

Red-footed Falcon

Falco vespertinus

Category A

Very rare vagrant

4 records

Breeds in mid-latitude eastern Europe, from Hungary eastwards into Asia. Winters in southern Africa.

A rare vagrant to Kent, mainly in spring and early summer, with 85% of the 81 dated records to the end of 2010 having occurred between the 17th April and the end of June. Almost three-quarters of the sightings have been since 1980, most notably in the “invasion” year of 1992, which produced 14 records (including the first modern local record).

The first Folkestone and Hythe record, at Sandling Park in 1862, was also the earliest for the county, and was documented in *Zoologist* for that year, p.8192: “an adult female of the orange-legged hobby (*Falco rufipes*) was killed at Sandling Park, near Hythe, in the early part of this summer. I saw the bird soon after, but as I believe its occurrence in this instance has not been recorded, I have asked permission to notify it – W. Oxenden Hammond, St. Alban's Court, near Wingham, September 15, 1862”. The occurrence was also recorded by Ticehurst in his *A History of the Birds of Kent* (1909), who notes that it was shot by Major William Deedes, mounted by Mr. Charles Gordon, and was in the Deedes collection known to be on loan to the Folkestone Museum, though the specimen could not be traced by Harrison (*The Birds of Kent*, 1953).

Mr. Benjamin Turner, Major Deedes’ gamekeeper, informed Ticehurst that he remembered this bird well, and that “he has seen another since, but, of course, this may have been a Hobby, though being such a good observer I should be unwilling to doubt his identification”.

There have been three subsequent records, also females, all since 1990, as demonstrated in figure 1.

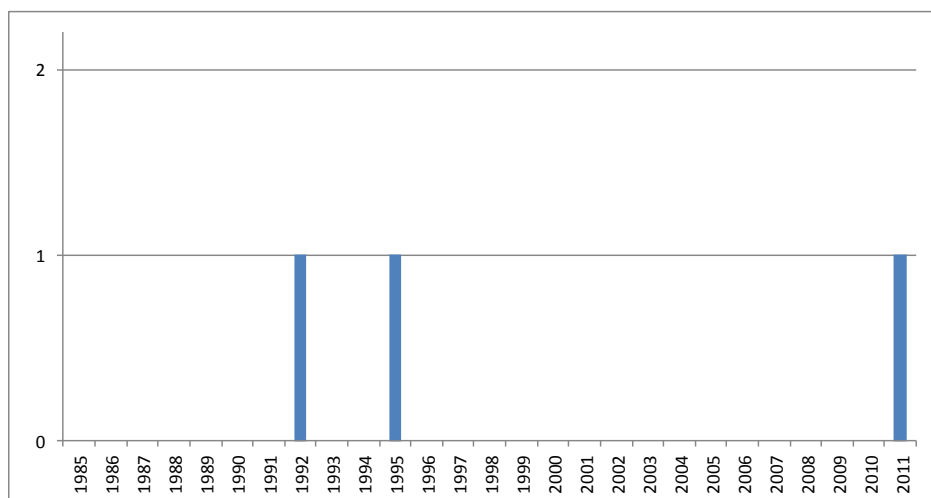


Figure 1: Red-footed Falcon records since 1985 at Folkestone and Hythe

All have been recorded between the 30th April and 16th May, as shown by figure 2, in line with the peak arrival times in the county.

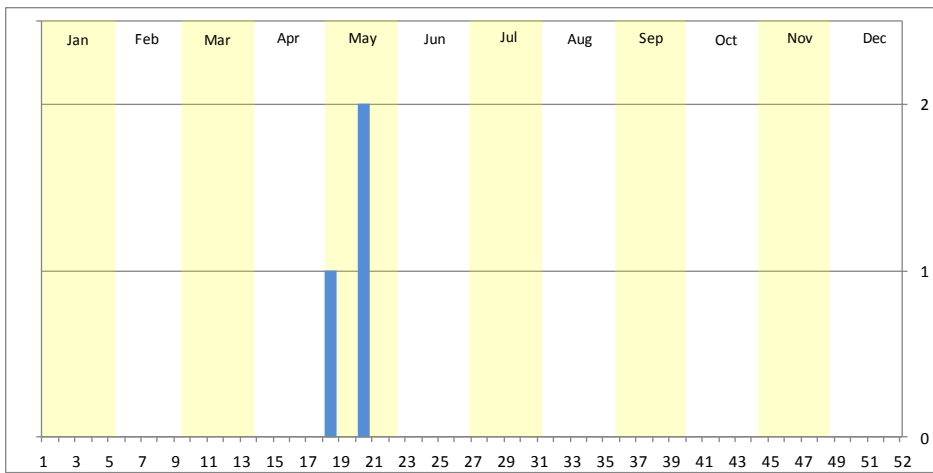


Figure 2: Red-footed Falcon records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1862** Sandling Park, adult female shot during the early part of the summer (W. Deedes)
- 1992** Abbotscliffe, female flew in off the sea, 16th May (I. A. Roberts, J. P. Siddle), together with another unidentified falcon, possibly also of this species
- 1995** Nickoll's Quarry, female chasing prey and perched briefly on a prominent boulder, 14th May (R. K. Norman)
- 2011** Copt Point, female flew in off the sea, 30th April (D. A. Gibson)