

American Wigeon *Anas americana*

BOU Category:	AE (GB), A (site) †
Site status:	vagrant visitor
Devon status:	<i>very rare vagrant</i> †
Conservation status:	BOCC3 (unlisted); † SPEC (unlisted); IUCN European and Global (Least Concern) †
Conservation levels:	n/a †

International

A fluctuating, but long-term stable population trend, it is presently estimated at 2.2 million mature individuals. † It breeds inland in low arctic and boreal regions, on lake islands but sometimes far from water, in Alaska and across Canada as far N as the Arctic Circle and in recent decades has spread E to Nova Scotia. It reaches S to Nevada, Colorado and Nebraska, where it is resident, and rarely also breeds in Michigan and Pennsylvania. It winters on shallow sheltered inshore waters, estuaries and lakes, generally S of its breeding range from 43°N; some along the Pacific coast N to British Columbia, also inland where relatively less common. It most commonly winters along the W Atlantic coast S from Massachusetts, reaching the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean Sea, including the W Indies, S to Columbia. † †

Following its post-breeding moult, migration from Sep peaks in Oct/Nov. Large numbers migrate E through the Great Lakes, then S along the Atlantic coast. The same route in reverse is taken in about Apr, reaching its furthest outposts in Alaska by late-May. †

Europe

Most frequently recorded in Britain and Ireland, it is also recorded in (records to 1999 ~ 2001) in Iceland (112), Finland (38), the Netherlands (35), France (31), Spain (18) and at least seven other NW European countries. † The establishment and increase of a population in NE Canada from the 1960s, reached by a NNE migration along the Atlantic coast in spring could account for spring records in Greenland & Iceland. † Interestingly, nearly all Scandinavia records were also in spring, but these may involve birds moving N that had crossed the Atlantic in a previous autumn. †

Great Britain and Ireland

There were a total of 462 records for Britain and Ireland up to the end of 2001 and 2000, respectively. Only 22 records prior to 1958 and not annually recorded until 1973, from then it has generally increased with double-figures of records annually since the mid-1980s (except the early-1990s) with a peak of 30 in 2000. This species was no longer considered by BBRC from 2002. †

The vast majority of records are believed to refer to genuine vagrants, but with records from every month of the year, despite efforts to exclude them, accepted records could still include some birds of captive origin. † Direct evidence of genuine vagrancy shown by five ringed birds, † including a pullus ringed New Brunswick, E Canada on 06 Aug 1966, shot on 07 Oct (2 months later) in Shetland, and a juv also ringed there on 29 Aug 1968, shot on 12 Oct (6 weeks later) in Co. Kerry, in a flock of this species that peaked at 13 on the previous day. † Thought to be common in wildfowl collections, its free-flying captive origin status is very poorly understood. †

Although records in all seasons are widespread, there exists bias to N & W regions in autumn; about a quarter of all records have occurred in Oct. Winter records are widespread, though generally occur where Wigeon winter, and spring records have a North Sea coast bias, suggestive of return migration. †

An increase in observer effort and an eastward spread of the breeding population may account for the increase in records in Britain. Population fluctuations and improved identification proficiency apparently do not correlate to record patterns.

Devon

Since the first two in 1983, there were 17 records of single birds, including those in 2011 and 2012. Three of these records relate to single dates, other birds remained from two days to some months. All have first dates within the period 15 Sep - 07 Apr and nine appeared in Oct/Nov. † The pattern of occurrence fits that for a transatlantic vagrant that performs both autumn and spring migrations along the W Atlantic seaboard and despite the presence of free-flying captive origin birds in the country, there is a complete absence of any accepted exotica (Cat D & E) records in Devon for this species (since the inclusion of such records in DBRs from 1988). There is, therefore, a presumption of genuine vagrancy, rather than of captive origin, in Devon. All have appeared with Eurasian Wigeon on reservoirs and on or next to tidal estuaries. †



15/01/2012 © Lee Collins

A hybrid drake on the Exe Estuary, off Exmouth, seen on 4 dates Oct - Dec 2007, was the first county record of an Eurasian Wigeon x American Wigeon. †

With hundreds of Eurasian Wigeon annually in N America, wild bred hybrids are regarded as more frequent than captive bred pairings. Hybrids, intraspecific variation and morphs are confusing identification pitfalls. †

Dawlish Warren

There are **three records** of single individuals:

27 Oct 1990 ~ 19 Jan 1991	drake; found from the hide (Brian Heasman <i>et al</i>)
07 Apr 2011	drake; close offshore (Alan Salter <i>et al</i>)
23 Oct 2011 - 11 Feb 2012	drake; in Shutterton Creek (LC <i>et al</i>)

All three records here relate to drakes found with Eurasian Wigeon.

The first American Wigeon was found from the hide amongst the assembled thousands of wildfowl on the estuary. Owing to difficult viewing (no public access to the golf course) it was not seen again until 13 Dec, and for a time moved to Exmouth, last being seen on 19 Jan 1991. Only the 2nd record for Devon; Britain recorded its then highest annual total in 1990.

The second record for the recording area was found with three Wigeon offshore mid-afternoon, where they remained until dark, but had departed by the following morning. The latest Devon record and only the second to appear in spring.



07/04/2011 © Ivan Lakin

The third drake first appeared within 1350+ Wigeon on the estuary along Shutterton Creek where it stayed, seen almost every day until 03 Feb 2012, when only relatively few wildfowl remained. It departed N at c.11:00 with a small flock of Wigeon and was later found on Bowling Green Marsh. Following a severe frost, it and hundreds of Wigeon returned to the less frozen waters of Shutterton Creek the following day, where it stayed until 11 Feb. It was relocated on 14 Feb at Powderham Marshes and soon settled on the adjacent Exminster Marshes, last seen there on 19 Mar 2012.



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