



*Little Owl by Chris Hindle*

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

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Mid-summer, although in the past I usually could rely on seeing a small but steady passage of Lapwings over my garden, which made me call it the beginning of autumn. Quite a few non-birders were very far from being grunted by this spot of idiosyncratic pedantry, but who cares what non-birders think! A range of conflicting circumstances have kept me from proper birding for the past few months, so I have been engrossed in gardening and watching birds and other life-forms around my home. This set me thinking about the passage of time and how I will cope when I cannot get out and about as I once did, a sobering exercise but one with possibilities.

This issue of the newsletter is more than a little melancholy as it contains obituary notices for two members of very long standing, indeed both Jim Flegg and Philip Redman were amongst the last surviving Founder Members of the KOS. Their passing is a bit of a landmark as we now have only one Founder Member remaining, my good friend John Hollyer. He will be known to many of you and there can be no doubt that over many years he has made a substantial contribution to Ornithology in Kent and elsewhere. Most of his birding now takes place from a strategic window, even so on a recent visit he reported a Spotted Flycatcher in the tree outside earlier in the week, a species I still have not found this year!! Long may he continue to delight in birds and drawing.

Good birding

Norman

## News and announcements

### KOS Newsletter May 2024

#### Avian Influenza and BirdTrack

Please continue to be vigilant and look out for sick or dead birds in circumstances where bird flu is suspected, especially around the coast and inland wetlands and water bodies.

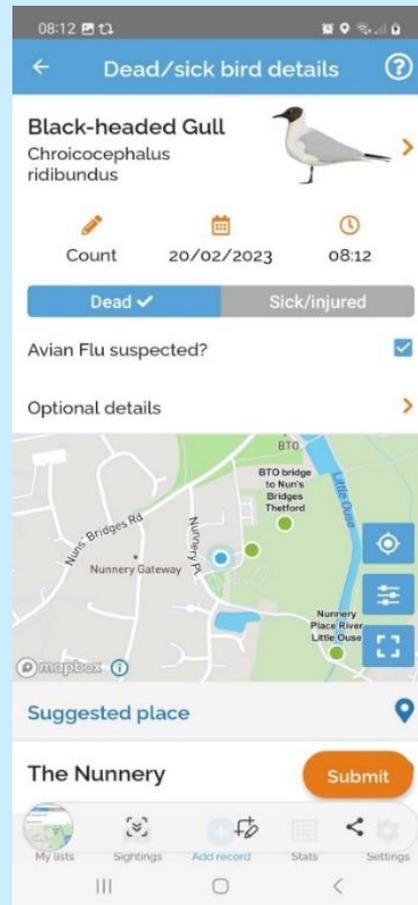
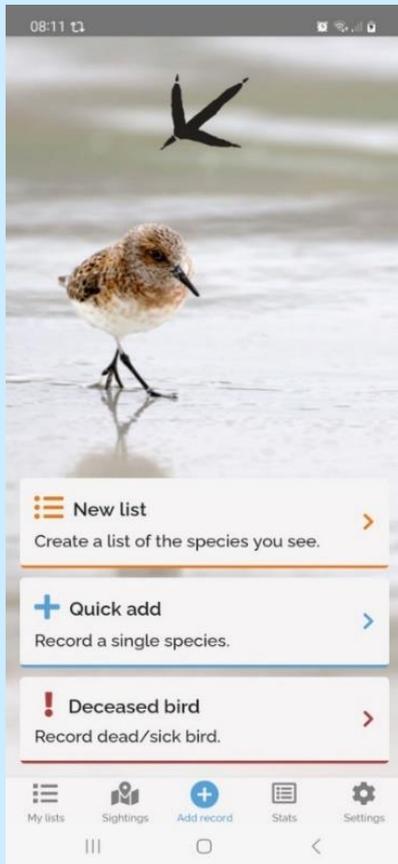
Defra guidelines for reporting have recently changed and you should report to Defra if you find:

- **One or more dead bird of prey, gull, swan, goose or duck in the same place**
- **Five or more dead wild birds of any other species in the same place**

#### Report at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/report-dead-wild-birds>

The BirdTrack 'Deceased bird' tool on the phone app provides a quick and easy way for you to report dead or sick birds which are not on the Defra priority list for reporting. An example could be a single as Grey Heron or Woodpigeon, or if you find fewer than five of the priority species, such as three Black-headed Gulls.

The additional data collected through BirdTrack complements information collected through the Defra scheme and the Epicollect system used by site managers working for country agencies. Thank you very much for taking the time to submit these records.



**References, links and further reading:**

Defra: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/report-dead-wild-birds>

Birdtrack: <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/birdtrack>

Defra: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/report-dead-wild-birds> 03459 33 55 77 (call charges may apply)

<https://www.bto.org/understanding-birds/avian-influenza>

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/avian-influenza-updates>

## Please Submit 2024 Survey Data Now!

### – BBS/WBBS, Heronry Census, Seabird Monitoring Programme (SMP), Rare Breeding Birds (RBBP)

For those that participated in the above, or any other breeding season survey in 2024, please ensure that you submit your data now!

On-line entry of BBS/WBBS data should be completed by the end of August for results to be included in “The Breeding Bird Survey 2024”, but paper Count Summary Sheets can still be submitted later to ensure that valuable data is not lost. Please send to Bob Knight [rjknight53@gmail.com](mailto:rjknight53@gmail.com)

Heronry Census counts should also be submitted by end of August so that results can be included in this year’s national summary. Please submit on-line or send data to Brian Watmough [brianwat@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:brianwat@yahoo.co.uk)

-Please also submit any notable breeding records recorded during the year, to the KOS or BirdTrack /eBird, especially those of RBBP species:-

Quail  
Garganey  
Shoveler  
Wigeon  
Pintail  
Pochard  
Turtle Dove  
Spotted Crake  
Black-necked Grebe  
Black-winged Stilt  
Avocet  
Little Ringed Plover  
Mediterranean Gull  
Little Tern  
Eurasian Bittern  
Cattle Egret  
Little Egret  
Honey Buzzard  
Goshawk  
Marsh Harrier  
Long-eared Owl  
Short-eared Owl  
Lesser Spotted  
Woodpecker  
Hobby  
Peregrine Falcon  
Golden Oriole  
Bearded Tit  
Woodlark  
Marsh Warbler  
Savi's Warbler  
Dartford Warbler  
Black Redstart  
Hawfinch

RBBP records can be submitted directly, in confidence, to David Smith [DavidSmith@epr.uk.com](mailto:DavidSmith@epr.uk.com) or Murray Orchard [murray.orchard@live.co.uk](mailto:murray.orchard@live.co.uk) or to the County Recorder - Barry Wright [umbrellabirds66@gmail.com](mailto:umbrellabirds66@gmail.com)

Thank You.

Bob Knight, Brian Watmough, David Smith, Murray Orchard, Barry Wright

## **BTO AUTUMN GULL SURVEY 2024**

The Winter Gull Survey (WinGS) collects information about our wintering gull populations, through the coordinated effort of volunteer surveyors across the UK.

Last winter (January 2024) volunteer counters helped Kent to achieve excellent coverage for the first WinGS count (see KOS News Number 549 March 2024).

In addition to the Winter survey periods (January 2024 and January 2025), WinGS is also covering the upcoming Autumn 2024 season. The key date for the **Autumn Gull Count** is **September 29th** with a week before and after the key date where counts can be conducted. Supplementary counts may also be submitted from August to the end of October if you wish to complete repeat counts of your site.

The purpose of the autumn survey is to capture seasonal peaks of gull species such as Yellow-legged and Lesser Black-backed gulls which are present in high abundances on passage and can be captured in post breeding aggregations.

We will be conducting comparisons between wintering numbers and autumn counts to assess changes in species peaks and distributions across seasons. This data is useful for effective conservation action where all aspects of the groups temporal movement ecology are considered.

All methods remain the same for the Autumn survey period as for the Winter count. Counters are to arrive at their allocated sites 1 - 2 hours before sunset and count gulls as they arrive at the site. If you are covering an inland sample site which includes urban environment, keep a look out for gulls roosting on roofs which is a more commonly observed behaviour in this season!

Count sites remain the same as for January 2024 and will once again be coordinated by the WeBS Local Organisers.

If you would like to participate in this survey, please sign up as before and request a site, or contact your WeBS Local Organiser who will advise on what to do (see below). WeBS Local Organisers in Kent;

**Thames**, Murray Orchard - [murray.orchard@live.co.uk](mailto:murray.orchard@live.co.uk)

**Medway**, Bob Knight - [rjknight53@gmail.com](mailto:rjknight53@gmail.com)

**Swale**, Brian Watmough - [brianrwat1@gmail.com](mailto:brianrwat1@gmail.com)

**East Kent**, Heather Mathieson - [HeatherMathieson@outlook.com](mailto:HeatherMathieson@outlook.com)

**Pegwell Bay**, Steffan Walton – [steffan.walton@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:steffan.walton@hotmail.co.uk)

**Dungeness area**, Dave Walker – [dungenessobs@vfast.co.uk](mailto:dungenessobs@vfast.co.uk)

**All other areas (including West Kent)**, Murray Orchard - [murray.orchard@live.co.uk](mailto:murray.orchard@live.co.uk)

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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.

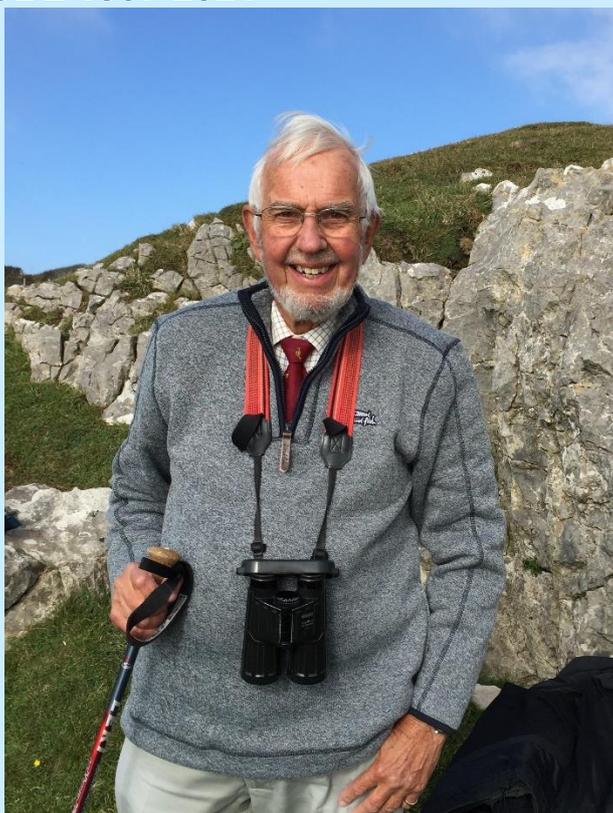
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We like to keep in touch with all our members, so if you change address, email address or phone numbers please remember to inform our membership secretary, Chris Roome. He can be contacted at:  
**Chris Roome, Rowland House, Station Rd., Staplehurst TN12 0PY**

Tel: 01580 891686 e-mail: [chrisroome105@icloud.com](mailto:chrisroome105@icloud.com)

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## Obituary - Jim Flegg OBE 1937-2024



Jim Flegg, who died on 7<sup>th</sup> May, was born in Hong Kong, where his father oversaw the water pumping station on Hong Kong Island. He and his mother were evacuated to Australia in 1941, his father being killed in the Japanese invasion just before Christmas.

Jim started school in Melbourne but in 1945 they started the long sea voyage back to Britain with stops at Cape Town and St Helena. Both Hong Kong and Australia had been formative with Jim later saying that 'once you have seen a Lyrebird you are hooked for life' and later visiting Hong Kong to take part in their bird race. He always had an affinity for Australia and was later to visit on family holidays and even to write a field guide to Australian birds. On the way from Avonmouth to London by train the net bags of oranges bought in Cape Town were looked on with envy by other passengers.

He and his mother settled back in the Medway towns close to her family but postwar austerity and the cold 1947 winter must have been a shock after life in Australia. Jim started at Gillingham Grammar School in 1948. No biological sciences were taught but first years had one lesson on Natural History each week. The teacher Mr G B Rimes inspired a love of the natural world in many of his pupils, such as the Davenport brothers, Ken Chapman & Mike Watts and also Peter Roberts, taking them out birdwatching on Sundays. He was a founding member of the Kent Ornithological Society in 1951 and took Jim to the first meeting in Canterbury. Jim joined as a junior and was one of only three surviving continuously serving founder members.

Whilst still at school he joined the British Trust for Ornithology and spent a week at Dungeness Bird Observatory being trained as a bird ringer by the legendary Bert Axell. After that intensive week he was approved for a permit. He later spent time at Monks House in Northumberland under the tutelage of Eric Ennion, another inspiration to many young ornithologists. He remained involved with Dungeness for the

rest of his life and in his turn trained and inspired many young people. In an interview with Chris Roome for the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the KOS Jim recalled cycling from Gillingham to Dungeness as well as all over North Kent.

University followed, reading Engineering at Queen Mary College in London. By his own admission, Jim did not apply himself to study, enjoying too many extra curricular activities and was culled after failing the first year exams. After a brief skirmish with the Ministry of Public Building and Works he decided on a career in biology, starting as a lowly lab technician at East Malling Research Station in 1957. Here, working under Dr R S Pitcher, an expert on nematodes, he was given a great deal of support both by Pitch and the Director Dr Tubbs, encouraging him to study for both Botany & Zoology A levels and towards a place at Imperial College London. This attempt was considerably more successful and a research project, on nematodes of course, resulted in Jim discovering a species new to science as well as gaining a first.

Then back to East Malling in October 1963 working on nematodes as agricultural pests of potatoes and strawberries.

All this time birdwatching and particularly ringing continued unabated, firstly with David Musson and then as a member of the Mid-Kent Ringing Group. In those days the Kent Bird Reports were liberally punctuated by the initials JJMF/DFM against their many sightings. Nocturnal wader ringing was started on Sheppey and at Grovehurst, the latter site now buried under Morrisons distribution depot. Other birding trips encompassed Almeria in Spain, the Scilly Isles, Great Saltee off Wexford and later the Welsh islands of Skokholm, Skomer and Grassholm.

Jim's regular ringing project was at Northward Hill in North Kent, then the site of Britain's largest heronry. 50 plus homemade nestboxes, some right under the herons, formed the basis of a study of Blue Tits mimicking Christopher Perrins' work on Great Tits at Oxford. In those days we used to dissuade Tree Sparrows from occupying the boxes that we felt were rightfully better used by Blue Tits.

Another summer activity was ringing Black-headed Gulls and Common Terns on the islands in the Medway and Swale estuaries, a very muddy and as far as the ringing group was concerned very expensive exercise. These island colonies were reached by a tiny flat-bottomed boat which could be carried inside Jim's Ford Squire Estate or later a Hillman Minx. If a calm tide allowed, it could just carry 4 people. At low tide it was pushed across the mud.

Jim was awarded his PhD in 1967 and his next career move was to the Ministry of Agricultural Plant Pathology Laboratory at Harpenden in Hertfordshire at Senior Scientific Officer grade, the Hillman being upgraded to a Rover 2000.

About this time Jim was becoming more involved with the British Trust for Ornithology through its Ringing Committee and he was approached to apply for the position of Director of Research there as they needed a PhD qualified zoologist with an active field interest in ornithology.

These were exciting times at the BTO with expansion from just 25 staff, the research, fieldwork and then in house publication of the groundbreaking Breeding Bird Atlas, the extension of the Beech Grove headquarters at Tring and later the planning of the move to Thetford.

Jim led the rationalizing of staff pay grades, restructuring bird ring prices and the use of outside sponsorship from such diverse sources as Shell, the Atomic Energy Authority and the RAF. A bonus of the RAF contract was a flight in a Mach 2 capable Lightning fighter.

Jim was a prolific writer, starting with the first paper of many on nematodes in 1964. There are also many on birds including Blue Tits, Black-headed Gulls and Puffins and about thirty books, from the revision of James Fisher's iconic *Watching Birds* in 1974 to *Time to Fly* about migration in 2004, all aimed at bridging the gap between science and the public. Perhaps his favourite was the *Collins Little Gem Guide*, illustrated by Marin Woodcock, a bestselling starter guide.

For those of us in Kent his most important contribution was as one of the editorial team, with Don Taylor and David Davenport for the *Birds of Kent* - the leading county avifauna published by the society in 1981. He was a member of the Notes Panel for British Birds journal for over 50 years and also an editor for the New Naturalist books, writing the introduction for the latest in the series, *Stoats & Weasels*, shortly before his death.

Through BTO contacts he also led several bird tours, a market for which was opening up in the 1970's- the Camargue, Crete, Ethiopia (where they flew out of Addis with gunfire around the airport as Haille Selassie was deposed), India & Nepal and the Galapagos. There were also trips to Scilly and to St Kilda, investigating the decline in Puffin populations

The return to East Malling in 1976 was for the rest of his career, eventually progressing to be Director of Horticulture Research International. As a result of his continuing dedication and leadership of horticultural research he was awarded the OBE in 1997.

In the 1980's he was much in demand on the lecture circuit, radio and TV. Radio 4 broadcast 100 ten-minute episodes of *Bird of the Week* in 1980-81, and there was also *Radio Nature Trails*, which led to TV with Animal Magic with Johnny Morris. He appeared many times as presenter of Southern Television's

*Country Ways*, a very popular early evening programme covering rural life first in Kent and later more widely across the South. By now family life, work and restoring their home at East Sutton limited Jim's ability to go out birding but he never lost his deep interest in natural history through Butterfly Conservation and the KTNC, and of course the KOS, for whom he served as chairman and then president from 1977 to 2003.

The move back to Kent immediately proved eventful as it was there that he met his wife-to-be, Caroline, who survives him with their sons Matthew & William, their wives and three grandchildren.

**Chris Cox**

## **Obituary – Philip Redman 1930 - 2024**

We recently heard from Philip Redman's son that his father had died in early July. He was either 93 or just 94 years old, but had been immobile in a wheelchair for about a year. He had a problem with his knees for some while but resolutely declined to seek medical attention. He had been living for many years with his partner Bettine in the centre of Paris and only rarely visited Kent. He was a founder member of the KOS, some 72 years ago when he would have been aged 21 – 22). After National Service in the army, he worked for many years at the Maidstone Law Courts where a letter addressed "Redman Law Maidstone" would invariably find him!

Phil was nothing if not adventurous, organising challenging ringing expeditions to Tory Island off the Ulster Coast and subsequently in the autumn of 1954 to Cap Gris Nez in Northern France, where he was accompanied by among others John Hollyer, who he had met in April 1951 at Grove Ferry. These were austere times and John Hollyer remembers hitch-hiking from Deal to Donegal and back, although I have no information as to whether Phil Reman followed a similar route!

John Websper mentioned to me that he first met Philip in 1953 soon after meeting Dennis Harle & John Hollyer, immediately following the North Sea floods. Philip was instrumental in the establishing of the observatory at Sandwich Bay. It was a trip he made with Dennis Harle to Skokholm, the Isle of May and Gibraltar Point in 1951 that led to the building of the initial Heligoland traps at Sandwich. While on the Isle of May they encountered a massive East Coast "fall" of migrants the remnants of which they found at Gib Point a few days later. This convinced them that some type of Ringing Station was worth a try at the Bay, leading to the first Heligoland in "The Garden" (Slazengers old house) in 1952, followed the next year by a second trap. At the time Phil lived in the Maidstone area so was not a daily visitor to the Bay but attended whenever he could, all of which led to John Hollyer, Tony Petitt, John Websper & George Dunkling involved in running the observatory.

Some years later Phil started a business supplying Refrigeration equipment to commercial clients and this allowed him to eventually settle in Paris, although he made flying visits to Kent from time to time. In recent years he had taken an interest in historic information regarding Kent birds and submitted a fine paper analysing population changes in a Wealden Farm incorporating data from the diaries of the late Norman Ticehurst, which appeared in a recent KOS News. A further paper looking at breeding bird population changes around Bearsted based in part on data collected as a schoolboy birder sadly presented several problems of interpretation and has fallen by the wayside. Phil had also been working for some while on a paper about the Hastings Rarities which may still be with British Birds, awaiting their decision on publication. It seems likely that it will not now see the light of day, a shame as Philip had done a good deal of research on the diaries of Norman Ticehurst which had apparently given some insight into the circumstances surrounding that sorry affair.

**Norman McCanch**

## ACROCEPHALUS WARBLERS

This article covers the warblers of largely brownish hue that inhabit reedbeds, marshes and similar habitats, in the genus *Acrocephalus*. There are seven species on the British list, all of which have been recorded in Kent: Great Reed Warbler, Aquatic Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Paddyfield Warbler, Blyth's Reed Warbler, Reed Warbler and Marsh Warbler. I will also mention one species that was on the British and Kent lists but now isn't. If you want to get to the bit about birds, skip the next two paragraphs. For Marsh Warbler, I haven't managed to complete my analysis in time for this newsletter, so the account here is a preliminary one.

I had always thought that the name *Acrocephalus* was derived from 'spear- or pointed-headed', which seemed right for these birds. When I came to check that, though, I found that in both Ancient and Modern Greek *akro-* and variants means 'high', 'extreme', 'edge', 'summit', 'tip', etc. There may have been some confusion over the name. Possibly *akro-* could mean 'pointed' in the sense of representing a peak but is it perhaps more likely that the genus was named in the mistaken belief that *akro-* did mean 'having a pointed shape'. I also saw a suggestion that the name arose because these warblers often sing from the top of reeds (not sure about that one). All this idle wondering was mainly to put off starting work on the article properly. So, then, I thought: what about the Acrow props used by builders; where does that name come from, and could it be related in some way to *akro-*?

No, it wasn't, but it was loosely associated with a bird's name. The prop was invented by a young man from Switzerland, William "Bill" de Vigier, who in 1935 received backing from a London lawyer to establish a company to produce the props, which were given the lawyer's name, and he was Arthur Crowe. Acrow factories were built around the world. One was near Saffron Walden, Essex, where for just seven years to 1964 there was a railway station Acrow Halt serving the factory. And by coincidence, Saffron Walden was where... No, get on with it.

For the four rarities in this article, I am including records up to 2023. For the others (Sedge, Reed & Marsh Warblers), only to 2022, as 2023 data are not yet fully collated. Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data are kindly made available by the British Trust for Ornithology; BBS is a partnership jointly funded by the BTO, RSPB and JNCC, with fieldwork conducted by volunteers. Murray Orchard, Barry Wright, Steffan Walton and Louise Bacon cleared up queries on various rarity records. Ian Hunter and Steffan Walton provided valuable information on tape-luring. Lawraine Wood and Dick Hartley gave me *ακρως* good advice on the Greek language.

## Great Reed Warbler



*Great Reed Warbler by Donna Zimmer*

Up to 2023, there are 42 acceptable records of Great Reed Warbler for Kent. It remains a rarity even though it is a regular if scarce breeding species just across the Channel in the Département du Nord, France.

Early records include a few which have been discounted including three (at Dartford in 1852, and at Erith and between Tonbridge & Sevenoaks between 1853 and 1856) which passed through the hands of James Green, a bird-dealer of City Road, London, who was known to import material from Rotterdam (Ticehurst, *History of the Birds of Kent*, 1909). Erith is, anyway, no longer in what we treat as Kent. The Dartford bird was initially recorded as a Thrush Nightingale – something which might elicit a cringe in anyone who was at Sandwich Bay on 23rd August 1968. There was also a sighting at Appledore on 2nd August 1937 (Harrison, *Birds of Kent*, 1953) by Claud Ticehurst, who made the mistake of saying he couldn't eliminate Clamorous Reed or Thick-billed Warblers and thus doomed the record.

The first accepted record for Kent is one shot by Mr G Thomas at a pond near Sittingbourne on 4th May 1853. It's a good, if early, date in the year and there was a specimen, which went to Exeter Museum, to back it up. The next was one shot near Wingham on 14th September 1881; that one went to Canterbury Museum where it was set up, misleadingly, next to a nest and eggs imported from Holland (Ticehurst 1909).

The first accepted in the twentieth century was one singing at Stodmarsh from 20th May to 4th June 1950, a place and date that has proved typical. While I usually start my charts in 1952, when the KOS was formed, I have included this record in Figure 1, which shows the annual totals between 1950 and 2023, while Figure 2 summarises the seasonal pattern of all records back to 1853 by ten-day (or month-third) periods.

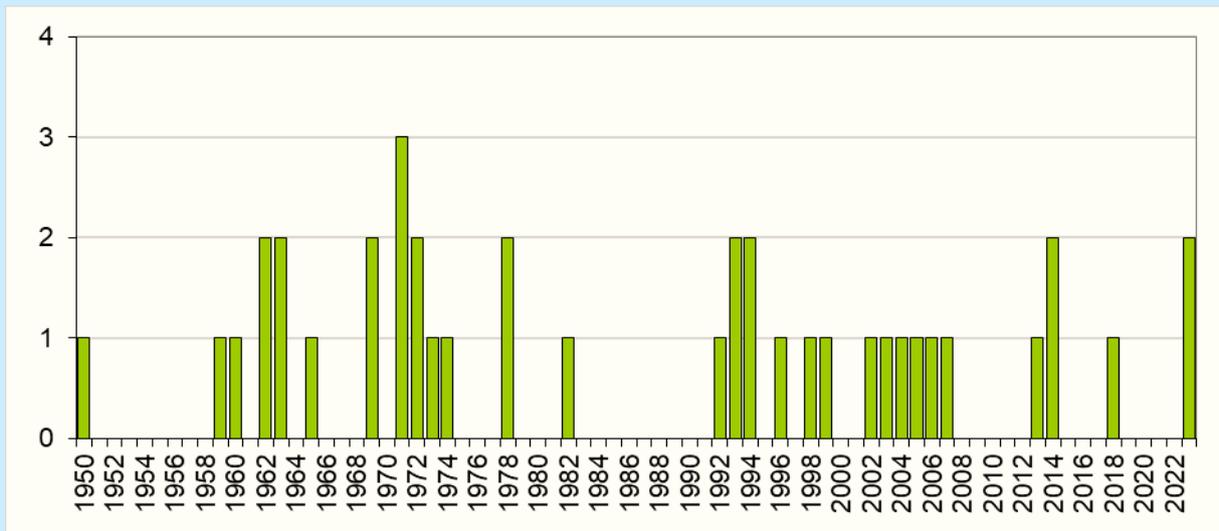


Figure 1. Great Reed Warbler: annual totals 1950-2023

Of the forty individuals occurring in the 74 years from 1950 onwards, eighteen were recorded during 1959-1982, which included the one year with three records (1971). However, I doubt that that concentration is anything more than chance.

I'd like to tell an inconsequential story about one record with which I was involved. My brother Alastair and I, then 20 and 16 and seldom leaving east Kent, visited Dungeness on 31st May 1969 and called at the observatory. A group sitting there, drinking tea, told us it was quiet (this will be a familiar picture to anyone regularly visiting bird observatories). But we left the car and went to walk around the Long Pits, finding a Great Reed Warbler kreeking and gurking away. Back at the observatory, the tea-drinkers soon put their cups down (the bird was later caught and ringed). We went to our car and there on the windscreen was a spoof parking ticket, saying that we had parked over a Little Ringed Plover's nest. The odd thing is that we didn't then know the birders who were there, and I have wondered since whether they did this to every visitor or thought the car was someone else's. By the way, the record is officially credited to Peter Grant (who signed the ticket), John Clements, Tony Greenland and Bob Scott. Ah well.

All records have involved single birds, and at least 24 (of the total of 40) were singing males. Most were known to be present for only one-three days but eight remained for eleven or more days. The longest stay was by one at Elmley from 27th May-3rd July 1993 (38 days) and one of the 2023 birds stayed for 26 days. These prolonged visits, generally or perhaps always in reeds growing in standing water, raise the hope that one might attract a mate and breed; it is only a hundred miles or so to the nearest breeding areas in France, not far for a trans-Saharan migrant. One at Elmley in 1994 was seen carrying nest material but no stronger evidence of breeding was obtained. Incidentally, there was speculation that the one in 1994, in the same reedbed as the long-stayer in 1993, was the same bird but the two are counted as different.

Most Great Reed Warblers in Kent have been found at just a few locations: 14 in the Dungeness area including one near Lydd, 12 in the Stour valley with ten of those between Stodmarsh and Grove Ferry, seven at Sandwich Bay, four at Elmley and three on the Hoo peninsula marshes. The remaining two were near Sittingbourne and Dover.

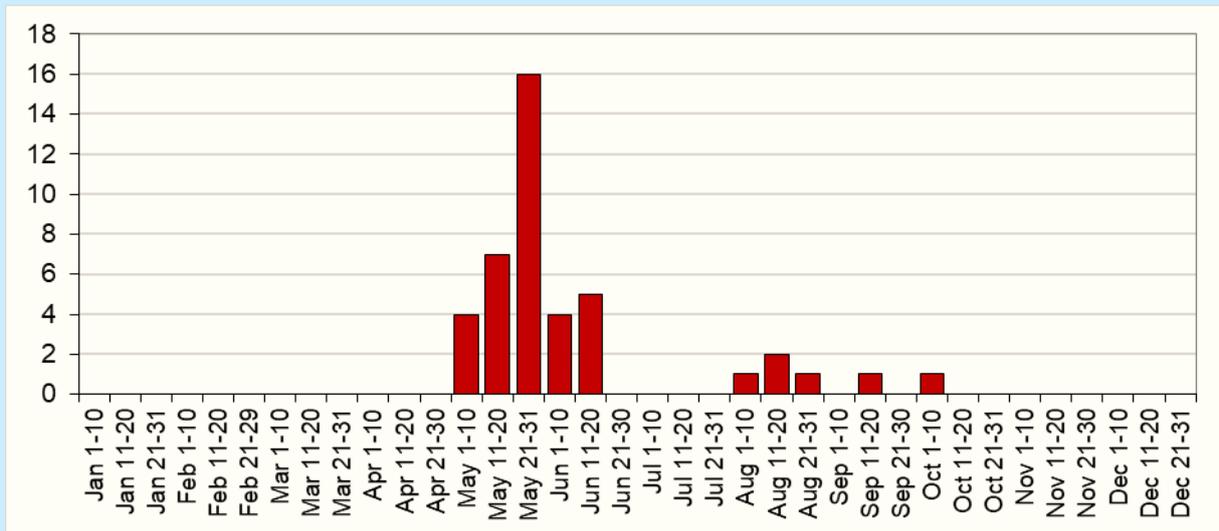


Figure 2. Great Reed Warbler: seasonal pattern of occurrence, 1853-2023

Figure 2 shows finding dates, whether birds were noted on just one day or longer. Of the total of 42 birds, 36 (86%) were found between 2nd May and 15th June (though note that five of the long-stayers remained after that, the latest of them to 3rd July). The autumn records include four in August, the earliest on the 3rd, one on 14th September, and the latest, one at Dengemarsh Gully, on 4th-5th October 1998.

### Moustached Warbler



Moustached Warbler by Dr Raju Kasambe

This is the species that was but isn't. It's a sorry tale, which I will plagiarise from an article in the facsimile 1952 Kent Bird Report, published in 2022.

For many years, a bird seen at Cliffe on 14th April 1952 was the only Kent record of this species, and one of the very few British records that included a pair feeding young in Cambridgeshire in 1946. They all were found unacceptable in a review in 2006. These birds were seen by reputable birders, those in Cambridgeshire by some of the most experienced ornithologists of the time... but they all ignored characters that were not right for Moustached Warbler. It's worth reading the paper in *British Birds* (vol 99 pp 465-478): it is a good example of observers 'seeing' only the characters they want to see and getting

carried away by the opinions of others. To be fair, many of us have done this at times, and we should bear in mind that few observers at that time had experience of Moustached Warbler abroad.

### Aquatic Warbler



*Aquatic Warbler (Wikicommons)*

Aquatic Warblers nest in sedgy marshes in eastern Europe, and winters in west Africa; it has suffered a large decline and is now considered vulnerable to global extinction. Some 99% of the breeding population is now found at sites in Poland, Belarus and Ukraine (*BirdLife International species factsheet*). It formerly bred well into Russia but, although it is uncertain, the population there is believed now to be very small.

Migrants pass through western Europe on their way from the breeding grounds to west Africa, and some reach Britain, being found in reedbeds and other wetland vegetation. As numbers have declined, they have tended to become more restricted in where they are found in England, with the majority along the south coast, especially to the west.

That western bias is odd, given the birds' origin; one would expect more in the south-east. Also odd is that, even historically when the population was larger, British spring records have been extremely few. This latter point suggests that they have a loop migration, following an eastern route in spring, and limited tracking data suggest that this is so (*Bird Conservation International* 29: 503-514 <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0959270918000357>).

Records of Aquatic Warbler in Britain have been bedevilled by the similarity of their head pattern to that of juvenile Sedge Warblers and the fact that they occur when there are many young Sedge Warblers about, by the skulking nature of the birds, and by wishful thinking.

The early records are difficult to assess. There are several which are hopeless cases, for example one seen by Earl Darnley on Cliffe Marshes that Ticehurst (*History of the Birds of Kent*, 1909) considered to be a Reed Bunting. Supposed breeding in Preston Marshes in 1926 and Cliffe Marshes in 1931 that Harrison (*Birds of Kent*, 1953) accepted at face value, Taylor *et al.* (*Birds of Kent*, 1981) didn't mention, and I regard as improbable. The Preston records, which include a specimen that remains accepted, were from Guy Mannering, who amassed a large collection of specimens and skins (they went to Maidstone Museum but many now are in Poland). Harrison's description of what he was told by Mannering, involving multiple sightings, is surprising to say the least. In my view, Mannering's records deserve a close look.

The 'official' first for Kent, in the [Kent List](#) and on [Historical Rare Birds](#), is of two-three seen at Dungeness by H G & C J Alexander during 7th-10th September 1907. This is a corruption of the facts. Harrison (1953), quoting a letter from HGA to Ticehurst, gets the year wrong, implying that they were seen

in 1915, but that letter, written in 1910, describes one near the Woolpack Inn on 7th September and three at the Open/Oppen/Hoppen Pits on 10th September, year not stated but by comparison with the *British Birds* account it must be 1907. The *British Birds* account (vol 9 p 273) of a 1915 sighting is vaguer and somewhat contradictory about the number in 1907, saying “two or three in Romney Marsh (one of them at the Hoppen Pits)”. Now, the HGA letter quoted by Harrison says that only one of the three at the Hoppen Pits was very bright and well-marked while the others were like the one on the 7th or even duller. The one on the 7th had “the central streak on the head being much less distinct than the two over the eyes”. My experience of the Aquatic Warbler is limited (by the fact that I’ve never seen one) but my suspicion is that people who do know might say that the one on the 7th and two on the 10th may have been juvenile Sedge Warblers. That would leave one on the 10th (“the line down the centre of the crown as bright buff as the two other lines”) as the only Aquatic Warbler in 1907. But at this point, I’ve left all four in, as the call described by HGA for all of them seems to fit Aquatic.

Both the Kent List and Historical Rare Birds discount one mentioned by Ticehurst, shot by Charles Gordon near Dover and placed in Dover Museum. It was recognised by J H Gurney and confirmed by John Gould in February 1871 as an Aquatic Warbler (we don’t know when it was shot). This seems to me as good a record as others involving Charles Gordon and the Dover Museum, but we don’t have a date and the museum was destroyed by bombing in 1943.

My tally, including the Dover bird, amounts to 12 birds between 1871 and 1951. Figure 3 gives the annual totals from 1952 onwards, amounting to 45 birds, all singles. Note that this chart includes one that was accepted by the British Birds Rarities Committee but never published in a Kent Bird Report (Dungeness 18th September 1960) and omits three that were published in KBRs despite not being accepted (Stoke Fleet 18th August 1963, Sandwich Bay 25th August 1964, Stodmarsh 6th September 1998). By the way, Aquatic Warbler records were considered by the Kent rarities panel rather than BBRC during 1983-2014.

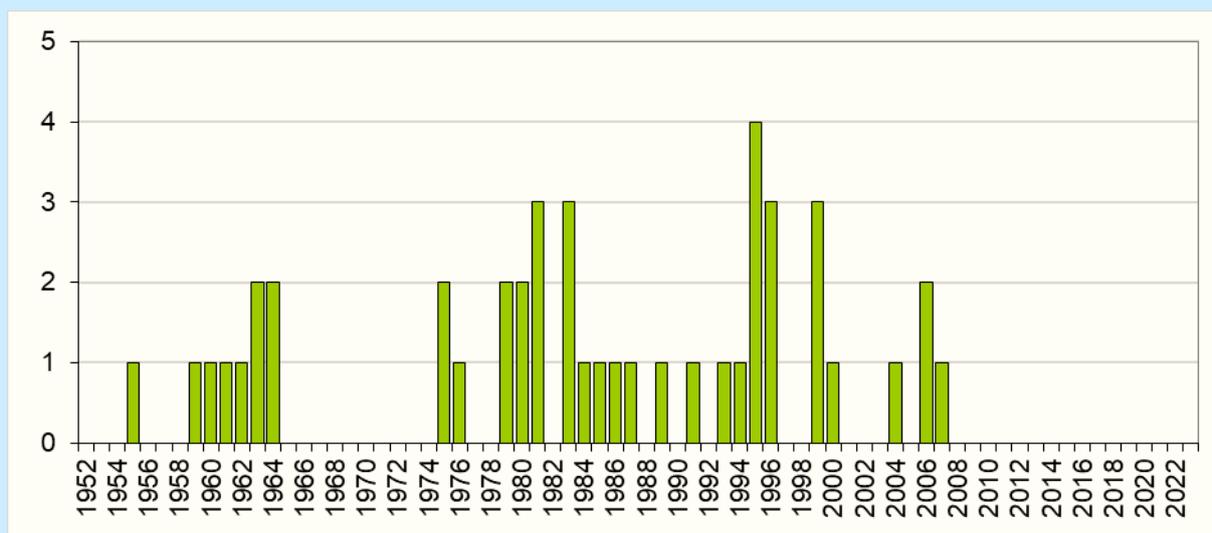


Figure 3. Aquatic Warbler: annual totals 1952-2023

Of the 45 individuals during 1952-2022, 14 were trapped and ringed. Birds in the hand should be easier to identify conclusively, though there were two ringed as Aquatic Warblers at Sandwich Bay in 1964 that did not meet the criteria for acceptance by the British Birds Rarities Committee. One can’t help wondering about some of the earlier sight records. But let’s assume that all of the accepted post-1962 birds really were Aquatic Warblers. There have been several years with three, and one with four: a remarkable sequence of individuals at Elmley between 20th August and 3rd September 1995. The absence of records since 2007 is probably significant, reflecting the continuing population decline of the species.

This is a skulking species, and no doubt many have occurred in the county without being found. The high proportion trapped reflects this, and some records such as those in 1995 resulted from directed searches rather than chance encounters.

Given the relatively small numbers that are caught in Britain (only about 830 since 1909, there have been a fair number of recoveries (nine), eight of them overseas. Those involving Kent include one relocating to Elmley from Icklesham, Sussex, between 12th and 25th August 1995, and one ringed as a nestling in Belarus on 17th June 2006 and caught at Sandwich Bay on 15th August 2006.

Figure 4 shows the seasonal pattern of occurrence. As discussed earlier, it is very strongly an autumn visitor to Britain and all claims in Kent in spring are now discounted. The earliest occurrence was one trapped at Dungeness by Bert Axell and James Ferguson-Lees on 15th August 1955 and the latest one seen there by D I M Wallace and Bob Emmett on 27th September 1964. There are some famous names for you.

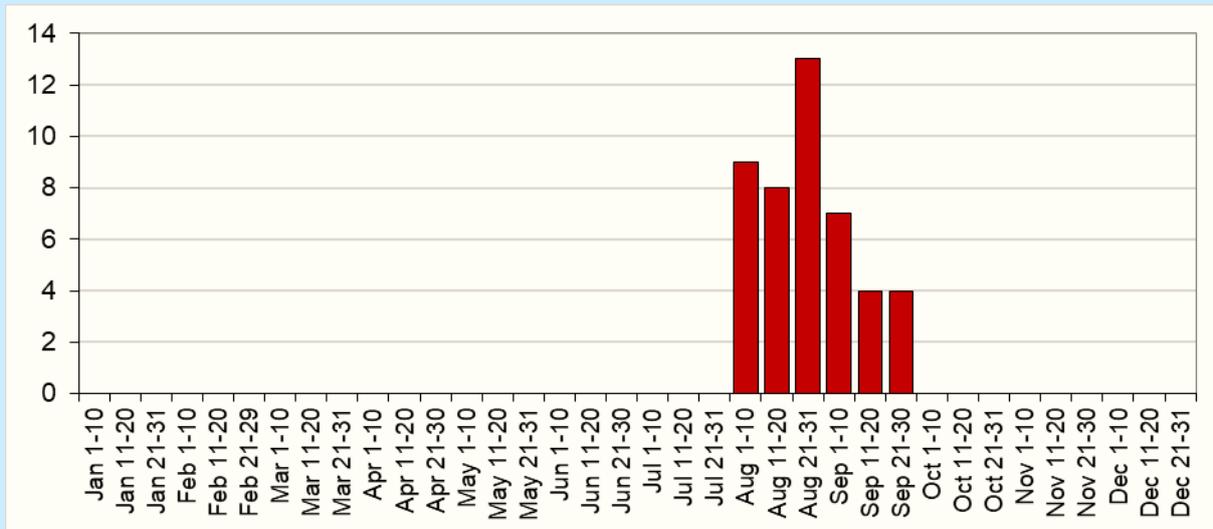


Figure 4. Aquatic Warbler: seasonal pattern of occurrence, 1952-2023

Dungeness has been the favoured location for Aquatic Warblers in Kent but there has been quite a wide spread, as this table shows (including all 57 birds back to the Dover one).

	No.	%
Dungeness/Brookland	25	43.9
Swale	11	19.3
Sandwich Bay	6	10.5
Stour valley	6	10.5
Thames	4	7.0
Foreness	3	5.3
Dover	1	1.8
Sevenoaks	1	1.8

## Sedge Warbler



*Sedge Warbler by Terry Laws*

The status of Sedge Warbler as an abundant summer visitor to wetlands throughout the county, and as a passage migrant, has changed little since the time of Ticehurst (*History of the Birds of Kent, 1909*). Perhaps one change since then is that there are now more in inland areas, thanks to the excavation of gravel pits. They are less closely linked to stands of reed than Reed Warbler, using a wider range of marshy vegetation and typically including some brambles or bushes in their territories.

Their current distribution is probably little different from one hundred years ago. Figure 5 is a copy of the map from the *Kent Breeding Bird Atlas 2008-2013*. Their strongholds are in the low-lying areas of the north Kent marshes, the lower Stour valley and Romney and Walland Marshes, and there appears to have been significant retraction from the upper Stour valley, from central and western Kent, and from the northern parts of Romney/Walland Marsh.

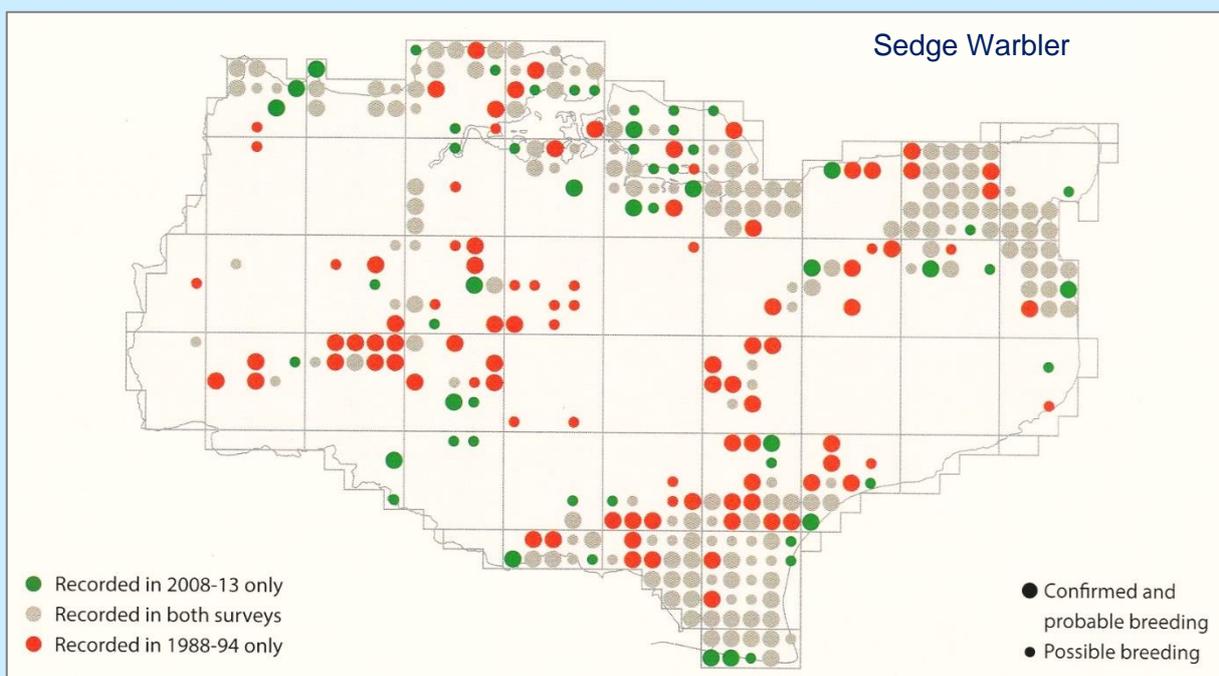


Figure 5. Sedge Warbler breeding distribution

The national population of Sedge Warblers took a big tumble in the late 1960s and 1970s, largely as a result of severe drought in the west African wintering areas. The Common Birds Census probably wasn't very good at tracking Sedge Warbler numbers, so we are not sure just how big that decline was, but it is thought that they have never wholly recovered. For the next few decades, and into the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) era, numbers fluctuated without showing any clear trend. More recently, beginning in about 2010, there does appear to have been a steady decline. The trend for south-east England (where the decline since 2010 has been over 30%) is shown in Figure 6, using BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey data downloaded from the BTO website. The reasons for the trend aren't certain but probably are the result of reduced adult survival related to changes in rainfall on their wintering grounds (*BTO Bird Facts*).

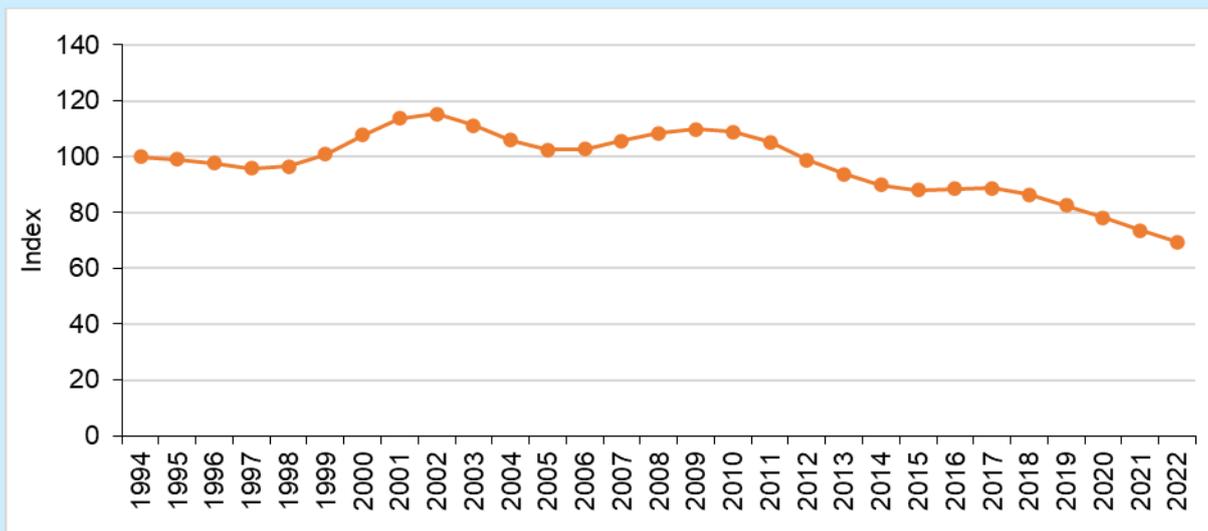


Figure 6. Sedge Warbler: smoothed BBS indices, south-east England

The *Kent Breeding Bird Atlas 2008-2013* gave an estimate of 5,000-7,000 territories in the county at that time, but it may not be very accurate, based as it was on small samples. Sedge Warblers are fairly easy to census but, to do so effectively requires multiple visits through the breeding season, and it's likely that many of the estimates that get published in Kent Bird Reports are from less intensive surveys (and we seldom know what methods have been employed). My own view is that these county estimates of commoner species are not particularly helpful; we are better to concentrate on ensuring that population tracking surveys such as the BBS are well-supported.

I will mention a few estimates of numbers in localised areas. I suspect (and in some cases know) that these were based on few (often one or two) visits, and so can be regarded as minima. In the Stour valley (probably this means Fordwich to Grove) in 1965, there were 1,300 singing males. In the east Kent lowlands (the Stour system from Ashford downstream to Reculver and Sandwich Bay) in 1977, 1,173 territories were located, with 1,003 there in 1979 and 878 in 1981. For Stodmarsh NNR alone, there were estimates of 171 pairs in 1980 and 128 pairs in 1990. At Dungeness RSPB reserve, with increasing amounts of wetland, numbers rose from around 40 pairs in the 1970s to 100 pairs by 1977 and 183 pairs in 1997, though estimates since have fallen. Three-figure counts elsewhere reported in Kent Bird Reports include 103 singing males on the Cliffe and Shorne marshes in 1980, and numbers at the RSPB's Seasalter reserve increasing from 55 pairs in 2015 to 125 pairs in 2022.

Sedge Warblers usually appear in Kent in the last week of March and are then present until some time in early October. Figures 7 and 8 show the first and last dates each year from 1952 onwards (with a few gaps when it is not mentioned in Kent Bird Reports) in the early years. There have been clear trends towards earlier dates in both cases, with first dates shifting about seven days, and last dates about three days earlier between the first and second halves of the whole period.

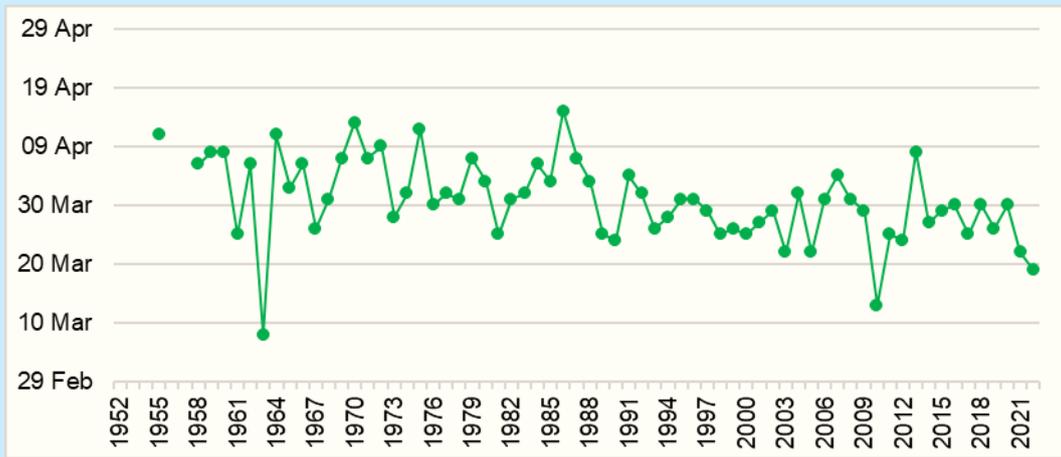


Figure 7. Sedge Warbler: first dates

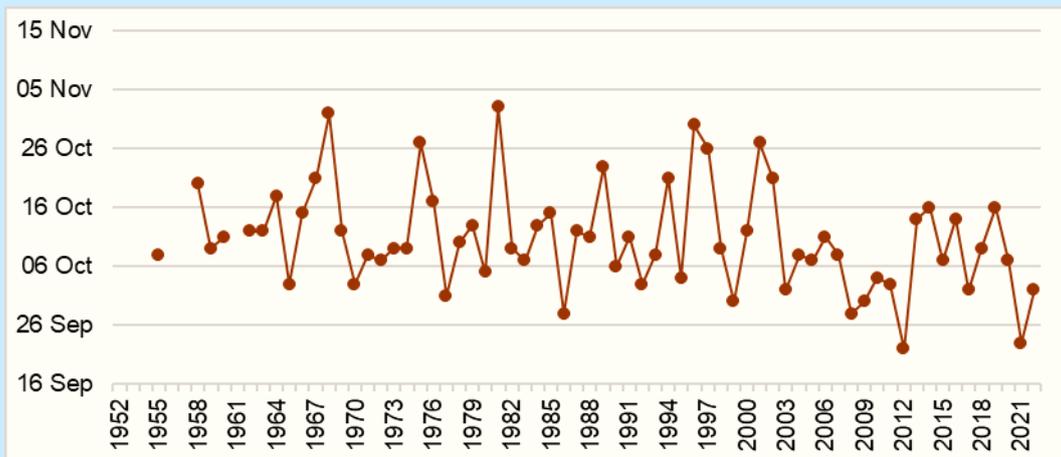


Figure 8. Sedge Warbler: last dates

The earliest of all was, perversely, in the early years of the sequence: one seen at Stodmarsh on 9th March 1963, just after the thaw ending that severe winter. It is a genuine record; it was seen by Bill Harvey and coincided with other early arrivals including Garganeys on 2nd March. The next earliest was one at Oare Marshes on 14th March 2010. The latest, and the only November records, were singles at Stodmarsh on 1st November 1968 and at Grove on 3rd November 1981 seen by Trevor and Terry Wyatt.

The shifting seasonality of Sedge Warblers could be affecting breeding success, but I'm not aware of any studies that have looked at this. The species has a proportion in Britain, perhaps a majority, that are double-brooded. There would appear still be plenty of time to fit those in, but we don't know whether the presence of birds in Kent breeding sites has changed. Jan Pritchard and Brian Watmough (*Kent Bird Report* for 2020, pp. 267-274), studying *Acrocephalus* warblers on the South Swale nature reserve, found that few adult Sedge Warblers were caught after mid August, indicating that the breeding season had already ended. Had that changed from earlier years?

Figure 9 shows, for a period of twenty-three recent years, the average maximum count for each ten day period through the year. There is a quick build-up in reported numbers as they arrive in April but counts then tail off, as song diminishes (and perhaps also as attention by observers diminishes). Peak numbers in autumn are in August, with a steep decline through September and few after that. The autumn peak shown here is artificially exaggerated because it includes counts of tape-lured birds (see below).

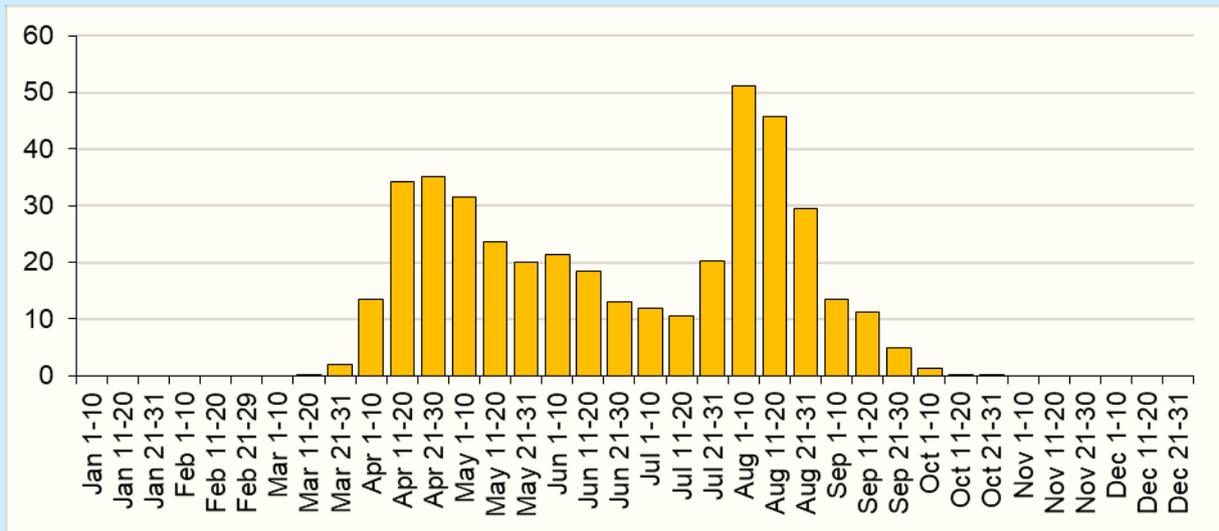


Figure 9. Sedge Warbler: seasonal pattern of counts, 2000-2022

There have been some high counts of Sedge Warblers in spring, but most of the larger ones were at breeding sites, and presumably comprised mainly local breeding birds. Table 1 lists all counts of 100 or more believed to relate primarily to migrants, though some of these are likely to have been a mix of locally breeding birds and migrants from further afield.

<b>Table 1. Sedge Warbler: high counts of migrants</b>	
Counts are colour-coded by season – <b>spring</b> and <b>autumn</b> .	
1962	100 at Dungeness on 4th May.
1968	150 at Murston on 3rd September.
1977	175 at Dungeness on 23rd August.
1983	100 at Dungeness on 18th August.
2000	235 at Sandwich Bay on 12th August.
2001	202 at Sandwich Bay on 6th August.
2006	150 at Sandwich Bay on 6th August & also 128 on the 15th and 100 on the 18th.
2007	128 at Sandwich Bay on 7th August & also 103 on the 3rd.
2008	108 at Sandwich Bay on 22nd August.
2014	221 at Sandwich Bay on 5th August & also 143 on the 7th and 117 on the 13th.

As can be seen, the table is dominated by counts from Sandwich Bay. These were artificially boosted, as they derive from the trapping of migrants using maize crops to which the birds had been attracted by playback of calls (see more comments on this under Reed Warbler). They therefore can't be compared directly to 'ordinary' counts but are a good indication of when peak passage takes place.

## Paddyfield Warbler



*Paddyfield Warbler by Tony Morris*

The first Paddyfield Warbler recorded in Britain was on Fair Isle in 1925. The next was also there, in 1953, but from the 1980s records became more frequent and widespread, though with a high proportion still on the Northern Isles including Fair Isle. It remains a rarity, though, with only about 130 British records. Paddyfield Warbler breeds in reedbeds and associated vegetation largely in central Asia (though it does reach the western shores of the Black Sea) and winters mainly in south Asia.

There have been four in Kent, as listed in Table 2. The first one was caught and ringed on the Dungeness RSPB Reserve on 9th September 2003 by Andrew Wraithmell and Wesley Attridge, with the identification confirmed by David Walker. After ringing, it was released near the capture site and, though elusive, was seen briefly later on the same day. A note about the event is in the *Kent Bird Report* for 2003 (pp. 158-159).

<b>Table 2. Paddyfield Warbler: all Kent records</b>			
Dungeness	9th September 2003	1	Adult trapped & ringed, RSPB Reserve
Cleve Marshes	20th September 2005	1	Adult trapped & ringed, South Swale LNR
Bockhill	28-29th September 2007	1	Adult
Shorne Marshes	31st May 2013	1	Adult trapped & ringed

## Blyth's Reed Warbler



*Blyth's Reed Warbler by Dr Raju Kasambe*

Blyth's Reed Warbler has a wide breeding range extending from Finland across Russia to Mongolia and Kazakhstan, and winters in south Asia. It is less tied to wetlands than most *Acrocephalus*, using a mix of shrubby woodland and tall herb vegetation. Its range has extended westward over the past century. The huge increase in frequency in Britain in recent decades had probably been helped by better understanding of the species' identification but also by the range expansion and by more birds, with their distinctive song, arriving in spring.

The total of five in Kent is not great, but we can expect more. The first was a singing male found by David Walker in the Dungeness Bird Observatory trapping area on 31st May 1999. A note about the occurrence is in the *Kent Bird Report* for 1999 (pp. 154-155). Details of all five Kent records, four in spring and one in autumn, are in Table 3. Note the closeness of the dates of the first four birds.

Table 3. Blyth's Reed Warbler: all Kent records			
Dungeness	31st May 1999	1	In song
Dungeness	28th May 2014	1	In song
Kingsgate	28th May 2016	1	In song
North Foreland	24th May 2017	1	In song
Sandwich Bay	19th September 2017	1	Trapped and ringed; first winter bird

## Reed Warbler



Reed Warbler by Mark Duggan

The Reed Warbler is very closely associated with stands of Common Reed *Phragmites australis* and has a breeding distribution in Kent that is similar to that of reeds. They can also nest in other tall emergent wetland plants, and in recent decades small numbers have done so in oil seed rape crops close to water. Their status has changed little since the time of Ticehurst (*History of the Birds of Kent*, 1909).

Reed Warbler breeding distribution during 2008-13, contrasted with the previous atlas, is shown in Figure 10, taken from the *Kent Breeding Bird Atlas*. As with Sedge Warbler, they are most abundant in the north Kent marshes, the east Kent lowlands and on Romney and Walland Marshes and, as with Sedge, seem to have been lost from quite a few areas in inland Kent. Note that they will always have had less dense populations in those latter areas.

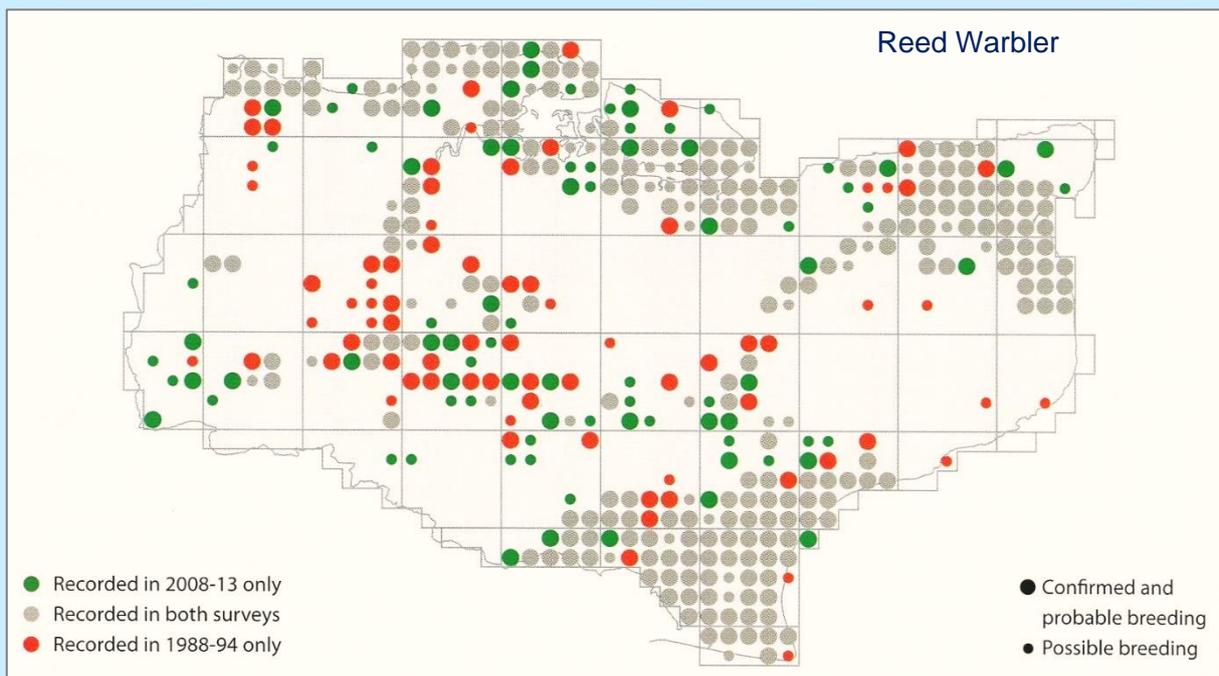


Figure 10. Reed Warbler breeding distribution

In contrast to Sedge Warbler, Reed Warbler is believed to have experienced a large increase since the early 1970s (*BTO Trends Explorer*). Common Birds Census and Breeding Bird Survey data for England suggest an increase of 81% since 1967 and 27% since 1994. This has been associated with range expansion to the north and west and continues to the present day (see the England line on Figure 11). There is some concern over the accuracy of this CBC/BBS trends, however, and as BTO point out, the ringing Constant Effort Scheme has shown a different pattern (*BTO Bird Facts*). It is also the case that in the Breeding Bird Survey, since 1994, the BBS trend for south-east England (Figure 11) has undergone ups and downs not closely matching the line for all England.

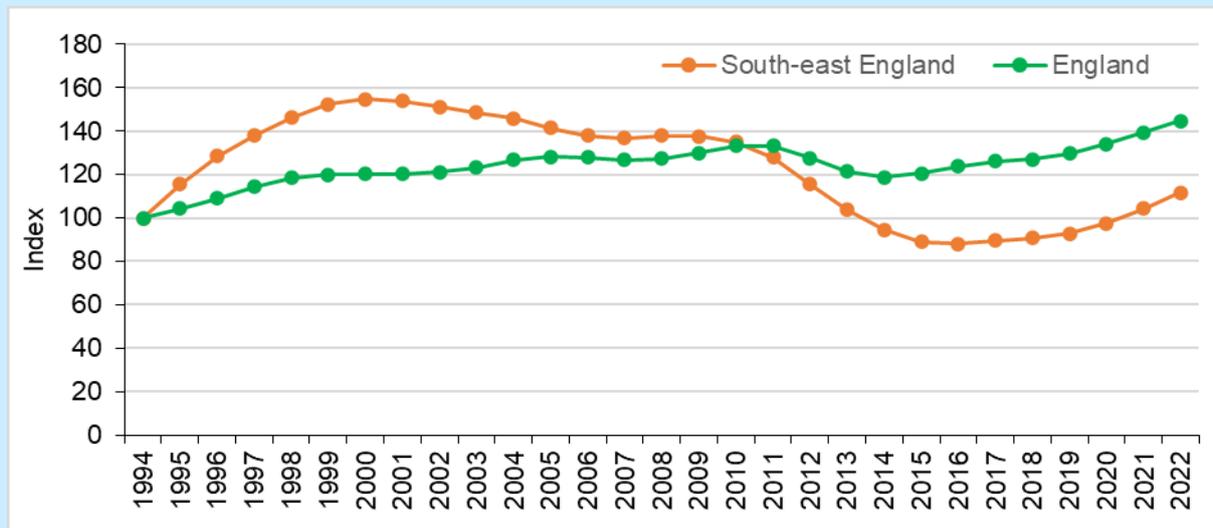


Figure 11. Reed Warbler: smoothed BBS indices

Reed Warblers sing most strongly shortly after arrival in spring. Once paired they can be easy to miss, and surveys based on one or two visits can seriously underestimate populations. In linear habitats (along dykes, for example) things aren't too bad and birds can be stimulated to sing by squeaking at them, but carrying out a census in large stands of reed is very difficult.

The *Kent Breeding Bird Atlas* suggested the county population during 2008-13 was in the range 30,000-40,000 pairs but, as the text makes clear, this is a rather crude estimate and may not be very accurate.

As for Sedge Warbler, I will mention a few estimates of breeding Reed Warbler numbers in localised areas, though again I don't know the survey methodology and the totals should be regarded as minima. In 1965, there were 705 singing males in the Stour valley (probably this means Fordwich to Grove), and 100 pairs in the Burham-Snodland area. In 1970, 600 singing males were counted between Fordwich and Grove. In the east Kent lowlands (the Stour system from Ashford downstream to Reculver and Sandwich Bay), 1,201 territories were located in 1977, 1,783 in 1979 and 1,656 in 1981. There were 200 pairs in the Minnis Bay/Reculver area in 1988 and 250 pairs at Burham Marsh in 1990. In the St Mary's Marsh-Stoke area, there were 155 pairs in 2005 and there had been a count of 179 pairs for the grid square TQ87 in 1996. Meanwhile in the Dungeness area, where just seven pairs were counted in 1970 and six in 1971, habitat creation on the RSPB reserve alone had raised the total to 30 pairs by 1974 and over 100 pairs by 1988. Estimates there remain high but variable, dependent perhaps on coverage; the highest I have seen was 355 pairs in 2008. The new RSPB reserve at Seasalter also attracts many: the highest estimate I have found was 144 pairs in 2019.

The first Reed Warblers each year used to appear in Kent in mid April, but first dates have shifted significantly earlier with occurrence in March in three years from 2014 onwards (Figure 12). The average first date during the first half of 1953-2022 was 16th April; in the second half it was 8th April. The trend for last dates (Figure 13) is less clear: they appear to have become later until the mid 1970s but subsequently became earlier. The averages for the first and second halves on the period 1953-2022 are 24th and 21st October, but for the fifty years 1973-2022 they are 27th and 19th October. Note that first and last dates are not mentioned in several early Kent Bird Reports.

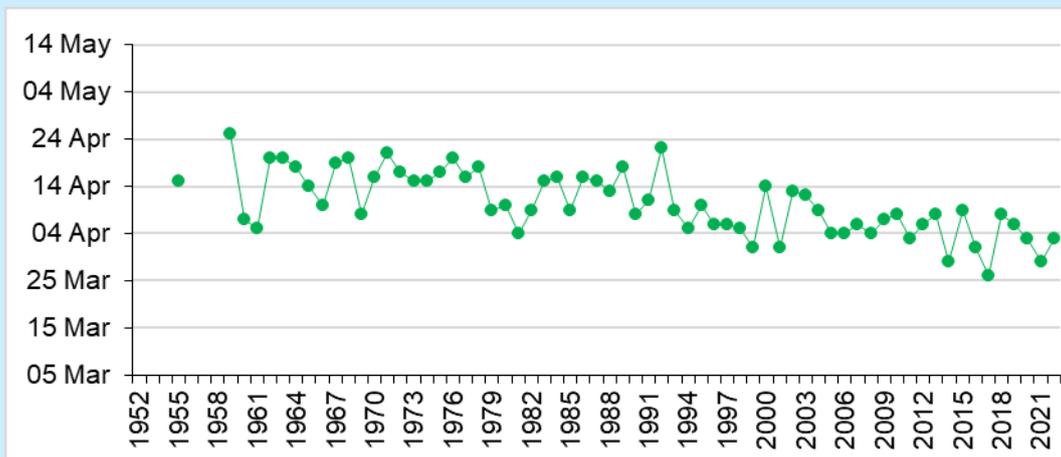


Figure 12. Reed Warbler: first dates

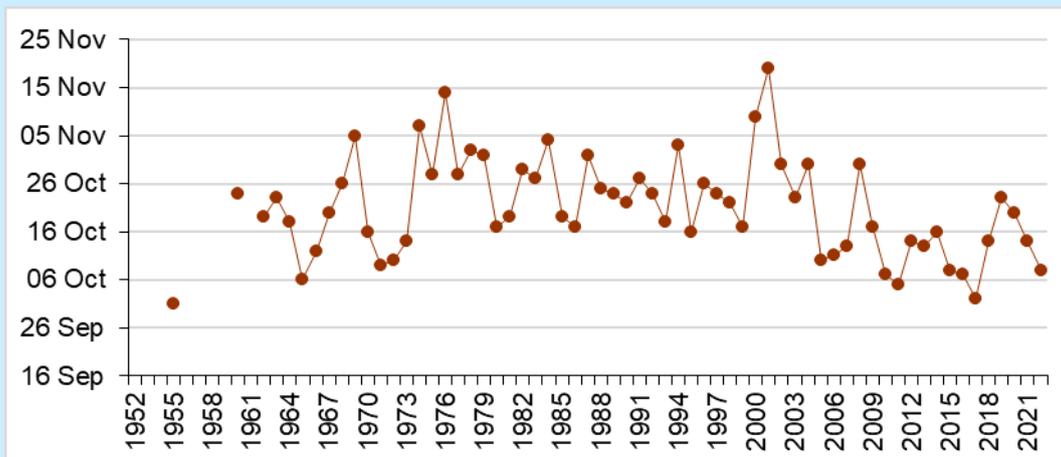


Figure 13. Reed Warbler: last dates

The earliest to date was one seen by John Neighbour at Conningbrook near Ashford on 27th March 2017. The other first March dates involved one at Dungeness on 30th March 2014 and one at Minster Marshes (Thanet) on 30th March 2021 (there were more on the 31st). Back in 1959, the first had been on Sheppey and at Leybourne on 26th April, and it was still as late as 22nd April (one at New Hythe) in 1992. The change has been amazing.

For last dates, the latest have been one at Langley on 14th November 1976 and one at Northward Hill on 20th November 2001. November records occurred in ten years during 1969-2001 but there has been none since. At the other extreme, there were last dates of 2nd October in 1955 (one at Chart Sutton, but of course there were fewer observers then) and of 3rd October in 2017 (one at Dungeness Bird Observatory).

Figure 14 shows, as for Sedge Warbler, the average maximum count of Reed Warblers for each ten day period through the year during 2000-2022. Numbers build up towards the end of April and counts are maintained at a high level throughout May and June, aided by the species' long song period. Reported numbers dip at the end of the breeding season, before autumn passage peaks in the first half of August, with a progressive decline after that, through to October. The autumn peak is relatively small, compared to Sedge Warbler's, but as for Sedge Warbler the August peak is influenced by birds tape-lured at Sandwich Bay (see below).

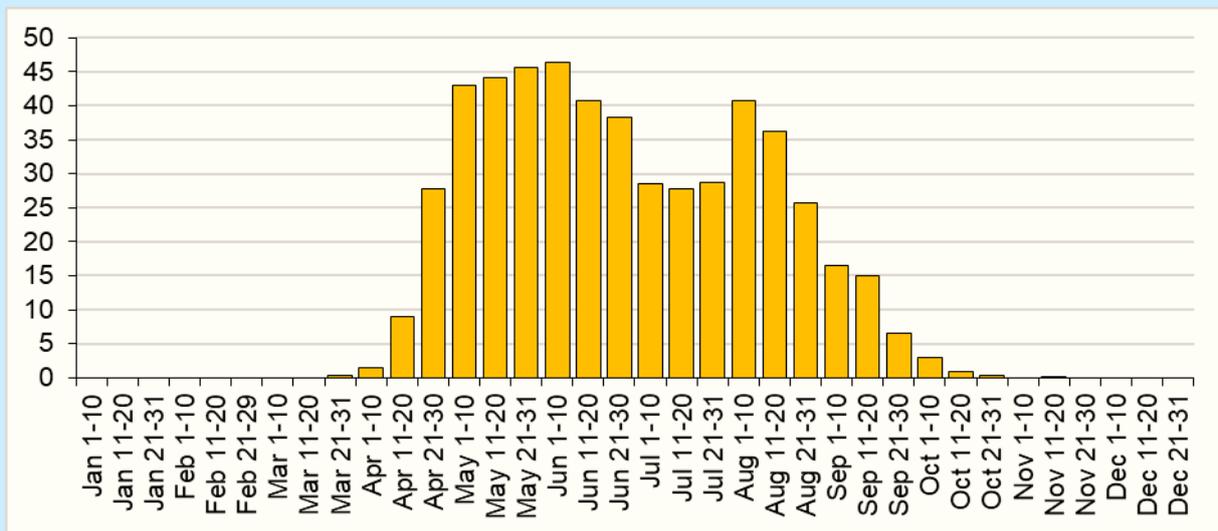


Figure 14. Reed Warbler: seasonal pattern of counts, 2000-2022

Table 4 includes counts of 80 or more in August and September mentioned in Kent Bird Reports. There are also plenty of high counts in earlier months of the year but those will be mainly or wholly of local breeding birds, and the table concentrates on migrants. Some of those in the table will still be local breeders of course. Jan Pritchard and Brian Watmough (*Kent Bird Report* for 2020, pp. 267-274), studying *Acrocephalus* warblers on the South Swale nature reserve, found adult Reed Warblers remaining into August more than Sedge Warblers did, but these concentrations can be regarded at least as pre-migratory gatherings.

Table 4. Reed Warbler: high autumn counts of migrants	
1975	80 at Dungeness on 3rd September.
1977	100 at Dungeness on 27th August.
1979	175 at South Foreland on 28th August.
1983	100 at Dungeness on 18th August.
1994	97 at Sandwich Bay on 20th August.
1995	96 at Sandwich Bay on 11th August; 90 at Dungeness on 19th August.
1997	87 at Sandwich Bay on 11th August.
2001	316 at Sandwich Bay on 13th August, also 91 there on 6th August.
2006	153 at Sandwich Bay on 18th August and 150 there on 6th August.
2007	85 at Sandwich Bay on 6th August.
2022	80 at Shuart Farm, Minnis Bay, on 1st August.

It is interesting that the dates of these high counts progressively get earlier in the season. That could be connected with the changing last dates and perhaps indicates an earlier end to the breeding season.

As in the case of Sedge Warbler, the table in the later years is dominated by counts from Sandwich Bay, where tape-luring to maize crops, under special licence, artificially boosted numbers (and of course catching birds for ringing usually results in more being found than you'd have thought present). Compared to other warblers, *Acrocephalus* seem especially attracted by tape-lures, and it may be that Sedges are more inquisitive and thus prone to being caught than Reeds (Ian Hunter & Steffan Walton pers. comm.). That may explain why there are more frequent high counts of Sedge Warbler than of Reed. Ian Hunter mentioned that an acquaintance in Scotland believed he could increase catches of Sedge Warblers by playing Deep Purple, but warbler songs are more conventional. Maize is no longer grown in the area used by Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory, and big counts haven't been made for the past ten years or so.

## Marsh Warbler



Marsh Warbler by Marc Heath

This is a preliminary account of Marsh Warbler in Kent. I've made a number of attempts to analyse the records and have abandoned analysis on a similar number of occasions. I am now making some progress but not to my satisfaction in time for this newsletter. I hope that something better will follow in due course, perhaps even in the next newsletter. Meanwhile, here is a little introductory material and a summary of where I've got to.

The account by Ticehurst (*History of the Birds of Kent*, 1909) mentions two breeding attempts: one at an undisclosed site (said by Harrison, *Birds of Kent*, 1953, to be in east Kent) in 1905, with a possible Marsh Warbler seen there in 1906, and (in the appendix) one near Birchington in 1909. Both nesting instances and the sighting at Godmersham seem fairly convincing for the time. He also implies that non-breeding records occurred but the only one detailed (in the appendix) was a sight record near Godmersham on 11th-16th June 1909.

Harrison itemised quite a few more records. A series in the Medway valley near Yalding is credible: a probable sight record in 1907, then breeding by one-three pairs during some or all years 1926-1938. Guy Mannering believed that "a few pairs" nested at Elmstone during the 1939-45 war; possible but, given his claim of nesting Aquatic Warbler a decade earlier, I am sceptical. I am also doubtful about one seen by James Harrison himself at Sevenoaks in "early May" 1944. A single pair was on Romney Marsh in 1945 and three pairs at Cottington in 1946, both believable. Finally, Harrison mentioned a lighthouse casualty at Dungeness on 8th August 1948, and one at Plumstead (outside the area covered by KOS) in June 1949.

Taylor *et al.* (*Birds of Kent*, 1981) describe the doubts that had arisen concerning some records in the years from 1952 onwards. To quote them: "Reported breeding records from north Kent in 1963 and from the Stour Valley and Appledore in 1973 are inconclusive on the evidence available, and the late Dr J. G. Harrison considered that similar doubts must be attached to the birds at Sevenoaks, and that records there since 1952, including some exceptionally early dates, might refer to mimetic Reed Warblers." Are mimetic Reed Warblers ever so similar to Marsh Warbler that they are confusable? Maybe... some Reed Warblers breeding within a Marsh Warbler colony in Belgium in the 1970s had mixed songs (with Marsh predominating) and one male paired with a female Marsh Warbler, though the hybrid pairing was unsuccessful (F Lemaire, 1977, *Behaviour* 63: 215-240). Tiresome birds!

I have been reviewing all records from 1952 onwards, aided by advice from numerous observers and by the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP), who have kindly provided the records they hold for Kent. As mentioned earlier, a full review of Marsh Warblers in Kent will have to wait but Figure 15 shows my current estimates for the numbers of individuals recorded in Kent each year. These totals include both breeding birds and migrants.

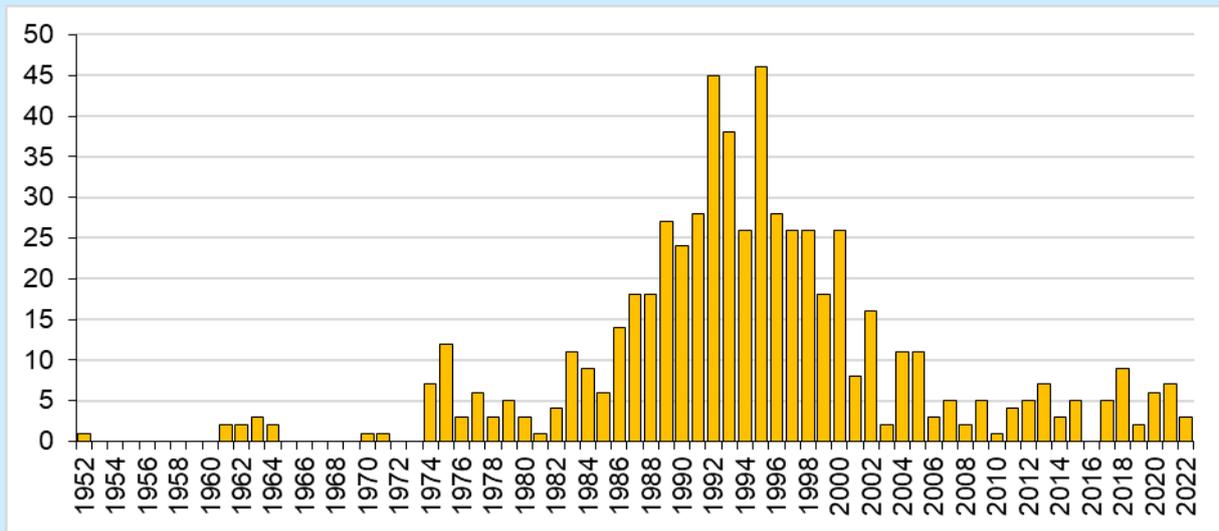


Figure 15. Marsh Warbler: annual totals, 1952-2022  
Preliminary totals, subject to change on further analysis

The totals shown in Figure 15 are minima. It's likely that some, perhaps even many, were not found or in some cases not reported. Breeding birds, in several widely spaced parts of the county, account for the majority of birds. They can be difficult to detect except in the short period after arrival when song is strongest. And there has been a tendency to withhold or obfuscate breeding information, understandable when the loss of at least one colony is believed to have been hastened by egg collectors.

I'd encourage anyone who finds Marsh Warblers in suitable breeding habitat to report them. The vegetation in which they are found is quite varied but typically includes tall herb vegetation, such as willowherb species, with a bit of scrub, often on the edge of wetlands but sometimes in dry areas. Don't spread the information too widely but make sure that accurate information is recorded; this can be done securely in a number of ways including directly to the RBBP or the Panel's representative on the KOS Conservation Committee (see KOS website). If you think you have any details of breeding attempts in the past that aren't in the records, please let me know via the newsletter editor.

**Andrew Henderson**

## The legacy of Meade-Waldo



*Little Owl by Martin Garwood*

The next time you spot a Little Owl, give a thought to the Kent man who is almost entirely responsible for introducing the species to both county and country. Edmund Gustavus Bloomfield Meade-

Waldo was born in Hever Castle in 1855 to a rich, aristocratic family. A passionate naturalist from an early age, he became a key ornithologist and conservationist, and an active member of many natural history societies including The Zoological Society of London, The British Ornithologists' Union and the RSPB. He travelled widely around the world in pursuit of all things natural and wrote many papers for the scientific journals of the day.

He lived most of his life near Hever in Edenbridge, where in 1879 he released the first **successful** batch of 40 Little Owls brought over from Europe, with a further 25 birds following later. The owls clearly found the habitat to their liking as they spread rapidly from this small base in West Kent, “.....to the north (the species) spread to Keston, Hayes, Bromley and North Cray. In 1893, 1894, it was recorded from the eastern part of the county in the neighbourhood of Sittingbourne.....and to Cuxton and Maidstone in the Autumn of that year. In 1907 it was recorded in Boxley.”(Harrison. J. 1953). Few introductions of birds, and it is still the case today, come without some controversy and Meade-Waldo was widely condemned at the time by game-keepers and the shooting lobby for releasing a bird which was thought would become a major predator of game bird chicks. Later research, which showed that Little Owls fed largely on small mammals and invertebrates, never quite satisfied the shooting brigade.

As a man with both the money and the time to devote to matters avicultural we also owe Meade-Waldo a debt for his work to protect the Red Kite, now a much loved and widespread raptor. In 1903 he was one of the founding members and the main funder of the “Kite Committee”, set up in response to the rapidly declining numbers of kites in Wales. Once common across Britain, by 1903 only a handful of breeding pairs remained. The committee had limited success against the casual shooting, poisoning and egg-collecting of the time but did play a significant role in raising awareness of the birds' plight. In 1958 the RSPB took over the challenge and the slow revival of the species began. If alive today he would surely be thrilled to see Red Kites regularly in the skies over West Kent.

It was not just the Little Owl and Red Kite that drew his attention bird-wise. At his estate in Edenbridge he bred and released Pochard and Tufted Duck both then uncommon in West Kent. More unusually and significantly, between 1895 and 1915, he raised three species of sandgrouse in his aviaries. A long way from home, the birds produced 61 broods over time and were much studied. Meade-Waldo was the first to report on the extraordinary behaviour of the male bird in collecting and bringing water to its chicks in its belly feathers. Even though this behaviour had long been known about in the birds' native habitats, his observations were widely dismissed as totally fanciful. It took another 60 years for him to be proved right, when detailed analysis confirmed that the birds could and did indeed carry water in this unique way after soaking the feathers for a few minutes. Later still, using electron microscopes, it was shown that the feathers had highly adapted structures enabling them to catch and hold water.

Meade-Waldo died in 1934 and is buried in Hever churchyard. His legacy lives on in the Little Owls and Red Kites we now enjoy and the many species he sought to conserve. He is remembered in the name of the now extinct Canary Island Oystercatcher, *Haemotopus meadowaldoi* and, more importantly, for a long life dedicated to ornithology and to the protection of biodiversity in Kent and far beyond.

**Martin Garwood**



*The Canary Island Oystercatcher, no longer considered a distinct species, first identified by Meade-Waldo. By Hendrik Gronvold.*

### Editorial comment:

Although Edmund Meade-Waldo made the first successful introduction of Little Owls to Britain, the earliest attempt was made by the wildly eccentric Charles Waterton, who brought a small group of birds from Italy to his estate in Yorkshire in 1842-43, followed by others in 1876-77. The motivation of both these men was the hope that Little Owls would be of benefit for market gardens and gardeners in helping to suppress insect pests.

As the source of Watertons' birds was southern Europe it is possible that they failed due to the effects of our more northerly climate. Certainly, the largest and most successful introduction was made between 1880-90 to Northamptonshire by Lord Lilford using birds from The Netherlands. As Martin rightly describes, there was much hostility towards these small birds from shooting interests until the BTO carried out research into the diet of the species by Alice Hibbert-Ware in 1937-38 and demonstrated their dependence on invertebrates. More recently research has shown the negative impact of Little Owls on Storm Petrels in Pembrokeshire. In recent years the species has declined in many parts of Britain probably due to the effects of pesticides and associated declines in larger invertebrates on farmland, a similar story to Red-backed Shrikes in Britain.

Norman McCanch

## KENT BIRD SIGHTINGS FOR MAY-JUNE 2024 - 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 in this newsletter.*

### WEATHER

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**May** started with thunderstorms across southern England and the weather continued to be unsettled for the first week but a high pressure system moved in on the 8<sup>th</sup> and brought more settled conditions. The clear weather coincided with a large solar flare on the 10<sup>th</sup> that led to the aurora borealis being visible across the country. Low pressure returned towards the middle of the month bringing further unsettled weather and thunderstorms. This pattern of unsettled weather continued for the rest of the month.

In contrast to the warmer than average of May, **June** was cooler than average, with temperatures in the first two weeks roughly 2°C below average. A low pressure centre developed over Scandinavia in the second week pushing further cold air from the north across the UK. There were scattered showers, although they were generally light and brief, with 13.5 mm of rain during the month to Bishopstone. From the 24<sup>th</sup> to the 27<sup>th</sup> a period of high pressure brought warm temperatures with some areas in the south-east experiencing over 28°C.

### PARTRIDGE TO WILDFOWL

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A **Quail** was calling at Worth Marshes between May 15<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> with three heard there on the 19<sup>th</sup>, another was flushed at Langdon Cliffs on May 17<sup>th</sup> whilst one was also heard at Wye on the 19<sup>th</sup>. One was flushed at Western Heights on the May 26<sup>th</sup>, there was also one at Langdon Hole on June 7<sup>th</sup> and another at Cooling on the 27<sup>th</sup>.

Up to 26 **Egyptian Geese** were seen at Bough Beech, Stodmarsh/Grove Ferry, Cliffe Pools, Godmersham, North Foreland, Nickoll's Quarry, Sevenoaks WR, Lympne Castle, Sandwich Bay and Worth Marshes and up to five **Mandarins** were seen at Penshurst Place, Nethergong and Whetsted GPs.

During May and June as many as five **Garganey** were recorded from Grove Ferry/Stodmarsh, Cliffe Pools, Dungeness RSPB, North Foreland, Elmley NNR and Worth Marshes.

A **Velver Scoter** flew E at DBO on May 11<sup>th</sup>.

### NIGHTJAR TO WADERS

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A **BAILLON'S CRAKE** was reported calling on two mornings in the Stour Valley during May and two **Common Cranes** were seen at Worth Marshes and then flying W at Stodmarsh on May 25<sup>th</sup> whilst a **Stone Curlew** flew W off the beach at Plum pudding on May 13<sup>th</sup>.

In May, single **Curlew Sandpipers** were seen at Swale NNR, Worth Marshes and Pegwell Bay and in June there were two at Worth Marshes on the 2<sup>nd</sup> with one still there the next day.

The **Temminck's Stint** first seen on April 30<sup>th</sup> at Worth Marshes was still there on May 2<sup>nd</sup> and another was seen there on May 18<sup>th</sup> whilst single **Little Stints** were seen at Worth Marshes on May 7<sup>th</sup> and Pegwell Bay on the 8<sup>th</sup>.

Two **Purple Sandpipers** were still at Foreness on May 3<sup>rd</sup> and one was seen at Oare Marshes on May 5<sup>th</sup> whilst the last bird of the spring was seen at Shellness on May 6<sup>th</sup>.

During May up to nine **Wood Sandpipers** were seen at Worth Marshes, Cliffe Pools and Stodmarsh/Grove Ferry. The first returning birds were three seen at Worth Marshes on June 18<sup>th</sup> with another reported from there on the 28<sup>th</sup>. In May one or two **Spotted Redshank** were seen at Seasalter and Pegwell Bay whilst the first returning bird was seen at Scotney on June 19<sup>th</sup> after which up to six birds were counted at Otterham Creek, Elmley NNR, Oare Marshes and Sandwich Bay.

#### GULLS TO SHEARWATERS

The Oare Marshes, adult **BONAPARTE'S GULL** returned for its 12<sup>th</sup> summer on June 21<sup>st</sup>. It remained there until the end of the month.

Four **Little Gulls** were seen at DBO on May 1<sup>st</sup> with singles at Stodmarsh on the 16<sup>th</sup>, at Lydd on the 24<sup>th</sup> and at Capel Fleet on the 26<sup>th</sup>.

Single **Caspian Gulls** were identified at DBO, Langdon Cliffs and Dartford Marshes with one or two **Yellow-legged Gull** seen at DBO, Cliffe Pools, Kearsney and Dartford Marshes.

A **CASPIAN TERN** was seen at Cliffe Pools on June 23<sup>rd</sup> whilst two **Roseate Terns** were seen at DBO on May 6<sup>th</sup>.



*Whiskered Tern by Steve Ashton*

A **WHISKERED TERN** flew E past DBO seawatch hide on May 6<sup>th</sup> and two were seen at Stodmarsh on May 12<sup>th</sup>. If accepted by the BBRC they will be the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Kent records of this species.

An adult **White-winged Black Tern** was seen for a while at Cliffe Pools on June 26<sup>th</sup> but eventually flew off with two Common Terns.

In May as many as 14 **Black Terns** were seen at DBO with smaller numbers recorded at Dungeness RSPB, North Foreland, Bough Beech and Stodmarsh. In June one was seen at Dungeness on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> and another was reported from Stodmarsh on the 25<sup>th</sup>.

Single **Great Skuas** were seen at DBO on the May 3<sup>rd</sup> and June 16<sup>th</sup> and four **Pomarine Skuas** flew E at DBO on May 1<sup>st</sup> with one there on the 4<sup>th</sup>, nine on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> and eight on the 12<sup>th</sup>.

During May as many as nine **Arctic Skuas** were seen at DBO and one flew E there on June 14<sup>th</sup> in addition two **Long-tailed Skuas** were reported flying N at North Foreland with a group of Kittiwakes on May 23<sup>rd</sup>.

During May one or two **Black-throated Divers** were seen at DBO and North Foreland with the last one seen flying E at DBO on May 17<sup>th</sup> and a **Great Northern Diver** flew W at Swalecliffe on May 3<sup>rd</sup> and there was an unexpectedly late record of one flying N at North Foreland on June 8<sup>th</sup>.

Four **Manx Shearwaters** flew past DBO on May 3<sup>rd</sup> and three were seen there on the 6<sup>th</sup> with two at North Foreland on June 1<sup>st</sup>. With a strong wind blowing on June 14<sup>th</sup>, 288 birds flew W at DBO with three also seen at Walmer Beach and on the 15<sup>th</sup> there were 109 at DBO and 12 at Sandwich Bay and on the 16<sup>th</sup> there were 62 still passing DBO. On June 19<sup>th</sup>, there were four flying S at North Foreland and one at Walmer Beach.

#### WHITE STORK TO WOODPECKERS

One or two **White Storks** were seen at Worth Marshes, Deal, Bough Beech, North Foreland, Broadstairs and Grove Ferry/Stodmarsh, a **Shag** was seen at North Foreland on June 16<sup>th</sup> and a **Glossy Ibis** was seen at Dungeness RSPB on June 29<sup>th</sup>.

As many as six **Spoonbills** were seen at Bough Beech, Dungeness RSPB, Kingsdown, Stodmarsh/Grove Ferry, Samphire Hoe, Swale NNR, Cliffe Pools, Plumpudding, Pegwell Bay, Oare Marshes and Worth Marshes.

Up to five **Bitterns** were seen in the Stour Valley, at Elmley NNR and at Dungeness RSPB whilst a **Night-Heron** was sound recorded at Stodmarsh at 2130 on May 29<sup>th</sup>.

As many as six **Cattle Egrets** were seen at Dungeness RSPB, Foreness, North Foreland, Sevenoaks WR, Seasalter, Elmley NNR, Oare Marshes, Sandwich Bay, Worth Marshes and Nickoll's Quarry



*Purple Heron by Shalley Lewis*

A **Purple Heron** was seen at Sandwich Bay/Worth Marshes between May 2<sup>nd</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> and up to three, two adults and one immature, were seen at Stodmarsh from May 8<sup>th</sup> into June with the first summer bird still present on June 30<sup>th</sup>. Two were also seen at Dungeness RSPB during May and one also flew E at Foreness on May 12<sup>th</sup>.

Up to three **Great White Egrets** were seen at Sandwich Bay and Worth Marshes, Minnis Bay, Foreness, Grove Ferry/Stodmarsh, Peshurst Place, Reculver and Dungeness.



*Osprey by Mike Gould*

During May single **Ospreys** were seen at Riverhead, DBO, Stodmarsh/Grove Ferry, Pegwell Bay, Graveney Marshes, New Hythe Lakes, Oare Marshes, Chartham Lakes and Godmersham. In June there was one at Pegwell Bay on the 1<sup>st</sup>, one at Gillingham on the 9<sup>th</sup>, another at Fowlmead CP on the 17<sup>th</sup> and one flew S at Sandwich Bay on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

**Honey Buzzards** began arriving on May 17<sup>th</sup> when two birds were counted at Langdon Cliffs and single birds were seen at Worth and Cliftonville after this there were coastal reports of one or two birds from North Foreland, Foreness, Hythe, Bockhill and Langdon Hole.

During May one or two **Hen Harriers** were seen at South Foreland, Worth Marshes and Dungeness RSPB with the last bird seen at Capel-le-Ferne on the 19<sup>th</sup>.

An adult male **Montagu's Harrier** flew S at Dungeness RSPB on May 7<sup>th</sup> and a ringtail **Montagu's or Pallid Harrier** was seen at East Cliff, Dover on the same day. A female **Montagu's Harrier** flew W at Rodmersham on May 10<sup>th</sup> with others flying WSW at Coxheath on the 11<sup>th</sup> and a first summer bird flying S at Plumpudding on May 13<sup>th</sup> and seen again at Brooksend on the 15<sup>th</sup>.

**Red Kites** were seen widely with a peak count of 55 at Teynham on May 8<sup>th</sup> and single **Black Kites** were seen at Sandown on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, North Foreland on May 4<sup>th</sup> and DBO on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>. On June 3<sup>rd</sup> a bird flew N at Kingsdown and was seen later at Broadstairs and North Foreland and one was seen at Stodmarsh on the 4<sup>th</sup>.

A **White-tailed Eagle** frequented Worth Marshes between May 22<sup>nd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>.

#### OWLS TO HIRUNDINES

One or two **Short-eared Owls** were seen at North Foreland, Foreness, Nethergong, Dungeness, Cliffe and Elmley NNR.

A **Hoopoe** was reported from Marden on May 24<sup>th</sup> and one was seen at Northward Hill on June 15<sup>th</sup>.

A **Bee-eater** was seen at DBO on May 13<sup>th</sup> and there were two at Kingsdown on the 15<sup>th</sup> and another at Dungeness RSPB on the 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> with two there on the 31<sup>st</sup>. A bird seen on June 2<sup>nd</sup> flew north from South Foreland and was recorded at various sites as far as Broadstairs whilst one was also reported on that day at Tunbridge Wells. On the 13<sup>th</sup> one was seen at Kingsdown and Bockhill and the next day there was one at North Foreland.



*Red-footed Falcon by Steve Ashton.*

A female **Red-footed Falcon** was seen at Stodmarsh from May 10<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup>, a first summer male was identified at Ham Marshes NR on the 11<sup>th</sup> and a male was recorded at Worth Marshes on May 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>. On May 23<sup>rd</sup>, a female was seen at Langdon Cliffs whilst later there were up to three at Worth Marshes that remained there until the 29<sup>th</sup>. A male was also seen at Hope Point on May 27<sup>th</sup> and a male was seen at North Foreland on June 3<sup>rd</sup>.

A **Merlin** was observed at North Foreland on May 7<sup>th</sup> and a male **Red-backed Shrike** was found at Worth Marshes on May 18<sup>th</sup> with another at Foreness on June 3<sup>rd</sup>. A **Woodchat Shrike** was seen at Folkestone Downs on May 18<sup>th</sup> and a male was identified at Dungeness RSPB on the 19<sup>th</sup>.

A male **Golden Oriole** was heard and seen at Bockhill and Kingsdown on May 2<sup>nd</sup> and one was singing at Sandwich Bay on the 4<sup>th</sup>. Others were recorded from Dungeness RSPB on May 24<sup>th</sup>, Headcorn on June

3<sup>rd</sup> with two at Reculver Marshes on the June 4<sup>th</sup>. Single birds were also seen at Dungeness RSPB on the June 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> and at Sandwich Bay on the 8<sup>th</sup>.

A **Red-rumped Swallow** flew along the cliffs at South Foreland on May 7<sup>th</sup> and another was seen at Bockhill on the 26<sup>th</sup>.

#### WARBLERS TO WHEATEARS

A **Wood Warbler** was seen and heard at Upstreet on May 2<sup>nd</sup> and another was seen at Langdon Cliffs on May 7<sup>th</sup> whilst a **GREAT REED WARBLER** was heard singing intermittently at Oare Marshes on May 16<sup>th</sup>.

**Marsh Warblers** are Schedule 1 species and very prone to disturbance so specific sites must remain confidential. There were however records at one site in **North**, four in **East** and one in **South**.

A **Melodious Warbler** was trapped and ringed at DBO on May 7<sup>th</sup> and another was seen there on the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>. A **FAN-TAILED CISTICOLA** was seen briefly at South Foreland on June 20<sup>th</sup>. If accepted by the BBRC this will be the sixth record for Kent.

It was a poor spring for **Grasshopper Warblers** with only one or two seen or heard at Worth Marshes, Seasalter and Upchurch.

A male **WESTERN SUBALPINE WARBLER** was found at North Foreland on May 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Single **Firecrests** were seen at DBO, Church Woods, Larkey Valley, Oare, Hothfield Common and Langdon Hole.

An adult **Rose-coloured Starling** flew W at Reculver Marshes on May 27<sup>th</sup> and a **Ring Ouzel** was seen on Cooling Marshes on May 4<sup>th</sup>.

The first four **Spotted Flycatchers** of the spring were seen at DBO on May 7<sup>th</sup> whilst a **Pied Flycatcher** was seen at DBO on May 3<sup>rd</sup> and there was a female at Tonbridge on the 24<sup>th</sup>.

As many as three **Black Redstarts** were seen at Dungeness, Dover, South Foreland, North Foreland, Reculver, Tankerton, Swalecliffe, Samphire Hoe, Langdon Hole, Abbotscliffe and Bockhill.

#### SPARROWS TO BUNTINGS

Two **Hawfinches** flew W at Hope Point on May 27<sup>th</sup> and during May and June one or two **Crossbills** were reported from North Foreland, DBO and Coombe Hole.

A **Serín** was seen at Langdon Hole on May 1<sup>st</sup> with others at DBO on May 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> and flying W at Tankerton on the 28<sup>th</sup>. A male was also singing at Kingsdown on June 8<sup>th</sup>.

A female **Cirl Bunting** was seen briefly, but fortunately photographed, at Dungeness on May 15<sup>th</sup>. If accepted by the KOS Rarities Panel it will be only the sixth record of this species in Kent since 1977.

**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](http://www.kentos.org.uk), KOSForum, Twitter and the RBA Hotline.

Records have been contributed by A. Appleton, Bockhill Birders, R. Bonsor, Bough Beech (per A. Ford), E. Brown, D. Bunday, N. Burt, G. Burton, F. Cackett, J. Cantelo, J. Carnell, P. Carr, M. Casemore, J. Chantler, P. Chantler, M. Chidwick, R. Collins, G. Coultrip, K. Cutting, DBO (per D. Walker), B. East, D. Ellingworth, A. Farrar, D. Faulkener, Folkestone and Hythe Birds (per I. Roberts), C. Gibbard, M. Gould,

R. Heading, J. Headley, A. Hindle, C. Hindle, M. Hindle, G. Hollamby, M. Hollingworth, P. Holt, M. Kennett, S. Kennett, J. King, G. Lee, O. Leyshon, A. Lipczynski, K. Lord, R. Mace, A. Malone, J. Massey, N. McCanch, S. McMinn, S. Message, S. Mills, S. Mount, R. Newham, R. O'Reilly, M. Orchard, J. Partridge, K. Privett, C. Powell, M. Puxley, R. Rackliffe, B. Ring, M. Roser, K. Ross, B. Ryan, Samphire Hoe (per P. Holt and P. Smith), SBBO (per A. Lipczynski and S. Walton), Sevenoaks WR, I. Shepherd, D. Smith, P. Smith, R. Smith, W. Stoneham, M. Sutherland, Swale NNR (per D. Faulkner, B. Whatmore, T. Hilsden), A. Swandale, D. Taylor, P. Trodd, C. Turley, J. Turner-Moss, D. Tutt, M. Watts, A. Wells, C. White, M. Wilson, T. Wilson, J. Woolgar, B. Woolhouse, D. Wrathall, B. Wright, M. Wright and J. Young.

Please send records for this review to Chris Hindle at [christopherhindle@hotmail.com](mailto: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.**

## Fifty Years Ago

### Red-breasted Flycatcher

A very unusual record was of one at French Street, Westerham, on July 18th, first observed from horseback and well described (CB).



*Red-breasted Flycatcher by H Gronvold*

**KBR 1974**

## MEET THE MEMBER – Heather Mathieson



### **1. Tell us about the role you play in the KOS and describe what it involves.**

I'm a member of the KOS Conservation and Surveys Committee, and help overall with social media and news updates for the society. It's great to be involved in what's going on in Kent – whether it's unusual sightings, conservation successes or potential surveys to try to gain a better understanding of how a particular species is faring.

### **2. What first drew you into the world of birds?**

I grew up in the countryside in NE Scotland. My parents instilled in me an appreciation for wildlife and interest in nature and as a result, I had some amazing encounters with birds and other wildlife from a young age. The icing on the cake for my overall fascination with birds was a trip to Zimbabwe aged 10. I was given three bird ID books to take on my travels and was hooked – Hornbills, Rollers, Weaverbirds – I'd never seen such a diversity of birds before or so much colour! The passion and excitement I had for birds then has never left me. I now work for the RSPB in the Investigations team, doing my dream job. Our main focus is to investigate and record incidents of bird of prey persecution in the UK. It's a very difficult subject to handle on a day-to-day basis but the motivation to prevent these incidents from happening is what makes the difficult days' worth it.

### **3. How are you involved with birds in Kent?**

As well as the voluntary work I do for the KOS, I also do a lot of voluntary work for the BTO. I am a BTO Ambassador for Kent, helping coordinate surveys in East Kent and the countywide Woodcock Survey. I love getting out there and gathering data, so I also take part in a number of BTO Surveys. The latest one I've started is the Blackbirds in Garden Survey which aims to monitor blackbird populations across the UK and the effect of the Usutu virus having on their numbers.

### **4. What has been your biggest birding blunder?**

The biggest one was trying to identify a bird whilst doing my PgDip. I was carrying out a House Sparrow census across London, logging all other bird species seen on a huge transect section. I heard what I thought was a repetitive contact call in a hedge behind a parked car and was trying to get a better view,

only to find it was actually a man crouched down cleaning his car with a squeaky sponge... rather embarrassing.

**5. What's your top tip for people who are interested in learning more about birds or getting more involved?**

Get into birding the way that suits you, whether it's in your garden or local park, at a nearby greenspace or nature reserve. Just go out and enjoy it for you. You could volunteer for a survey (BTO Garden BirdWatch is a great way to start), or just put up a bird feeder and see what happens. Focus on the birds which give you most pleasure – whether that's because of their behaviour, conservation status or way they help you connect to a place.

If you're a beginner learn to ID by sight – there are some great reference books out there. To help with learning birdsong use the free Merlin App on your mobile. It can often confirm what you thought you heard or saw if you can't nail it down visually to start with. It's a good learning tool if used wisely as long as you realise that it's not perfect. If something seems unbelievable on the App it probably is. Verify by sight or, if you can't, leave it as a question mark.

Record what you see on the BTO BirdTrack App. Data is so valuable and the more we have the more we can understand and identify patterns and trends, and feed this into wider conservation efforts.

**6. What is the bit of kit that you take with you when out and about birding?**

My camera is the second most important thing to grab after my bins. I love getting footage and photos of birds when I'm out and about. I've recently upgraded to a new camera so mastering that's the next challenge.

**7. How do you feel we can improve the future for birds in Kent and bird life on a larger scale?**

We need people to have greater respect and protection. People need to understand that these species can't be taken for granted and we need to do what we can to ensure their survival and safety. Whether it's stopping your dog from chasing waders on a beach, to rethinking what you plant in your garden, making a birdbath or putting up a nest box. There's so much we can do individually that can have huge benefits to bird life.

**8. Tell us about a species, place or project that interests you.**

I'm fascinated with the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and this has been growing into a bit of an obsession over the years. Many hours have been spent in the woods looking up! In Kent we're incredibly lucky to have them. Their elusiveness is extremely frustrating at times, but I think that makes seeing one all the more amazing.