

BOU Category:	A (GB and site) †
Site status:	vagrant
Devon status:	very rare vagrant † †
Conservation status:	BOCC3 (unlisted); † SPEC (unlisted); IUCN European and Global (Least Concern) †
Conservation levels:	nationally important (not applicable)

International

It is widespread across the southern hemisphere and north to c.50°N, except N Africa and W Europe. Four or five subspecies recognised; *alba* is the resident race in Europe.

Europe

Following reduced persecution for the plume trade, re-colonisation of south-east Europe in the 1940s accelerated through the 1970s † with rapid population increase and expansion into western Europe since the 1990s. Its breeding distribution in Europe remains fragmented, reflecting availability of extensive wetlands and reed-beds. Its strongholds are in Hungary, Ukraine and Russia, but scattered isolated colonies exist elsewhere in Europe, † most notably at Oostvaardersplassen, Netherlands, established since 1978 and supporting 45 pairs in 2002. † It is a relatively short distance migrant with main wintering areas around the E Mediterranean, including the Adriatic, Turkey and Israel, though is increasingly found at unfrozen inland wetlands, estuaries and coasts elsewhere in Europe. †

Great Britain

Previously extremely rare, the increasing appearance of this stately white heron has reflected its expansion westward and colonisation of the Netherlands. † An annual visitor since 1997, † it ceased to be considered by BBRC after 2005. † Since 2010 has remained resident at a site in SW England, breeding for the first time in 2012.

Devon

Excluding unconfirmed historic reports, the first proven record was in 1989 and the county has assembled 18 records involving 20 birds to 2010. It has appeared in all months Apr - Dec, with slight peaks in spring and autumn. †

Dawlish Warren

There are three records:

- 18 Oct 1997 one strode about the mudflats for 20 minutes on the ebbing tide before flying up the estuary. Later that evening it was relocated at Countess Wear, 7 miles north at the top end of the Exe Estuary, but soon departed flying NNW upriver. After a series of unconfirmed sightings, presumably the same bird was seen again on 22 Oct flying N over the VC towards the estuary, but was not relocated. This was the 5th for Devon and the 97th accepted record for Britain (IL, KRy). †
- 31 May 2000 leaving the site after a day's birding, the finder watched it from the car park as it flew over the golf course and down the coastline towards Dawlish (KRy). The 7th for Devon. Possibly same as one at Ashleworth Ham, Gloucestershire; one of 26+ records accepted by BBRC in 2000. †
- 11 May 2002 one flew SW over the site at 18:22, before circling round and heading back NNE over the sea and 10 minutes later was still visible distantly, flying high over Orcombe Point, Exmouth (IL, ARo, KRy *et al*). The team of three delighted observers were on a 24-hour bird race at the time, later breaking the county record, which still stands at 140 species – what a day! The 9th for Devon; one of at least 50 records accepted by BBRC in 2002. †