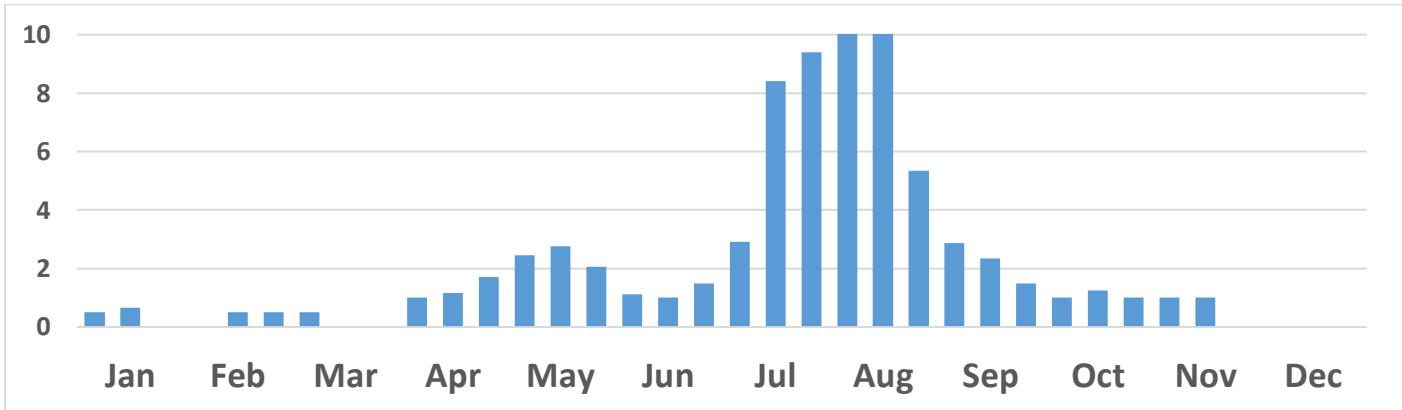
Recorded annually since 1970 with the exception of 1994. Generally very scarce or absent during spring when records have mainly been confined to May, although spanning the period 29 April (1987) to 6 June (1993). Most are seen on return passage between mid July and mid September, especially during August. Peak numbers have included eleven at Flat Beach on 24 August 2011, nine on 30 July and 11 August 2011 and seven on 10 August 1973. The latest record was a single on 29 October 2019.



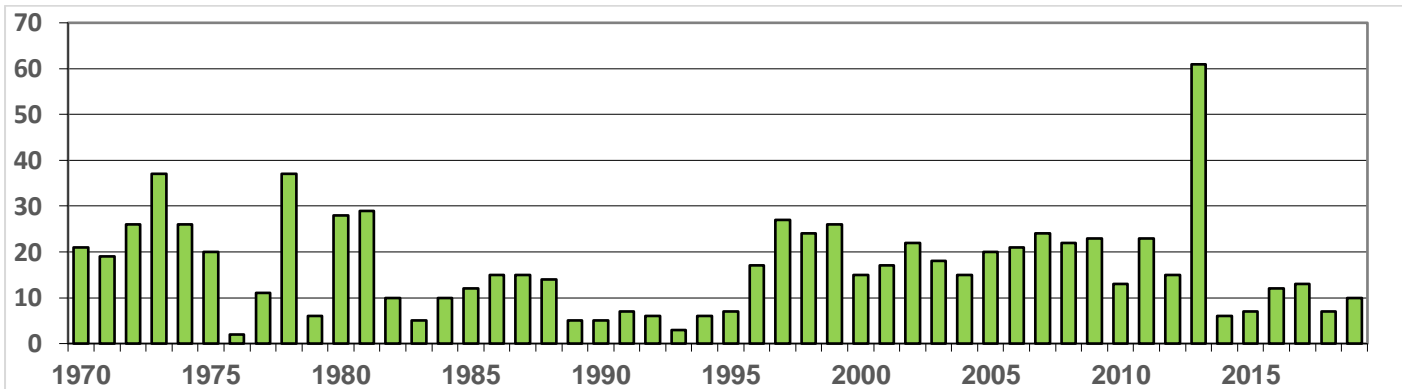
**COMMON SANDPIPER** *Actitis hypoleucos*

**Fairly common passage migrant**

Most frequently seen around the margins of the large pools that have bare margins. Spring migrants appear mainly between late April and early June, the earliest being a single on 7 April 1974. The return passage is much stronger, with most passing through in July and August. Seven winters have produced records, although there are no records during December. The peak annual count since 1970 has averaged 16 with 57 present on 9 August 2013.



Common Sandpiper: 10 day period mean peak counts 1991-2019



Common Sandpiper annual peak counts at Rye Harbour

**TEREK SANDPIPER** *Xenus cinereus*

**Rare vagrant**

All three records have been from the south of the reserve.

2008: 31 May – photograph

2013: 25 May.

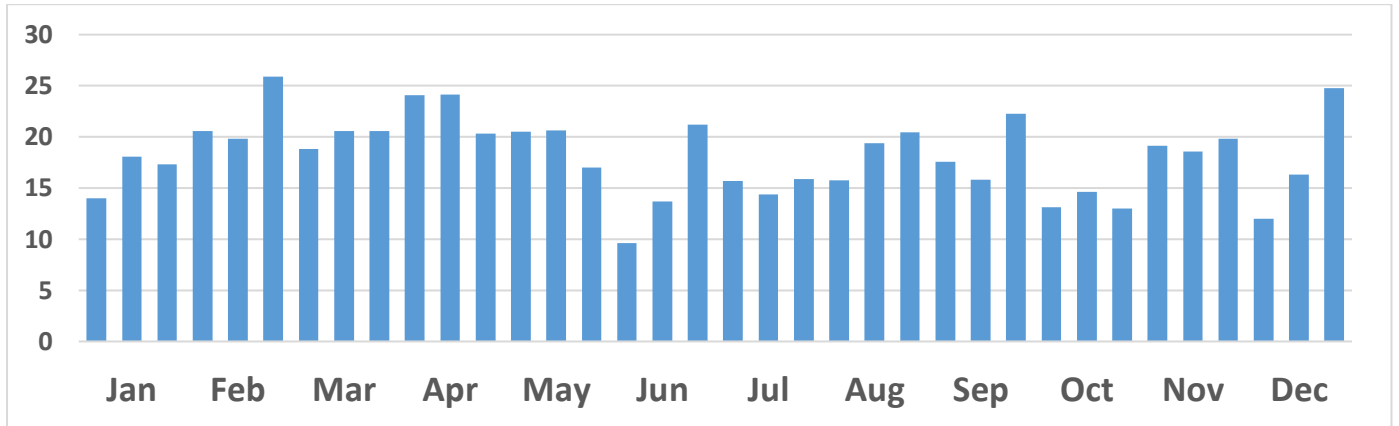
2018: 18 and 19 May.



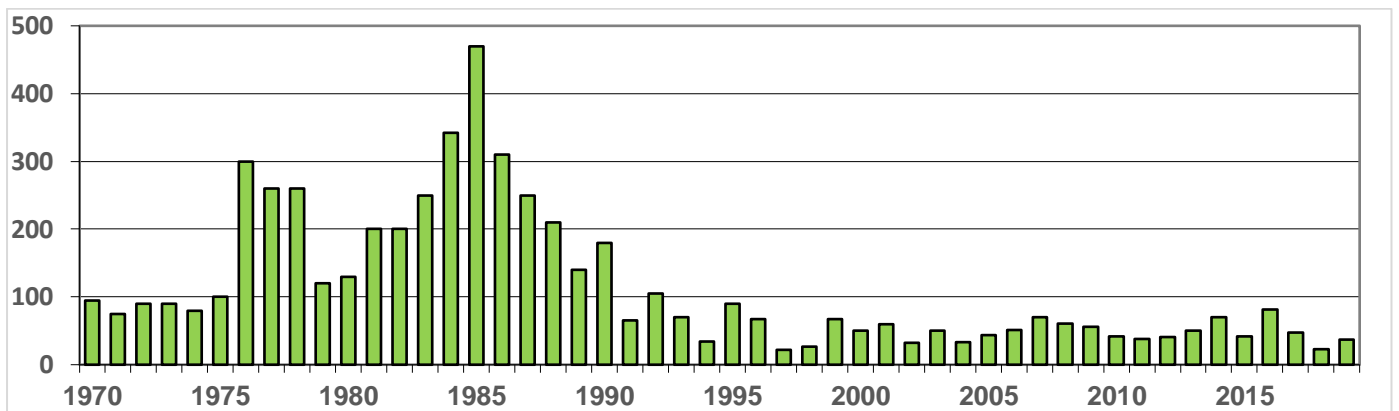
**TURNSTONE** *Arenaria interpres*

**Fairly common non breeding resident and passage migrant**

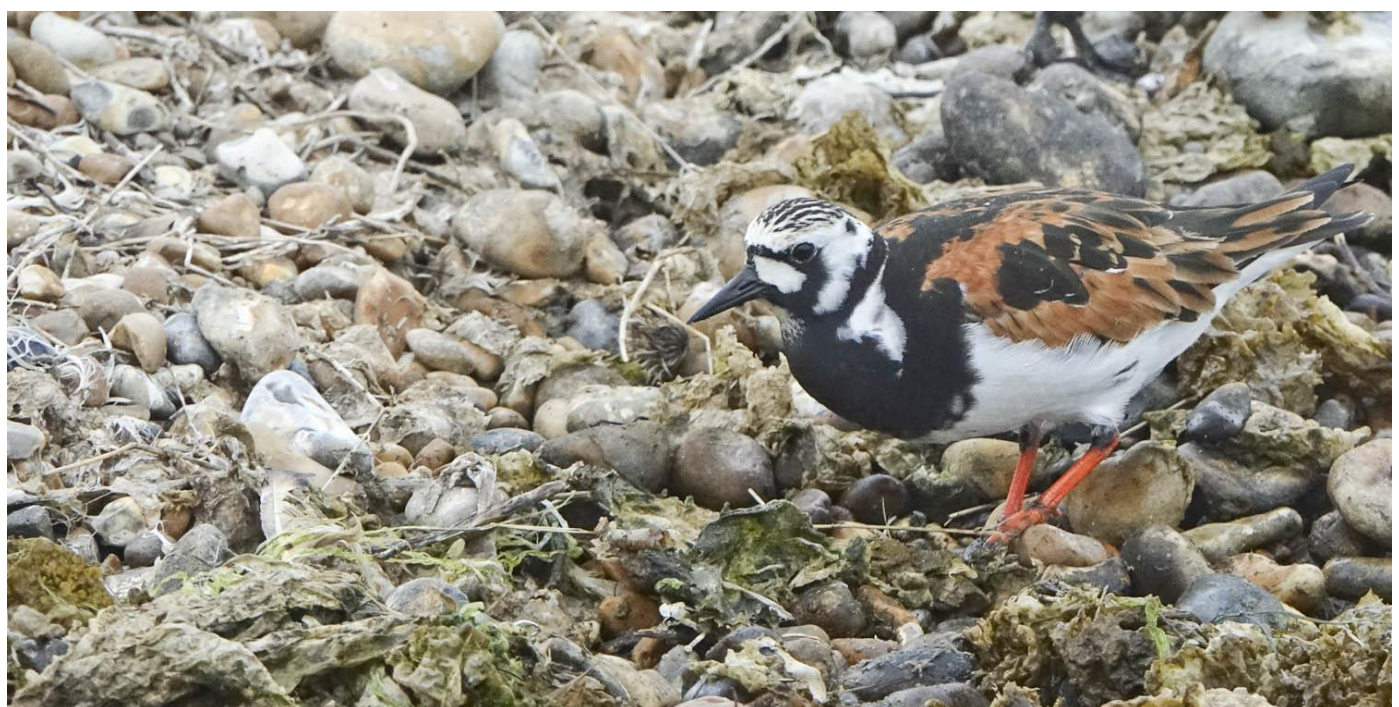
Peak numbers normally occur in the passage periods April/May and August. Strictly coastal, keeping mainly to the shore and tidal River Rother. The population experienced an increase from the mid 1970s, reaching a peak during the mid 1980s, since when a decline has occurred. Peak counts concern 470 on 10 May 1985, 350 on 11 August 1985 and 342 in August 1984.



Turnstone 10 day period mean peak counts 1991-2019



Turnstone annual peak counts at Rye Harbour



Turnstone male in breeding plumage 7 May 2017

**WILSON'S PHALAROPE** *Phalaropus tricolor*

**Rare vagrant**

Two records as follows:

1984: adult female in summer plumage Ternery Pool, 30 Jun to 1 Jul.

1985: first-winter at dusk at Ternery Pool on 9 Oct.

**RED-NECKED PHALAROPE** *Phalaropus lobatus*

**Rare visitor**

Recorded in six years, with three in spring between 16 May and 8 June, and three in autumn between 25 August and 18 September:

1970: immature from 11 to 18 Sep.

1974: female in almost full summer plumage at Ternery Pool on 7 and 8 Jun.

1980: one at Ternery Pool on 16 May.

1985: one at Ternery Pool for less than an hour on 22 May.

1990: juvenile at Ternery Pool on 29 Aug then at Long Pit from 31 Aug until 4 Sep.

2003: two juveniles on Ternery Pool 29 Aug to 2 Sep.

**GREY PHALAROPE** *Phalaropus fulicarius*

**Rare visitor**

Recorded in ten years, mostly in autumn/early winter between 26 September and 3 December:

1972: one on 20 Nov.

1973: one at Ternery Pool on 23 Apr.

1979: one at Long Pit on 3 Dec.

1981: at Ternery Pool, one arrived during a force eight south-westerly on 26 Sep, remaining until 11 Oct, and joined by a second bird from 4 to 8 Oct.

1984: adult at Ternery Pool, 20-25 Oct; first-winter also there, 25-27 Oct.

1988: one at Wader Pool on 7 Oct and at Ternery Pool on 10 Oct.

1996: one on floods at Flat Beach on 30 Oct.

2008: singles seen on 7 Sep, 5-6 Oct and 8 Nov.

2011: one on Flat Beach on 2 Sep.

2016: one at Flat Beach on 1 Oct.

**POMARINE SKUA** *Stercorarius pomarinus*

**Rare passage migrant**

First observed in 1971 when nine flew by on 5 May, this is still the largest group. Since then, it has been seen on thirteen occasions always over the sea. Seven records have been in the spring and six have been autumn migrants. The species has not been seen since two headed west on 24 Oct 2011.

**ARCTIC SKUA** *Stercorarius parasiticus*

**Uncommon passage migrant**

Has occurred annually since 1970 with the exception of two years. A few are normally seen on spring passage in April and June with a stronger return passage mainly from August to September. The majority of records concern one or two individuals, mostly offshore, although there have been a few observed over the SSSI. The earliest was a single bird on 30 March 1999, whilst the latest was seen on 22 November 1985. The peak count was nine off shore on 24 April 2003 and nine on 6 August 2011.

**LONG-TAILED SKUA** *Stercorarius longicaudus*

**Rare autumn migrant**

There are three records as follows:

1996: an adult flew west offshore before returning east on 1 Sep.

1999: an exhausted juvenile blew in off the sea at about 5pm on 18 Sep before sheltering behind a clump of Red Valerian on Flat Beach Ridges.

2004: an adult was present on the shore before flying off eastwards on 9 Oct.

**GREAT SKUA** *Stercorarius skua*

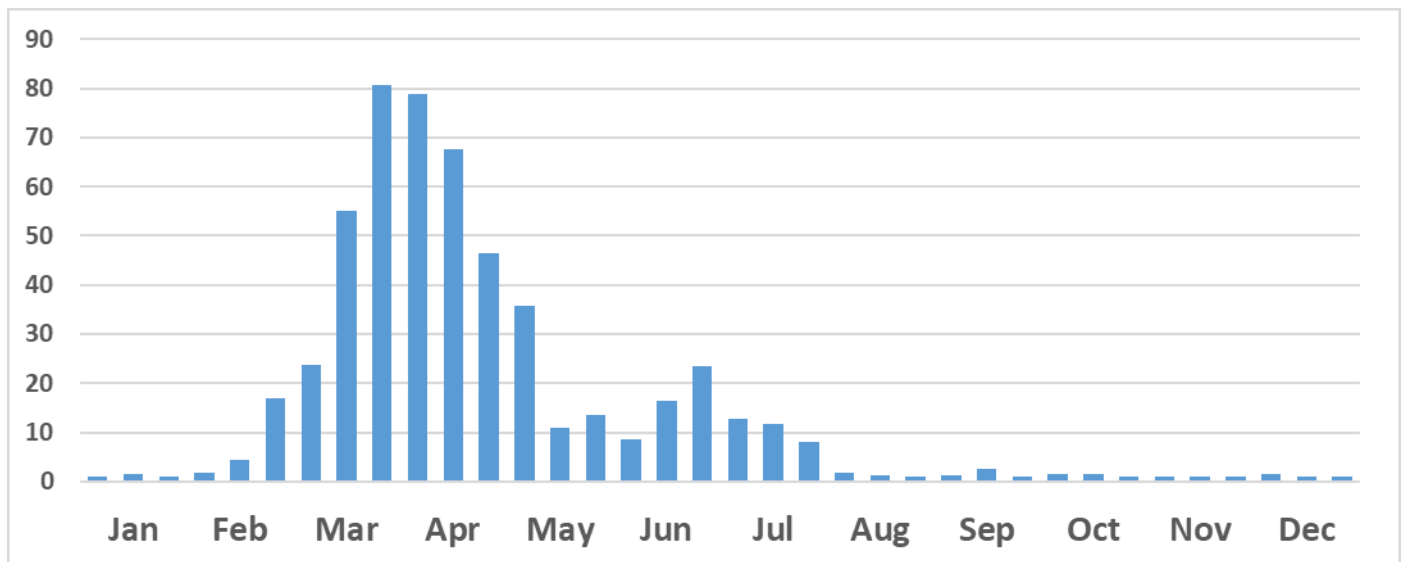
**Scarce passage migrant and rare winter visitor**

Recorded in 31 years since 1970. Spring passage has yielded records in 19 years between 13 March (1988) and 17 June (1978). The return passage has been evident in 28 years, with two on 1 August 1992 being the earliest and one on 8 November 2010 being the latest. There are also several winter records: one in November, two in December, three in January and three in February. Most records involve singles, although 14 headed west on 9 October 2011, nine were seen on 25 April 2000 (eight east, one west) and six headed west on both the 8 November 2010 and 24 October 2011.

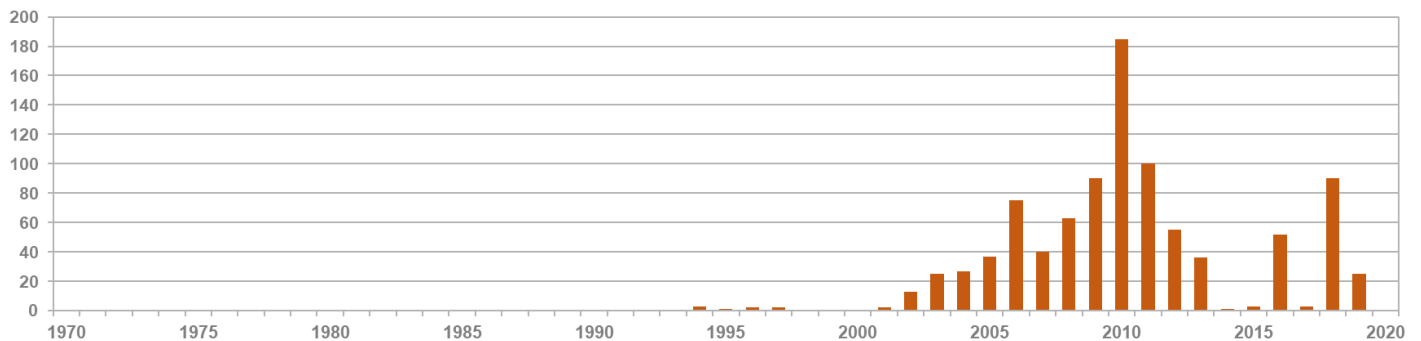
**MEDITERRANEAN GULL** *Larus melanocephalus*

**Fairly common breeder and spring passage migrant**

Recorded throughout the year with the vast majority of records falling between March and June when both breeding birds and passage migrants are present with the peak activity during April. The peak count was 550 on 30 March 2012 with an increase in numbers since the early 1980's. Breeding was first attempted in 1994 and has occurred in all years since except 1998-2000. Since 2001 numbers have increased significantly with a maximum of 37 pairs in 2005. The vast majority occur on the islands at Ternery Pool where they nest among the Black-headed Gulls. Colour ringed birds seen during the breeding season have come from Belgium (17), France (14), Holland (5), Germany (3), UK (2), Hungary (2) and Italy (1).



Mediterranean Gull 10 day period mean peak counts 1991-2019



Mediterranean Gull breeding pairs at Rye Harbour

**LITTLE GULL** *Hydrocoleus minutus*

**Scarce year round visitor and spring migrant**

Can occur at any time of year, especially on spring passage between early April and mid June, with peak activity around early May. Often appears at the various shingle pits, where birds sometimes remain for long periods, although also regular offshore. The highest counts have been 94 at Ternery Pool on 11 November 2013, 38 on 4 May 1974 (14 at Ternery Pool; 24 at sea) and c.35 heading south west on 9 Nov 1984.

**BONAPARTES'S GULL** *Chroicocephalus philadelphia*

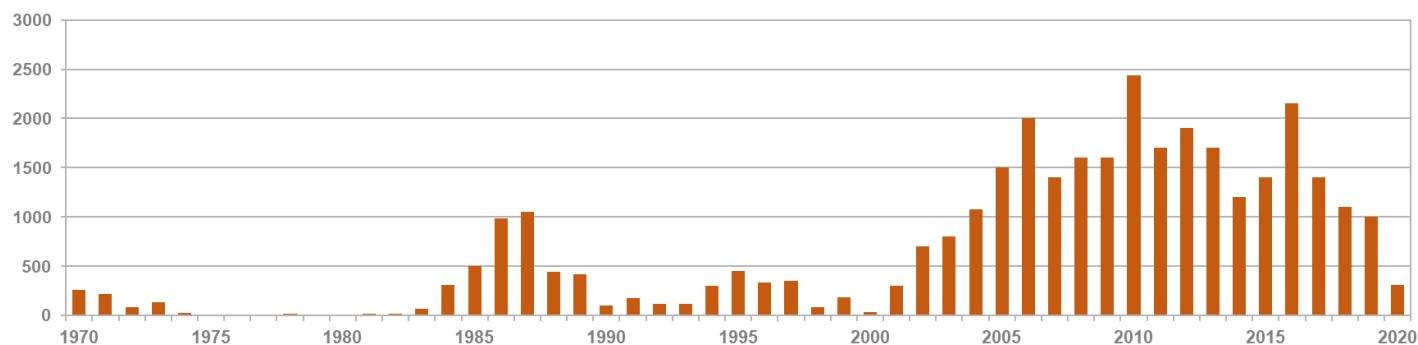
**Very rare vagrant**

The only record was of a first year at Ternery Pool 20 July 2013

**BLACK-HEADED GULL** *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

**Common breeding resident and winter visitor**

Has bred in most years since at least 1947 when 11 pairs nested. Ternery Pool and Flat Beach have held most of the pairs but in recent years, islands created at Castle Water have been colonised. The number of pairs reached a peak of 1500 in 2005, but has varied considerably and since 1970 has averaged 310. Fledging success is also variable, with total failure some years due to predation particularly by foxes. A few years have resulted in more than one fledged young raised per pair, the most successful being 2005 when 1500 pairs raised 1900 young. Large numbers roost along the shore or on the sea overnight during the winter months, the highest counts recorded are 40000 on 16 March 1986, 13500 on 31 March 1992 and 13200 on 18 March 1991. Several ringed birds show that Russian and Eastern European bred birds winter at Rye Harbour. A bird was wing tagged in Madrid, Spain in December 1994, where it stayed until at least 5 March, then it was seen nesting on an island at Dungeness from 10 April to 8 May, but all nests on the island failed on 6 June. It was seen at Rye Harbour on 12 June, back at Dungeness on 20<sup>th</sup>, back at Rye Harbour from 6 July where it nested and raised young until 9 August. It returned to Rye Harbour on 16<sup>th</sup> April 1996, but did not stay!



Black-headed Gull breeding pairs at Rye Harbour

**SLENDER-BILLED GULL** *Larus genei*

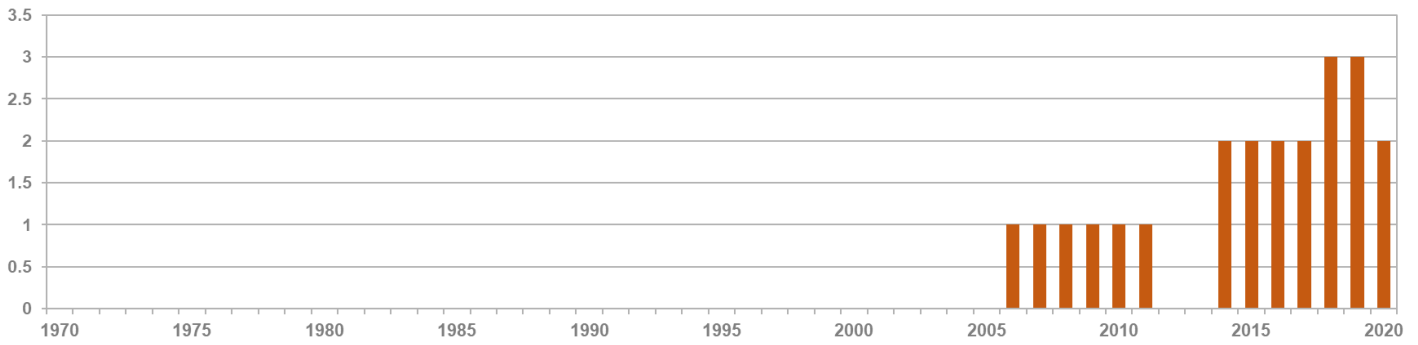
**Very rare vagrant**

The sole record concerns a first-summer present for an hour at Rye Harbour on 28 April 1963.

**COMMON GULL** *Larus canus*

**Occasional breeding, common at other times**

Numbers are generally lowest around June and July, before a large wintering population starts to arrive. Peak numbers usually occur during March, when thousands arrive to roost along the beach at dusk, before returning inland at dawn to feed in sheep-grazed pastures, playing fields, etc. The highest roost counts are 32,500 on 18 March 1991, 21,600 on 31 March 1992 and 20,000 on 14 March 1998. There have been a small number of records during the breeding season, and in both 1997 and 2005 pairs were observed nest building at Ternery Pool, although on both occasions no subsequent activity was noted. Birds have nested in 13 year since 2005, but although small chicks have been seen, none have fledged. Birds ringed as chicks in Estonia, Germany and Denmark have been found dead at Rye Harbour in the winter.

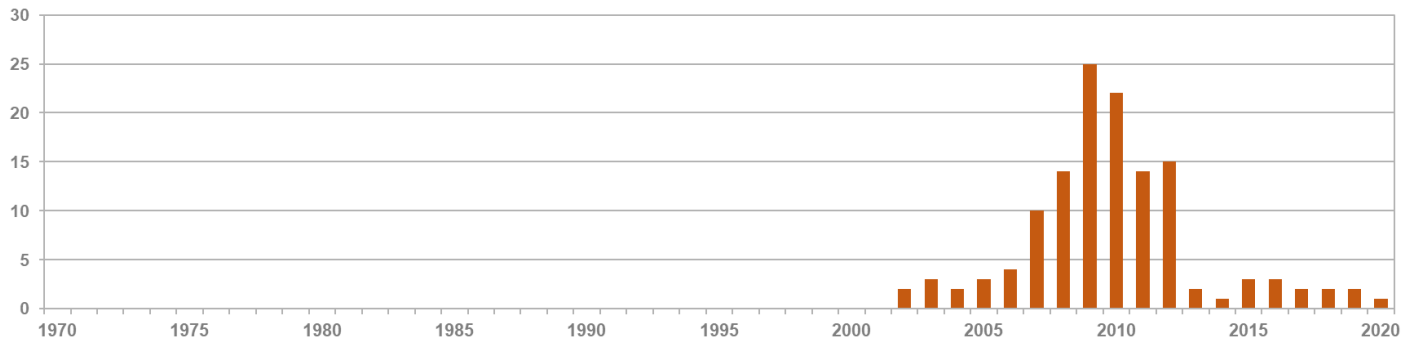


Common Gull breeding pairs at Rye Harbour

**LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL** *Larus fuscus*

**Fairly common, especially on passage, occasional breeding**

Present throughout the year, although numbers build up during the passage periods, especially late February to mid April and late July to late September. Peak counts concern 400 on 3 April 1970, 300 on 10 April 1971 and 10 Mar 1973 and 250 during August and September in three years. Outside the passage periods, numbers are usually in single figures. The brief period of large breeding numbers of 10-25 pairs cannot be explained. Birds ringed as chicks in Norway and Orkney have been found dead at Rye Harbour in the winter.

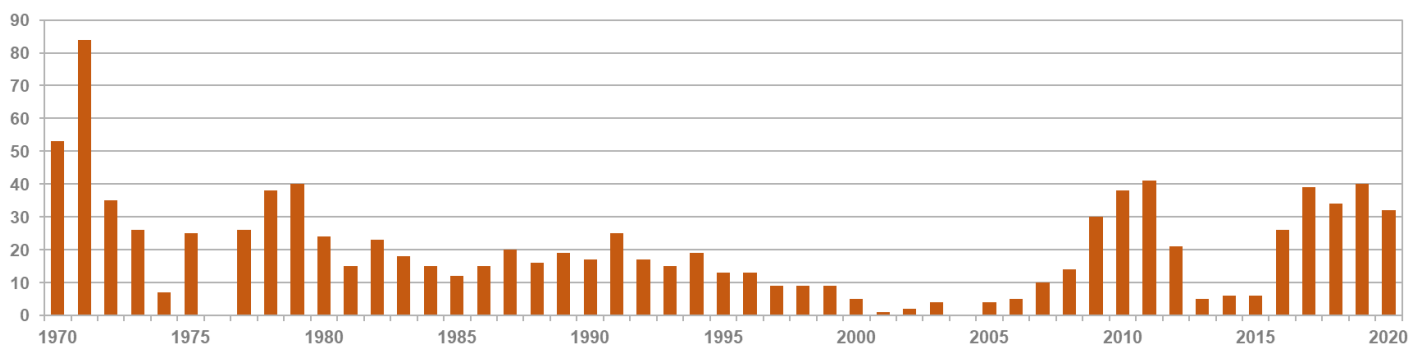


Lesser Black-backed Gull breeding pairs at Rye Harbour

**HERRING GULL** *Larus argentatus*

**Common breeding resident and winter visitor**

As a breeding species it is currently less common than formerly. The highest number of nests recorded since 1970 was 84 in 1971, most of which were at two main colonies at Narrow Pit, but growth of vegetation soon made that unsuitable. In recent years the primary locations have been Flat Beach and Castle Water. Since 1980 the population has varied between one and 25 pairs. A large population became established on rooftops in Rye Harbour village during the 1990s, although no thorough survey has been conducted. The population is highest between November and March, when peak counts have involved roosts on the beach of 4,000 on 3 October 2004, 3,650 on 25 November 1991 and 3,000 on 22 December 1998.



Herring Gull breeding pairs at Rye Harbour

**YELLOW-LEGGED GULL** *Larus michahellis*

**Rare visitor**

This was not considered a separate species from the Herring Gull until 2005. Singles have only been recorded on two occasions since. A second or third year bird was seen on 2 November 2008 and an adult was found at the River Mouth on 18 November 2019.

**ICELAND GULL** *Larus glaucoides*

**Very scarce late winter visitor and spring migrant**

Recorded in eight years since 1970, with all records involving singles between 20 February and 12 May:

1979: one at Long Pit on 24 Feb, probably second-winter.

1980: first- or second-year at Long Pit on 22 Mar.

1982: first-winter flying east along shore on 20 Feb.

1985: first-summer at Ternery Pool on 8 Apr; one reported there on 14 Apr; second- or third-summer on shore on 4 May.

1994: adult at Ternery Pool at dusk on 22 Apr.

1996: one reported at the river mouth on 19 Apr; one, probably second-summer, at Ternery Pool at dusk on 12 May.

2001: first year on Flat Beach on 15 Mar.

2003: second year over the Beach Reserve on 7 Apr.

**GLAUCOUS GULL** *Larus hyperboreus*

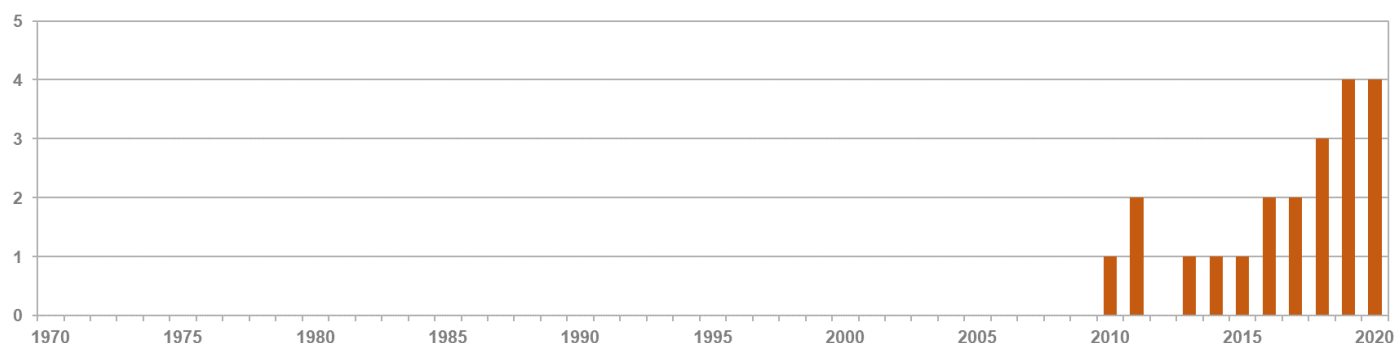
**Very scarce winter visitor and early spring migrant**

Recorded in 18 years since 1970, all between 26 November (1977) and 21 April (1997), with the exception of one at Ternery Pool on 30 May 1984 and one found dead under power cables on 21 October 1984. Nearly half of all records fall within the period mid March to mid April, suggestive of passage. The majority of records are for one day, although a third-winter bird frequented the shore and Long Pit from January until mid April 1977 and a first-summer was seen regularly between 3 and 14 April 1985. Two were noted on a few dates in late March 1985 and on 29 December 1999.

**GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL** *Larus marinus*

**Common winter visitor, but present all year**

May be present in good numbers at virtually any time of year, although peak counts come from the early winter period: 1305 on 25 November 1991, 1210 on 9 November 1984 and 1026 on 11 December 1995. All counts involve birds gathering to roost along the shore at dusk.



Great Black-backed Gull breeding pairs at Rye Harbour

**KITTIWAKE** *Rissa tridactyla*

**Scarce, but occasional offshore for much of year**

Occurs throughout the year, generally in small numbers, although larger numbers appear on occasions, and were regular during the 1970s. Peak counts concern 350 on 8 November 2010, 300 on 4 August 1972 and 280 on 14 July 1977. Most are seen offshore, although individuals or groups may rest on the shore on occasions, and odd individuals are sometimes attracted to Ternery Pool. Has become scarce during the last decade.

**GULL-BILLED TERN** *Gelochelidon nilotica*

**Rare passage migrant**

Recorded in seven years, with four records in May and the other three in Aug:

1975: one on 24 Aug over Long Pit.

1978: one on 27 Aug on a sand bank west of the river mouth.

1980: one at Ternery Pool on 5 May.

1981: adult at Ternery Pool on evening of 19 May.

1995: two at Ternery Pool in evening on 28 May.

1999: one at the Beach Reserve, late morning on 1 Aug.

2005: one at Quarry in evening 6 May.



Gull-billed Tern on 6 May 2005

**CASPIAN TERN** *Sterna caspia*

**Rare vagrant**

There are three records, falling between 14 June and 19 July:

1964: one at shingle pits, 19 Jul.

1984: one roosted overnight at Ternery Pool on 9/10 Jul.

1996: one on 14 Jun on Camber Sands flew towards Ternery Pool.

**LESSER CRESTED TERN** *Sterna bengalensis*

**Rare vagrant**

There are two confirmed records:

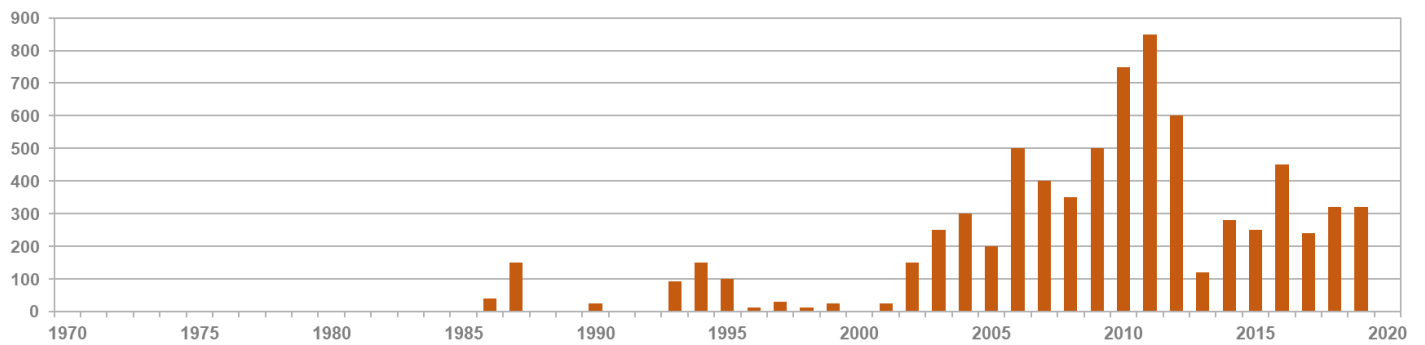
1986: an adult was in the Sandwich Tern colony at Ternery Pool from 1445 to 1645 hrs on 13 May.

1998: one in the tern roost at Ternery Pool at dawn on 4 May headed out over the sea bank at 0510 hrs.

**SANDWICH TERN** *Sterna sandvicensis*

**Common summer visitor and passage migrant, regularly breeds**

The first arrivals normally appear in mid March and numbers quickly build up to reach a spring peak in April. The first two pairs nested at Ternery Pool in 1984 and breeding has occurred there in all but four years since, with a maximum of 850 pairs in 2011. The colony has been successful in only a few years when fish supply is good and predation low. Productivity can be high with over 400 young raised in both 2003 and 2004. A late summer influx is often evident between mid July and early September, usually involving smaller numbers than the spring passage. Few generally remain thereafter with the latest record being three on 8 November 2014. Peak counts include 1800 on 25 April 2011, 1364 August on 18 August 2005 and 1000 on a number of dates in 2008 and 2009. Numbers have increased significantly since the 1970s and the spring arrival starts much earlier than formerly. There is one winter record: a single on 8 and 11 January and 11 February 1981. Seven colour ringed birds seen on passage had come from The Netherlands, Aberdeenshire and the Farne Islands, whilst a juvenile found dead on 27 July 2005 had been ringed as a nestling at Heist in Belgium on 6 June that year.



Sandwich Tern pairs at Rye Harbour



Sandwich Terns nesting on the island in front of the Parkes Hide 27 May 2019

**ROSEATE TERN** *Sterna dougallii*

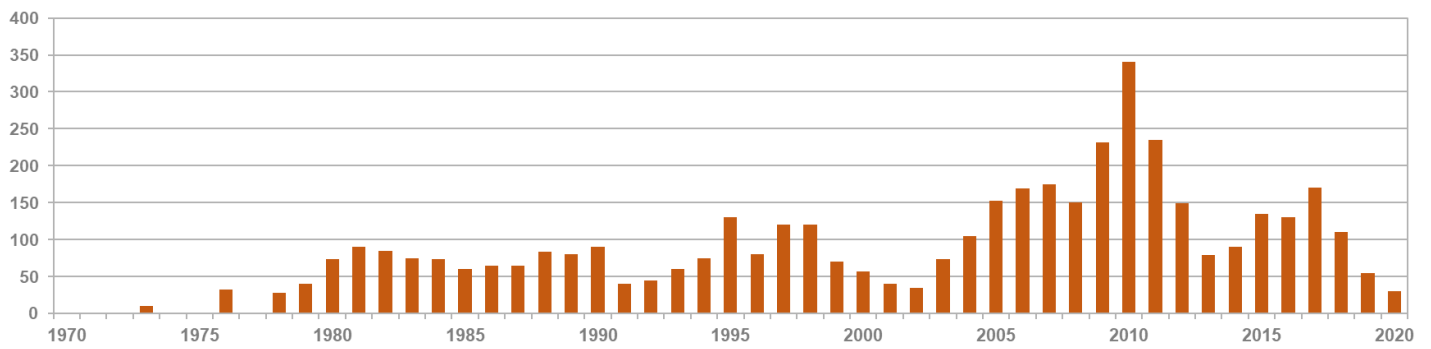
**Scarce summer visitor**

Recorded annually since 1970 with the exception of 1975 and 1976. Apart from two heading east on 16 September 1974, all were seen between late April and mid August, with no obvious peaks or troughs in activity within this period. The earliest was on 25 April 1987 and the latest record was two on 16 September 1974. Ternery Pool is the favoured locality, doubtless attracted by the nesting terns there. The majority of records involve singles, although five were seen on 11 June 1989 and up to four were present between 3 and 15 July 2005.

**COMMON TERN** *Sterna hirundo*

**Common breeding summer visitor and passage migrant**

Typically the first few appear during early April, prior to a rapid build up of numbers. Ternery Pool often attracts large roosts at high tide and especially overnight, maximum counts have been 565 on 13 May 1996 and 520+ on 26 August 1981. A colony has nested on the islands of Ternery Pool in most years since at least 1973, with an average of just over 60 pairs per year and a peak of 153 pairs in 2005 when an estimated 300 young were raised, a record figure. Numbers of breeding pairs have been consistently higher since the late 1970s. Generally speaking, the Common Tern has been quite successful at raising young here, although some years have produced poor results or total failure due to problems such as predation of eggs and chicks by Fox or Badger. Returning migrants often increase numbers between early August and early September. Few are normally seen after mid September, the latest being one on 24 October 2004.



Common Tern pairs at Rye Harbour

Photo below is adult feeding a large chick



**ARCTIC TERN** *Sterna paradisaea*

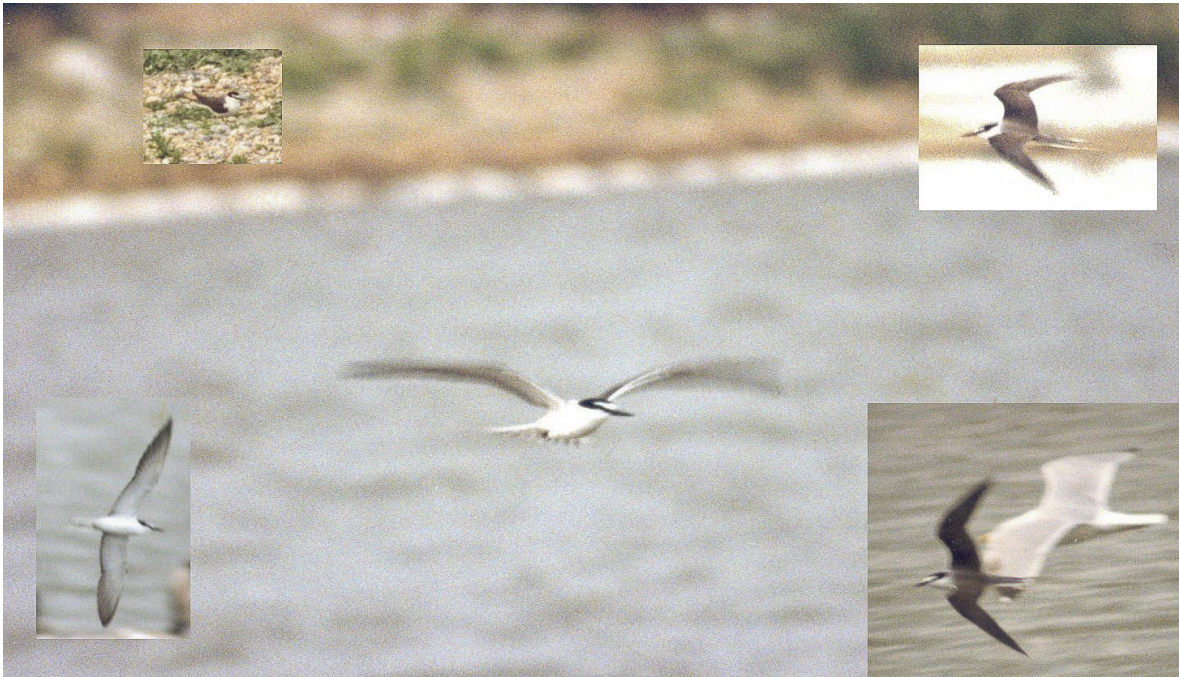
**Uncommon summer visitor, probably under recorded**

Recorded in 27 years since 1970, with records well scattered throughout the period mid April to mid October and no obvious peak in activity. The earliest was two on 30 March 1972 whilst the latest was a single on 1 November 2005. There have been no records since a single on 4 July 2015.

**BRIDLED TERN** *Sterna anaethetus*

**Very rare vagrant**

The sole record concerns an adult at Ternery Pool on the evening of 16 May 1993. It was still present at dawn the following day, leaving at 5am.



Various photos of the Bridled Tern on 16 May 1993

**SOOTY TERN** *Sterna fuscata*

**Very rare vagrant**

One record: an adult at Ternery Pool on 9 July 1984 between 10am & 1pm seen flying among Sandwich Terns and occasionally landing. After leaving Ternery Pool it was seen roosting on the shore until at least 1.15pm.

**Sooty Tern** *Sterna fuscata* (16, 9, 1)

**Kent**, Dungeness, 9th July (S. Bellinger, S. McMinn), also seen in East Sussex.

**Sussex, East Rye**, 9th July (P. Philpott, Dr B. J. Yates) (plate 265), same as Kent individual.

(Tropical and subtropical islands in all oceans, also Red Sea) A typical record, but the first since 1980.

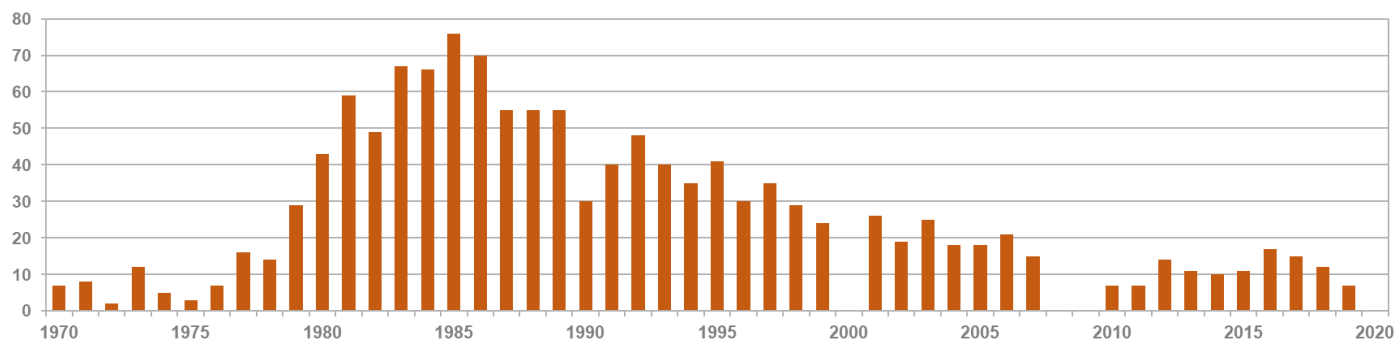
The entry in British Birds



265. Adult Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata*, East Sussex, July 1984 (B. J. Yates)

**LITTLE TERN** *Sternula albifrons***Fairly common summer visitor and declining breeder**

The first few normally return during mid April. Highest numbers are present in May until July or early August, with small numbers sometimes noted until about mid September. The earliest was one on 4 April 1981 whilst the latest was three on 2 October 1999. Breeding numbers have fluctuated with a peak of 76 pairs in 1985. A decline since then reached 24 pairs in 1999 and then no nesting attempts in 2000 (when 11 pairs nested 5km. away at the Midrips). The Little Tern is a notoriously unsuccessful breeder, and the colony at Rye Harbour is no exception. In only 14 out of the last 50 years have the number of fledged young per pair exceeded 0.5 – the number considered necessary for a population to sustain itself. Predation by Fox, Badger, Little Owl and Kestrel have been a cause of failure, but the primary issue is lack of small fish in the sea within 1km of the colony. The future of this species is looking uncertain until the health of our sea improves.



Little Tern pairs at Rye Harbour

**LEAST TERN** *Sternula antillarum***Very rare vagrant**

A male was present in each summer from 1983 to 1992, appearing between late May and mid July amongst the breeding Little Terns. The most significant feature was the distinctive call, with other characteristics being very subtle. This was the first record of this species in Europe.

**WHISKERED TERN** *Chlidonias hybridus***Rare vagrant**

Recorded in three years:

1979: two at Ternery Pool from 31 May to 4 Jun.

1988: adult at Ternery Pool on 28 and 29 May.

1994: one at Ternery Pool/Long Pit/Narrow Pit on 7 and 8 May.

**BLACK TERN** *Chlidonias niger***Regular, but uncommon passage migrant and summer visitor**

Occurs mainly on passage during late April to early June and early August to mid September, although occasionally seen at any time during the intervening period, usually singly. The earliest record was 12 April 1989 whilst the latest record was 17 October 1982. Frequently occurs in the company of Little Gulls. Peak counts have included 38 at the River Mouth on 26 August 2010, and 30 at Ternery Pool on both the 22 August 1992 and 12 May 1993.

**WHITE-WINGED BLACK TERN**    *Chlidonias leucopterus*

**Rare vagrant**

Recorded in nine years since 1970, with most records falling between late May and early September apart from a long stayer in October/November 2014.

1971: one at Ternery Pool for a few minutes on 23 Aug.

1972: one over Ternery Pool for four minutes on 28 May.

1973: one at Castle Water on 19 Jun and another at Ternery Pool on 23 and 24 Jun.

1977: one at Ternery Pool on 28 Aug.

1981: one at Ternery Pool on 15, 20 and 21 Jun.

1987: one at Ternery Pool on 14 Jun.

1992: adult at Narrow Pit from 28 Aug to 4 Sep.

1995: one at Ternery Pool on 13 Jul.

2014: one at Castle Water from 12 Oct to 3 Nov.



White-winged Black Tern upper and lower view, 20 October 2014

**GUILLEMOT** *Uria aalge*

**Fairly common winter visitor offshore**

The most common auk. Occurs mainly between December and March, although small numbers can appear at virtually any time of year. Most are seen offshore, although weakened individuals occasionally come ashore, normally due to oil contamination. Peak counts concern 1200+ flying east on 12 January 1982, 450 on the sea on 13 February 2017 and 290 flying north east on 10 February 2001. The only ringing recovery comes from a bird ringed as a chick in the Island of Canna in Scotland and found dead at Rye Harbour in its first winter in February 1993.

**RAZORBILL** *Alca torda*

**Scarce winter visitor offshore**

Recorded alive in 22 years since 1970, although a further nine years have produced records of dead birds. Occurs mainly between late September and mid March, especially November to February, although has been recorded in all months except August. As with Guillemot, a proportion of records relate to weakened or dead birds along the shore, mainly as a result of oil pollution offshore. Peak counts relate to 200 on 21 January 2011, 150 on 21 January 2011 and 120 on 25 January 2013, all inshore. Larger numbers presumably occur in the company of Guillemots on occasions, but difficulties in separating the two species at long range result in these being unidentified. The only ringing recovery comes from a bird ringed as a chick in the Island of Canna in Scotland and found dead at Rye Harbour in its first winter in December 1993.

**BLACK GUILLEMOT** *Cephus grylle*

**Vagrant**

The only record concerns one flying east offshore on 10 May 1996.

**LITTLE AUK** *Alle alle*

**Rare winter visitor**

Singles have been recorded in thirteen years, mainly between late October and December. Whilst most records are of birds flying west over the sea, exhausted and oiled birds have been picked up in 1969 and 1986. One could be seen on the River Brede from 17 to 21 November 1995 and another was located on Long Pit and later on Castle Water on 26 October 1997. The maximum counts have been five west on 17 November 2007 and three west on 3 November 2016.

**PUFFIN** *Fratercula arctica*

**Rare visitor**

Singles recorded on four occasions:

1952: offshore on 23 Jul.

1953: juvenile freshly dead along the shore on 18 Jul.

1958: oiled bird at Rye Harbour on 29 Nov.

1980: one dead at Camber Sands on 23 Feb.

**STOCK DOVE** *Columba oenas*

**Scarce breeding resident, widespread in winter**

Numbers increase during the winter months, with flocks of 100 or more noted between November and March in north part of nature reserve. Peak counts concern 200 at Harbour Farm on 3 November 1999, 190 at Castle Farm on 6 February 1997 and 150+ in November/December 1978 and November/December 1979. Breeding has taken place in the castle and in nestboxes intended for Barn Owls.

**WOOD PIGEON** *Columba palumbus*

**Common breeding resident**

Breeds commonly in scrub and trees across much of the area, although numbers are difficult to monitor. Estimates have suggested 15-25 pairs breeding in the mid 1980s. The highest numbers involve early morning movements during late October and November, when thousands can be seen heading south west. The largest such movements recorded here concern 4600 on 4 November 2002, 4000 on 30 October 1998 and 3600 on 1 November 1998.

**COLLARED DOVE** *Streptopelia decaocto*

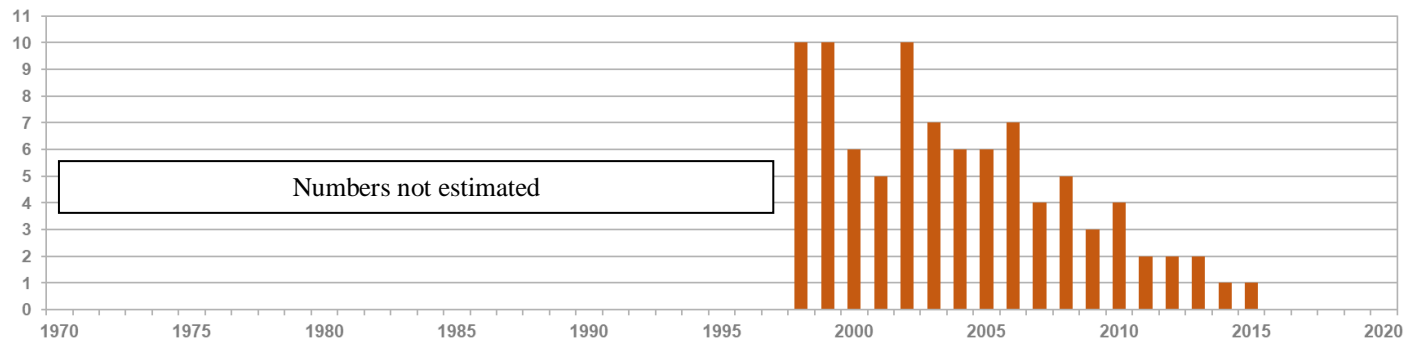
**Fairly common breeding resident**

The breeding status is unclear, but a few are thought to nest in most years. Large numbers used to gather at the Harbour Farm grain store between October and April, this is now unused. All peak counts come from this site: 320 in January 1984, 281 in October 1999, 265 in December 1997 and again 265 in January 1998.

**TURTLE DOVE** *Streptopelia turtur*

**A summer visitor that has gone from common to rare.**

Present from late April until October. The first arrivals have been noted from 20 April and the last of the autumn 16 October. They used to breed but the species has experienced a huge national and local decline over the last thirty years. With the closure of Rye Harbour Farm there are no longer flocks present feeding on grain spills. Exceptionally, two were seen at Harbour Farm during the 1990/91 winter: one on 2 December, a different individual on 3<sup>rd</sup> and both on 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>. One of these was regular until 18<sup>th</sup>. One was again present around the barns from 28 February to 12 March and was presumably the bird found dead on 19 March. The peak counts were 100+ on harvested rape on 21 August 1986 and 80 at the Quarry on 31 August 1997. The earliest spring bird was one on 26 March 1970, the latest being 27 October 1982.



Turtle Dove breeding pairs at Rye Harbour

**RING-NECKED PARAKEET** *Psittacula krameri*

**Rare feral visitor**

Recorded in six years, as below:

1985: one in the Wood on 26 Aug; one feeding in maize crop at Castle Farm on 13 Oct.

1987: one near the Wood on 17 Sep.

1999: male at Rye Harbour on 14 Jun; one at Long Pit on 25 Aug and flying east over Flat Beach on 10 Oct.

2000: one over Rye Harbour on 11 Aug; four over Ternery Pool on 18 Aug.

2001: two heading NE over SSSI on 9 Jan.

2016: two in the Wood 14 Apr.

**CUCKOO** *Cuculus canorus*

**Common breeding summer visitor**

The first of the spring is usually noted between 15 and 23 April and several birds frequent the area throughout the spring. The highest number recorded was ten on 5 May 1974. Most adults depart by early July, and just a few juveniles are normally seen thereafter, with the last noted in August or September. The earliest record was a single on 21 March 1993 while the latest was seen on 2 October 1977. The only host species recorded here has been Reed Warbler.

**BARN OWL** *Tyto alba*

**Fairly common breeding resident**

One or two pairs breed annually. Often encountered throughout the year, hunting across most of the SSSI, normally singly, although up to three have been seen sharing a fairly small hunting area on occasions. Activity is generally highest when adults are busy feeding young, and during cold spells in the winter when food may be harder to find.

**LITTLE OWL** *Athene noctua*

**Non-native resident**

Has declined in recent years, but still often found around the Wood/Castle Farm/Castle Water area, although can occur throughout the area.

**TAWNY OWL** *Strix aluco*

**Scarce visitor**

Recorded in 15 years since 1970. The majority have occurred between September and November, although there are records from all months. All occurrences relate to singles apart from at least two calling near Castle Farm on 25 June 1972 and two heard on 9 March 1985.

**LONG-EARED OWL** *Asio otus*

**Scarce visitor, mainly in winter**

Recorded in 27 years since 1970, mainly between early November and early April, although there have been records in all months of the year. In several years, birds have been noted during the summer months, most recently in 1992 when there were three sightings between late May and mid July, raising the possibility that this species may have bred. Small roosts have been located in some winters holding up to four individuals, although up to six were present at a roost on an island of Narrow Pit in February 1990. Such roosts were first detected in December and January, with most birds remaining into March, but with singles sometimes staying until mid or late April. The last record was one at Castle Pit on 6 December 2011, but we expect that unknown roosts exist!



Spot the Long-eared Owl roosting at the Narrow Pit 24 February 2005

**SHORT-EARED OWL** *Asio flammeus*

**Scarce winter visitor**

Occurs annually, mainly between September and May. In several winters a few have remained for long periods, although in most years numbers are low, with sightings infrequent. The best winters were 1978/79 with a maximum of seven on 3 April, 1981/82 with up to six in January/February and 1992/93 with a maximum of six on 25 March. Since 1993 only singles have been recorded. There are three summer records: singles on 29 July 1982 (freshly dead under wires) and 26 July 1996 and a bird seen on 7 and 23 June 2016. The earliest returning bird was 28 August 1977 with the last spring record on 1 June 1983.

**NIGHTJAR** *Caprimulgus europaeus*

**Rare spring migrant**

Singles have been recorded on three occasions:

1973: in the wood on 25 May.

1987: at dusk flying over Harbour Farm on 23 May.

1992: a female in flight at the Beach Reserve on 2 Jun.

**SWIFT** *Apus apus*

**Common summer visitor**

The first spring arrivals are normally noted between 23 and 27 April, the earliest being 14 April 2012. Numbers then build up to a peak in May and early June, but sometimes higher numbers are noted into July. Over 2,500 were feeding over Long and Narrow Pits on 6 June 1981. There are impressive gatherings over the Long Pit during cold weather and at dusk when the flock spirals higher and higher, before going out to sea to roost in the air. There were 3,000 flying east into a storm on 30 July 1985 with 3,000+ flying west on 9 August of the same year. Numbers are usually much reduced by mid August, with only single birds noted occasionally. The last are typically seen during September, with the latest being 16 October 1974. The only ringing detail is of a bird caught at Watch Cottage in May 1986 and found at Lyndhurst, Hampshire in May 1990.

**ALPINE SWIFT** *Apus melba*

**Rare vagrant**

Singles have been recorded on three occasions:

**1978:** flying east over the Beach Reserve on 8 Jun.

**1982:** flew in from the sea and over the Beach Reserve at 1430 hrs on 9 Apr before leaving towards Dungeness.

**1983:** at Ternery Pool around 1445 hrs for ten minutes on 8 May before departing east.

**KINGFISHER** *Alcedo atthis*

**Scarce resident, regular in autumn**

Formerly less regular and present mainly during the autumn and winter months. Since 1989, spring and early summer records in several years suggest breeding nearby, and it was not until 2000 that nesting was confirmed when a pair were observed visiting a hole in a recently constructed bank at Castle Water. Activity is highest during the autumn, especially during September, although a few remain throughout the winter. Kingfishers utilise all water bodies, but are most frequent on the saline waters of the south part of the nature reserve and along the river south of Rye Harbour village. Peak counts concern seven on 26 August 2003 and five on a number of dates.



Two Kingfishers at the Denny hide 2 September 2014

**BEE-EATER** *Merops apiaster*

**Rare vagrant**

There are nine records of singles, six of which are in July:

1981: at Winchelsea Beach on 25 May.

1988: reported in the wood on 30 Jul.

1991: over Beach Reserve on 3 Jul and another over Winchelsea Beach on 28 Jul.

1996: one calling overhead at Harbour Farm barns on 17 Jul.

2001: single flew east over Beach Reserve on 4 Jun.

2002: one flew north-east over Castle Farm on 14 Jul.

2003: one heard calling from Lime Kiln Cottage on 6 Jul.

2004: one in flight over Carters Pit on 5 Jun.

**HOOPOE** *Upupa epops*

**Rare migrant**

Singles noted within the recording area on four occasions:

1971: adjacent to the caravan site on 3 May.

1978: in the Wood on 1 May.

1987: moving from Harbour Farm to Castle Water on 2 May.

2004: one at Winchelsea Beach on 25 Aug.

**WRYNECK** *Jynx torquilla*

**Scarce migrant**

Recorded in 17 years since 1970. Apart from one on 11 May 2000, all appeared within the period 24 August to 28 September. All records relate to singles. Some have remained for several days.

**GREEN WOODPECKER** *Picus viridis*

**Resident, common in winter**

Two or three pairs are thought to have nested in recent years at least. Numbers are boosted during the winter months when birds are present throughout the SSSI, including the Beach Reserve. The maximum count was nine in September 2005.

**GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER** *Dendrocopos major*

**Fairly common resident**

Most sightings come from the Wood, where they probably nest and Castle Water. During the autumn months in particular, individuals are more frequently encountered throughout the SSSI. Only two records involve more than two: three on 11 September 1990 and on 22 January 1999.

**LESSER SPOTTED WOODPECKER** *Dendrocopos minor*

**Very scarce visitor**

Noted in seven years since 1970. All reports involve singles in the Wood apart from one at Castle Water in 1994, and all fall within the period 6 October to 4 January apart from one in June. Recorded on the following dates: 20 December 1978 (male), June 1984, 1 November 1987, 18 November 1988 (male), 22 October 1990, 1 December 1990, 6 October 1994 and 4 January 2002. The chance of another sighting are poor as the bird is now verging on extinction in Sussex.

**WOODLARK** *Lullula arborea*

**Very scarce passage migrant**

Recorded in eight years:

1986: one near Harbour Farm barns on 23 Oct.

1991: one in the Wood on 27 Sep.

1996: four flying NE over Long Pit and one later at Harbour Farm on 8 Mar.

1998: one reported at Castle Farm on 29 Apr; singles flying overhead on 11 Oct and 11 Nov.

1999: one flew north near Long Pit on 14 Oct.

2006: five flew east over Castle Pit on 5 Jun.

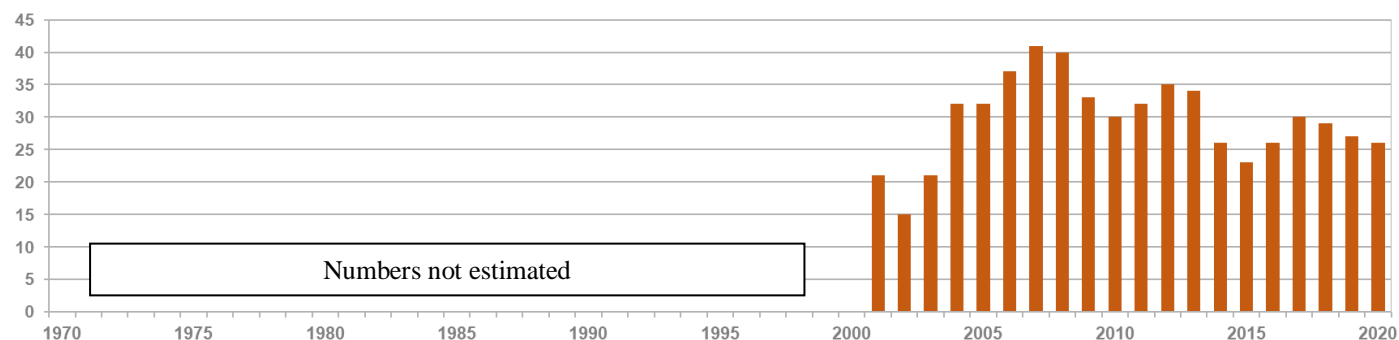
2008: single headed east over Beach Reserve on 8 Oct.

2011: one at Carters Pit on 29 Oct.

**SKYLARK** *Alauda arvensis*

**Common breeding resident**

Breeding numbers have varied between about 15 and 41 pairs in recent years, with the great majority nesting at Harbour Farm and the Beach Reserve. During autumn and winter flocks up to 250 now gather on the saltmarsh habitat that produces masses of tiny seeds.



Skylark breeding pairs at Rye Harbour

**SHORE LARK** *Eremophila alpestris*

**Very scarce winter visitor**

Noted in eight years between 13 November and 9 April:

1957: one on 13 Nov.

1996: one at Wader Pool, 17-21 Nov.

1997: one with Skylarks in fields at Harbour Farm on 23 Nov.

1998: one on 20 Feb west of the river mouth was perhaps the same bird that was regularly present on an area of short turf and shingle near the river mouth between 22 Mar and 9 Apr. Two were reported in Oct, then in Nov one was by the river on 13th, and two were at Wader Pool the next day. From 1 Dec one was present virtually daily along the sea bank, usually just east of Ternery Pool until the end of the year. Wader Pool produced one on 4th and 5th, possibly the bird from the sea bank, and two were reported along the sea bank on 26th and 30th.

1999: one remained at the Beach Reserve until at least 23 Jan when it had a broken wing; singles noted on 3, 6 & 25 Dec.

2004: two birds on the saltmarsh 13 to 16 Nov.

2008: a long staying single on Beach Reserve from 23 December 2007 until 1 March 2008.

2020: a long staying single near Red-roofed hut from 16 November to end of year



Shore Lark feeding on seeds of Rottingdean Sea Lavender December 2020 – photo James Tomlinson

**SAND MARTIN** *Riparia riparia*

**Common passage migrant, scarce in mid-summer, last bred in 1994**

The timing of the start of the spring arrival varies considerably from year to year, with the first migrants normally noted between 13 March and 11 April, with passage continuing until late April. The earliest was one on 4 March 2000. Formerly an annual breeder, but since 1983 only two years have yielded nesting records, a single pair in 1985 and two pairs in 1994. Since 1970, the highest number recorded was 126 pairs at Saunders Pits and Castle Water in 1972, and no other years exceeded 45 pairs. The return passage normally involves higher numbers and is strongest between early July and late September, although small numbers are often seen into October and the latest being three on 24 November 1982. Annual peak counts since 1996 have varied between 60 and 1500. The highest total being 15500 on 18 August 1972.



**SWALLOW** *Hirundo rustica*

**Common passage migrant and summer visitor**

A few pairs breed in most years. The first arrivals are often noted in late March, preceding a spring passage during April and May. The earliest was seen on 17 February 1995. Return passage is evident from around late August, with highest numbers typically during September when thousands can sometimes be seen moving through. Numbers are normally much lower during October and the last few are usually seen in early November, the latest being 5 December 1994. The peak count was 32,000 on 3 September 1994 and 30,000 hirundines, mostly Swallows, heading east on 12 September 1996.

**RED-RUMPED SWALLOW** *Hirundo daurica*

**Rare vagrant**

1987: one near Watch Cottage with Swallows on 26 May.

1993: one at the south end of Castle Water in a mixed hirundine flock numbering 500+ on 16 Oct.

2000: one at Ternery Pool on 6 Aug.

2010: one feeding with Swallows over Long Pit on 4 May.

**HOUSE MARTIN** *Delichon urbica*

**Common passage migrant and summer visitor**

The main spring passage occurs between April and May, although one or two are often seen in late March, the earliest being three on 17 March 2008. A small population nest under the eaves of buildings in Rye Harbour. The return passage occurs mainly in September until mid October, the highest number being 70,000 heading east on 23 September 1994. Small numbers are noted into November in some years with the latest recorded on 17 November 1995 and 1999.

**RICHARD'S PIPIT** *Anthus novaeseelandiae*

**Rare vagrant**

The only confirmed record concerns two on 22 September 1970.

**TAWNY PIPIT** *Anthus campestris*

**Rare vagrant**

Recorded in seven years between 5 and 17 September:

1970: adult from 5 to 7 Sep.

1971: one calling in flight on 6 Sep was probably the same bird seen in fields near Castle Water on 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>.

1974: one on 16 and 17 Sep near the Castle.

1986: two adults at the river mouth on 9 Sep.

1992: two in a kale field near the Castle from 13 to 16 Sep.

1995: one at Harbour Farm on 10 Sep.

2008: one at Beach Reserve on 25 and 26 May.

**TREE PIPIT** *Anthus trivialis*

**Uncommon passage migrant, mainly in autumn**

Recorded in 27 years since 1970, although probably overlooked in those years with no records. Spring records come from nine years with extreme dates of 5 April (1999) and 31 May (1973), with most records involving singles. There have been two summer records: one singing along Harbour Road on 25 June 1990 and one on 20 July 1972. Most records relate to birds flying overhead during the autumn migration between mid August and early October, extreme dates being 6 August (1970) and 13 October (1998). Peak counts have been seven on 11 September 1971, five west the following day and four on three dates. There have been no records since two over the reserve on 26 September 2015.

**MEADOW PIPIT** *Anthus pratensis*

**Common resident; sometimes scarce in winter**

Breeding numbers have reached 21 pairs, but are generally less than 10 pairs, mostly on the Beach Reserve. The highest numbers are present on autumn passage in September and early October, both on the ground and passing overhead. Winter numbers are generally low, although variable. Peak counts relate to 1400 on 13 September 2005, 580 on 20 September 2016 and 500 on 19 September 2016.

**RED-THROATED PIPIT** *Anthus cervinus*

**Very rare vagrant**

The only record concerns one calling in flight near Camber Castle on 16 September 1992.

**WATER PIPIT** *Anthus spinoletta*

**Passage migrant and possibly winter visitor**

This is probably a regular winter visitor, but is very difficult to identify.

Singles have been recorded in nine years since 1970, all but three between 4 March and 23 April:

1974: 11 Mar and 15 and 23 Apr.

1975: 9 Apr.

1977: Horseshoe Pool on 4 Mar.

1985: Ternery Pool on 18 Oct.

1990: moulting into summer plumage at Ternery Pool on 3 and 6 Mar; one in summer plumage at Wader Pool on 5 Apr.

1996: in summer plumage at Castle Water on 4 Apr.

2001: one at Ternery Pool on 22 Oct.

2003: one on Flat Beach on 2 Apr.

2007: one at Harbour Farm on 3 Dec.

**ROCK PIPIT** *Anthus petrosus*

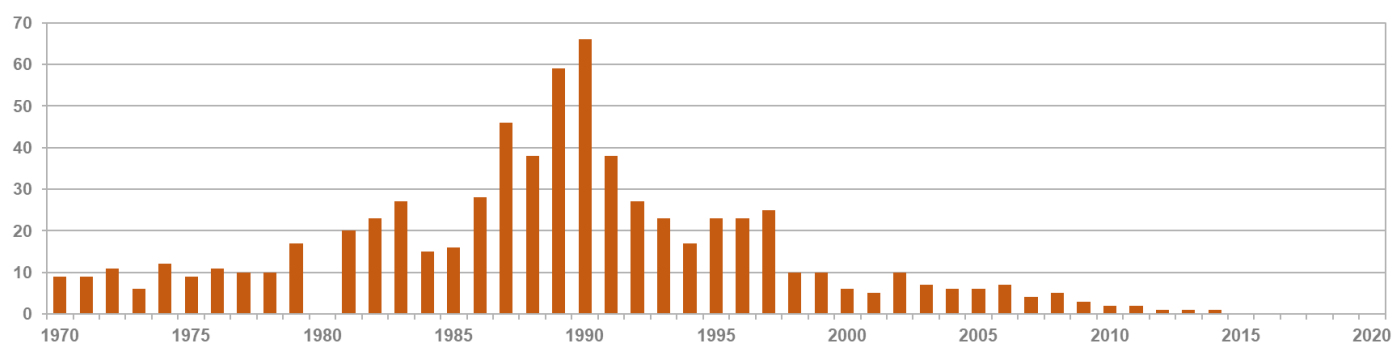
**Uncommon winter visitor**

A few individuals normally overwinter in the vicinity of the saltmarshes at the eastern end of the Beach Reserve. Generally present from early October until late March, sometimes into April. Passage is often evident in October when numbers can be slightly higher than during the winter months. The highest counts were made between 1978 and 1985 involving 20 to 30+ individuals along these saltmarshes, mainly in January and February.

**YELLOW WAGTAIL** *Motacilla flava*

**Scarce summer visitor and fairly common passage migrant**

This former breeding species has undergone a dramatic decline nationally and locally. The breeding population peaked at 66 pairs in 1990, but has since declined to none in 2005 and since. The first spring migrant is normally noted in late March, although the main arrival takes place from early April. The return passage is evident mainly between late August and late September and large numbers can sometimes congregate during this period, especially along the Beach Reserve, e.g. 500 on 29 August 1996 and 450 on 24 August 2013. The last few are normally seen in October, although November records are not unknown, e.g. one at Winchelsea Beach sewage works on 13 November 2000. Records of the blue-headed race *M.f.flava* were regular in the 20th century during spring migration and there were occasional breeding records.



Yellow Wagtail breeding pairs at Rye Harbour

Photo below is the brightest of male Yellow Wagtails at Denny hide 24 April 2015



**GREY WAGTAIL** *Motacilla cinerea*

**Uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor**

Most records relate to the autumn passage period, between early September and mid October, when birds can often be heard calling overhead, normally during early/mid morning. This normally involves ones or twos, but larger numbers have occurred on occasions, e.g. 11 flying east on 11 September 2000. During the winter months sometimes recorded at the Winchelsea Beach sewage works, where one has probably been present for much of the winter in recent years. There are few records from late spring/summer.

**PIED WAGTAIL** *Motacilla alba*

**Common resident**

Several pairs nest in and around the SSSI in most years, especially along the industrial areas of Harbour Road. Outside the breeding season, flocks sometimes arrive at dusk to roost in reedbeds at Castle Water. The highest count has been 182 flying over Flat Beach at dawn after leaving a nearby roost on 29 September 2014. White Wagtails *M.a.alba* are often noted in early spring, mainly in March or April.

**WAXWING** *Bombycilla garrulus*

**Rare winter visitor**

Noted in five years in November and January:

1974: one at the Castle on 24 Nov.

1987: two in the Wood on 24 Jan.

1991: one at Narrow Pit on 28 Nov.

1996: 12 in the Wood on 10 Jan.

2010: 26 at Castle Pit on 11 Dec with 8 seen there on 14 and 16 Dec.

**WREN** *Troglodytes troglodytes*

**Common breeding resident**

Fairly common as a breeder in scrubby or wooded areas, with probably around 20-25 pairs nesting within the SSSI. Remains common throughout the winter months. This normally resident bird has occasionally wandered as seen by the one ringed at Beachy Head on 5 October 1977 and found at Rye Harbour two months later.

**DUNNOCK** *Prunella modularis*

**Common breeding resident**

The breeding population is probably around 30 pairs in a typical year and good numbers are present throughout the remainder of the year. A male ringed at Watch Cottage on 5 September 1986 stayed there until at least 26 May 1991.

**ROBIN** *Erithacus rubecula*

**Common resident, small numbers breed**

Breeding numbers are very low within the SSSI, e.g. only three territories located in 1999, although many more probably nest in the Winchelsea Beach area where gardens provide more suitable nesting habitat. Good numbers arrive during the autumn, many of which remain throughout the winter.

**NIGHTINGALE** *Luscinia megarhynchos*

**Scarce passage migrant**

Noted in 25 years since 1970. Spring records come from eighteen years and span the period 13 April (2012) to 1 June (1975), with most between late April and late May. Some have been heard in song, but none have remained for long and no breeding has been evident. Seven years have produced records from the return passage, six of these in August, with extreme dates of 2 July (2001) and 26 August (1983). Most records relate to singles apart from three on 15 April 1971 and two on a number of occasions.

**BLUETHROAT** *Luscinia svecica*

**Rare vagrant**

Four records, mainly from September:

1965: one almost in summer plumage at the shingle pits on 14 Sep, showing characteristics of the race *cyanecula*.

1967: one at the shingle pits from 16 to 18 Sep.

1989: a white-spotted adult reported in front of Parkes Hide, Ternery Pool on 12 Sep.

2000: a very early individual seen four times briefly in flight at Castle Water on 16 Aug.

**BLACK REDSTART** *Phoenicurus ochruros*

**Uncommon passage migrant, scarce winter visitor**

Recorded mainly during the passage periods March and April and again in October and November. Occasionally noted during the winter months. Records during the return passage and winter normally involve singles, although small influxes often occur during the spring, e.g. up to 11 in early April 1996.

**REDSTART** *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

**Uncommon passage migrant**

One or two are seen in most springs between early April and mid May, but the main period is August and October when several may be present on many dates.

**WHINCHAT** *Saxicola rubetra*

**Fairly common passage migrant**

Occurs in most years on spring migration between late April and May, normally appearing singly. The main period is mid August to October when small groups frequently occur, sometimes amounting to double figures. A few are occasionally seen in October and exceptionally into early November.

**STONECHAT** *Saxicola torquata*

**Fairly common passage migrant and winter visitor and occasionally nests.**

Occurs mainly from September onwards, although singles are occasionally noted as early as mid August. Numbers are generally highest during late September and October when migrants are passing through, though normally only in single figures. Small numbers remain for the winter, usually occurring in pairs and they generally depart by mid/late March. Spring migrants occasionally turn up singly during May, and mid June has produced single juveniles on at least three occasions.

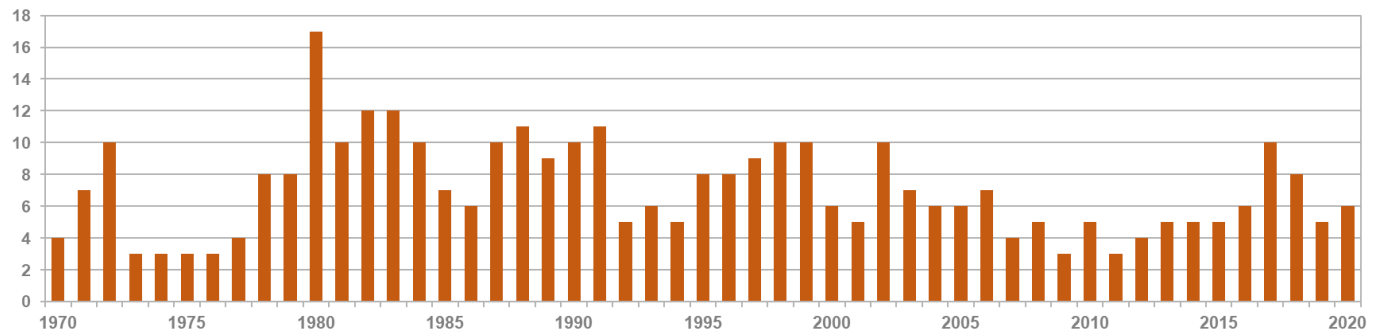
Female Stonechat 12 December 2017



**WHEATEAR** *Oenanthe oenanthe*

**Breeding summer visitor and common passage migrant**

The first migrants are normally noted in early March, although the main arrival is not until the end of the month. Many of these are stopping briefly on their way north, but a small breeding population remains on the Beach Reserve. This population is part of a small isolated group that includes Dungeness and possible the north French coast and so is vulnerable to extinction. Here on the nature reserve it is only hanging on with the provision of artificial nesting tunnels and the exclusion of Badger and Fox from large areas. This reached a maximum of 17 pairs in 1980, although the typical number now is more like 5 pairs. Freshly fledged juveniles can be seen from late May. Migrants begin to pass through again in early August, and good numbers are often present between mid August and October, with the last singles typically in early November. The maximum in recent years has been 37 on 31 August 2016. A chick ringed in a nestbox at Rye Harbour on 31 May 1991 was found dead 2,156 km south at Amellago, Morocco on 4 March 1992.



Wheatear breeding pairs at Rye Harbour



Wheatear fledglings (two) near their artificial nest site 9 July 2017

**RING OUZEL** *Turdus torquatus*

**Scarce passage migrant**

Occurs less than annually. Spring migrants normally appear singly in April. Returning birds in the autumn are more frequently encountered, normally appearing between late September and October, and even in early November. In recent years the maximum count has been 12 at Castle Water on 17 October 2014.

**BLACKBIRD** *Turdus merula*

**Common breeding resident**

Breeds throughout the SSSI with an estimated 41 pairs in 2005. Migrants increase the population during the autumn months, and good numbers stay for the winter.

**FIELDFARE** *Turdus pilaris*

**Fairly common winter visitor**

The first autumn arrivals are normally noted in October or November. The main occurrence period is early November to late March. In many winters flocks of 100+ are seen at Castle Water where they roost. The maximum recent count was 419 on the Beach Reserve on 1 February 2010.

**SONG THRUSH** *Turdus philomelos*

**Uncommon breeding resident, common in autumn and winter**

A few nest within the nature reserve with numbers increasing to 4 or 5 pairs as the amount of scrub has increased. Greater numbers during the autumn and often remain for the winter.

**REDWING** *Turdus iliacus*

**Uncommon winter visitor**

Generally present in small numbers from mid October to late March, although some winters see larger flocks with 150 present on 13 January 2010. Migrants can sometimes be heard passing overhead at night during March, October and November.

**MISTLE THRUSH** *Turdus viscivorus*

**Fairly common breeding resident**

Occurs in small numbers throughout the year, favouring the grassland adjacent to wooded areas. Several pairs usually breed, mostly just outside the SSSI.

**CETTI'S WARBLER** *Cettia cetti*

**Fairly common breeding resident**

First recorded in 1981, this species was formerly a scarce winter visitor recorded in only nine years between 1981 and 2000. Since then, it has become regular and common throughout the year. Peak counts concern 12 on 22 April 2007, nine on 16 October 2004 and 20 October 2005 and eight on 8 May 2005. Breeding is now widespread as the area of reed and wet scrub has increased and it is estimated there are now 18 singing males.

**GRASSHOPPER WARBLER** *Locustella naevia*

**Very scarce passage migrant and occasional summer visitor**

Probably occurs annually, but so easily overlooked, and only recorded in 19 years since 1970. Occurrences have been well spread throughout the period April to September, with extreme dates were 14 April 2018 and 26 September 1992. Many records up until mid July relate to males in song, although breeding has never been confirmed. Many such records may relate to wandering unmated birds. Most records are of singles, although two have been noted on a few occasions during passage periods (late April to mid May and late July to mid September) and three were noted on 15 August 1971 and on 4 August 1976.



Singing Grasshopper Warbler Rye Harbour Farm 19 June 2020 – photo James Tomlinson

**SAVI'S WARBLER** *Locustella luscinioides*

**Rare summer visitor**

Recorded in three years:

1991: one singing at Narrow Pit on 24 and 25 May.

1996: one singing at Narrow Pit from 11 to 15 Apr; another in song on the northern boundary of Castle Farm on 14 Apr.

2000: one at Corner Pool on 11 Jun and Castle Water on 16 Jun.

**AQUATIC WARBLER** *Acrocephalus paludicola*

**Rare autumn migrant**

Recorded on four occasions:

1986: juvenile between Ternery Pool and the caravan site on 18 Aug.

1995: one at Ternery Pool on 7 Sep.

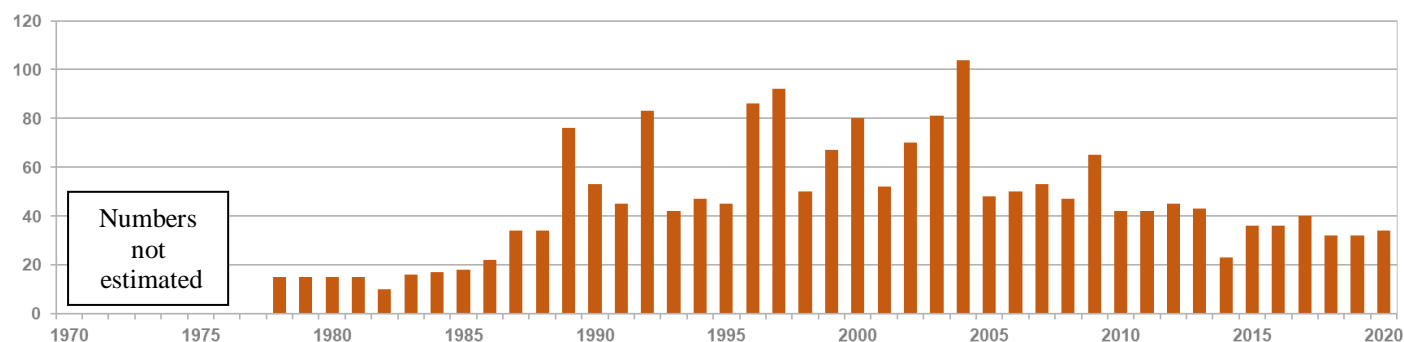
1999: one at Ternery Pool on 18 Sep.

2000: one at Castle Water on 18 Aug.

**SEDGE WARBLER** *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

**Common summer visitor and passage migrant**

The first spring migrants normally arrive in early April, prior to a large breeding population flooding in around mid month. Breeding numbers have increased significantly since the early 1980s with the development of scrub and reed. About 15 pairs nested annually during the early 1980s, compared with estimates of between 42 and 92 pairs during the 1990s with the peak in 1997. Good numbers remain until mid September when many migrants pass through and the last often remain until early/mid October. A chick ringed in Cumbria on 30 June 1986 was caught at Rye Harbour 38 days later.



Sedge Warbler breeding pairs at Rye Harbour



Sedge Warbler singing 15 April 2015

**BLYTH'S REED WARBLER** *Acrocephalus dumetorum*

**Very rare vagrant**

This singing male (photo) was present at the Wood from 17 to 19 June 2016. There is a video with sound at <https://youtu.be/HPpawPavzs4>



**MARSH WARBLER** *Acrocephalus palustris*

**Very rare summer visitor**

There are two records thought to relate to this species, both in song at Harbour Farm by the caravan site on 16 June 1987 and 14 May 1996.

**REED WARBLER** *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

**Common summer visitor and passage migrant**

The first spring migrants generally appear around mid April with a breeding population now of an estimated 300 pairs arriving during the next four weeks. A large increase has occurred since the early 1980s when only about 30 pairs were nesting. Reed Warblers remain plentiful during the early autumn when migrants are passing through, and small numbers may remain into early October. A young bird was caught and ringed at Rye Harbour in August 1987 and subsequently controlled at Bainton, Cambridgeshire, July 1988 and then at Icklesham (5km. from Rye Harbour) in July 1989.

**GREAT REED WARBLER** *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*

**Rare vagrant**

Recorded on two occasions:

1978: one singing at Corner Pool (Harbour Farm) from 23 to 30 May.

1998: one at Castle Water on 8 May.

**ICTERINE WARBLER** *Hippolais icterina*

**Rare vagrant**

Recorded on three occasions:

1982: one in the Wood on 11 Sep.

1987: male in song at Watch Cottage on 4 Jun.

1999: a very late individual reported at Castle Water on 7 Oct.

**MELODIOUS WARBLER** *Hippolais polyglotta*

**Very rare vagrant**

The only record concerns one in the Wood on 29 July and 1 August 1988.

**DARTFORD WARBLER** *Sylvia undata*

**Scarce winter visitor**

Noted in 12 years, with the first record in 1986. Records fall between 15 October (2004) and 8 March (1993). Birds have remained for lengthy periods on a few occasions. In 1999/2000, for instance, at least one was probably present at Long and Narrow Pits throughout the period 4 December to 26 February, and two were present until 19 December at least. Peak counts concern three on 14 November 1999 and two on a number of occasions. Areas of gorse scrub at Long Pit, Narrow Pit and Castle Water are favoured.

**BARRED WARBLER** *Sylvia nisoria*

**Rare vagrant**

Noted on four occasions in the autumn:

1979: juvenile in a Rye Harbour garden on 24 Aug.

1980: juvenile in the Wood on 4 Sep.

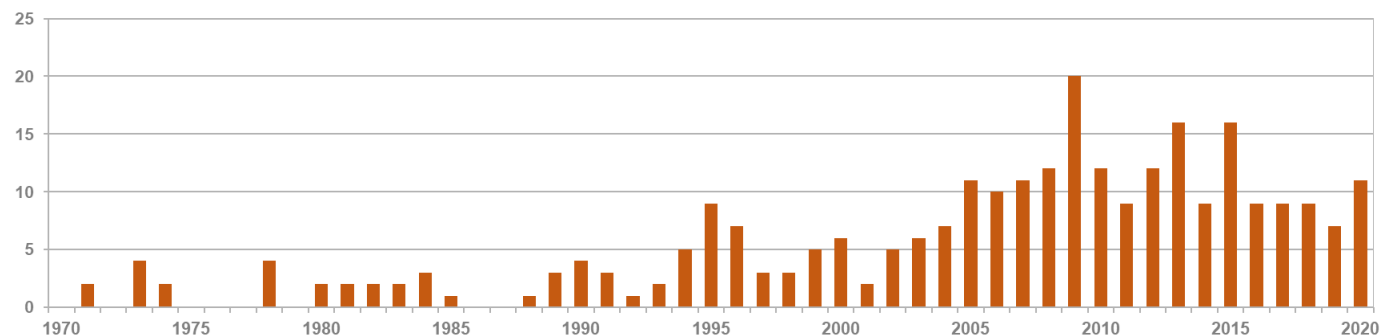
1981: one in the Wood on 12 Sep.

1999: two reported at Narrow Pit on 3 Sep.

**LESSER WHITETHROAT** *Sylvia curruca*

**Common passage migrant; uncommon breeder**

Typically present from late April to early October. Numbers in spring and summer are generally low, with an average of four pairs nesting, although the number of breeding pairs since 1970 has fluctuated between zero and 11, with a peak in 2005. Many migrants pass through in early autumn, and scrubby areas often support good numbers between late August and mid September in particular. On 3 August 2020 a total of 17 were ringed on the reserve. A young bird ringed at Rye Harbour in September 1988 was controlled in Beeby, Leicestershire in April 1989.

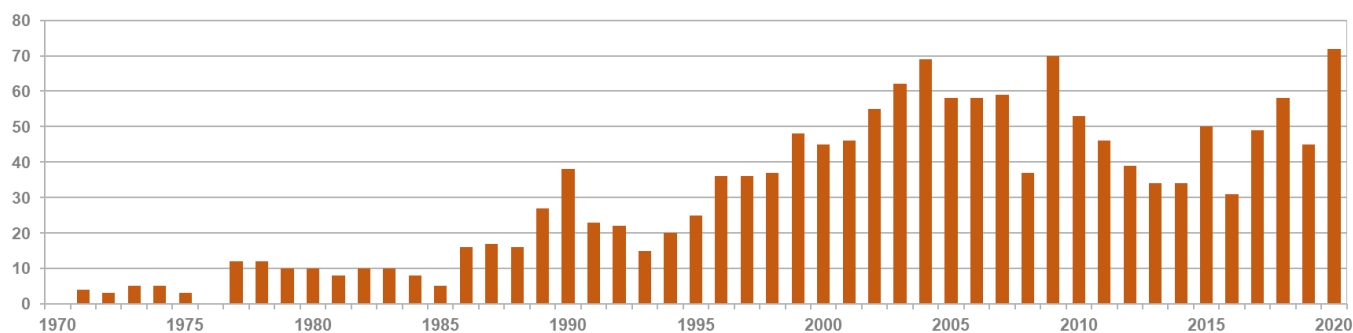


Lesser Whitethroat breeding pairs at Rye Harbour

**WHITETHROAT** *Sylvia communis*

**Common summer visitor and passage migrant**

The first spring migrants appear during early or mid April, before a large breeding population arrives. Prior to 1986 no more than 12 pairs had been recorded breeding annually, but a large increase in numbers follows the spread of Hawthorn and Bramble scrub. Since 1990, estimated numbers have ranged from 15 to 69 pairs annually, with the peak in 2004. Good numbers are generally present for most of September, but few are seen thereafter.



Whitethroat breeding pairs at Rye Harbour

**GARDEN WARBLER** *Sylvia borin*

**Uncommon summer visitor and passage migrant**

Recorded mainly on passage between late April and mid May and from early August to mid September. Up to three pairs have been recorded nesting in some years, in the Wood.

**BLACKCAP** *Sylvia atricapilla*

**Common summer visitor and passage migrant, scarce in winter**

Present mainly from late March to early November although very occasionally noted during the winter months. One or two pairs nest in the Wood in most years, although Blackcaps are most plentiful during the autumn migration period from late August to mid October, when they can be found in scrubby areas throughout the SSSI. The peak count was 121 ringed on 16 September 2019. A bird ringed at Sandwich Bay, Kent on 5 July 2019 was controlled on the reserve on 28 August 2019.

**PALLAS'S WARBLER** *Phylloscopus proregulus*

**Very rare vagrant**

The sole record relates to one in scrub at Bourne's Field, Castle Water on 7 December 2000.

**YELLOW-BROWED WARBLER** *Phylloscopus inornatus*

**Rare vagrant**

Recorded in six years:

1985: one in the Wood on 15 Oct.

1988: one in the Wood on 1 Oct.

1991: one reported by Rye Harbour car park on 13 Nov.

1999: one adjacent to the caravan site on 12 Oct, probably additional to one at Narrow Pit on the same morning; one in the wood on 14 Oct.

2001: one in the Wood on 5 Nov.

2014: one at Carters Pit on 17 Oct.

**BONELLI'S WARBLER** *Phylloscopus bonelli*

**Very rare vagrant**

The only record involves one in the Wood from 27 August to 1 September 1979.

**WOOD WARBLER** *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*

**Very scarce passage migrant**

Eleven individuals have been recorded in ten years since 1970 but none since 1999. Spring records are from just four years between 28 April (1979 & 1992) and 4 May (1981), all involving males in song. Returning birds have been noted in six years between 28 July (1987) and 21 September (1986). All records relate to singles on one date only apart from one on 19 & 21 September 1986. Records come mainly from Rye Harbour village and the Wood, but one was ringed at Watch Cottage on 28 July 1987 and one was at Castle Water on 27 August 1999.

**CHIFFCHAFF** *Phylloscopus collybita*

**Common passage migrant, some nest and a few may overwinter**

Spring migrants generally begin trickling in during March, although it is often difficult to tell whether some are birds which have overwintered. One or two pairs nesting in the Wood was the only breeding in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but in recent years up to 12 singing males have been noted during the summer. The main return passage occurs in September and October. Small numbers often linger throughout the winter months.

**WILLOW WARBLER** *Phylloscopus trochilus*

**Common passage migrant, scarce in summer**

The first spring migrants typically arrive during early April, a few often sing thereafter, although in recent years none have remained to breed. Autumn migrants are fairly common until mid September. A young bird controlled on the reserve on 21 August 2018 had been ringed at Holtwhistle, Dumfries and Galloway 34 days before.

**GOLDCREST** *Regulus regulus*

**Fairly common passage migrant and scarce winter visitor**

Present mainly between August and April, but especially late September to March. Occasional sightings of very young birds suggest they probably nest locally.

**FIRECREST** *Regulus ignicapillus*

**Regular passage migrant and scarce winter visitor**

Has increased in numbers during the last decade. Present mainly during the migration periods March, April, September and November. Occasionally noted during the winter months, usually singly. The Wood, Reedbed Viewpoint and areas of scrub are favoured, although freshly arrived migrants can take advantage of any small piece of cover nearer the beach.

**SPOTTED FLYCATCHER** *Muscicapa striata*

**Decreasing passage migrant**

Present in small numbers on migration, mainly between late April and mid May and early August to late September. The autumn passage generally involves higher numbers than during the spring.

**RED-BREASTED FLYCATCHER** *Ficedula parva*

**Very rare vagrant**

The only record concerns an immature in the Wood on 17 September 1988.

**PIED FLYCATCHER** *Ficedula hypoleuca*

**Scarce migrant**

Recorded annually between 1970 and 1992, but in only ten years since then. Very scarce on spring migration, although singles have been noted occasionally in late April/early May. Autumn migrants are more regular, occurring mainly between early August and late September, but occasionally until mid October. Records usually involve singles, but two or three are occasionally noted.

**BEARDED TIT** *Panurus biarmicus*

**Fairly common breeder and passage migrant**

Used to occur primarily between October and February. Following the reedbed creation at Castle Water in 2003 it now breeds in small numbers estimated at up to 8 pairs. Peak counts have included 36 on 11 October 2016, 33 on 22 September 2016 and 22 on 7 July 2014.

**LONG-TAILED TIT** *Aegithalos caudatus*

**Fairly common breeding resident**

Outside the breeding season small flocks can be encountered in any areas of scrub or trees. Only a few pairs nest annually, but numbers are increasing as the area of scrub increases. Peak counts have been 33 on 5 November 2007 and 28 on 10 January 2012.

**MARSH TIT** *Parus palustris*

**Rare visitor**

Singles recorded on just two occasions:

1971: on 30 Aug.

1973: in the Wood on 26 Sep.

**WILLOW TIT** *Parus montanus*

**Rare visitor**

Singles recorded on two occasions:

1983: in the Wood on 15 Jan.

1998: in a garden of Front Ridge from 14 to 22 Aug and again from 23 to 29 Sep.

**COAL TIT** *Parus ater*

**Uncommon visitor**

Most have been recorded around March to May and during September and October. Recorded less than annually.

Most records involved singles, although a maximum of four were noted on 5 October 1978 in the Wood.

**BLUE TIT** *Parus caeruleus*

**Common breeding resident**

Present in small numbers in all areas of scrub and trees with a few pairs nesting annually.

**GREAT TIT** *Parus major*

**Common breeding resident**

Frequents scrub and trees over much of the area in small numbers with a few pairs nesting.

**NUTHATCH** *Sitta europaea*

**Rare visitor**

Singles have been seen in nine years usually in the Wood or by the caravan site.

**TREECREEPER** *Certhia familiaris*

**Uncommon breeding resident**

Present in small numbers in the Wood throughout the year where breeding probably occurs annually. Rarely noted elsewhere.

**PENDULINE TIT** *Remiz pendulinus*

**Very rare vagrant**

Recorded on four occasions:

1998: one at Corner Pool (Harbour Farm) on 28 Dec.

2003: one at Carters Pit on 6 Oct.

2007: two at Carters Pit on 20 Oct.

2009: single at Carters Pit in 17 Apr.

**GOLDEN ORIOLE** *Oriolus oriolus*

**Rare visitor**

Recorded in nine years between 1 May and 16 Jul:

1977: heard singing in a sycamore in Rye Harbour village on 16 Jul.

1984: male in May at the Wood on 1<sup>st</sup>, Beach Field on 5<sup>th</sup> and Sea Road on 7<sup>th</sup>.

1986: male reported by the caravan site on 19 May.

1990: female seen at the Beach Reserve on 10 Jun.

1992: reported singing in the Wood on 25 Jun.

1997: male at Long Pit on 6 Jun.

1999: female at Narrow Pit on 19 and 21 Jun.

2009: male at Carters Corner (Harbour Farm) on 3 Jul.

2013: male seen at Castle Pit on 18 Jun.  
2020: one was heard at Narrow Pit on 16 May

**RED-BACKED SHRIKE** *Lanius collurio*

**Rare passage migrant**

Recorded on 14 occasions:

1970: one on 30 Aug.

1973: female on 1 Jun in the Wood.

1974: female from 20 to 28 Sep.

1977: at Rye Harbour allotments one on 26 Aug, two, possibly three, the following day, one from 28<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> and one on 3 Sep, all females or immatures.

1981: male at the Beach Reserve on 23 May.

1986: male at Beach Field on 29 May.

1994: female/immature at Rye Harbour allotments on 1 Oct.

1995: male and female seen separately at Beach Field on 11 Jun.

1998: juvenile at the south end of Castle Water on 17 Sep.

2006: juvenile at Castle Water on 13 and 14 Sep.

2007: juvenile at Ternery Pool on 11 Jun.

2009: an adult male at Ternery Pool on 3 Jul.

2015: juvenile Rye Harbour Farm 3 Sep.

2020: an adult male at Castle Water on 15 May.



Juvenile Red-backed Shrike near Corner Pools 3 September 2015

**LESSER GREY SHRIKE** *Lanius minor*

**Very rare vagrant**

The only record concerns an adult female along the fence near Lime Kiln Cottage on the evening of 3 June 1977.

**GREAT GREY SHRIKE** *Lanius excubitor*

**Rare autumn visitor**

Recorded on four occasions:

1974: one on 3 and 10 Oct.

1978: one on 15 Oct.

1992: adult at Castle Farm on 16 Oct, flew off west.

2007: single at Beach Reserve on 10 Nov.

**JAY** *Garrulus glandarius*

**Scarce visitor, mainly during spring/autumn**

Occurs mainly during April, May and October, with numbers usually very small. The Wood is the primary location, although many records relate to birds flying overhead or stopping briefly.

**MAGPIE** *Pica pica*

**Common breeding resident**

Present throughout the area, with several pairs nesting annually. Larger numbers, up to 42, may gather prior to roosting in the evenings near the Wood.

**JACKDAW** *Corvus monedula*

**Common breeding resident**

Mainly found in flocks on farmed areas. 10-30 pairs nest in Camber Castle. Pre-roost counts have reached 3-500 in recent winters.

**ROOK** *Corvus frugilegus*

**Common resident**

Occurs throughout the area, often forming sizeable flocks, especially at Castle Farm. There are several rookeries in nearby countryside, but only one nesting record within the nature reserve, 2 pairs nested unsuccessfully at Castle Water in 2009.

**CARRION CROW** *Corvus corone*

**Common breeding resident**

Occurs throughout the area, although not normally forming large flocks. A few pairs nest annually.

**HOODED CROW** *Corvus corone*

**Scarce winter visitor**

Recorded in eight years from 1970, scattered throughout the year. The last record was one on the Beach Reserve from at least 21 January until 22 March 2004.

**RAVEN** *Corvus corax*

**Fairly common resident and now breeds**

First recorded in 1997, it had however only been recorded in four years until it became an annual visitor from 2006 onwards. It is now recorded in all months of the year with a peak count of 11 over the Beach Reserve on 8 October 2017. A pair has nested successfully each year since 2018.



**STARLING** *Sturnus vulgaris*

**Common breeding resident**

Few nest within the SSSI but many nest in adjacent villages and towns. Large flocks of several thousand can often be encountered, either feeding or prior to roosting in reedbeds. Rye Harbour village often has evening gatherings that sometimes use the white flagpole. Small movements are sometimes evident during the autumn. A young female ringed from one of the Wheatear nestboxes on the ground in August 1987 was recovered 234km. away in Vauville, France in November 1987.



**HOUSE SPARROW** *Passer domesticus*

**Common breeding resident**

Found particularly near human habitation or on nearby arable land, where large flocks sometimes form. Has declined dramatically as a breeding bird at Watch Cottages.

**TREE SPARROW** *Passer montanus*

**Formerly uncommon breeding resident, now absent**

Bred annually in specially erected nestboxes at Castle Farm and Castle Water up to 2001, but with none since then. Flocks used to sometimes gather during the winter months. There have been no recent records since four at Castle Pit on 16 November 2008.

**CHAFFINCH** *Fringilla coelebs*

**Common breeding resident**

Breeds in areas of scrub and trees with small numbers remaining throughout the winter months.

**BRAMBLING** *Fringilla montifringilla*

**Uncommon migrant, mainly in autumn, scarce winter visitor**

Most often seen on autumn passage between early October and November when small numbers can be seen passing overhead. One or two are occasionally noted on spring passage in March and April.

**SERIN** *Serinus serinus*

**Rare vagrant**

Singles recorded on five occasions:

1986: Beach Reserve on 19 Oct.

1994: female at Ternery Pool on 1 Jun.

1998: one flying north at the river mouth on 11 Nov.

1999: one flying west at the old lifeboat house on 6 Oct.

2010: one flying over Wader Pool on 4 May.

2014: one at Harbour Farm barns 12 Jul.

**GREENFINCH** *Carduelis chloris*

**Fairly common but declining breeding resident**

Breeding involves small numbers, and autumn used to bring large flocks of hundreds gathering on the Beach Reserve to feed on the seeds of Sea Kale. Some remain during the winter months, but the numbers have been very low in the last decade – it's now noteworthy to see any!

**GOLDFINCH** *Carduelis carduelis*

**Increasing breeding resident**

Breeds in small numbers with numbers increasing as scrub has increased. Flocks gather in the autumn when migrants are passing through. Peak counts have included 500 flying east on 12 October 2010 and 28 October 2011. Generally a few small flocks are present during the winter months, favouring the many patches of Teasel.



**SISKIN** *Carduelis spinus*

**Fairly common passage migrant**

Occurs mainly in the autumn when birds are mainly heard overhead between September and November. Numbers are generally low, although small flocks are often noted including a peak of 240 heading east on 29 September 2008. A few are sometimes noted on spring passage between March and May.

**LINNET** *Carduelis cannabina*

**Common breeding resident and passage migrant**

Present in good numbers during the breeding season when many pairs nest in scrubby areas, although numbers are difficult to estimate. Large flocks build up during the autumn, but often scarce in late winter. There were 1000 present on Flat Beach on 27 September 2018. The main return is from mid March onwards.

**TWITE** *Carduelis flavirostris*

**Scarce winter visitor**

Formerly a regular winter visitor along the saltmarsh adjacent to the Rother, but now less than annual and in small numbers, mainly between October and February. Since 2000 the species has only been recorded in November 2004 when four were present, and three that stayed on the reserve from 30 December 2018 until 12 April 2019.



Twite in March 2019 – note their yellow bill (*flavirostris*) – photo by Jane Lovell

**LESSER REDPOLL** *Carduelis flammea*

**Uncommon visitor, mainly in autumn**

The majority of records involve small groups passing overhead during October and the first half of November.

**CROSSBILL** *Loxia curvirostra*

**Scarce migrant**

Recorded overhead on 11 occasions, usually picked up by their flight calls. All records have been in the autumn except three on 17 January 2001 and one on 22 March 2003. The maximum recorded were eight flying north over Castle Water on 26 August 2001.

**BULLFINCH** *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

**Uncommon breeding resident**

Present mainly around the Wood and Winchelsea Beach area where a few pairs probably breed. Small numbers sometimes stray to other areas of scrub within the SSSI.

**HAWFINCH** *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

**Rare vagrant**

Recorded on three occasions; in the Wood, on 1 April 1989 and 10 April 1996, and at Narrow Pit on 1 February 2004.

**LAPLAND BUNTING** *Calcarius lapponicus*

**Very scarce autumn migrant and winter visitor**

Recorded in 19 years since 1970, with all records falling between 16 September (2010) and 28 January (2016). The majority have been noted from mid November onwards. Most records relate to one or two individuals, and none have remained for more than a few days, although peak counts concern six over Harbour Farm on 8 January 1994 and four at Wader Pool on 21 November 1996.

**SNOW BUNTING** *Plectrophenax nivalis*

**Scarce winter visitor**

Relatively common during the 1970's, this species has been rather scarce in recent years with most records relating to singletons, mainly between November and February.

**YELLOWHAMMER** *Emberiza citrinella*

**Very scarce visitor**

In the 1970s the species was relatively common, with sizeable flocks occurring during the winter months, and breeding was also recorded. Since 2000 singles have been recorded in only four years with the last sighting being on 2 November 2008.

**ORTOLAN BUNTING** *Emberiza hortulana*

**Rare vagrant**

Recorded on two occasions:

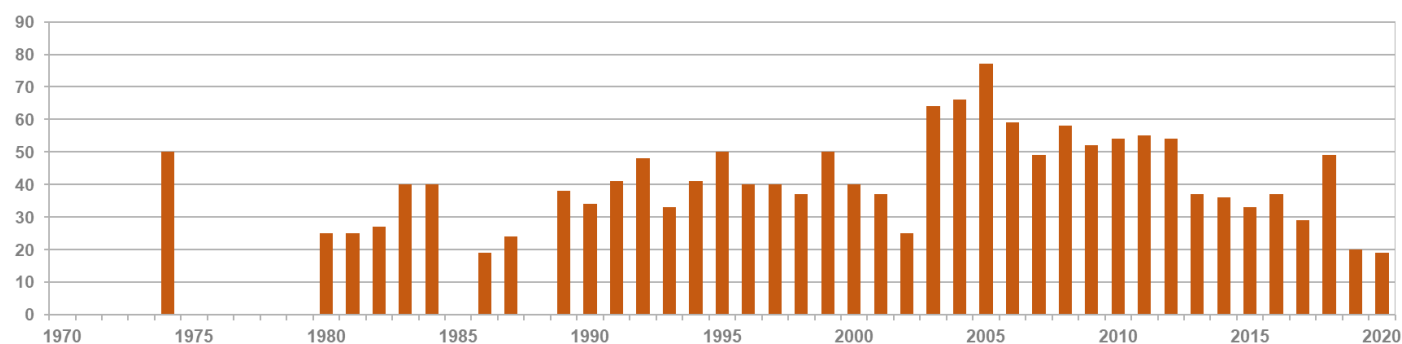
1995: an immature at Rye Harbour on 16 and 17 Sep.

1996: male near Long Pit on 4 May.

**REED BUNTING** *Emberiza schoeniclus*

**Common breeding resident**

An average of 40 pairs have nested annually since 1970, with peak estimates of 77 pairs in 2005. An increase in numbers is often evident during the autumn as birds stop off on passage, but lower numbers remain for the winter.



Reed Bunting pairs breeding at Rye Harbour

**BLACK-HEADED BUNTING** *Emberiza melanocephala*

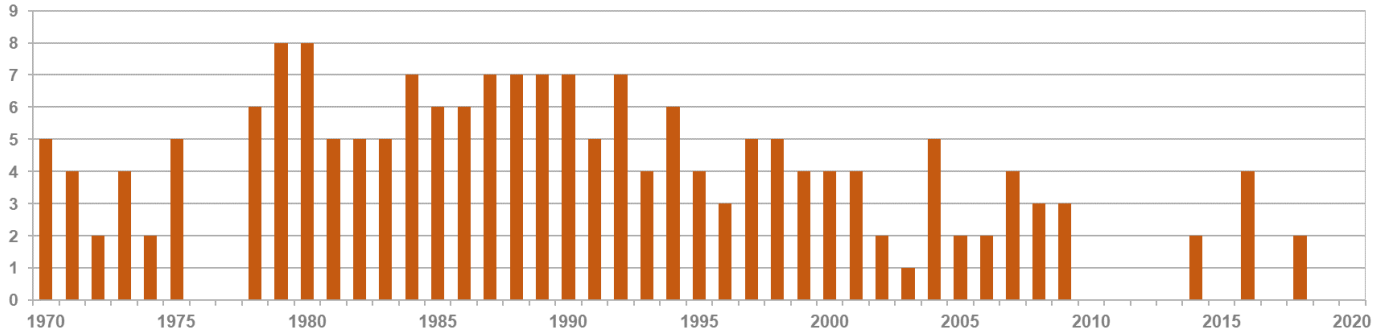
**Rare vagrant**

A male on 8 and 9 September 1971 is the only record.

**CORN BUNTING** *Miliaria calandra*

**Used to breed and be resident, but now rare visitor**

Up to 8 singing males were regular until 2009, then suspected breeding became erratic and the number of winter visitors had plummeted. The maximum since then has been seven on 9 February 2015. A few are still seen each winter with records until mid June.



Corn Bunting pairs breeding at Rye Harbour



Corn Bunting at Rye Harbour Farm 23 January 2005

# Fish

**BROWN TROUT** *Salmo trutta fario*

**Introduced to SSSI, but not seen recently**

It was probably this species that was introduced for fishing to the Long and Narrow Pits in the 1950s. In July and August 1979 several dead trout were seen there.

**PIKE** *Esox lucius*

**Common in fresh water**

Common at Castle Water where they can sometimes be seen in the clear water waiting to ambush their prey. In spring the occasional dead specimen seen floating there may be due to the stress of spawning.



**COMMON CARP** *Cyprinus carpio*

**Common and widespread**

This non-native fish is common at Castle Water and other pits that are not too saline. In May spawning activity may be seen among emergent vegetation with large specimens cruising through the shallows and splashing amongst the emergent vegetation. In the clear water of Castle Water large specimens can be watched on calm days, especially from the Halpin hide



Common Carp spawning from the Halpin hide 15 June 2012

**GRASS CARP** *Ctenopharyngodon idella*

**Introduced to SSSI, but not seen recently**

This species is thought to have been introduced to Castle Water before 1990 to control the growth of aquatic weed. It is a native of Asia and is not known to breed in north west Europe. None have been seen since and the weed still grows thickly !

**CATFISH** *Siluris glanis*

**Introduced to SSSI, but not seen recently**

Introduced into the Long and Narrow Pits in the 1950s, but not seen recently.

**TENCH** *Tinca tinca*

**Common in fresh water**

Common at Castle Water where large specimens over 3kg. have been caught. Young fish are often caught in ponds and ditches while “pond dipping”, being easily identified by the black spot at the base of the tail.

**BREAM** *Abramis brama*

**Introduced to SSSI, but not seen recently**

Introduced to Castle Water before 1980 to improve the fishing interest there. No young fish have been reported and the last known adult was caught in 1993.

**RUDD** *Scardinius erythrophthalmus*

**Very common and widespread**

In Castle Water, and other pits and ponds of low salinity this is the most common species. At Castle Water the shallow areas created since 1992 have been places to see large shoals of small Rudd. The shallow water warms up quickly and is free of Pike! This apparent increase in the population may be a factor in the area’s capacity to hold many Bittern, Little Egret, Grey Heron, Cormorant and Great Crested Grebe.

**ROACH** *Rutilus rutilus*

**Common in fresh water**

Similar in distribution and appearance to Rudd, but less common.

**DACE** *Leuciscus leuciscus*

**Scarce and local**

Thought to occur in Long Pit where large specimens, to 700g., were reported in 1998.

**EEL** *Anguilla anguilla*

**Very common and widespread**

Common in all water bodies with some very large individuals claimed, such as the 1.2m. long catch at Castle Water in 1993.



Eel caught during fish survey 10 December 2002

**PERCH** *Perca fluviatilis*

**Uncommon, but widespread**

Known recently from Narrow Pit and Castle Water, but only in small numbers.

**GOLDEN MULLET** *Liza aurata*

**Scarce and local**

Mullet are regularly seen in Nook Drain and in the river Brede near the lock. However, the only confirmed identification of this species occurred in February 1987 during freezing weather when 12 fish about 30cm. long were found dying in Nook Drain near Watch Cottage.

**THREE-SPINED STICKLEBACK** *Gasterosteus aculeatus*

**Very common and widespread**

Common in all water bodies. Even found getting into the Wader Pool and Quarry from the tidal river Rother, demonstrating that they are very tolerant of a wide range of salinity.

**TEN-SPINED STICKLEBACK** *Pungitius pungitius*

**Scarce and local**

This species was found in the Rye Harbour Petty Sewer in 1994.

# Amphibians

**GREAT CRESTED NEWT** *Triturus cristatus*

**Scarce and local**

The first record for the area was not until March 1994, when a female was found on an island at Castle Water during a work party. Since then there have been a further seven records involving up to seven individuals. This species has probably benefited from the creation of ditches and ponds and the lower grazing pressure at Castle Water.

**SMOOTH NEWT** *Triturus vulgaris*

**Very common and widespread**

This is the most common newt species and is found in most water bodies, even the saline Ternery Pool where large numbers were often seen under work rafts. During most of the year they can be found away from water under virtually every log and stone – they only return to water to breed,



A very young Smooth Newt found under a log at Watch Cottage 22 March 2019

**PALMATE NEWT** *Triturus helveticus*

**Scarce and local**

The only record was of three found during a nocturnal Great Crested Newt survey in a ditch near the Castle Farm barns in March 1998.

**COMMON TOAD** *Bufo bufo*

**Common and widespread**

This common species is often overlooked, but in spring its high pitch call can be heard in most water bodies and in February and March it can sometimes be seen on mild wet nights along the track to Watch Cottage.

**COMMON FROG** *Rana temporaria*

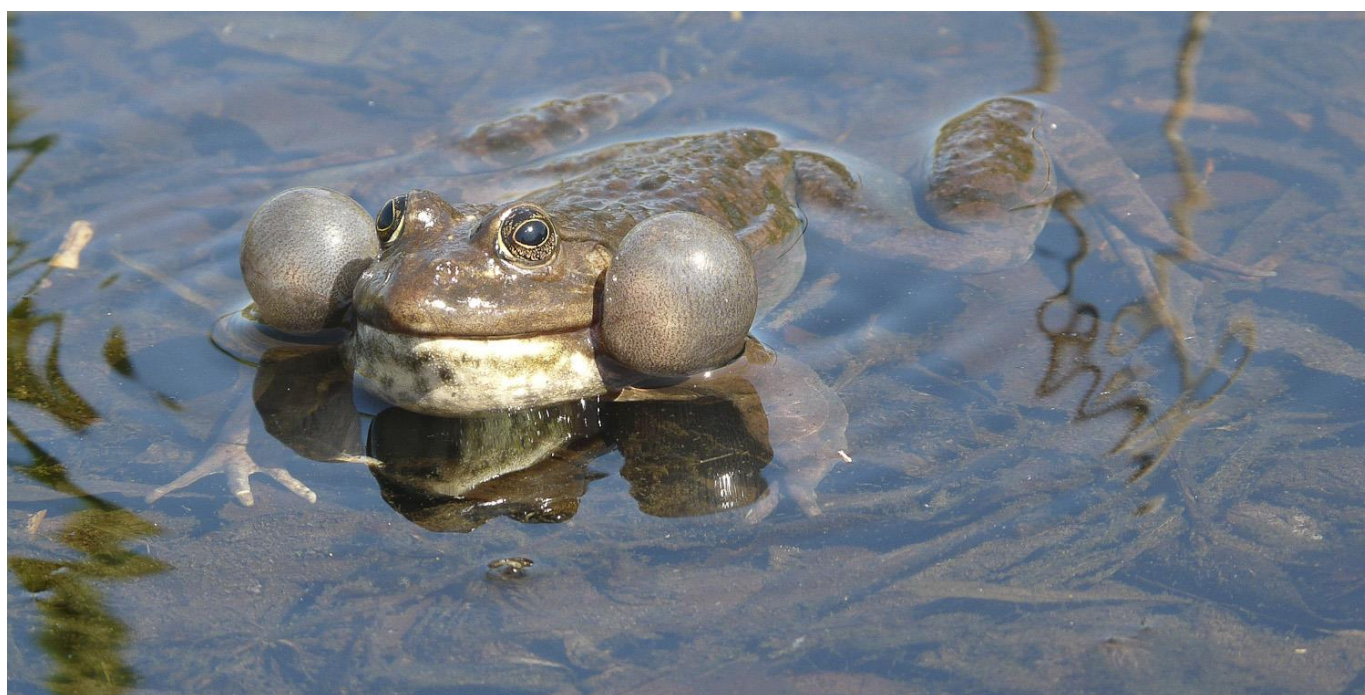
**Scarce and local**

Just 12 records of this native species, mostly from Castle Water. Not recorded this century. It is likely that that the large and numerous Marsh Frog is a direct competitor.

**MARSH FROG** *Rana ridibunda*

**Introduced, abundant and widespread**

This species was introduced from Hungary to the Romney Marshes in 1935 and had spread to the west of Pett Level by 1940. It is now one of the characteristic sounds of the area - its laughing call is produced by “blowing up its cheeks” and is heard from mid-April until October. It does not wander far from water, but will sunbath within jumping distance of it. It is tolerant of high salinity, even occasionally at the Wader Pool and Ternery Pool. It may be detrimental to native species, including the Common Frog, but it is also the most important food of the rare Medicinal Leech and regular prey of Marsh Harrier.



A calling Marsh Frog 2 June 2009

# Reptiles

**RED-EARED TERRAPIN**     *Chrysemys scripta elegans*

**Introduced and rare**

Introductions of this American species may be the result of unwanted pets growing too large. Hibernation is possible, but it is doubtful if breeding is possible, so the few individuals involved should not be a threat to native species. One seen in the ditch near the Wood in May 1982 was probably the same as one there in 1984, but hopefully different from the one in front of the hide at Castle Water in June 2000.

**COMMON LIZARD**     *Lacerta vivipara*

**Common and widespread**

Found throughout the SSSI, but often overlooked. The earliest date seen was 1 April 1995, and the latest 30 October 1993. The best time to watch them is on cold, but sunny autumn days when they are sunbathing on fence posts, stones or logs. They are very approachable and photogenic, but easy prey for Kestrels!



**SLOW-WORM**     *Anguis fragilis*

**Common and widespread**

Not often seen unless searched for under logs, stones or corrugated iron. At Castle Water 15 were found together in a Rabbit burrow on 4 March 1997 when a work party was reprofiling an area to create a sandy habitat for the rare carabid beetle *Omophron limbatum*.



A pair of Slow-worms with the female larger and with a dark stripe along the back

**GRASS SNAKE** *Natrix natrix*

**Common and widespread**

Numerous records from throughout the SSSI, but most are from Castle Water where there is long grass and rushes, shallow water and sandy soils that warm up quickly and lots of food..... The earliest record was 19 March 1995.



Grass Snake eating a large Marsh Frog, very slowly 6 May 2008

# Mammals

## **HEDGEHOG** *Erinaceus europaeus*

### **Scarce and local**

Recorded in nine of the 16 years to 1986, mostly from around Rye Harbour Village. There have only been four records since 1986, two were road casualties outside the SSSI and two were at Rye Harbour Farm. This apparent decline has coincided with the increase in the number of Badgers.

## **MOLE** *Talpa europaea*

### **Common and local**

Common on the pasture of the northern half of the SSSI. The individuals are rarely seen, but the molehills are an obvious feature.



## **COMMON SHREW** *Sorex araneus*

### **Common and widespread**

Found throughout the SSSI and their remains are common in Barn Owl pellets.

## **PYGMY SHREW** *Sorex minutus*

### **Scarce and widespread**

Less frequently encountered than the Common Shrew, but probably widespread. Several of the nine records were found freshly dead along paths. Trail cameras are revealing more, such as this one under wood on Rye Harbour Farm <https://youtu.be/BA4yQlleeOw>

## **WATER SHREW** *Neomys fodiens*

### **Scarce but widespread**

There are few records of this black shrew. In April 1985 one was disturbed from the work raft at Ternery Pool and swam after it for a short distance during a workparty. Recent developments of trail cameras has shown them to be quite widespread, for example this one in a reedbed on Rye Harbour Farm <https://youtu.be/Z-ouibUBml4>

**NATTERER'S BAT**     *Myotis nattereri*

**Scarce**

This species has a preference for woodland habitat, however it can often be found foraging along vegetated watersides. The first records are of up to four feeding by trees near the Rye Harbour Martello Tower in June 1998, 1999 and 2000. Four were caught for ringing between 2015 and 2019 at Castle Water.



Natterer's Bat caught for ringing at Castle Water 5 September 2015

**DAUBENTON'S BAT**     *Myotis daubentoni*

**Common**

This species is often called the 'water bat' as they often fly low over water, catching their insect prey from the surface. There are several records of up to five feeding over the larger gravel pits within the SSSI in the summers of 1982, 1989 and from 1996. Nine were caught for ringing between 2015 and 2019 at Castle Water. They are regularly recorded at Castle Water.

**SEROTINE**     *Eptesicus serotinus*

**Scarce**

This species mainly preys upon moths and beetles, with dung and chafer beetles being a favourite. The species is showing signs of population decline in East Sussex. Recorded occasionally at Castle Water.

**NOCTULE** *Nyctalus noctula*

**Common**

One of the largest British bat species and usually seen early in the evening, sometimes before sunset. They feed upon moths, beetles, mayflies and flying ants and in turn the cattle grazing surrounding Castle Water is of significance. There were regular counts of 100-300 of this large bat over the SSSI from 1978 until 1983. These were thought to come from a roost in an old Oak tree near Rye. In recent years adults and juveniles have been regularly recorded foraging at Castle Water during the peak summer months, a maternity roost is likely to be a short distance away. This a link to one calling over Castle Water 10 September 2020 <https://youtu.be/guViMeLeinY>



Noctule bat caught at Castle Water for ringing 2 August 2015

**COMMON PIPISTRELLE** *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*

**Common and widespread**

This is our commonest bat and it calls at 45kHz. The pipistrelles were so common before 1990 that there were Nature reserve guided walks to watch and hear the regular “flocks” feeding over the pits on summer evenings. They are still regularly seen and heard over all pits, but not in those high numbers. Occasionally seen on mild winter days.

**SOPRANO PIPISTRELLE** *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*

**Common and widespread**

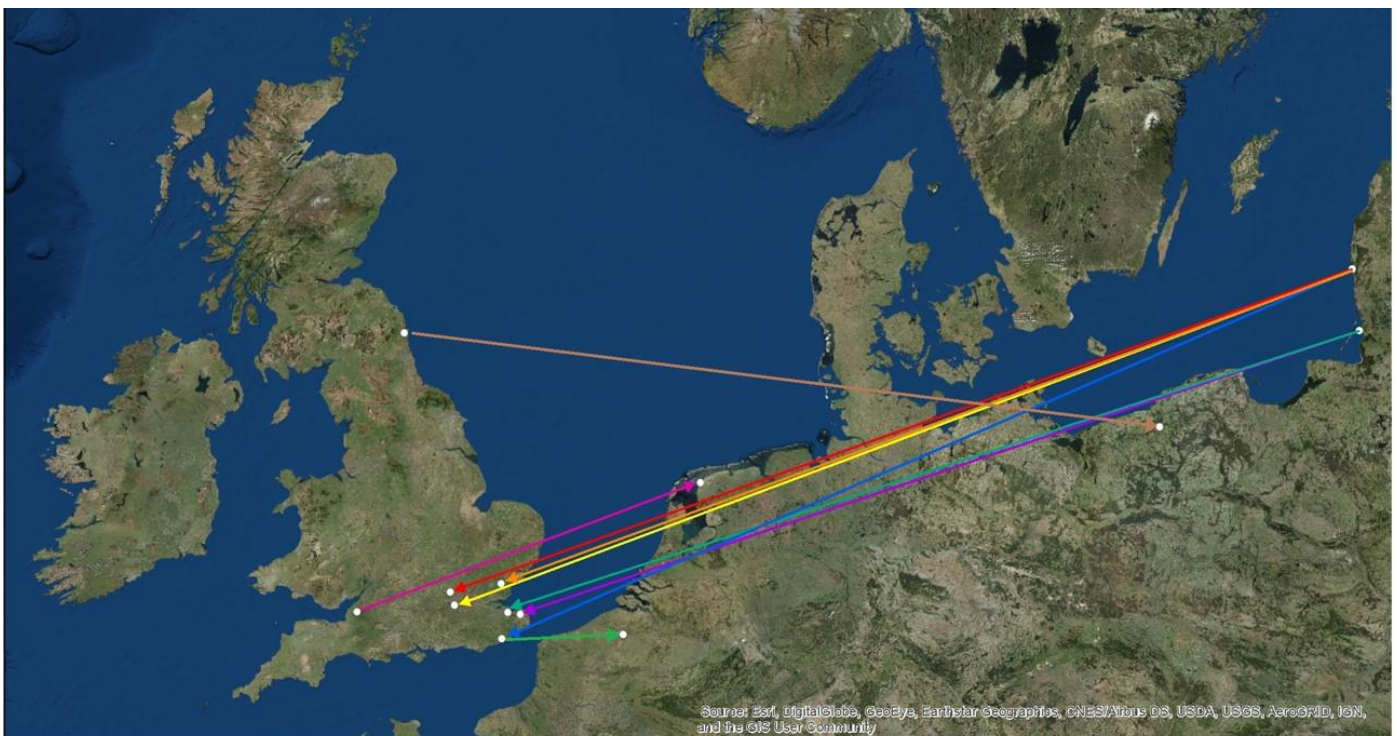
This species was only differentiated from the Common Pipistrelle in 1999 and so pre-1999 records will have included the Soprano Pipistrelle. This species can be distinguished on a bat detector via its echolocation frequency which is around 55kHz. Soprano pipistrelle have similar habitat preferences to the Common Pipistrelle, however Soprano Pipistrelle are more frequently associated with wetland habitats. This species is abundant and commonly recorded at Castle Water, with maternity roosts within close proximity.

**NATHUSIUS' PIPISTRELLE** *Pipistrellus nathusii*

**Common and widespread**

This is a rare bat in the UK, though records have increased in recent years. It is a migratory species, and most bats are encountered in autumn, although some do remain all year and breed in the UK. It is similar in appearance to, but slightly larger than the much more commonly found pipistrelles. It has been recorded at Castle Water from late March, through to November, with peak activity recorded during the late summer and autumn migration period. Acoustic data over many years in the area had confirmed the presence of the species. Water bodies are particularly important for this species during the migration period as they provide a reliable source of insect prey for them to feed upon and provide the necessary energy.

In autumn 2015 The National Nathusius' Pipistrelle Project recaptured the first European ringed bat in the UK, a young male Nathusius' Pipistrelle had flown (at least) 1,453km from Latvia to the UK here at Castle Water, 50 days after it left Latvia. In autumn 2016, the team recaptured an adult female 1.5hrs after having been released (following capture) by a team in Kent at Dungeness, confirming a coastal flight path. Following this, a female ringed at the reserve in 2015 was discovered in 2018 in Belgium, this was the first UK ringed female bat to be confirmed as having crossed The English Channel.



- Blagdon, North Somerset to Holland - 597km
- Latvia to Rye, East Sussex - 1,453km
- Lithuania to Oare, Kent - 1,418km
- Lithuania to Stodmarsh, Kent - 1,396km
- Latvia to Hillingdon, London - 1,492km
- Latvia to Maldon, Essex - 1,410km
- Latvia to Feltham, London - 1,499km
- Rye, East Sussex to Belgium - 215km
- Druridge Bay, Northumberland to Poland - 1,190km

Examples of ringing recoveries of Nathusius' Bat, including two that relate to the nature reserve.

**BROWN LONG-EARED BAT** *Plecotus auritus*

**Rare**

This is also known as the ‘whispering bat’ owing to their very quiet echolocation calls. They catch their prey by both hawking and gleaning and they specialise in preying upon moths and butterflies. The first was caught on barbed wire in August 1982, one in Rye Harbour shop in October 1985, one flying at Winchelsea Beach in October 1995 and one at Castle Water in 2019.

**WHISKERED BAT** *Myotis mystacinus*

**Scarce**

This species forages in a variety of habitats, including over open large water bodies and vegetated edge habitats, catching a broad variety of insects. Seven recorded at Castle Water between 2015 and 2018, both sexes present.

**RABBIT** *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

**Abundant and widespread**

This introduced species occurs throughout the SSSI, even close to the shore. As a competitor to arable and sheep farming the numbers are controlled by landowners. It frequently suffers from myxomatosis and we now suspect that Viral Haemorrhagic Disease plays a part in controlling numbers. It can be a significant grazer of many shingle flowering plants including the endangered Least Lettuce, so 15 Rabbit exclosures were constructed in the last 15 years to maintain a varied flora. However, Rabbits do create the ideal short turf for the endangered weevil *Limobius mixtus*, Ringed Plovers and Wheatear and it is also the prey of Stoat and Fox, and of course, home to the Rabbit Flea, *Spilopsyllus cuniculi*.

**BROWN HARE** *Lepus capensis*

**Scarce and widespread**

Nowadays this popular mammal is only encountered occasionally. In the 1980s up to 26 could be seen at one time just across the Beach Reserve and it was a regular sight passing in front of the hides. Since then the population of Fox and Badger has increased and the improved electric fences prevented the movement of Hares and the last seen in the south part of the reserve was in about 2005.

**GREY SQUIRREL** *Sciurus carolinensis*

**Scarce**

With so little woodland in the area this species remains rare, except in the Wood. However, on 23 August 1993 one did make it into the SSSI when it was seen on the roof of Watch Cottage!

**BANK VOLE** *Clethrionomys glareolus*

**Common and widespread**

Probably widespread, but very few records.

**FIELD VOLE** *Microtus agrestis*

**Common and widespread**

Trapped throughout the SSSI, recorded as bones in the pellets of Barn Owls and now seen by trail cameras. This may be the most common small mammal here.

**WATER VOLE** *Arvicola terrestris*

**Common and widespread**

This is the UK’s most rapidly declining mammal and has been lost from 94% of places where they were once prevalent. Against this national trend it is common throughout the nature reserve. They are rarely seen, but leave characteristic signs of short lengths of chewed vegetation and latrines along the network of ditches. The trapping of the American Mink by several local landowners is part of the reason this species does well here. A video of one at night can be seen here <https://youtu.be/LppQDtEbJB4>

**WOOD MOUSE** *Apodemus sylvaticus*

**Common and widespread**

This is the most frequently seen small mammal, which is often seen running across fields and tracks at night and it is a frequent visitor to every part of the nature reserve.

**HARVEST MOUSE** *Micromys minutus*

**Scarce and local**

There are few records of this tiny mouse, but recently trail cameras have shown it to be widespread, especially in reedbeds. In October 1980 one was brought into Watch Cottage by a cat. In the summer of 1989 one was trapped at Harbour Farm. In November 2002 two were found on one of the very small islands of Ternery Pool (at least 45 metres from the shore) among the dense growth of Sea Aster that a workparty was clearing. Their tennis ball sized nest are sometimes found in margins of ungrazed reedbed.



Harvest Mouse on island at Ternery Pool 5 November 2002

**BROWN RAT** *Rattus norvegicus*

**Common and widespread**

Frequently seen at night around buildings on and adjacent to the SSSI. In 1980 there was a colony established at Lime Kiln Cottage. In 1995 it became a serious problem to the breeding seabirds on the islands of Ternery Pool. Still occasionally caught on trail cameras

**HOUSE MOUSE** *Mus musculus*

**Common, but local**

Was a regular winter visitor to Watch and Lime Kiln Cottages, but not seen recently.

**BOTTLE-NOSED DOLPHIN** *Tursiops truncatus*

**Scarce**

From May to August this species is occasionally seen in Rye Bay. They are most easily seen around high water when the weather is calm and sunny. Recorded in three years since 1995 with groups of up to six individuals.

**BLUE-WHITE DOLPHIN** *Stenella caeruleoalba*

**Rare**

One was found dead on a falling tide on 16 February 1996. It measured 143cm long.

**WHITE-BEAKED DOLPHIN** *Lagenorhynchus albirostris*

**Rare**

On 8th May 2016 local fisherman Colin Brown was out fishing in Rye Bay about eight miles south of Rye Harbour when he captured a video of at least two White-beaked Dolphins. The video can be viewed at [https://youtu.be/zM8XPzt\\_Myl](https://youtu.be/zM8XPzt_Myl)

**COMMON PORPOISE** *Phocoena phocoena*

**Scarce**

Occasional individuals washed up on shore are presumed to be bycatch of commercial fishing.

**KILLER WHALE** *Orcinus orca*

**Rare**

Reports of a group of large black and white dolphins in July 1991 may have been this species.

**FIN WHALE** *Balaenoptera physalus*

**Rare**

In November 2006 a 17metre long Fin Whale was washed onto the beach at Camber.



**FOX** *Vulpes vulpes*

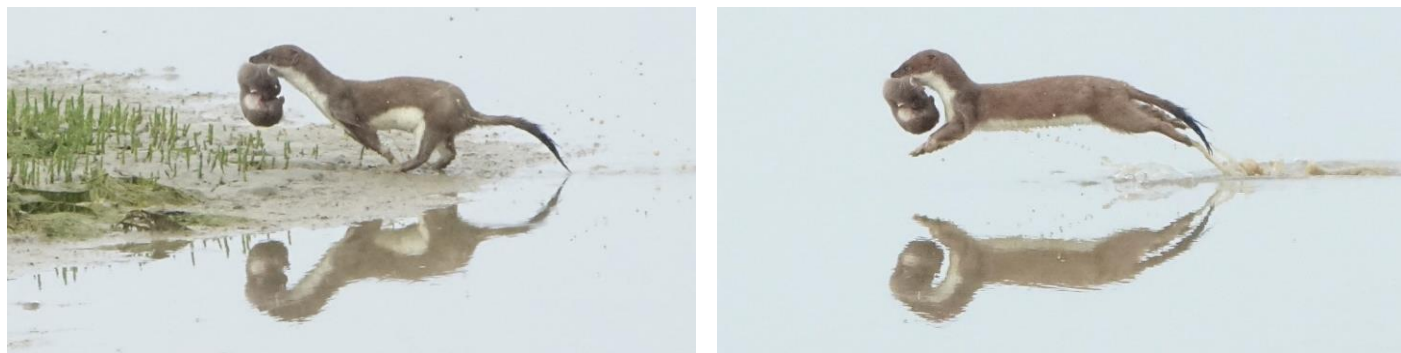
**Common and widespread**

This species remains common in part due to people feeding them in gardens and caravan sites in the surrounding area. The population is also sustained by high rabbit numbers. Before about 1985 the local Fox population was controlled because of the commercial value of winter pelts. About that date the rising concern of animal welfare and the wearing of animal fur reduced the value and the pressure from local people declined. The Fox population has since increased and put greater pressure on most ground nesting birds. This has had a dramatic impact on all species of breeding terns which may already be under threat from the decline in the food available from the sea.

**STOAT** *Mustela erminea*

**Common and widespread**

The most common member of the mustellid family which is seen regularly throughout the SSSI. Individuals showing the white “ermine” colouration were noted in January 1989 and March 1990, so was probably the same individual. On 24<sup>th</sup> May 2018, after heavy rain, the female in the photo below was observed moving her 10 kits, one at a time, from the Wader Pool to a drier site 400m away near the Red-roofed hut. A similar behaviour was observed after heavy rain about the same date in 2019.



**WEASEL** *Mustela nivalis*

**Common and widespread**

This smallest of member the Mustellid family is not often seen because of the small population, its small size and its secretive nature.

**FERAL FERRET** *Mustela furo*

**Introduced and scarce**

Apart from a family group of six at Castle Water in July 1979 there have only been occasional sightings of individuals lost after efforts to reduce the rabbit population.

**AMERICAN MINK** *Mustela vison*

**Introduced, common and widespread**

Sightings are regular throughout the SSSI, except from Ternery Pool. Most individuals are black with a small white chin spot. This introduced species is a major threat to Water Voles and ground nesting birds, so the nature reserve operates monitoring rafts all year round and trap them when there are any signs. Since 1996 one to twelve have been trapped each year which contributes to the success of native species.

**BADGER** *Meles meles*

**Common and widespread**

In 1979 there was just one occupied sett in the SSSI, by 1982 there were two, 1985 three, 1995 at least five, by 2000 there were about 10 in or close by and 22 by 2010! This dramatic increase followed the protection in 1981 and 1992 which gave the Badger more protection than any other species. (The Badgers Act 1973 afforded limited protection against badger digging, but this practice was not finally outlawed until 1981. The Protection of Badgers Act 1992 consolidates past Badger legislation and, in addition to protecting the Badger itself, makes it an offence to damage, destroy or obstruct Badger setts.) This was also a time when there was a decline in the number of Hedgehogs, Bumblebees, Lapwing, Black-headed Gulls and terns. Individual Badgers have been observed out on the islands of Ternery Pool during the breeding season and footprints are found on many islands at Castle Water. At Rye Harbour the ground often dries out in spring which probably makes earthworms, the preferred food of Badgers, difficult to obtain. Unlike the Fox it is not possible to control the Badger population, but its impact on some of our other wildlife has been reduced by electric fencing.

**COMMON SEAL** *Phoca vitulina*

**Was scarce, but now common**

Before this century 1-3 individuals could be found in winter in the Rother estuary, but today there is a small population of up to 10 and they may breed.



Common Seal at river mouth 21 August 2012

**GREY SEAL** *Halichoerus grypus*

**Was rare, but now common**

Before this century there were just occasional sightings offshore, but now they can be seen regularly all year round.



Grey Seal on shore 12 September 2015

**MUNTJAC** *Muntiacus reevesi*

**Introduced and rare**

The only deer record for the SSSI was an unlikely visitor to the Beach Reserve early on 11 July 1989.

## Appendix 1 - Wildlife Recording

The nature reserve keeps its wildlife records on a computer database called RECORDER, which enables a large amount of data to be kept safely and accessible. This data is shared with the Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre

You can help to add to this information which will in turn help us to protect and manage the wildlife, and assess the populations that occur in the area. Please send your wildlife records to [rhnroffice@sussexwt.org.uk](mailto:rhnroffice@sussexwt.org.uk)

### What makes a useful wildlife record ?

A useful record does not need to be of an unusual species, we are lacking a lot of information on the distribution of many common species.

An acceptable wildlife record needs four basic parts;

- the name of the species - please indicate if you are not 100% certain.
- its location - preferably a name and a six figure grid reference e.g. Discovery Centre at TQ945186.
- date - preferably 9 October 2021, but October 2021, autumn 2021, but 2021 or before 2021 can be used.
- your name and anyone else involved in identifying the species.

other information is useful;

- abundance - an exact count, or 1, 10, 100, 1000, or
- DAFOR- dominant, abundant, frequent, occasional, rare.
- sex/stage - male, immature, or flowering, rosette, seeding.
- record type - sighting, dead on road, trapped.....
- associated species - e.g. feeding on leaves of White Willow.
- comment - e.g. seen on road after heavy rain or found under stone.

*Please make sure that you keep to public places, or, footpaths,  
or, that you have the landowner's permission.*

### And Finally...

We would appreciate your support our work by joining one or both of the charities that enable the nature reserve to operate.

[Please join Sussex Wildlife Trust by clicking here](#)

[Please join The Friends by clicking here](#)

And if you have found this report interesting we hope to be able to produce a printed version in 2021. A donation would help this process along, please give online

[DONATION](#)

Thank-you.  
Barry Yates

31 December 2020