

KOS News

The Newsletter of the Kent Ornithological Society

Number 542 January 2023



Short-eared Owl by Mark Chidwick

- News & Announcements ●
- Owls in Kent ●
- Bird Sightings – NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2022 ●
- Fifty Years Ago ●

KOS Contacts – Committee Members details are available on the society website

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A minor celebration in this issue as it marks my 50th as editor. Over the past ten years we have seen the newsletter move from a quarterly 24-page printed booklet posted to each member, to an online PDF format which arrives six times in a year. The benefits of this transition were significant; unlimited pages (about 35 in most issues) extensive colour and the opportunity to add links to sound and other files. In addition, the savings were also useful for a small organisation like ours, as the previous format cost us around £4000 a year in postage alone! A very real benefit of the PDF format is that it allows members to print off the issue to keep a hard copy if they desire, who knows, one day they may be valuable!

We still face the universal problems of a society newsletter, notably the reluctance of members to contribute, but I must acknowledge the continued efforts of Chris Hindle in collating the recent records section and Andrew Henderson for his regular detailed analyses of the historical records derived from the societies archive.

On a birding front the New Year began quite well for me, with the chance finding of a first winter Ring-necked Duck at Stodmarsh. It is 46 years since my first of this species in West Wales and I have seen several since, but this was the first in this plumage. Birding always brings surprises and something new or different can be just around the corner!

Good birding

Norman

News and announcements

AVIAN INFLUENZA GUIDANCE

Avian Influenza, or 'Bird Flu', is currently a major problem particularly in colonies around the North Sea, with high levels of sickness and mortality seen in many areas, including Kent.

If you find a dead or dying bird, avoid touching it directly if possible. If you have to move a dead bird please use protective gloves or a plastic bag and dispose of the bird by wrapping it and putting it in your general household waste, making sure you wash your hands thoroughly afterwards.

Any dead waterfowl, seabirds, or birds of prey, as well as other wild birds if five or more are found, should be reported to Defra.

You can contact them on 03459 33 55 77, or by email at defra.helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk.

If you have visited any of the reserves or birding sites in Kent, it is recommended that you wash or anti-bac your hands before leaving.

Finally, if you feed the birds in your garden, it is always advisable to keep your feeders clean using a mild (1:20) disinfectant/water solution. Don't leave old food on the feeders, always change water daily, and wash your hands thoroughly when finished. This helps to control other pathogens including Trichomoniasis and Salmonella

Appeal for WeBS Counters!

The estuaries and wetlands of Kent hold internationally important passage and wintering numbers of wildfowl and waders. We only know this because of regular counting, and the most important method of collecting such data is through the Wetland Birds Survey (WeBS) which requires sites to be counted once a month from September to March, and ideally year-round. To ensure adequate cover of all areas in Kent, many volunteers are required, especially for the large estuaries. We are currently struggling to cover all sites and existing volunteers are not getting any younger! New counters are urgently needed, particularly on the Thames and Medway. One important site that currently has no counter is Cliffe/Cooling Marshes, which includes an exciting new area of managed retreat.

If anyone is interested in taking on a WeBS site then please get in touch. An introductory visit to a site can be arranged as well as access if on private land, although a commitment to regular counting would be a requisite for such sites.

Contacts - Bob Knight, Brian Watmough, Murray Orchard.

Surveys Planned for 2023

KOS NIGHTINGALE SURVEY

The KOS is conducting a survey of Nightingales in Kent this year. It is 11 years since the last survey - the national 2012 BTO Nightingale Survey. This produced a Kent population estimate of 1,450 – 1,550 males (Andrew Henderson et al).

Developments and land use change continue to threaten Nightingale habitats and even our major “hot spots” are at risk with huge housing and/or new road proposals at or adjacent to sites like Lodge Hill, Chattenden and Old Park, Canterbury. To assess the potential impact of such developments on our Nightingale population, it is important to have up to date information on numbers and distribution.

The survey will employ a similar website design to that used for Turtle Doves in 2021, with an introductory home page and then a county map showing the squares to be surveyed. Volunteers can click on a square to send an email request to the organisers. An email will be returned confirming the allocation and the volunteer will then be able click on the square to select and download/print the survey instructions, recording form and map of the square. Two early morning visits are requested between mid/late April and late May to search for and map the location of all singing males within the square. Basic habitat details will also be requested and information on the presence/absence of deer and certain scarce woodland/scrub birds such as Marsh Tit, Spotted Flycatcher and Turtle Doves!

Full details will be available when the survey goes live on the KOS website in March.

HOW MANY WOODCOCKS ARE LEFT IN KENT? BTO Woodcock Survey

There will be a repeat of the national Woodcock survey in 2023. Previous surveys were conducted in 2013 and 2003. Between these survey years, several sites (squares) have been monitored annually, including a few in Kent, to provide an indication of population trend. This year, however, the number of squares has been significantly increased to achieve greater coverage and enable an updated estimate of the UK population. In 2013 the population was assessed at 55,241 males, which represented a 29% decline from 2003, and the Woodcock has now been “Red Listed” as a bird of European concern.

The survey methodology is similar to that employed in 2013, with a few modifications, and the priority is to re-visit all squares that were covered in the last survey: these are Priority 1 sites, of which there are 34 in Kent, and constitute the minimum survey sample size. An additional 38 Priority 2 sites are to increase the sample size and the robustness of the population estimate. Further squares can be made available once 75% of the Priority 1 sites are allocated.

The survey requires up to four visits at dusk, with a reconnaissance trip in April to establish a fixed viewpoint and three main 75-minute survey visits (at least a week apart) between May 1st and June 30th. If no birds are observed during the reconnaissance and first survey visits, then no further visits need be made. In addition, habitat use will be investigated to improve our knowledge of habitat requirements, which can improve future woodland management for Woodcock.

Full details of the survey and downloads of the instructions, recording forms and other useful information can be found on the BTO website at www.bto.org/our-science/projects/woodcock-survey where you can sign up for the survey using your BTO account details (username & password). [If you don't have an account there are simple instructions for setting this up]. You can then select a square from the interactive map. Priority 1 sites appear as yellow on the map and Priority 2 as blue.

COLOUR RINGED REDSHANK-REQUEST FOR SIGHTINGS.

The Swale Wader Group [Swale Wader Group - Home \(swalewaders.co.uk\)](http://swalewaders.co.uk) have started a five-year project colour ringing project on Redshank. Redshank numbers are declining nationally and the study aims to provide information on the origins of Redshank wintering in north Kent and the dispersion of our local breeding population. Please report any sightings to Brian Watmough brianrwat@yahoo.co.uk

Surveys

Current surveys are usually posted on the KOS website, for further information please contact Murray Orchard at murray.orchard@live.co.uk

KOS Annual Subscription Increased from 1st January 2023

At the KOS AGM in April this year, members attending the meeting voted to raise the Annual KOS subscription from **£12 per year to £15 per year**. This increase is the first for almost 20 years.

Each member needs to take action to make this change from £12 p/a to £15p/a.
Below is advice on how to do it.

How do you pay your annual KOS Subs?

The majority of members pay their subscription using:-

- 1) a **Standing Order with their Bank** or:-
- 2) an **Annual arrangement with PayPal**.

1) Standing Orders

If you pay using this method please contact your bank and arrange for the SO to be raised to £15 from January 1st 2023 onwards. **Only you can change your Standing Order by instructing your bank. Please do this as soon as possible.**

2) PayPal Annual Arrangement.

If you pay using an annual PayPal arrangement, to change the amount from £12 to £15 **you must let PayPal know of your wish to increase the annual sum charged. Please contact PayPal to do this.**

3) Other Payment Methods

If you pay by **cheque** you can still send the Membership Secretary your subscription - for £15 - to my home address:- **Chris Roome, KOS Membership Secretary, Rowland House, Station Road, Staplehurst, Kent TN12 0PY. (Make cheques out to Kent Ornithological Society please.)**

4) Alternatively, you can pay your subscription via BACS:-

KOS Details are:-

Name of Account : **Kent Ornithological Society**
Sort Code: 30-95-37
Account Number: 01637909
Reference: Please use your surname

An email to me - chris.roome@kentos.org.uk letting me know you have acted on this issue would be really helpful!

Thanks, best wishes and Good Birding,
Chris
KOS Membership Secretary

Can you help KOS to continue to grow and develop?

These are busy times for KOS with a number of exciting projects underway or in the pipeline, * in addition to our target of reaching 1,000 members by 2024.

We are looking to add new members to the executive and other committees to help us in these important tasks as well contributing to the day to day running of the Society.

There are currently vacancies on the Executive Committee which we hope to fill at this year's AGM. If you feel that you could contribute then we would like to hear from you.

We are interested in anyone who feels that they can contribute to the work of the committee especially if they have skills or experience in the following areas

- financial or accounting experience to support the work of and deputise for the Treasurer
- database experience to support the work of the archivist to collate and manage our bird records
- communications or website experience to support the membership committee to improve the way we communicate with our members and the public
- organisational skills to develop and run a programme of on line talks on behalf of the Membership Committee

If you don't feel you can help, perhaps you know someone else with the skills or experience that you might like to suggest or recommend?

If you would like more information or would like to discuss these opportunities please contact Andre Farr, Chair andre.farrar57@gmail.com or Chris Roome, Vice Chair chrisroome105@icloud.com

* Current or pipeline projects include

- replacing our master database in which all our bird records are archived
- digitalising our pre 2004 paper records so they can be incorporated into the archive
- creating a new digital Birds of Kent
- developing our website further to develop new features and provide better information to members
- creating a fund to support environmental projects and initiatives around the county
- increasing our influence so we can better represent the interests of bird watchers in the county

We would like to encourage members to contribute items or photographs for inclusion in the newsletter, especially regarding birds in Kent. If you are interested, I am always happy to offer advice or assistance to aspiring authors. To facilitate page composition text needs to be presented as a Word document, photos or illustrations as j-peg files.

Norman McCanch (Editor) : nvmccanch@hotmail.com

we like to keep in touch with all our members, so if you change address, email address or phone numbers please remember to inform our membership secretary, Chris Roome. He can be contacted at:

Chris Roome, Rowland House, Station Rd., Staplehurst TN12 0PY

Tel: 01580 891686 e-mail: chrisroome105@icloud.com

OWLS IN KENT

To coincide with shortest days, I've chosen a group of birds associated with the night for this newsletter. Five species of owls – admittedly some quite often seen in daytime – are of regular occurrence in Kent, with four of them breeding here annually (and the fifth in most years). Another six species have been reported in the county, though the claims in some cases stretch credibility too far.

Despite some of the species being reasonably common and widespread, they remain mysterious and seldom seen. Perhaps because of that, numerous myths have grown up about owls. They often have a reputation for wisdom, maybe because of their penetrating gaze. There's also an association with melancholy, no doubt from the hooting or moaning calls, and sometimes with death. One myth, that they can deliver messages, is not a myth at all but a fact.

As a result of their low detectability, there is less information in KOS records on which to base analysis of distribution and trends than for many species. So, the hard information in this account will be quite thin. It won't stop me veering off on more detail of minor matters, though. I'm grateful to Chris Cox for helping me to trace a little bit of Scops Owl trivia, Michael Walter for useful background to Blean Woods Tawny Owl counts, and to Murray Orchard who commented on draft accounts for the five regularly occurring species, and Martin Sutherland let me see preliminary results from nocturnal recording on Thanet farmland which has shown that conventional recording understates owl distribution there.

Barn Owl



Barn Owl by Steve Young

Barn Owls have had a difficult time over the past century but, despite some continuing threats, seem to be doing quite well at present. Figure 1 shows the breeding distribution during 2008-13, and also changes since the previous atlas coverage in 1988-94.

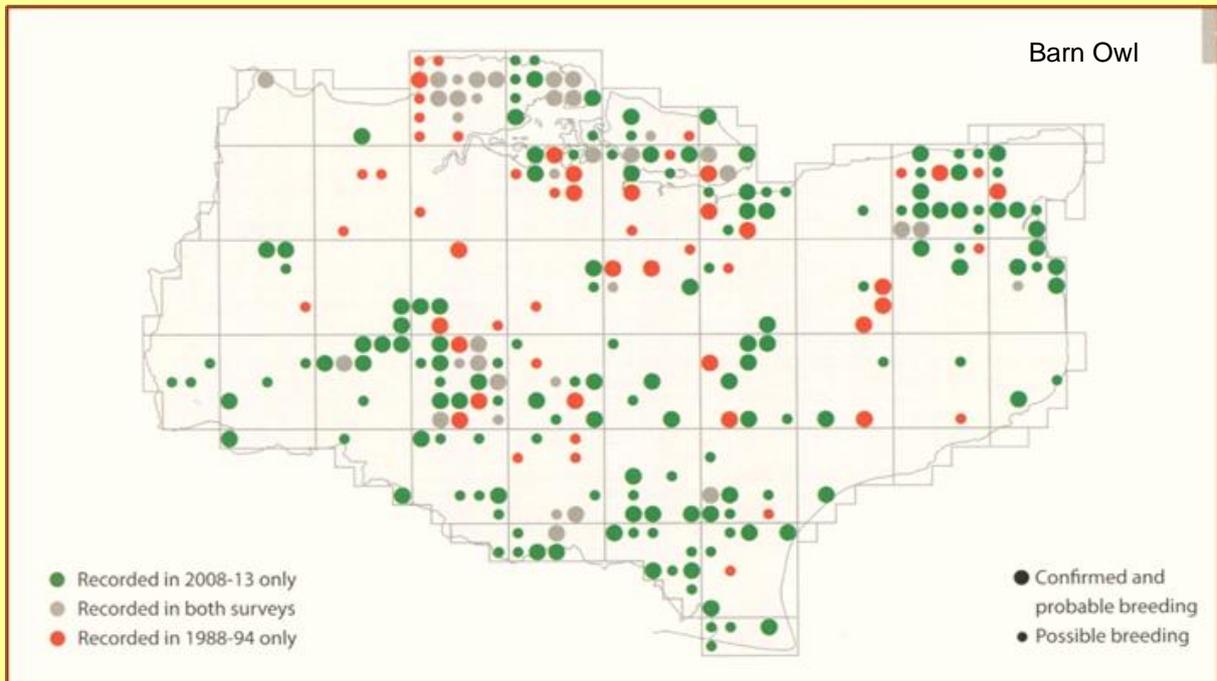


Figure 1. Barn Owl breeding distribution

This map shows considerable spread in lower-lying country in the north, east and south of the county, and through the Weald. The one zone where birds had apparently been lost was the North Downs, especially along the dip slope. This map is believed to be reasonably accurate but, as the *Kent Breeding Bird Atlas 2008-13* (from which the map is taken) says, it's possible that fewer night-time visits on the downs may have produced a misleading result. The absence on Thanet also appears to be misleading: Martin Sutherland found Barn Owls across open areas as far east as near Margate hospital in 2022. The atlas (still available from the KOS website) estimates that some 100-200 pairs were present during 2008-13, around double what had been present twenty years before. The atlas (still available from the KOS website) estimates that some 100-200 pairs were present during 2008-13, around double what had been present twenty years before.



Barn Owl chicks East Kent drawn by Norman McCanch

Going further back, Ticehurst (*History of the Birds of Kent*, 1909) described the Barn Owl as resident and fairly common, though more numerous in areas with plenty of mature trees than in towns and marshes. He did note, though, marking a difference from the present, that they were not infrequently seen in towns, living in church towers and hollow

trees in squares, and in marshes where there were mature elm trees (remember them?). The species had too often been in gamekeepers' sights, but with better understanding of the species' prey that had become less of a problem.

Harrison (*Birds of Kent*, 1953) thought their status little changed. He suggested that some decreases might have occurred through birds taking rodents that had ingested poison baits. That is something that remains a problem today.

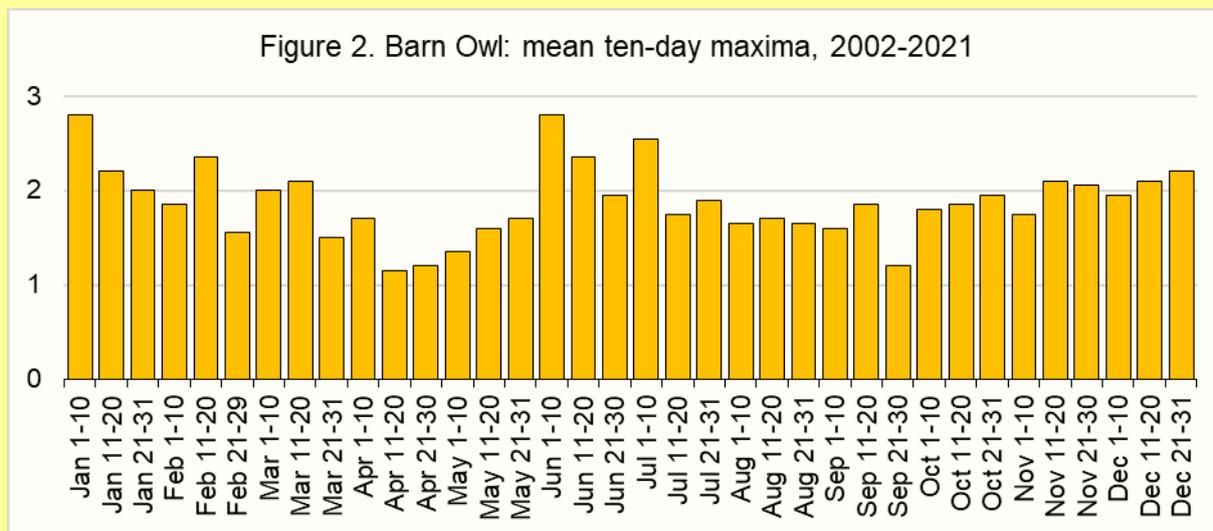
The largely nocturnal behaviour of Barn Owls, and their relatively low density make tracking numbers difficult, with an additional complication being that populations fluctuate considerably with vole abundance. Other than what is provided by the three atlas surveys, there is little available to detect population changes since 1952. The numbers of tetrads in Kent in which Barn Owls were recorded were as follows, in each case showing all tetrads (2x2km squares) with records and, in brackets, tetrads with probable or confirmed breeding:

1967-73: 107 (58) 1988-94: 89 (46) 2008-13: 191 (107)

Both in Kent and nationally, Barn Owls suffered greatly from the use of persistent pesticides such as dieldrin in the mid and late twentieth century. Severe winter weather (and also cold wet conditions during the breeding season) also can cause losses. The winter of 1962/63 in particular took its toll, and pesticide-induced declines continued into the 1980s (dieldrin was not fully banned until 1989). Nationally, numbers may have halved between the 1930s and 1970, and the trend continued for some time after that (BTO Bird Trends); it seems that Kent Barn Owl trends have followed the national pattern.

From around 1990, strong increase has occurred (reversed occasionally by cold weather such as in 2010). The process has been aided by nest box provision, something that may be more important than formerly because of losses of mature trees (such as elms) and the exclusion of birds from buildings. As mentioned earlier, Barn Owls remain at risk from rodenticides. However, most reports of dead Barn Owls in recent years have involved birds hit by cars (which admittedly are more likely to be noticed than those which die in cover).

There is little variation through the year in the size of counts reported to the KOS, as expected for a species that is well-dispersed and doesn't form flocks. Figure 2 shows, for the recent twenty year period, the average size of maximum counts in each ten day period. Numbers seen are higher during the summer when birds are feeding chicks and in the winter when they may be more obvious perhaps because either they are having to hunt more actively to get enough food in cold weather, or because more observers are out at dawn and dusk. The highest values include 1st January (lots of people enthusiastically recording to start the year) and 1st June (to which date breeding records are often allocated), but even those don't differ hugely from nearby periods.



British Barn Owls are fairly sedentary (about 240 of 350 ringing recoveries affecting Kent have been in Kent, and most of the rest in Sussex) but a few travel considerable distances. Birds ringed as nestlings in Devon, near Manchester and in Galloway have been found dead in Kent, and a Kentish nestling was recovered in Yorkshire.

Dark-breasted Barn Owls

The British population of Barn Owls belongs to the white-breasted subspecies *Tyto alba alba*. On the European mainland, there is a dark-breasted subspecies *T.a. guttata*. However, there is no clear boundary between the two. A wide zone of intergradation exists, and the situation is further complicated by the fact that *alba* parents can rear dark *guttata*-like chicks (and vice versa). There is a paper on identification of *guttata* Barn Owls (Paul French, 2009, *British Birds* 102: 494-503).

In Table 1, I have listed all reports of dark-breasted Barn Owls in Kent that I have found. Very few of these have been critically assessed and I suspect that some would not stand up to modern scrutiny. Only one (in 1996) has been formally accepted as *guttata* by the British Birds Rarities Committee; I don't know which other recent examples have been submitted to BBRC – perhaps none. The dark-breasted birds are not migratory but do tend to disperse over greater

distances than British birds. The one foreign ringing recovery in Table 1, in 1984, was from the Netherlands; more recoveries in the BTO scheme have come from that country than from any other – yet no British-ringed birds have been recovered there.

Table 1. Reports of dark-breasted Barn Owls in Kent		
Details are taken from sources indicated, including Historical Rare Birds (HRB), or from KBRs and/or KOS database for 1952 onwards.		
Year	Location	Notes
1847	Romney Marsh	Obtained prior to 1847; was in Plomley collection. Ticehurst p.249
1885	Tongue lightship (5 miles N of Margate)	Flew W at 08:00 on 20th October. Ticehurst p.249; Harrison (2) p.11
1887	East Goodwin lightship (10 miles E of Deal)	Flew ESE to WNW at noon on 30th October. Ticehurst p.249; Harrison (2) p.11
1903	St Albans Court	Obtained prior to 1903; in Hammond collection. Harrison (2) p.11
1919	Wittersham	Found dead on 12th December. British Birds 13: 275; Harrison (2) p.11
1922	St Margaret's at Cliffe	Date notional: December 1921 or January 1922. Found dead in barn, referred to as a 'blue' owl. Harrison (2) p.11
1937	Dungeness	Seen asleep under a low bush on 18th September. Harrison (2) p.12
1937	Quex Park	Adult female, caught in gun tower on 8th December. Harrison (2) p.12
1938	Midrips/Wicks	Two on 3rd December at The Wicks; one on Dec 11th & 28th, Jan 2nd & 5th, and up to Feb 18th. British Birds 32: 273-274
1939	Sevenoaks	One killed on 7th September, described as 'blue'. NB HRB says 1939 but Harrison (2) p.12 says 1937 (I assume it's the same bird)
1943	Romney Marsh	Obtained before 1943 (when HFW died); in collection of H F Witherby. Harrison (2) p.11
1946	Galloways	One seen on 20th January between Lydd & Galloways. Harrison (2) p.12
1947	Canterbury	Obtained prior to 1947. Male in collection of Dr A McMillan. Harrison (2) p.12
1948	The Midrips	One seen on 29th March; no indication of it being in Kent. Harrison (2) p.12
1952	Stodmarsh	One seen on 13th January
1953	Dungeness	One seen on 10th April
1955	Allhallows	One seen on 29th October
1959	Stoke	One seen on 25th January
1960	Sandling Park, near Hythe	Four trapped & released, 14th-15th January
1960	Sheppey	One seen on 28th February
1961	Sandwich Bay	One found dead on 22nd November
1965	Stodmarsh	One seen on 1st January
1967	Dungeness	One present during January-February
1967	Maidstone	One found dead in December
1973	Sandwich Bay	One seen on 27th October
1979	Dover	One found dead on 12th February, on a lorry recently arrived from Italy
1981	Eastry	One found dead on the road, 30th November
1984	Reculver	One found dead on 26th September. This bird carried a Dutch ring; it had been ringed as a nestling in the southern part of the Netherlands on 15th June 1983
1985	Cliffe	One seen between 16th March and 18th April
1991	Kemsley	One caught at Kemsley and released at Elmley on 29th October
1994	Grain	One seen on three dates during 3rd-13th April
1996	Dungeness	One found dead on 30th October. Accepted by BBRC
2008	Walland Marsh	Two seen on Walland Marsh on 17th February



Dark-breasted Barn owl, found dead Dover, Kent February 1979 drawn by Norman McCanch

Little Owl



Little Owl by Martin Garwood

Often treated as an honorary native species, the Little Owl is in fact an introduction just as much as Canada Goose and Ring-necked Parakeet. It is held in higher regard perhaps because it doesn't squawk loudly, leave mess all

over lawns, or indeed breed like a rabbit. The first introductions of Little Owl to Britain were famously by the eccentric (or visionary?) Charles Waterton in Yorkshire, but those are not thought to have established a breeding population.

The first successful introductions were by Edmund Meade-Waldo at Stonewall Park, near Chiddingstone Hoath in west Kent. Meade-Waldo was an outstanding ornithologist who, among other things, was the first to record the now-extinct Canary Islands Oystercatcher and discovered that sandgrouse carried water, by soaking their breast feathers at waterholes, to unfledged chicks. He was only about 19 in 1874 when he began his Little Owl releases; they first bred in 1879. With other introductions elsewhere, the species soon became well-established, and now is widespread through lowland England, though remaining scarcer in the far south-west and in Wales and very scarce in Scotland.

I said earlier that Little Owl was an introduction. But there is some evidence that, before it became established in Britain, it may occasionally have arrived here as a vagrant from continental Europe where it is numerous and widespread. Ticehurst (*History of the Birds of Kent*, 1909) listed six records prior to 1874 and, while it is possible that some of them were errors or from failed releases, it could be that some were natural arrivals. Note, though, that there have been no ringing recoveries between Britain and the continent in more than a century of ringing. For the record, the early examples were:

Prior to 1845	A female shot at/near Maidstone
Spring 1856	One caught alive at/near Maidstone, surviving some time in captivity
Spring 1857	One caught at Eltham (outside modern Kent), also surviving some time in captivity
1862	One shot at/near Sevenoaks
1864	A female obtained somewhere in Kent
1870 or 1871	One shot near Dartford

Returning to the more recent past, Figure 3 shows the breeding distribution from the *Kent Breeding Bird Atlas 2008-13*. As can be seen, it is widespread. There are many tetrads (2x2km squares) with records only from 1988-94 or only from 2008-13 but there's no coherent pattern to these and I believe they reflect the species' low detectability. Unless you know a pair is present or are there during the short periods at dusk or dawn when calling is most frequent, they are very easy to miss.

There are a few areas where Little Owls do seem to be genuinely scarce or absent. One of those is eastern Thanet; I noticed a comment, in the 1996 Kent Bird Report, that one at Foreness for a few weeks that autumn was the first in the area for ten years. However, Martin Sutherland's surveys in 2022 found the species to be widespread except in the easternmost (and most built-up) sector.

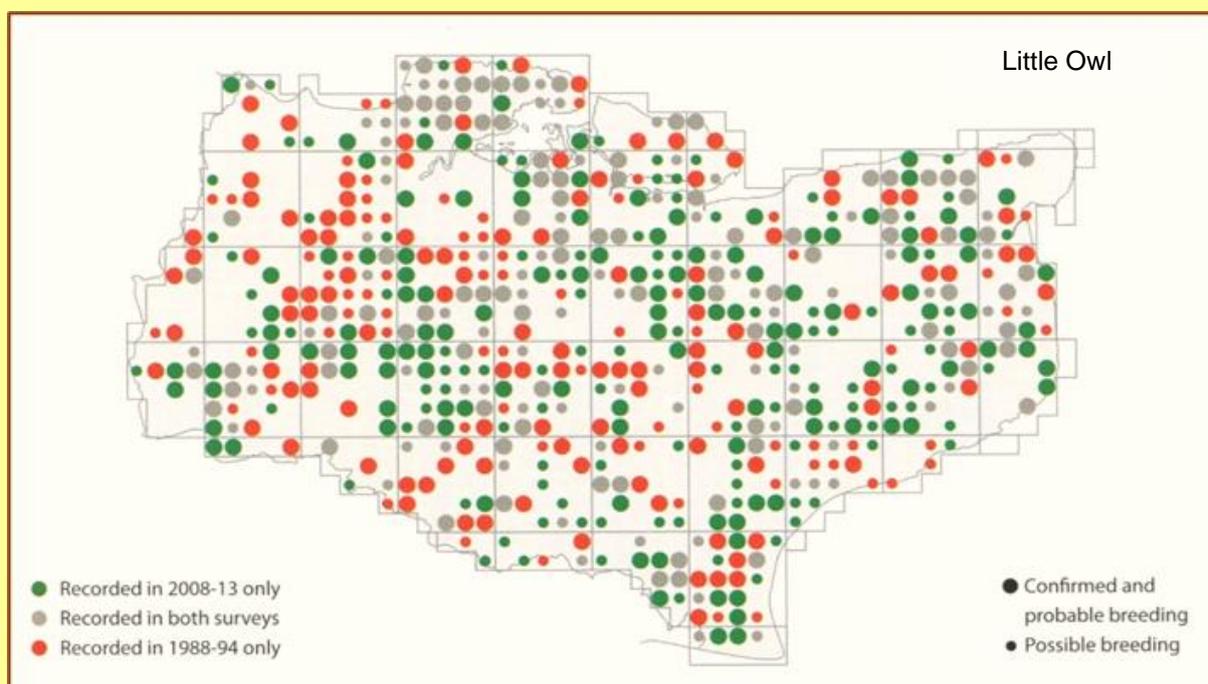


Figure 3. Little Owl breeding distribution

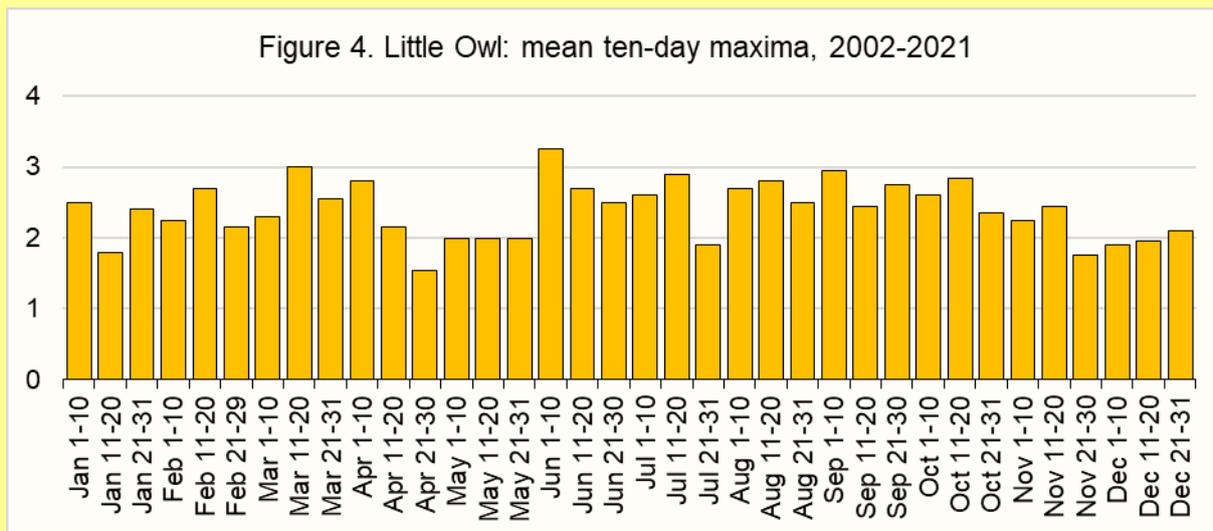
The 2008-13 Atlas estimated the Kent population to be in the range 2,000-4,000 pairs. This was based on sample survey densities and probably more realistic than the guess of 600-800 pairs in 1988-94. However, it represented over 50% of the UK population estimate at the same time! It's more than likely that the latter was too low but, to be honest, we don't really know how many there are. In some places with plentiful nest sites and good feeding areas, quite high densities have been found. For example, at Northward Hill, up to 15 pairs were believed to be present in the late 1970s (though only three pairs in 1982 and 1989), up to eight pairs in 50 ha at Boughton Park during 2001-2006, and 10-13 pairs in the Sandwich Bay recording area in 2017.

There has been a common belief for a number of years that Little Owl numbers are declining in Kent – but not a great deal of hard evidence for that. The numbers of tetrads in Kent in which Little Owls were recorded in atlas surveys were as follows, in each case showing all tetrads (2x2km squares) with records and, in brackets, tetrads with probable or confirmed breeding:

1967-73: 387 (244) 1988-94: 360 (235) 2008-13: 400 (211)

The totals of probable/confirmed breeding do show a small decline but there’s no clear trend for all records, though bear in mind that this is a measure primarily of distribution, not abundance. It is possible for distribution to remain similar at tetrad level even though numbers are falling. It is the case that national BBS data show a substantial decrease, of more than 50%, starting in the mid 1990s. The BBS sample in Kent is unfortunately too small to track the county population.

As with Barn and Tawny Owls, there’s not a great deal of variation in numbers reported through the year. Figure 4 shows, for the recent twenty year period, the average size of maximum counts in each ten day period. This shows a very flat pattern, strikingly different from that of a migrant such as Long-eared Owl (see below).



Long-eared Owl



Long-eared Owl by Kevin Duvall

This is perhaps the least known of our owls. It is the most nocturnal, with a less penetrating (and less familiar) call than Tawny Owl's, and the typical experience of Long-eared Owl for many is merely visiting a roost that someone else has found.

Ticehurst (*History of the Birds of Kent*, 1909) found it, as a breeding bird, mainly in conifer plantations, which at that time were concentrated on the North Downs with some in the south-west adjoining Ashdown Forest, with only "single isolated pairs at wide intervals in deciduous woods". By the time of Harrison (*Birds of Kent*, 1953), things were little changed, although nesting pairs were being found regularly in the Hoo peninsula woodlands. Both authors noted that breeding birds dispersed in autumn, and that numbers were augmented by birds arriving from elsewhere, though it was not known whether they came from further north in Britain or from overseas. Roosts could be large: one of 20 was found on the Hoo peninsula some time prior to 1925.

Figure 5 shows the breeding distribution from the *Kent Breeding Bird Atlas 2008-13*. Any concentration along the North Downs has disappeared, and recent distribution is mainly on the Hoo peninsula and in low-lying areas of east Kent. Many areas occupied in the previous atlas, in 1988-94, seemed to have been abandoned. I doubt that that is entirely accurate, suspecting that thorough survey away from known sites would reveal additional pairs. Indeed, since the 2008-13 Atlas, nests have been located in central and west Kent.

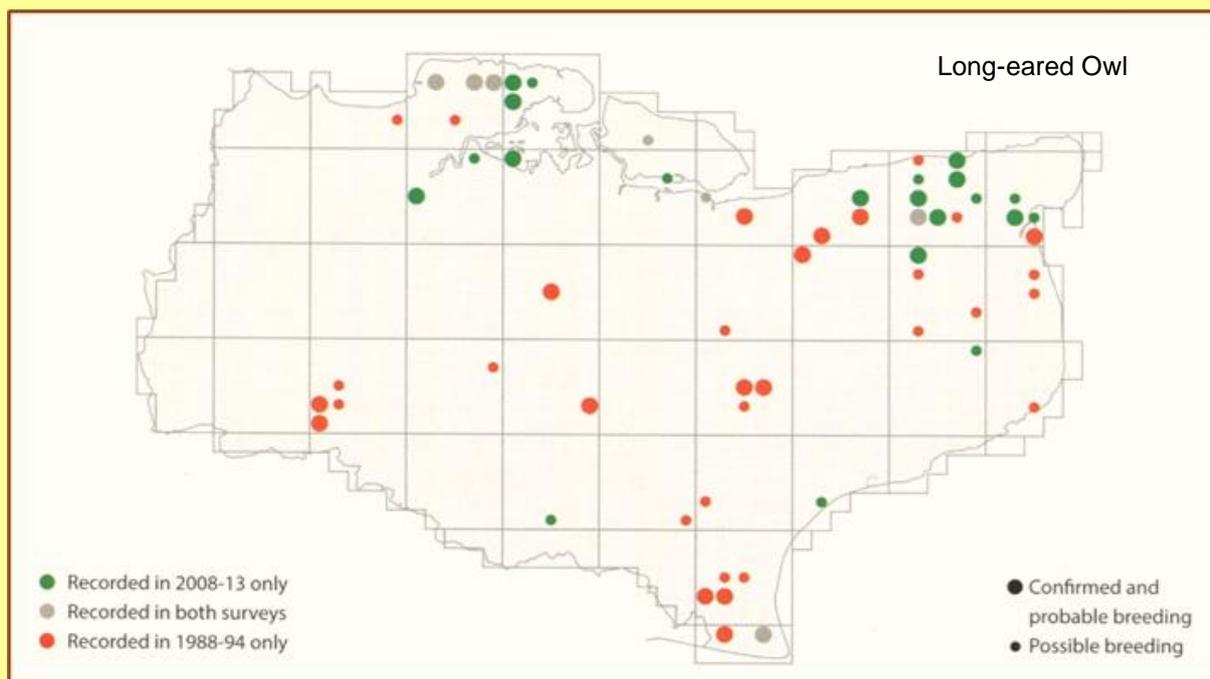


Figure 5. Long-eared Owl breeding distribution

The typical habitat of nesting Long-eared Owls today is a tall thick hedge or scruffy bit of scrubby woodland, often with ivy or something else to make the vegetation denser. While coniferous woodland may still be used, they are by no means confined to blocks of woodland (where, it's thought, they can be predated by Tawny Owls) and small patches of cover in open farmland are worth investigating.

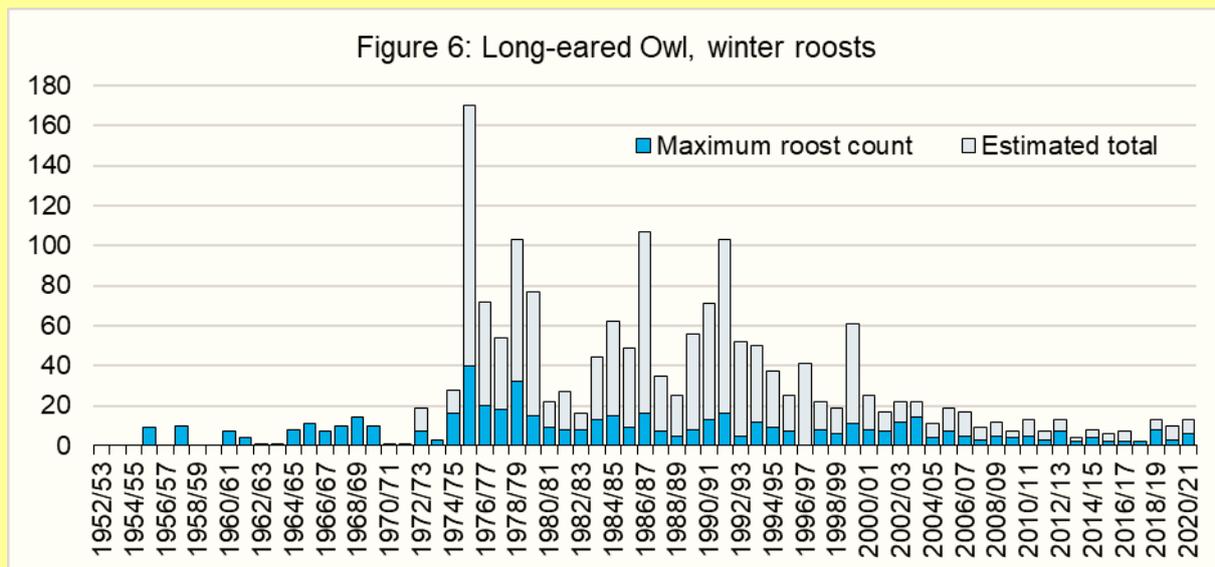
Table 2 gives the average and maximum numbers of breeding pairs reported each year, per decade, since 1952. I have been fairly generous in interpreting what constituted a breeding pair: it could be a nest or young being located but sometimes simply the presence of calling birds in suitable habitat. The totals are only approximate, since totals are not always given in the records and sometimes it is not clear if one or more pairs were at a site. In any case, as I said above, I suspect these totals are considerable underestimates.

Table 2. Mean and maximum annual Long-eared Owl breeding pair totals per decade		
	Mean	Maximum
1952-1961	2.9	7
1962-1971	3.8	12
1972-1981	3.9	8
1982-1991	6.2	11
1992-2001	7.8	13
2002-2011	6.5	12
2012-2021	7.1	10

Winter numbers of Long-eared Owls are (or were) much higher than could have been generated by the reported breeding population and we now know that they come from a long way away. Figure 6 shows an estimate of the total winter (November-February) population, when available, with the largest single roost reported in each year (and forming part of the total). The data have been extracted from Kent Bird Reports, augmented for the period from 2000 onwards by the KOS computerised database.



Long-eared Owl chicks, by Norman McCanch



My customary warning when introducing these seventy year charts is that we should treat the data for the 1950s with caution. That is valid again here, as the KBRs in those early years are sparing on detail, and it's also important not to be misled by the absence of county total estimates for the period up to the early 1970s. The KBR entries then do not provide that information (and the recently digitised recording cards are not yet available).

Roosts of ten or more have been found occasionally, most frequently during 1975-1987 when nine of the thirteen years had roosts of that size. The largest of all (15 or more) were as listed in Table 3. It is significant that roosts of this

size haven't been recorded for thirty years. In fact, the last roost of more than eight was one of 14 in north Kent early in 2004.

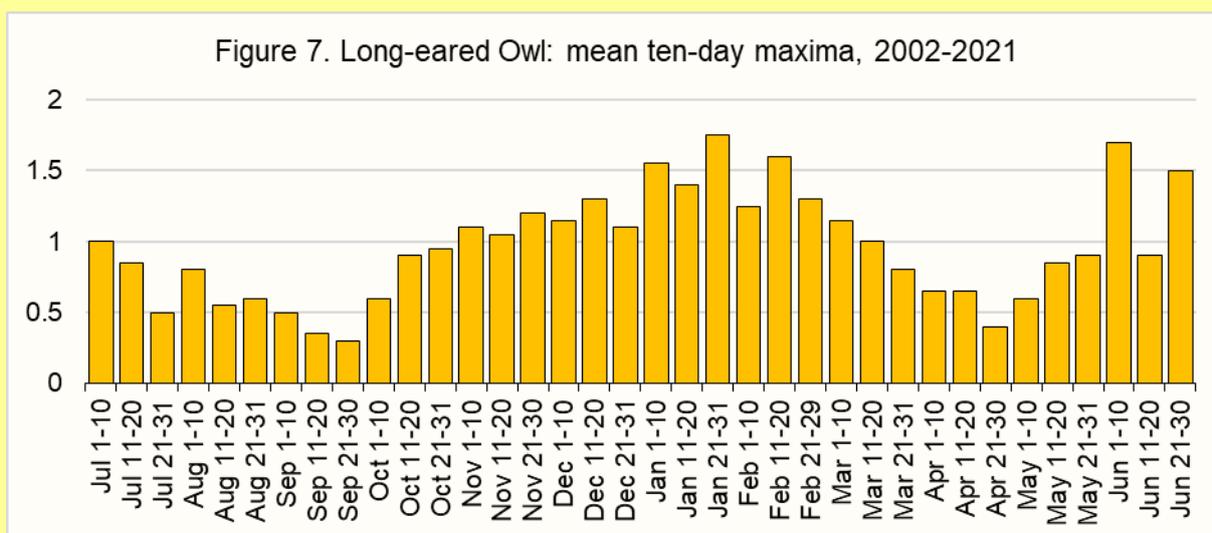
	Largest roost	Other roosts >15
1974/75	16	
1975/76	40	29, 27, 15
1976/77	20	18
1977/78	18	
1978/79	32	18
1979/80	15	
1984/85	15	
1986/87	16	
1991/92	16	15, 15

Even though there are questions over how many roosts are not found (do observers simply look in the usual places?), it seems, at least from the size of the largest roosts, that the late 1970s saw larger numbers than before or since. And it is pretty clear that numbers have fallen since then; one might explain the earlier increase as being the result of better coverage but that can't apply to the decline. We don't know why these changes occurred, but possibilities include milder winters on the continent permitting 'short-stopping', with birds remaining there rather than crossing to Britain, or population decline resulting in fewer arriving (though trends of continental populations are unknown, per BirdLife International).

There have been 17 ringing recoveries of Long-eared Owl involving Kent: six within Kent, six elsewhere in England between Hampshire and Lincolnshire, and five from abroad. The foreign ones came from Belarus (the furthest east, and the only one ringed as a nestling), the Kaliningrad enclave of Russia, Lithuania, Germany (Heligoland) and the Netherlands – that list may well be a summary of the origins and migration routes of our wintering birds.

Passage times are not well-recorded but birds actively migrating have been seen between early September and mid November, with fewer in spring mainly in March-May though they can be later, such as one at Foreness on 2nd June 2006. Birds are occasionally seen coming in off the sea, such as, in 1996, one at South Foreland on 13th October and two at Foreness on 10th November.

The seasonal pattern of reported numbers in Kent is shown in Figure 7. As the species is (so far as we know!) more numerous as a winter visitor than a breeding bird, the chart shows a July-June year rather than January-December. The pattern includes a rise and fall of counts around mid winter but also higher numbers in the breeding season as observers find nests or fledged young (the 1st June spike is artificially a little high because of some breeding records being allocated to that date).



Short-eared Owl



Short-eared Owl by Steve Ashton

Short-eared Owl is primarily a winter visitor to Kent but small numbers nest here in most years. Figure 8 shows the breeding distribution from the *Kent Breeding Bird Atlas 2008-13*. As can be seen, the north Kent marshes are the area most favoured but there are occasional instances elsewhere. The Sandwich Bay area used to be a regular breeding site but that seems to have become less common in recent years. Areas of rough grassland or upper saltmarsh tend to be the habitats most often used.

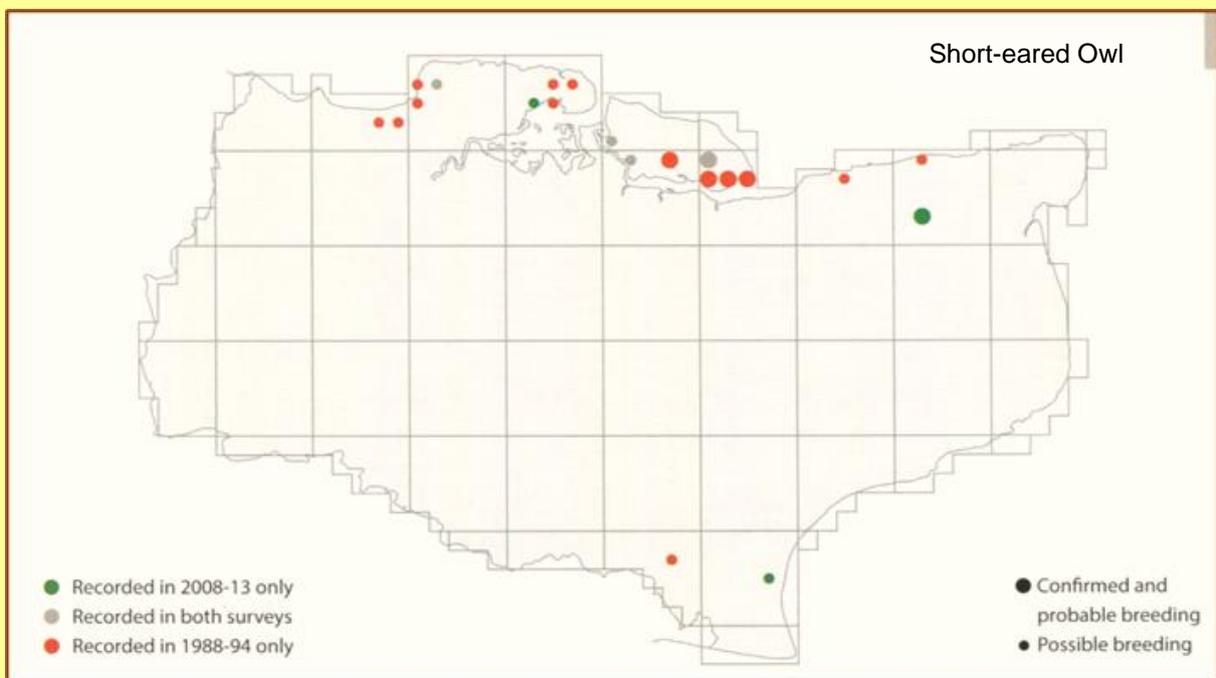
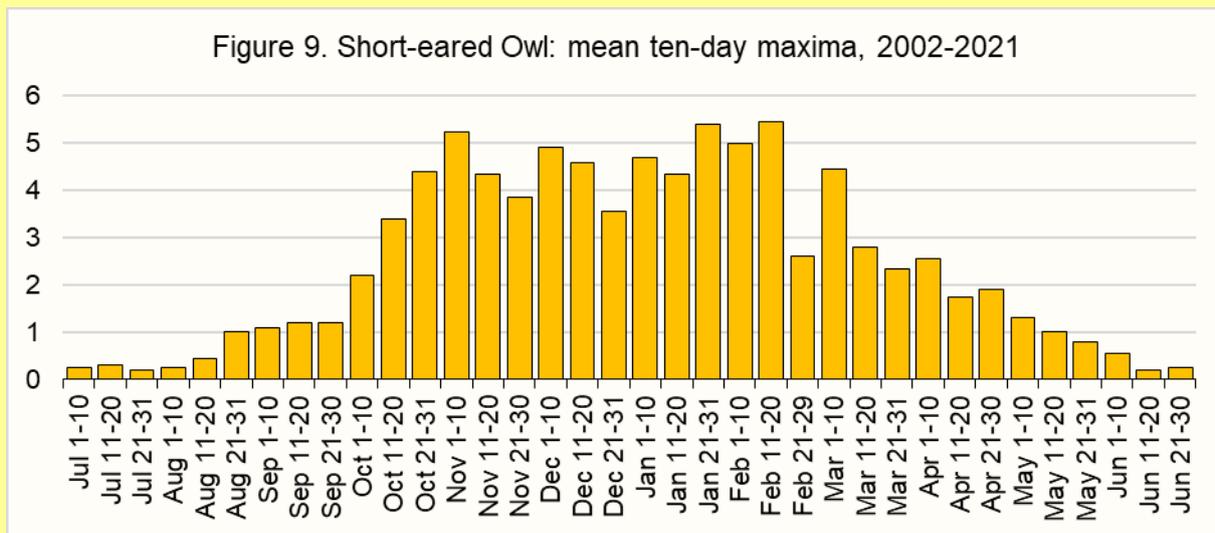


Figure 8. Short-eared Owl breeding distribution

Table 4 shows the average number of pairs per year in each decade. I have generally followed what was reported in KBRs but have been fairly generous about including instances of 'probable' breeding. The highest totals of all were 14 pairs in 1957 and 10 pairs in 1954. There were six pairs in both 1972 and 1998, but the latter preceded the longest period with none reported, from 2003 to 2010 inclusive.

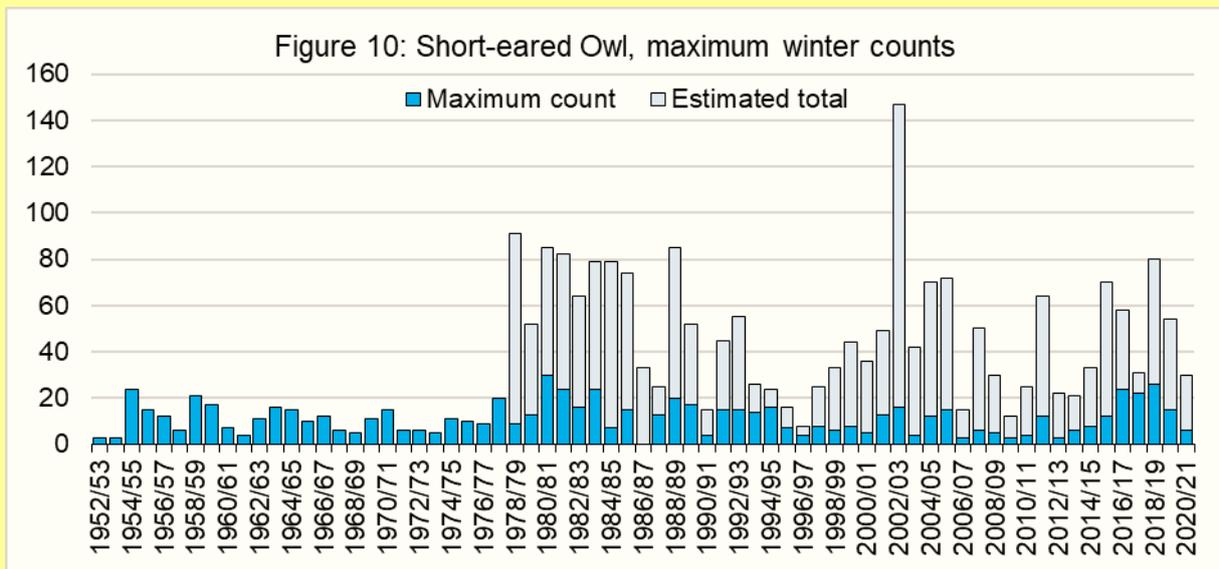
Table 4. Mean and maximum annual Short-eared Owl breeding pair totals per decade		
	Mean	Maximum
1952-1961	4.9	14
1962-1971	2.3	5
1972-1981	2.5	6
1982-1991	0.9	3
1992-2001	2.4	6
2002-2011	0.2	1
2012-2021	1.3	3

Figure 9 illustrates the seasonal pattern of abundance, as for Long-eared Owl based on July-June years as this is definitely mainly a winter visitor. It consists of a pretty straightforward rise and fall about mid winter, but with slightly elevated numbers in late October-November which is peak autumn passage time, and in late January-February. The latter peak is too early for spring passage (March-April) and probably reflects further arrivals during spells of cold weather.



Coastal migrants, often in places away from regular wintering sites, are most apparent in autumn, though a few are seen in March-May. Most of the autumn movement is during September-November, and birds are quite often seen coming in off the sea. A few examples: in 1988, 30 were seen arriving at Foreness during 6th October-27th November, with up to four per day; in 2015, over 50 coastal migrants were seen around the whole county during 3rd September-20th November, 20 of them coming in off the sea; and on 17th October 2016, three came in at Reculver and 12 were flushed at Bockhill. Very occasional arrivals off the sea are also noted in June-August, perhaps involving failed breeding birds.

To examine trends in wintering numbers, I have extracted from KBRs the maximum count at any one site and, for 1978/79 onwards, an estimate of the wintering total (November-February) each year. It's not possible to calculate winter totals reliably before 1978/79. I should also point out that deciding what is a 'site' isn't always straightforward; I have tended to ignore totals quoted for the whole of Sheppey for example, preferring more restricted areas such as Elmley or Capel Fleet-Harty-Shellness. Figure 10 gives the results. The totals shown include the site maxima; thus for 1978/79 the highest site total was nine and the county total was 91. It seems likely to me that the figures include the majority of birds in the county. Inland records are uncommon, and mostly at passage times, and probably most birds in the relatively well-watched coastal areas are seen.



Clearly, numbers vary a lot between years but there doesn't seem to be any clear underlying trend. Variation may well be related to factors such as vole populations or cold weather to the north or on the continent. Estimated totals of 50 or more have occurred in thirteen years, with the outstanding total of 147 in 2002/03. That peak was in November, and numbers did fall by mid winter. The highest site count was 30 at Elmley in 1980/81, also in November. As shown in Figure 9 above, numbers do fall a little between November and early January; however, I have generally tried to exclude obvious short-term migrants from Figure 10.

Short-eared Owls wintering in south-east England come from a wide spread of breeding areas, including northern England and Scotland, and continental areas extending to Scandinavia, Finland and western Russia. There are only six ringing recoveries of Short-eared Owl involving Kent. They include birds ringed as nestlings in Lancashire, the Netherlands and Finland, illustrating the wide geographical range providing our wintering birds.

Tawny Owl



Tawny Owl by Barry Wright

Nocturnal, resident, sedentary, widely distributed and with a (probably) fairly stable population: not surprisingly, Tawny Owls don't attract much attention from birdwatchers. In the words of Harrison (*Birds of Kent*, 1953) "there is really surprisingly little recent information about this species". Even ringing has been unproductive for Tawny Owl: of 1,074 ringed in the county, only seven have been recovered, all in Kent. I told you they were sedentary.

Figure 11 shows the breeding distribution from the *Kent Breeding Bird Atlas 2008-13*. The species is spread throughout areas with woodland and large trees but absent or very scarce in more open country such as the north Kent marshes, Romney Marsh and Thanet. There has been some indication of spread into those areas, nesting at Northward Hill first recorded in 1995 and breeding noted on Lydd Ranges in 2004 and 2005, for example. Breeding has been reported occasionally on Thanet since the 1940s, and Martin Sutherland's 2022 farmland surveys confirm broadly the atlas distribution, with the addition of near Cliffs End. Sheppey remains more or less Tawny-free. The only birds noted there in KOS records in the past 25 years were one on 7th November 1998 at Eastchurch and a male on 11th and 25th March 2015 heard distantly from Shellness, calling from somewhere towards Harty Ferry.

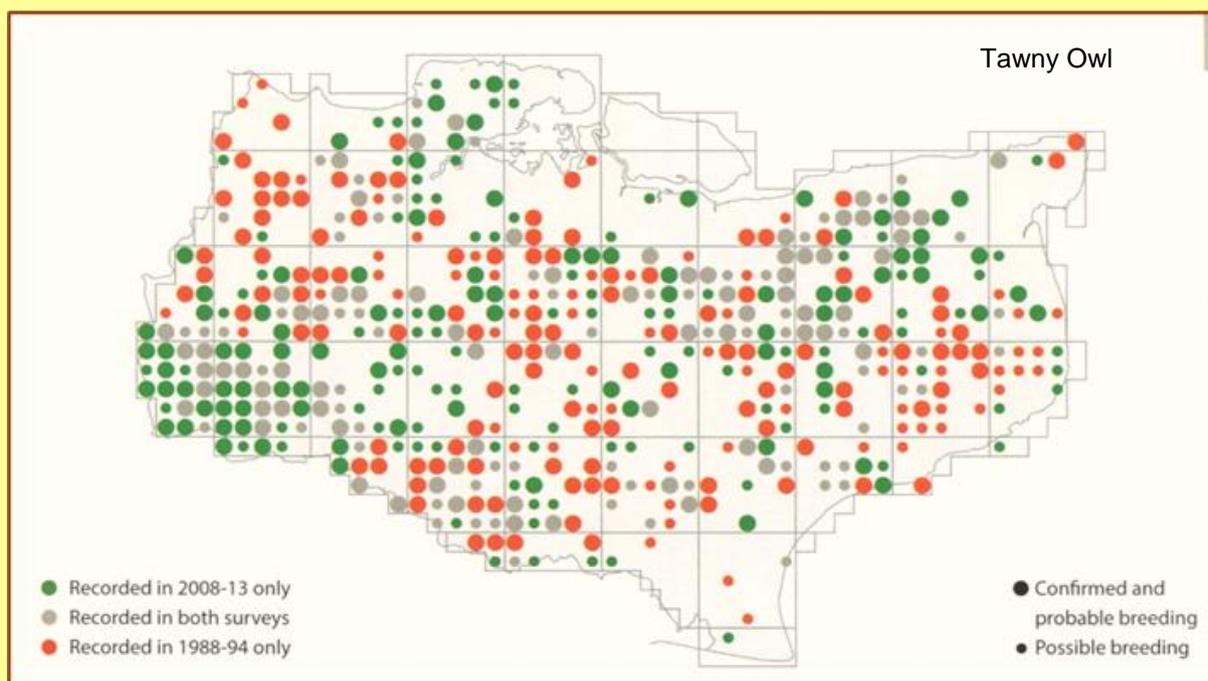


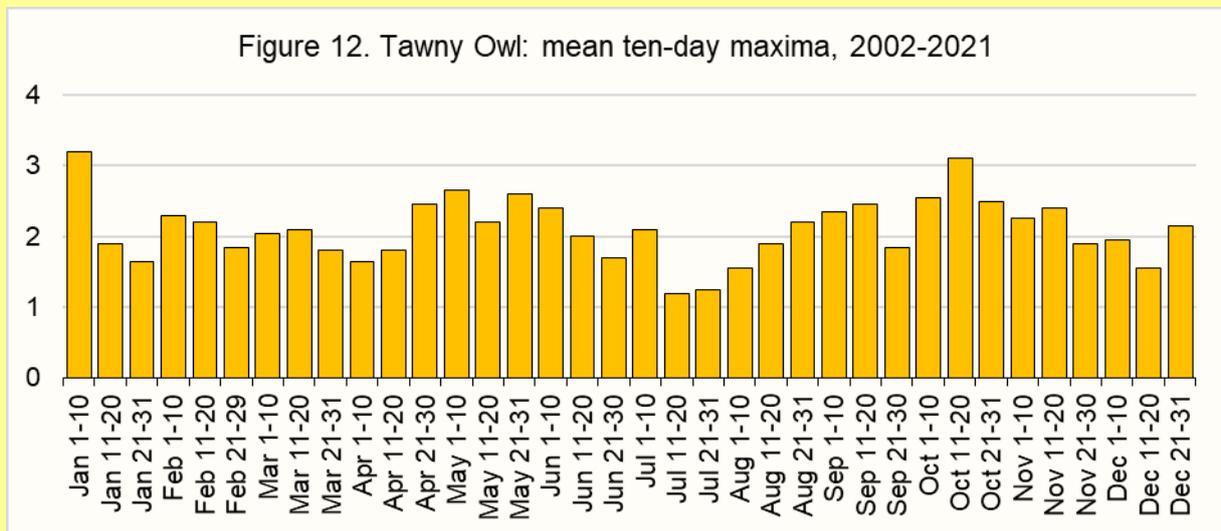
Figure 11. Tawny Owl breeding distribution

There are some odd features of the map. Overall, the number of tetrads with records in successive atlases have been very similar but there was a marked fall of about 25% in those with confirmed/probable breeding between 1988-94 and 2008-13. And there are two areas in which the trend between those two periods was predominantly gain, in contrast to the rest of the county, namely to the east of Canterbury and especially to the west of Tunbridge Wells. My guess is that those effects are more to do with changes in coverage than genuine changes in the owl's status. Tawny Owl is pretty obvious when it calls, and begging young are easy to locate, but you have to make visits at the right time of day (late dusk and early dawn are best) and to spend enough time to be sure you've not missed them.

The population estimate in the 2008-13 Atlas was 800-1,200 pairs. That was based on an average of two-three pairs per occupied tetrad (2x2 km square) and the assumption that they were present in 400 tetrads (i.e. more than they were actually recorded in, 327). My guess is that suggested total is still too low. I'd be surprised if they weren't present in nearer 500 tetrads and feel sure the average density must be higher than 2-3 per tetrad. In broad-leaved woodland (of which there is plenty in Kent) densities can be far higher. For example, at Blean Woods RSPB reserve, up to 24 pairs have been estimated in 509 ha (a density of 18.9 pairs/tetrad). Counting such a large area is difficult and time-consuming and, not surprisingly, complete coverage of that reserve, let alone other woodland in the county, isn't often attempted.

The Breeding Bird Survey, in England, suggests a decline of over 25% since the mid 1990s (BTO Bird Trends), though of course the BBS is a daytime survey and unlikely to be very reliable for a nocturnal species.

Figure 12 shows the average maximum count in the KOS database for each ten day period through the year, over twenty years. The pattern here, as for Little Owl, is fairly flat as expected for a non-flocking sedentary species. There are slight rises in spring, perhaps mostly indicating observers getting out more, and in autumn, which is the time when Tawny Owls can be noisiest, setting up territories for next year, and a dip in July when they're moulting. Note also the spike at the start of January: a spurt of new year enthusiasm (for observers, not owls).



As for almost all species, a look through hundreds or thousands of records will encounter a few unusual ones. For Tawny Owl, I noticed one killed by a train near Dover, something that Long-eared Owls also seem prone to. While the species is sedentary, young birds have to disperse from their parents' territory and that perhaps explains one seen flying out to sea at St Margaret's Bay on 29th March 1974 (I don't know who the observer was but assume it was a Tawny Owl). Perhaps the strangest Tawny Owl story in a Kent Bird Report involved a bird that arrived at Sandwich Bay in the back of a car, "having presumably travelled from Dover", in November 1964; did the driver not notice it?

Now we get on to the fun bit (or is it the trivial bit?): the rarities. I can promise a fair amount of fun and games, anyway. A lot of the records of rare owls are from long ago, and the key Kent sources are Ticehurst (*History of the Birds of Kent*, 1909) and Harrison (*Birds of Kent*, 1953), but www.historicalrarebirds.info is also extremely useful.

Tengmalm's Owl



Tengmalm's Owl, Sweden by Kenny Bruce

Tengmalm's Owl is a bird of northern forests in Europe, Asia and America (where it's known as the Boreal Owl). It's a very rare bird in Britain, most examples being found in Scotland or northern England, and with the majority of records coming from before 1950.

There are two records of the species in Kent that are just about acceptable, and two others which are not. The first was one said to have been shot in Kent, though we don't know where, and received by a London taxidermist in May 1836 (so presumably shot in May or late April).

The second record was of one shot near Dartford on 18th November 1881 and preserved by taxidermists in that town named Davis. An odd thing about this record, pointed out by Ticehurst (p.255), is that W J Davis, who wrote books on the birds of the Dartford district (1904) and Kent (1907), failed to mention the Tengmalm's Owl in them. We can only speculate why not. Another consideration regarding this record, from the point of view of KOS, is that we are assuming it was shot in Dartford district and not across the River Cray in what became Greater London which KOS does not cover.

The first of the two unacceptable records is one in the Hammond collection in Canterbury Museum (where I assume it still is but haven't checked). This specimen had no details, so may not have been obtained in Kent. William Oxenden Hammond was a banker and landowner in east Kent, with land near Nonington. He collected many birds in Kent and the specimens were often carefully labelled, his collection going to the museum when he died in 1903. Unfortunately, some specimens came from elsewhere and some were not labelled, so an unlabelled Tengmalm's Owl has to remain a mystery.

The other unacceptable record involved two, said to have been shot at Sandhurst (the Kent one) on 2nd January 1914 (*British Birds* 7: 265). In the very short note recording them, H W Ford-Lindsay describes them as a pair, implying male and female, but I'm not aware of an explicit statement of that. Anyway, this record was bootied out with all the other Hastings Rarities (see *British Birds* vol.55, August 1962), on the grounds of statistical improbability.

Hawk Owl



Hawk Owl, Brukksvalarna, Sweden by Norman McCanch

Hawk Owl (nowadays Northern Hawk-owl) is another species of northern forests. It is even rarer in Britain than Tengmalm's, with most occurrences many years ago and no acceptable record since 1983. There are no acceptable records at all for Kent but five examples ranging from possible to improbable exist.

Ticehurst (p.260) mentions three: one in the Simmons collection (thus before 1877) in Maidstone Museum (still there? I don't know); one in the Thompson collection (before 1836) at Dover (lost to bombing in 1943); one in George Webb's collection. The first two collections include some North American specimens and, since the Hawk Owls are unlabelled, there must be overwhelming doubt that they were obtained in Kent. The bird in the Webb collection (he was based in Tunstall) was said to have been shot in Kent, but Ticehurst and other authors have regarded the general lack of detail as unsatisfactory. I don't know where the collection went, nor when George Webb died. A complete review of museum and other collections involving Kent birds would be a valuable project, if there is someone with the time and energy and the necessary painstaking approach to see it through.

Two further dubious records are mentioned by Harrison (vol.2, pp.16-17). One was a specimen in Folkestone Museum with no details, so worthless. The other was a sight record by J R Tart at Dungeness on 8th August 1923 "lacking any confirmatory evidence". Most British records, by the way, are during November-February but there are a few old ones in late August.

Scops Owl



Scops Owl by Imran Shah (wikicommons)

This vagrant from southern Europe turns up occasionally in Britain. As a long-distance migrant, it might be expected to occur more frequently and, indeed, perhaps it does, but its small size and nocturnal behaviour may result in birds not being found. Apart from chance encounters, it tends to be the distinctive piping call that draws attention. I say distinctive, but there was an occasion in about 1967, not in Kent but involving a senior, large and bearded, member of BTO staff and two observers from Kent, both later serving terms as KOS President, who thought they had found a Scops Owl but then with embarrassment realised they were following one of the police Velocette motorcycles, which had radios emitting “kiu, kiu, kiu” (*British Birds* (1985) 78: 198).

The six records for Kent, ranging from genuine to possible, are detailed in Table 5.

Table 5. Reports of Scops Owls in Kent		
Details are taken from sources indicated, including Historical Rare Birds (HRB), or from KBRs and/or KOS database for 1952 onwards. I have indicated which records I consider acceptable (normal type) or <i>unacceptable (italics)</i> .		
Year	Location	Notes
Pre-1845	Maidstone	Shot prior to 1845. Acceptable to Ticehurst (p.260) but Harrison thought it not fully substantiated. Specimen was part of the Thompson collection in Dover Museum, now lost. Not currently accepted on Kent List or HRB.
<i>Pre-1845</i>	<i>Unknown</i>	<i>A second bird in the Thompson collection but with no details of the date or place it was obtained. It was in Dover Museum, now lost. Ticehurst (p.260).</i>
1898	Broadstairs	Caught alive but later died, in March 1898 (Ticehurst p.260, photograph in Harrison vol.2 pp.12-13).
1900	Ashford	<i>In Ticehurst's time, there was one in a case at Hythe town hall. The case was labelled "shot in the wood of Ashford" but unfortunately the case also contained a Short-eared Owl, there was no indication to which the label applied nor of a date, and (I may add) nothing to say it wasn't Ashford, Middlesex. Ticehurst p.261.</i>
1904	Chelsfield	<i>Date notional; shot in a wood at Chelsfield and in the hands of a taxidermist in 1904. The location is outside the area covered by KOS, in the GLC area, but is not accepted there. Ticehurst p.261.</i>
1971	Crundale	Found injured on Crundale Downs on 22nd October and later died; accepted by BBRC (<i>British Birds</i> 65: 338).

Snowy Owl



Snowy Owl by R Scott (wikicommons)

Ignoring occasional reports of white owls that were believed to be badly-seen Barn Owls, there have been six or seven reports of this Arctic species in Kent, of which five are currently thought acceptable. Table 6 summarises what we know about them.

The 1992 occurrence is worth a couple of comments. One point is that no-one saw this large and, one would have thought, obvious bird after it landed in Kent. Another is to wonder how many rare birds may have made ship-assisted crossings to Britain. Migrant owls, including Long- and Short-eared, do seem to make a habit of landing on ships, as of course do other species, perhaps especially American sparrows, such as the Junco and White-throated Sparrows that arrived off Orkney from Canada on 14th October 2022.

Table 6. Reports of Snowy Owls in Kent		
Details are taken from sources indicated, including Historical Rare Birds (HRB), or from KBRs and/or KOS database for 1952 onwards. I have indicated which records are regarded as acceptable (normal type) or <i>unacceptable (italics)</i> .		
Year	Location	Notes
1844	Frinsted	Probably one bird, shot in 1844 (Ticehurst p.259). One interpretation of confused reports is that it was an adult male.
1844	<i>Unknown</i>	<i>There could have been a second (and just possibly even a third) individual in the Sittingbourne/Doddington/Frinsted area at around the same time as the first record (Ticehurst p.259).</i>
1927	Langdon	An adult, shot on 4th March. This was in the collection of Guy Mannering, which went to Maidstone Museum (Harrison vol.2 p.16).
1948	Swalecliffe	One seen on 13th January (Harrison vol.2 p.16).
1950	Dungeness	One seen at the lighthouse at 3 a.m. on 30th March (Harrison vol.2 p.16).
1965	Lydd	A female was present near Lydd from 24th to 31st January (British Birds 65: 338).
1992	<i>At sea</i>	<i>One landed on a ship in the Atlantic (we don't know exactly where) on 26th February and flew off towards Folkestone on the 29th (KBR 1992 p.71).</i>

Eurasian Eagle-owl



Eagle Owl (wikicommons)

Eagle Owl is common enough across Europe, if mostly at low densities, but is not currently on the British list. It's a popular species in collections and at falconry displays, and inevitably some escape into the wild. That has happened in Kent at least as a consequence of the great storm of October 1987. There are quite a few instances of Eagle Owls breeding in the wild in Britain, including for several successive years in Lancashire.

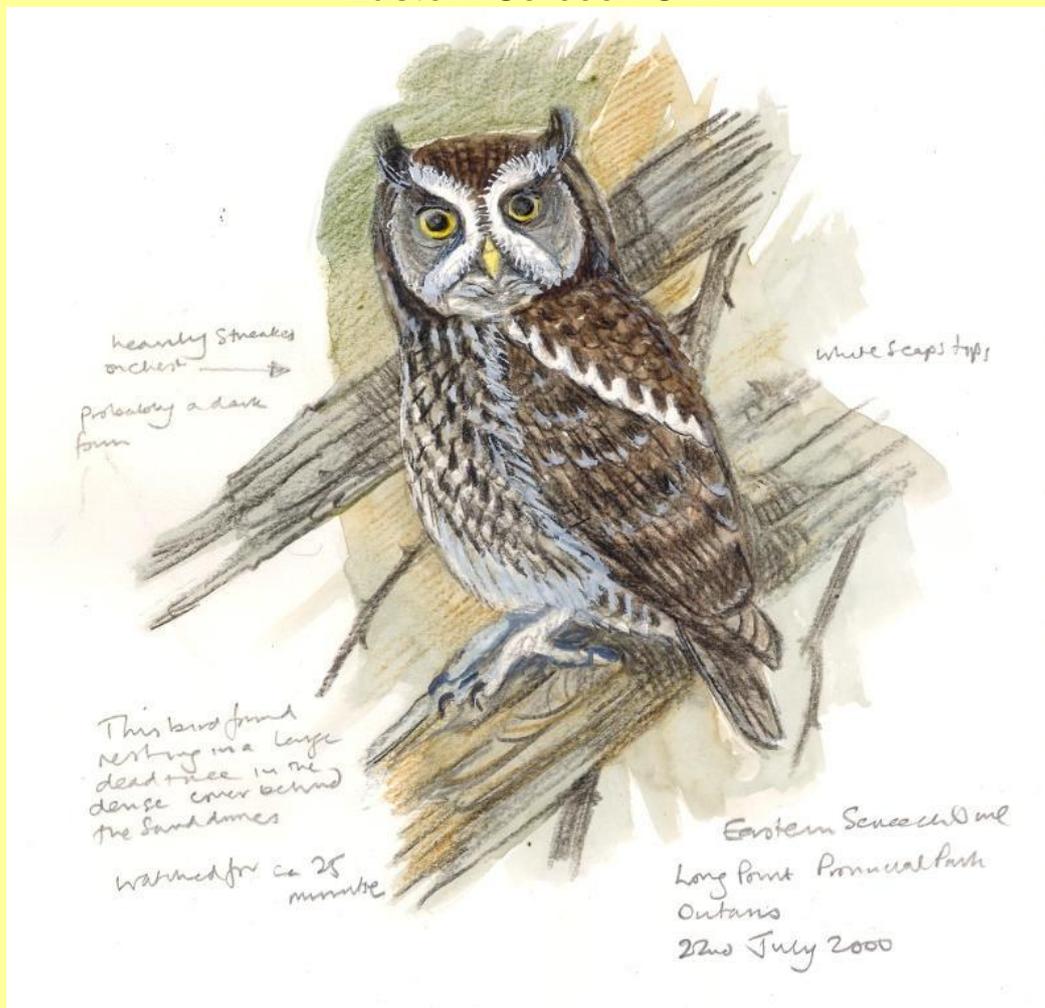
A paper in *British Birds* (2011, vol.101 pp.478-490) reviewed the status of Eagle Owl in Britain and considered whether it might qualify for admittance to the British list. There are plenty of people who believe that some occurrences in Britain are of wild birds from mainland Europe but the paper concluded that there was not yet strong enough evidence to admit the species.

Table 7 lists all of the records that I have managed to trace (including two, at Charing in 2006-2008 and at Ruckinge in 2019, not previously in a bird report). The 1770 record is perhaps the best candidate for a wild bird, but one wonders whether it might have been a combination of Tawny or Long-eared Owl and imagination. The 2012 Ashford record had a surprising twist in the tail.

Table 7. Reports of Eagle Owls in Kent		
Details are taken from sources indicated, including Historical Rare Birds (HRB), or from KBRs and/or KOS database for 1952 onwards. None of these is accepted as a wild bird.		
Year	Location	Notes
1770	Kent	John Latham, of Kentish bird-naming fame, mentioned that Eagle Owl "has once been seen in Kent, perched upon a gate, near to a large wood, in the spring of 1770" (Ticehurst p.261).
1984	Hamstreet	One was in the Hamstreet area from 22nd to 26th June (KBR 1984 p.73).
1988	Sandwich Bay	One in the Cinque ports golf course area between Sandwich Bay and Deal on 2nd December (SBBO report 1988 p.45).
1990	East Blean Wood	Seen on four occasions between 24th May and 15th June. Three were known to have escaped from a local wildlife park during the previous three years (KBR 1990 p.85).
1995	Sandwich Bay	One at Sandwich Bay on 1st December was reported as an eagle owl species, and not definitely <i>Bubo bubo</i> (KBR 1995 p.123).

2003	Broadstairs	One seen on 19th October. It was wearing jesses, and thus a falconer's/owl handler's bird (KBR 2003 p.118).
2004	Elmley	One was at Elmley RSPB reserve from 30th January to 1st February (KBR 2004 p.123).
2004	South Medway	One was at Lower Halstow on 15th May (KBR 2004 p.123).
2005	Hawkhurst	One was seen near Hawkhurst on 16th May (KBR 2005 p.125).
2006-2008	Charing	An escaped male lived in the wild in Charing "for eighteen months". Search www.kentonline.co.uk/ashford/news for Eagle Owl on 31st January 2008.
2010	Canterbury	A Finnish-ringed Herring Gull was killed by an Eagle Owl being used to scare birds from Canterbury refuse tip (KBR 2010 p.79).
2012	Ashford	One present in Ashford town centre from late July into August was trapped and ringed on 14th August. It was found, long dead, in Hampshire, on 12th March 2016 (KBR 2010 p.165, 2016 p.170).
2019	Ruckinge	One was filmed on the Port Lympe to Ruckinge road at 2 a.m. on a day presumably shortly before 1st June. Search www.kentonline.co.uk/ashford/news for Eagle Owl on 1st June 2019.

Eastern Screech Owl



Eastern Screech Owl, Long Point Ontario by Norman McCaugh

This is an educational story of Victorian social media. An "American Mottled Owl" was reported by Lord Clifton at Cobham Park on 11th April 1870 (*Zoologist* 1870 p.2138). This species has had tumultuous English and scientific nomenclature but is currently Eastern Screech Owl *Megascops asio* (and n

ot Mottled Owl *Strix virgata* which is something entirely different). It is a non-migratory bird found across the eastern United (?) States of America and into Canada. Ticehurst (p.261) says that the supposed occurrence is "so improbable that no credence need be attached" to it. But it is worth reading the correspondence in the *Zoologist* (available online through www.biodiversitylibrary.org).

After Lord Clifton's original report, there are replies, in *The Zoologist*, first from Henry Hadfield (p.2181) and J H Gurney (p.2221). These seem quite mild, but Lord Clifton returns to support his claim (p.2343) "undeterred by the adverse opinions of our most distinguished ornithologists". Henry Hadfield then issues a scathing response (p.2382) and the editor says "I think it will be better that this discussion should end here". Such a thing could never happen nowadays, could it?

Andrew Henderson

KENT BIRD SIGHTINGS FOR NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2022 - Chris Hindle

Species printed in **red** require descriptions or good quality photographs to be accepted by the British Birds Rarities Committee (species in capital letters) or the KOS Rarities Committee (species in lower case). The results of these committees' deliberations are regularly published on the KOS website.

WEATHER

Most of **November** was warmer than average with fewer frosts although it became colder towards the end of the month. The month was predominantly unsettled with no dry spells longer than three or four days. Rainfall was double the average for the south-east with a monthly total of 124.5 mm at Bishopstone compared to 20 mm for this month in 2020. **December** was colder than average overall, the only month in 2022 for which this was the case. There was a very cold spell from the 7th to the 18th with snow falling overnight on the 12th. Rainfall was limited during the cold spell, but from the 18th there was more rain with a total of 57.25 mm falling at Bishopstone during the month.

PARTRIDGE TO WILDFOWL



Black Brant with Brent Goose by Mikme Gould

An adult **Black Brant** was seen again at Seasalter on Dec 3rd whilst in November and December single **Pale-bellied Brent Geese** were seen at Seasalter and Allhallows and in addition 23 **Barnacle Geese** were recorded from Swale NNR on Dec 25th.

Eight **Pink-footed Geese** were seen at Worth Marshes and seven flew past Sandwich Bay on Nov 5th whilst seven flew N at DBO on the 30th. Four were seen at Cliffe on Dec 3rd, there were 11 at Scotney on the Dec 4th and up to 10 at Walland Marsh between the Dec 7th and 9th

30 **Russian White-fronted Geese** flew S at Samphire Hoe on Nov 18th and then up to 125 were seen at Swale NNR from Nov 27th and in addition, as many as 33 were recorded at Walland Marsh, Dungeness RSPB, DBO, Lydd, Scotney GPs, Conningbrook, Swalecliffe, Worth Marshes, Cooling Marshes and Cliftonville.

The first reports of **Bewick's Swan** came on Nov 13th with six at Cliffe Pools and two at Funton Creek. After this, up to 47 birds were recorded from Walland Marsh with smaller numbers at Cliffe Pools, Dungeness RSPB, Capel Fleet, Tankerton and Pegwell Bay.

Five **Whooper Swans** were reported flying S at North Foreland on Nov 9th with two seen at Dungeness RSPB from Nov 14th-16th and six at Allhallows on the 26th. On Dec 2nd, nine birds arrived at Walland Marsh and remained there the next day and two or three were seen at Dungeness RSPB and Walland Marsh between Dec 7th and the end of the year.

As many as 40 **Egyptian Geese** were seen at Tonbridge with up to four at Bough Beech, Gravesend, Littlebrook, Sandwich Bay, Weddington, Postling and North Foreland and a **Ruddy Shelduck** was seen at Lower Haysden on Dec 16th and 17th with up to 19 **Mandarin Duck** recorded at Bough Beech, Gravesend, Collard's Lake, Hayesden Lake, Swalecliffe, Folks Wood, Willop Basin, Selling, Nickoll's Quarry, Tonbridge, Penshurst Place and East Peckham.

A drake **Green-winged Teal** was identified at Dungeness RSPB between Nov 26th and Dec 22nd and another male was seen at Sandwich Bay on Dec 11th.



Green winged Teal by Richard Hanman

A **Scaup** was seen at Foreness on Nov 13th, a male was found sitting on the sea with 9 Common Scoter off Reculver Towers on Dec 12th, two flew E at Grenham Bay on Dec 17th and there was one at Dungeness RSPB on the 30th.

Three **Velvet Scoter** flew past DBO on Nov 14th and 19th with one on the 15th and one at Ramsgate Harbour on Nov 19th. After this up to six were recorded from DBO, Swalecliffe, Tankerton, North Foreland, Foreness, Reculver and Dover Harbour.

A **Long-tailed Duck** was seen at North Foreland on Nov 4th whilst a male was seen at Sandwich Bay on the 15th with two at Foreness on the 19th and one at North Foreland on the 20th. One or two

Goosanders were seen at Swalecliffe, Foreness, West Hythe, Sellindge, Stodmarsh, Seasalter, Tonbridge, Botolph's Bridge, North Foreland, Worth Marshes and Folkestone with a peak of 15 at Bough Beech during December.



Common Crane by Kevin Duvall

The **Common Crane** first seen on Chislet Marshes during October remained there until Dec 10th roosting at Stodmarsh/Grove Ferry overnight.

As many as two **Red-necked Grebes** were recorded almost daily from November to the beginning of December around the coast from Swalecliffe and Shellness as far as Pegwell Bay. One was also seen off North Foreland on Dec 24th and 25th.

A **Black-necked Grebe** was seen at Swalecliffe on Nov 22nd whilst single **Slavonian Grebes** were seen at Swalecliffe on Nov 2nd and at Reculver, Tankerton and Swalecliffe on the 4th. Four were reported from Seasalter on Nov 20th with one or two at Swalecliffe from Nov 22nd-27th, three from the 28th-Dec 1st and single birds at Cliffe Pools from Dec 5th-22nd and Oare Marshes on the 19th.

A **PALLID SWIFT** picked up and taken into care at Swalecliffe on Nov 2nd may well have been the bird seen at Tankerton the day before. Unfortunately, it did not survive. Unidentified **Swifts** were also seen at Sandwich Bay on the 2nd and Foreness on the 6th.



Pallid Swift (moribund) by Andy Taylor

A **Stone Curlew** was reported flying N and calling at Northward Hill on Nov 3rd whilst a **Dotterel** was seen at Dungeness RSPB on Dec 3rd and at Lydd Airport on the 4th and 5th, again at Dungeness RSPB on the 10th and 11th and at Weddington on the 28th.

A **Curlew Sandpiper** was reported from North Foreland on Nov 4th and three were reported from Elmley on Nov 27th.

As many as 19 **Purple Sandpipers** were recorded from Foreness, DBO, Dumpton, Broadstairs, Deal, Dover, Hampton, Swalecliffe, Shellness, Cliffe Pools and North Foreland.

Single **Little Stints** were seen at Swalecliffe on Nov 18th, at Cliffe Pools on Nov 22nd and Dec 12th and at Elmley on Nov 27th.

During November and December up to four **Jack Snipe** were recorded from Dungeness RSPB, DBO, Sandwich Bay, Trenley Park Woods, Walmer, Faversham Creek, Swanscombe, Swalecliffe, Nethergong, Oare Marshes, Donkey Street and Ham Road.

A **Grey Phalarope** was seen on the sea off the fishing boats at DBO between Nov 9th and the 12th whilst others flew W at Foreness on Nov 19th and S at Sandwich Bay on the 23rd.

Single **Spotted Redshank** were seen at Worth Marshes, Oare Marshes, Pegwell Bay, Lower Halstow, Gillingham and Cliffe Pools.



Sabine's Gull by Steve Ashton

The juvenile **Sabine's Gull** found in the car park at Port Lympne feeding on earthworms on Oct 27th and was still there until Nov 13th whilst other juveniles flew past Folkestone on Nov 6th and were seen at DBO from the 12th-22nd. A juvenile was also reported flying E at Seasalter on Nov 13th and there was an adult at DBO on the 27th.

Up to 194 **Little Gulls** were seen at DBO and Foreness with as many as 50 at Reculver, Herne Bay, Sandwich Bay, Folkestone, North Foreland, Grenham Bay, St Margarets-at-Cliffe, Hythe, Minnis Bay, Foreness, Mill Point, Scotney, Botolph's Bridge, Samphire Hoe, Kingsdown, Nickoll's Quarry, Tankerton and Swalecliffe.

Single **Glaucous Gull** were seen at North Foreland on Dec 6th and 19th whilst one also flew S at Walmer on Dec 8th and a juvenile was seen at DBO and Lade between the 23rd and 24th. An **Iceland Gull** was reported from St Margarets-at-Cliffe on Nov 23rd, one was reported flying S at North Foreland on Dec 8th and there was a third winter bird at DBO on Dec 23rd and 24th.

As many as three **Yellow-legged Gulls** were seen at DBO, Pegwell Bay, North Foreland, Sandgate and Dungeness RSPB with up to seven **Caspian Gulls** at DBO, Dungeness RSPB, Dover, Sandwich Bay, North Foreland, Deal, Walmer Beach, Sandgate, Kingsdown, Folkestone and Pegwell Bay.

A very late juvenile **Little Tern** was seen at Oare Marshes on Nov 16th.

During November as many as 13 **Great Skuas** were seen at DBO, Reculver, North Foreland, Foreness, Grenham Bay, Samphire Hoe and Swalecliffe. In December one flew S at North Foreland on the 20th and 21st.

On Nov 4th, with a fresh NW wind blowing, 10 **Pomarine Skuas** were seen at Reculver with three at Swalecliffe. Two were also seen at DBO on the 6th with singles on the 7th, 11th and 12th. Single birds were also reported from North Foreland on the 13th, 14th and 20th with three reported from there on the 19th. There were also two at DBO on Nov 21st and a dying bird was found at Sandwich Bay on Dec 2nd.



Arctic Skua by Johnathan Dodds.

During November up to 16 **Arctic skuas** were seen at DBO, Reculver, North Foreland and Swalecliffe and a **Long-tailed Skua** was recorded from DBO on Nov 15th and a juvenile was seen there on the 27th.

Single **Little Auks** were seen at DBO, Folkestone and Sandwich Bay on Nov 20th and the next day there were five at DBO and two at Hythe. One was seen at Cliftonville on the 22nd with single birds at Foreness and North Foreland on the 23rd and two reported from North Foreland on Dec 3rd.

Single **Puffins** were recorded from DBO on Nov 6th, 11th, 14th and 27th with two on the 15th and five on the 21st. One was also reported from North Foreland on the Nov 15th.

During November and December up to seven **Black-throated Divers** were seen at DBO with as many as three reported from St Margarets-at-Cliffe, Sandwich Bay, Tankerton, Deal, Dover, Walmer, Hampton, Swalecliffe, Cliftonville, Hythe and North Foreland and up to four **Great Northern Divers** were recorded from DBO, Dungeness RSPB, Swalecliffe, North Foreland, Foreness, Oare Marshes, Hythe, Samphire Hoe, Nickoll's Quarry, Ramsgate, Grenham Bay, Sandgate, Minnis Bay, Herne Bay and Reculver.

Two **Leach's Petrels** flew W past DBO on Nov 7th and 17th and one flew S on the 27th. On Nov 3rd, 26 **Sooty Shearwaters** flew past DBO with five also recorded from Mill Point and another flew E at Reculver on the 4th. There were four at DBO on the Nov 7th and one on the 8th, two on the 11th and 24th and nine on the 15th. On Nov 20th, one flew past Folkestone and two flew past DBO whilst on the 24th there were three at DBO. One was also reported flying N at North Foreland on Dec 5th.



Sooty Shearwater by Martin Garwood

Single **Manx Shearwaters** flew past DBO on Nov 7th, 8th and 15th.

WHITE STORK TO WOODPECKERS

Two **White Storks** flew over Dungeness on Dec 10th and two **Glossy Ibises** remained at Dungeness RSPB until the end of the year.

As many as six **Shags** were seen at DBO, Dover, Foreness, Sandwich Bay, Samphire Hoe, Chatham Dock, Tankerton, St Mary's Island and North Foreland.

Up to three **Spoonbills** were seen at Cliffe Pools, Oare Marshes, Faversham Creek, Harty Marshes, Bough Beech, Seasalter, Brooksend, South Swale LNR, Pegwell Bay, North Foreland, Foreness, Reculver Marshes, Swalecliffe and Tankerton.

Single **Bitterns** were seen at Snodland and Stodmarsh on Nov 30th and then during December, particularly after the cold weather, one or two birds were recorded at Dungeness RSPB, Stodmarsh/Grove Ferry, Swale NNR, Oare Marshes, New Hythe and Elmley.

Up to 14 **Cattle Egrets** were seen at Dungeness RSPB, Donkey Street, Elmley, Oare Marshes, Seaton, Littlebourne, Capel Fleet, Preston, Lydd, Hythe, Swalecliffe, Shellness, Uplees, Lympe, Worth Marshes and Stodmarsh/Grove Ferry.

The long staying juvenile **Purple Heron** was last seen at Seasalter on November 2nd whilst what was probably the same bird was seen at Swale NNR on the Nov 7th.



Purple Heron by Shane Vale

During November and December as many as three **Great White Egrets** were seen at Dungeness RSPB, DBO, Worth Marshes, South Swale LNR, North Foreland, Capel-le-Ferne, Bough Beech, Nickoll's Quarry, Botolph's Bridge, Seabrook, Chislet Marshes, Otford, Preston, Oare Marshes and Stodmarsh/Grove Ferry.

An **Osprey** remained at Appledore until Nov 13th.

As many as three **Hen Harriers** were seen at Dungeness RSPB, Worth Marshes, Sandwich Bay, Conyer, Hothfield Common, Oare Marshes, St Mary's Marsh, Swalecliffe, Sarre, Swale NNR, Halstow Marshes, Scotney, Grove Ferry/Stodmarsh, Langdon Bay, Northward Hill, Preston, Reculver, Seasalter, Elmley, Capel Fleet and Harty Ferry.

During November and December one or two **Red Kites** were seen at Sandwich Bay, Worth Marshes, Ashford and Penshurst Place and there were 16 reported from Knockholt on Nov 15th.

A **Rough-legged Buzzard** was reported flying NW at Abbotscliffe on Dec 14th.

A male **Long-eared Owl** was heard at Bishopstone during December and during these two months as many as five **Short-eared Owls** were recorded from Seasalter, Foreness, North Foreland, Dartford Marshes, Samphire Hoe, Cliffe Pools, Conyer, Oare Marshes, Sandwich Bay, Worth Marshes, Reculver and Dungeness RSPB.

A **Hoopoe** was seen at Dungeness on Nov 5th with one was recorded from Lympe from Nov 17th-22nd.

FALCONS TO HIRUNDINES

One or two **Merlins** were seen at DBO, Dungeness RSPB, Reculver, Swale NNR, Northward Hill, Stodmarsh, Swalecliffe, South Swale LNR, Pegwell Bay, Worth Marshes and Sandwich Bay.

A **Great Grey Shrike** was seen at Hothfield Common between Nov 8th and the 26th.



Great Grey Shrike by Russ Blackman

Up to four **Ravens** were recorded from Sandwich Bay, Worth Marshes, Dungeness, Penshurst Place, Nethergong, Scotney, Minster, Reculver Marshes, Bedgebury, Dover, Fordwich and Bockhill.

The first **Waxwing** of the winter flew over Pegwell Bay on Dec 5th whilst two were reported flying in off the sea at North Foreland on the 11th with single birds seen at Broadstairs on Dec 16th and Betteshanger on the 19th.

Two **Penduline Tits** were found at Brickfields, Elmley on Dec 10th and remained there until the 17th.

Four **Woodlarks** flew in off the sea at Whiteness on Nov 2nd with one at Bockhill on the 4th and another at Sandwich Bay on the 13th. One also flew over Worth Marshes on Dec 20th.

Very late **Sand Martins** were found at Nickoll's Quarry in the company of five Swallows on Nov 16th and at DBO on Nov 20th.



Red-rumped Swallow by Mark Chidwick

Two **Red-rumped Swallows** frequented the Foreness area between Nov 5th and 11th and another bird was seen at Sandown Castle on Nov 10th and 11th with two at Kingsdown on the 17th. Single birds were also seen at Foreness and Pegwell Bay on Nov 18th and Cliftonville on the 22nd.

WARBLERS TO WHEATEARS

A **HUME'S WARBLER** was found at Dover on Dec 20th and remained there until the end of the year whilst single **Yellow-browed Warblers** were reported from Port Lympne on Nov 4th and St Margarets-at-Cliffe on the 12th and 19th.



Hume's warbler by Steve Reynaert

A **Pallas's Warbler** was found at South Foreland on Nov 11th with two there between the 12th and the 14th and one on the 17th. One was also found at Dungeness on Nov 27th.

A **Siberian Chiffchaff** was seen at Reculver on Nov 29th and ringed there on 30th.

©moihicksphotography



Dartford Warbler by Moi Hicks

During November and the beginning of December up to six **Dartford Warblers** were seen at Dungeness with as many as four reported from Lade, Foreness Reculver, Hothfield Common, Aycliff, Ham Marshes, Abbotscliffe, Lade, Conyer, North Foreland, Chamber's Wall, Nethergong, Oare Marshes, Elmley, Hoo St Werburgh and Sandwich Bay. Fewer birds were reported after the freezing spell of weather in December.

Up to five **Firecrests** were recorded from DBO, Sandwich Bay, Dungeness RSPB, South Foreland, Northward Hill, Hythe, Folkestone, Shuart, Monkton and New Hythe.

During November one or two **Ring Ouzels** were seen at Bough Beech, Samphire Hoe, Gillingham and Langdon Cliffs. There was also an unexpected record of one seen and photographed at East Malling on Dec 23rd.

As many as four **Black Redstarts** were seen at Bough Beech, Dungeness, Dover, Hythe, Abbotscliffe, Langdon Bay, Folkestone, Reculver, Foreness, Whitstable, Lympne, North Foreland, Kingsdown, Plumpudding, Kingsgate, Swale NNR, Mill Point, Southborough, Swalecliffe, Chetney Marshes and Samphire Hoe.

A first winter **SIBERIAN STONECHAT** was seen at Dungeness from Nov 5th-6th. An injured **Wheatear** was seen at Swale LNR on Nov 19th.

SPARROWS TO BUNTINGS

During these two months up to 10 **Water Pipits** were seen at Stodmarsh/Grove Ferry, Oare Marshes, Nethergong, Swanscombe, North Foreland, Dartford Marshes, Dungeness RSPB and Worth Marshes.

Single **Hawfinches** were seen at Nethergong on Nov 5th, Trottiscliffe on Nov 29th and Dec 17th whilst a calling **Serin** flew over North Foreland on Nov 29th. During November single **Lapland Buntings** were recorded from Sandwich Bay, Worth Marshes and Marden.



Snow Buntings by Mike Gould

Up to 15 **Snow Buntings** were recorded from North Foreland, Sandwich Bay, Foreness, Langdon Bay, Oare Marshes, Plumpudding, Dungeness RSPB, Margate, Grenham Bay, Reculver, St Mary's Marsh, Walland Marsh, Allhallows, Shellness, Abbotscliffe, Bockhill and Swalecliffe.

DBO = Dungeness Bird Observatory **BBRC** = British Birds Rarities Committee

RSPB = Royal Society for the Protection of Birds **BOU** = British Ornithological Union

"The Patch" = the warm water outflow from Dungeness Nuclear Power Station

NNR=National Nature Reserve **NR**=Nature Reserve **LNR**=Local Nature Reserve

FC = Field Centre **WR** = Wildlife Reserve **GP** = Gravel Pits **CP** = Country Park

CONTRIBUTORS

This summary owes much to the contributors to the various sites in "Latest Sightings" on the KOS Website at www.kentos.org.uk, Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp and the RBA Hotline.

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Please send records for this review to Chris Hindle at christopherhindle@hotmail.com

Records sent to me may not all be used for this report as I try to extract the more interesting sightings, however all records are equally important and I forward them to the appropriate Area Recorders and they are then entered onto the KOS database.

Please also send to me any descriptions or photos of rare birds so that they may be assessed by the relevant committee.

The following 2022 KOS Rarities have recently been accepted by the KOS Rarities Panel based on published photos or from descriptions submitted.

Common Rosefinch	Langdon Hole	Sept 13th-15th
1 or 2 Black Brants (adult)	Seasalter	Oct 19th-Dec 3rd
Black Brant	Minnis Bay/Reculver	October 29th-30th
Green-winged Teal (male)	Dungeness RSPB	Nov 26th-Dec 22nd
Pectoral Sandpiper	Worth Marshes	July 28th & 29th
Red-necked Phalarope	Worth Marshes	September 14th
Purple Heron (juvenile)	Seasalter	Aug 27th - Nov 2nd
Red-footed Falcon (juvenile)	Graveney Marshes	Sept 14th-15th
Red-footed Falcon (juvenile)	Elmley NNR	October 3rd-9th
2 Penduline Tits	Brickfields, Elmley	Dec 10th-17th
2 Red-rumped Swallows	Foreness	November 5th-11th
2 Red-rumped Swallows	Kingsdown	November 17th
Red-breasted Flycatcher	Leysdown-on-Sea	September 25th
Green-winged Teal (male)	Sandwich Bay	December 11th
Buff-breasted Sandpiper	Sandwich Bay	September 17th
Night-heron (juvenile)	Lade Pits	Sept 21st-23rd
Siberian Chiffchaff	West Brook Valley, Reculver	January 21st
Siberian Chiffchaff	Reculver	Nov 29th-30th

Fifty Years Ago **Greenfinch**

There were widespread records of this species and during the winter months flocks of over 100 were reported from all areas. Largest counts were 450 on Jan. 13th at Broadness, 200 at Joyden's Wood on Jan. 18th, 900 at Nettlestead on Jan. 7th



Greenfinch by JG Keulemans (PDI)

KBR 1973

