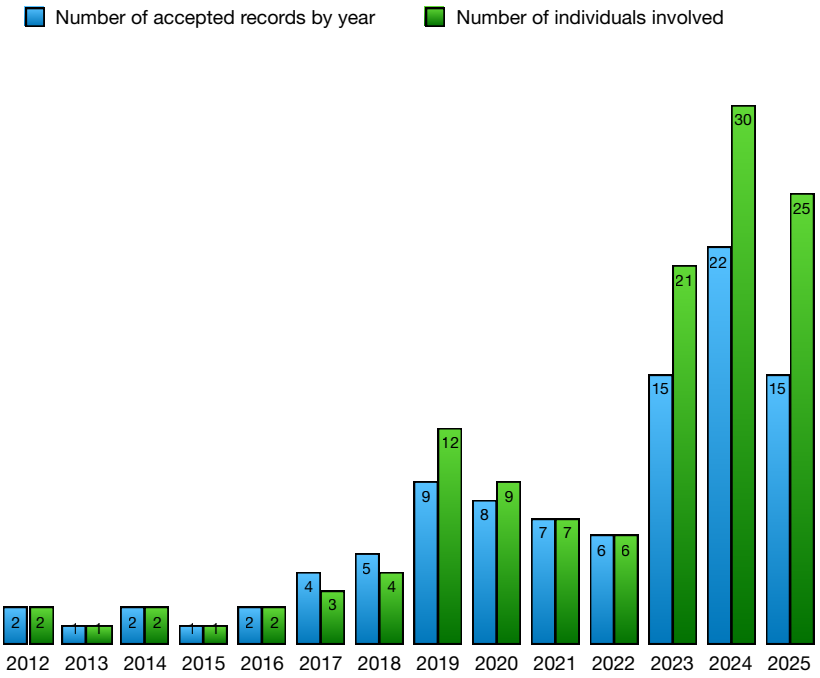
As of November 1st, 2025, Great White Egret was removed from the County Rarity List and descriptions will no longer be required by the Greater Manchester County Rarity Committee.

The first county record was 30 years ago, when one was found at Prestolee Road on 30th July 1995, seen the following day at Abram Flashes. It was a further seven years until the next record, with a bird at Chorlton Water Park on 18th August 2002, also seen the following day at Broad Ees Dole. After another six year wait, the next two records included the first long-staying individual, with a one-day bird at Pennington Flash in May 2008 and another inhabiting roadside ditches at Rindle, Astley Moss for 26 days during October and November with the same individual then moving to Elton Reservoir and Walmersley Flash for two day spells at each site later the same November. Three years passed before the next record, with 2012 becoming the first year where more than one individual occurred in the same year.

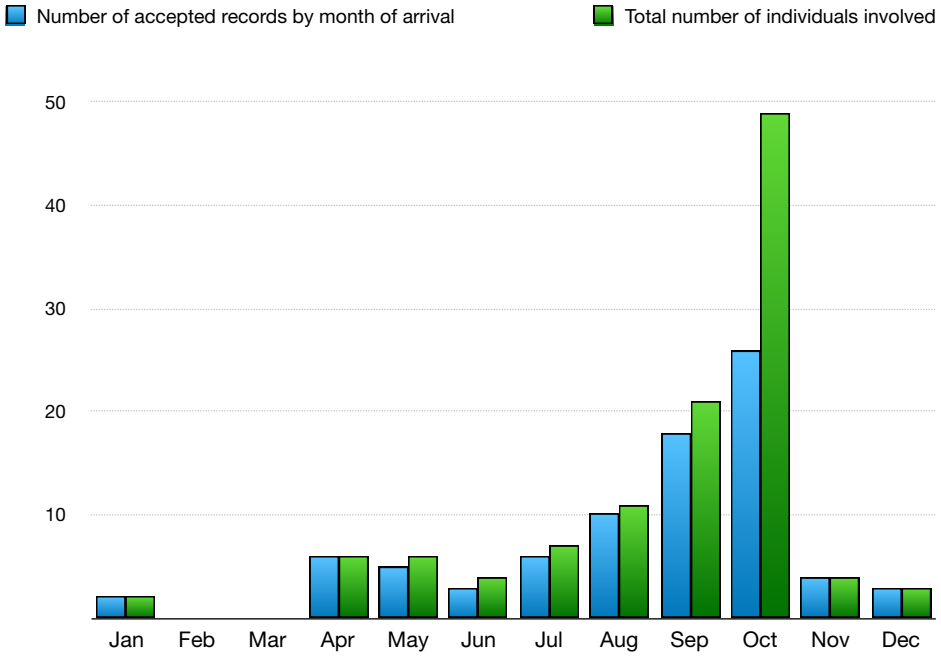
Accepted records by year and the number of individuals involved in those records from 2012 to November 1st, 2025 is summarised in the table below.



The more recent explosion of records in the county was only a small part of the decision to remove the species though. 2023 recorded the first sizeable flock of Great White Egrets in Greater Manchester, with an incredible eight together at Elton Reservoir in October and this was swiftly followed by another flock of eight at Audenshaw Reservoirs the following October, along with seven birds setting up camp at Pennington Flash in November of the same year. Audenshaw Reservoirs recorded another flock, this time of seven birds, in October 2025 and Pennington Flash once again held up to seven birds during the same month. With this number of birds in the county at any one time, tracking their movements between sites became very difficult. This was made more problematical by long-staying and wandering individuals epitomised with the red-ringed Somerset born bird which was first observed in the Wigan Flashes during mid-June 2025 and remains around the Pennington Flash area at the time of writing (November 2025). This single individual could regularly be recorded moving in between both the Wigan and Abram Flashes during the same day, a similar pattern to its regular movements between Pennington Flash, Bickershaw Country Park and Lightshaw Hall Flash later in the year. With a varying number of un-ringed birds doing similar at other sites throughout the county the situation as to which might be new birds and which weren't became unattainable, further complicated by the species' habit of going missing from sites, unnoticed in nearby ditches and ponds before reappearing at initial sites again. Coupled to this is the species' fairly meteoric increase in abundance throughout the north-west of England (not to mention wider UK) which has led to increased observer familiarity to the point where misidentifications have become very rare and to illustrate the point, the last submission to the County Rarity Committee found not proven was a single back in 2022.

So, with these factors taken into consideration the species sufficiently met the parameters for its removal from the County Rarity List. It will be interesting to see what the future holds for the species' status in the county though and one would like to think it might not be long before the first breeding attempt was made but either way, the thrill of seeing, let alone finding, a Great White Egret in the county should never be eroded by its mere removal from a list.

The table below gives the arrival months and their total number of Great White Egrets in Greater Manchester between 2015 and 2025. Each record is for the first arrival date only (subsequent dates of short or long-staying birds are not included) and birds known to be duplicates from other sites or reoccurrences have been taken into consideration and are also not included.



Ian McKerchar
November 2025