

Montagu's Harrier

Circus pygargus

Category A

Rare migrant

19 records

Breeds mainly across middle latitude Europe but also south into Spain. A very scarce breeding species in Britain, with the 2010 Rare Breeding Bird Report giving a five year mean of 16 breeding pairs. Western populations winter in sub-Saharan Africa.

A scarce but regular passage migrant in Kent, which occasionally summers and has bred in recent years.



Montagu's Harrier at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)

Ticehurst in his *A History of the Birds of Kent* (1909) states that "there is no doubt that formerly this species bred regularly ... on the North Downs, and probably also in Romney Marsh. Drainage, reclamation of waste lands and game preserving have, however, long since done their work". On the North Downs they used to breed in "gorse-fields", but no locations are given and the last two pairs that nested there were both killed in 1865. He goes on to say that "locally obtained specimens can be inspected in the museums of Folkestone, Dover..."

Harrison in his *The Birds of Kent* (1953) refers to a note to *British Birds* (vol. 3, p.307) from P. Vernon Dodd stating that "a Montagu's Harrier was shot on November 18th, 1909, near Folkestone". He continues that "Colonel Montagu said he had never known of one in England later than October". Harrison includes a number of other late autumn and winter records and the later *Birds of Kent* (1981) warns that confusion with Hen Harrier "seems to be a possibility".

In 1958 a second-year male was watched as it flew slowly north across the west end of Hythe Ranges, over the old pit (at what is now Nickoll's Quarry), then west across the 'airfield'. The first modern record was in 1991, since when it has occurred with some regularity, as demonstrated in figure 1.

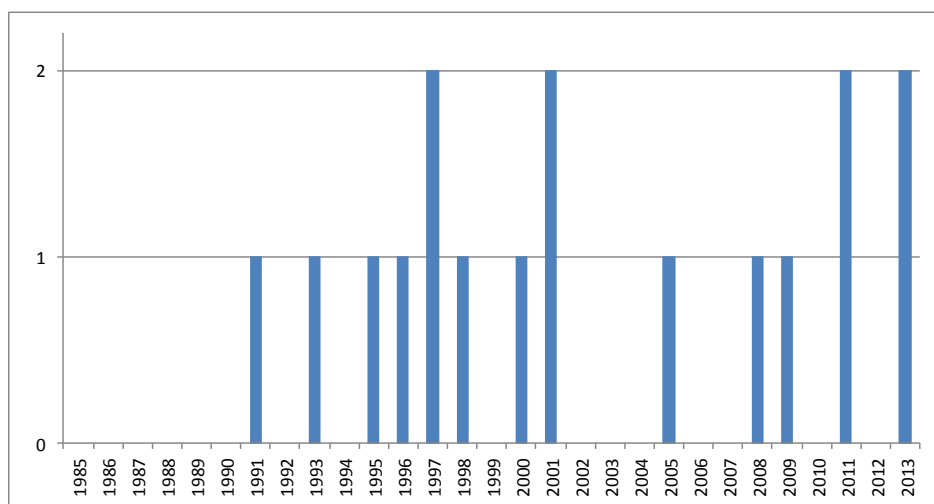


Figure 1: Montagu's Harrier records since 1985 at Folkestone and Hythe

Figure 2 shows the arrival dates by week. The majority of records have been in spring, between 27th April (week 17) and 3rd June (week 23), with a distinct peak in week 19 when five have occurred between 8th and 12th May. There are three autumn records between mid-August and early September.

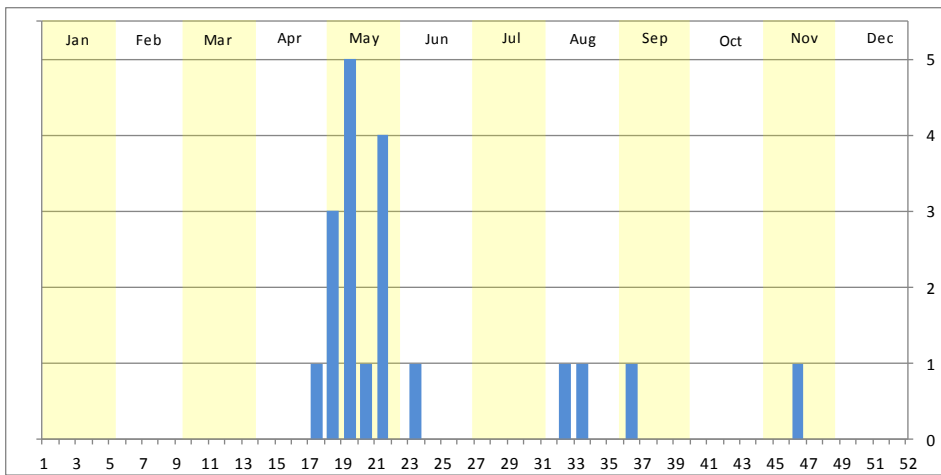


Figure 2: Montagu's Harrier records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Eight have been recorded along the cliffs between Abbotscliffe and Capel-le-Ferne, with others at Samphire Hoe (3), Cheriton (2), Copt Point (2) and single sightings at five other sites.

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1909** Folkestone, one shot near Folkestone, 18th November (per P. Vernon-Dodd)
also some in Folkestone Museum were obtained "locally" prior to 1909 (per Ticehurst, 1909)
- 1958** Nickoll's Quarry, male flew north across the Hythe Ranges, then over Nickoll's Quarry, 11th May (R. K. Norman)
- 1991** Mill Point, male on about 12th May (reported)
- 1993** Abbotscliffe, one flew south-west, 7th September (J. P. Siddle)
- 1995** Abbotscliffe, immature/female, 8th to 19th May, photographed (D. A. Gibson)
- 1996** Abbotscliffe, immature/female flew in off the sea, 3rd June (D. Belshaw)
- 1997** Capel-le-Ferne Café, immature/female flew east, 27th May (I. A. Roberts)
- 1997** Cheriton, one flew south-west, 12th August (D. A. Gibson)
- 1998** Capel-le-Ferne Café, female flew east, 19th May (D. A. Gibson)
- 2000** Abbotscliffe, immature/female flew in off the sea then north-west, 20th May (I. A. Roberts)
- 2001** Copt Point, one flew in off the sea, 5th May (I. A. Roberts)
- 2001** Capel-le-Ferne, immature/female flew west, 24th May (I. A. Roberts)
- 2005** Capel-le-Ferne Gun Site, male flew in off the sea, 9th May (I. A. Roberts)
- 2008** Samphire Hoe, immature/female male flew east, 9th May (I. A. Roberts)
- 2009** Folkestone, female flew east, 25th May (P. Howe)
- 2011** Copt Point, male in off the sea, 27th April (I. A. Roberts)
- 2011** Samphire Hoe, juvenile flew west, 16th August, photographed (P. Smith)
- 2013** Samphire Hoe, immature/female flew in off the sea, then north-west, 30th April (I. A. Roberts)
- 2013** Cheriton, immature/female flew north-west, 30th April (P. Howe), presumed same as above
- 2013** Princes Parade (Hythe), male flew in off the sea, 2nd May (P. Howe)



Montagu's Harrier at Abbotscliffe (Dale Gibson)