

Wryneck

Jynx torquilla

Category A

Formerly bred, now a rare passage migrant.

24 records since 1980

Breeds across much of Europe, though now absent in Britain (with last confirmed breeding in England in 1985 and Scotland in 2002), following a long-term decline, and decreases have also been witnessed in north-west France, Belgium and the Netherlands.

Mainly migratory, wintering in small numbers or irregularly in the Mediterranean basin or Middle East, otherwise in Africa south of the Sahara. Having formerly bred in Kent it is now only a scarce passage migrant.



Wryneck at Samphire Hoe (D. Campbell)

Henry Ulyett in his *Rambles of a Naturalist Round Folkestone* (1880) included the Wryneck in the list of species recorded in the neighbourhood of Folkestone, within a radius of six miles from the town hall. Whilst this range extends further inland than the current Folkestone and Hythe area, so is not conclusive evidence of occurrence here, the species was widespread and probably fairly common locally in the nineteenth century. Ticehurst in his *A History of the Birds of Kent* (1909) described the Wryneck as plentiful and generally distributed throughout the county, particularly in gardens, coppices and old orchards.

Harrison in his *Birds of Kent* (1953) suggested some decline, particularly in the east and south-east of the county between 1919-47, but cited evidence that pointed to a slight increase in the numbers of breeding pairs in some localities between 1948-52.

The decline of the Wryneck as a breeding species in England since is well documented, with the majority of the breeding records during the later years of the decline occurring in Kent. During the review period (1952-76) of the *Birds of Kent* (1981) the vast majority of breeding records were north of a line linking Sevenoaks with Hythe, an area predominantly of chalk and greensand. Breeding was quite widespread within this area.

Locally the stronghold at this time appears to have been at Hythe, where probable breeding was recorded in 1952-55, before confirmed, probable and possible breeding was recorded there during the Kent Ornithological Society's Wryneck survey in 1956. In 1957 a total of five pairs were proved to have bred in the Hythe area, with further instances of probable and possible breeding there. In 1958 three pairs were confirmed to have bred, with another pair possibly breeding, and in the following year birds were noted by William Nevin to have returned on the 25th March, with three of the four pairs again raising broods successfully. Three pairs bred again in 1960, and in 1961 there were a total of six definite breeding pairs recorded at Hythe by William Nevin and George Shannon.

Elsewhere, one was recorded at West Hythe in April 1952 and in the spring of 1953 "Wrynecks were much in evidence in the neighbourhood of Sandgate and the curious call - a high pitched 'Quee-quee-quee-quee' could be heard on most days during May and early June" (Folkestone Natural History Society annual report for 1953, per H. M. Rowland). A pair possibly bred at Folkestone in 1955, a nest with young was found by Roger Norman in an orchard off Castle Road, Saltwood, in June 1957 and a pair probably bred at Folkestone in 1960 and 1961, whilst one recorded at Folkestone on the 23rd March 1961 is the earliest spring record for Kent. A single bird at Hythe Ranges on the 28th August 1957 was presumably a migrant.

Across Kent at this time a decline in numbers was noted to have "accelerated markedly". The Kent Bird Report for 1962 mentions "fewer breeding pairs reported" with "a small number of records" from six sites, including Hythe. The 1963 report indicates "a further decrease in the number of breeding pairs, with a total of six definite pairs reported from the Hythe, Canterbury and Maidstone districts", whilst warning that the "species is obviously declining rapidly", and the British Trust for Ornithology enquiry in 1964 found only one definite pair in Kent, which was at Hythe. Wrynecks were again recorded at Hythe in April 1965 but there were no further reports of breeding and, apart from a single pair in the west of the county in 1973, there has been no conclusive evidence of proven breeding in the county since 1968.

H. M. Rowland, writing in *Some aspects of the natural history of the Folkestone District* (1968), summed up the local position concisely: “a visitor would almost certainly hope to see the Wryneck, but unfortunately this area is rapidly losing its nesting Wrynecks. Ten years ago Wrynecks were nesting in suitable holes in fruit trees or nesting boxes all over the district”. It is quite fitting that the last record from this time is of one found dead at Hythe on the 23rd August 1971.

It is now only a scarce passage migrant in Kent and there have been 24 records in the Folkestone and Hythe area since 1980, as shown in figure 1. The four records in 1984 were part of an exceptional influx into the county, with a minimum of 38 recorded in Kent during the autumn, whilst the recent total of 15 records in 14 years should offer some encouragement to observers hoping to encounter this enigmatic species locally.

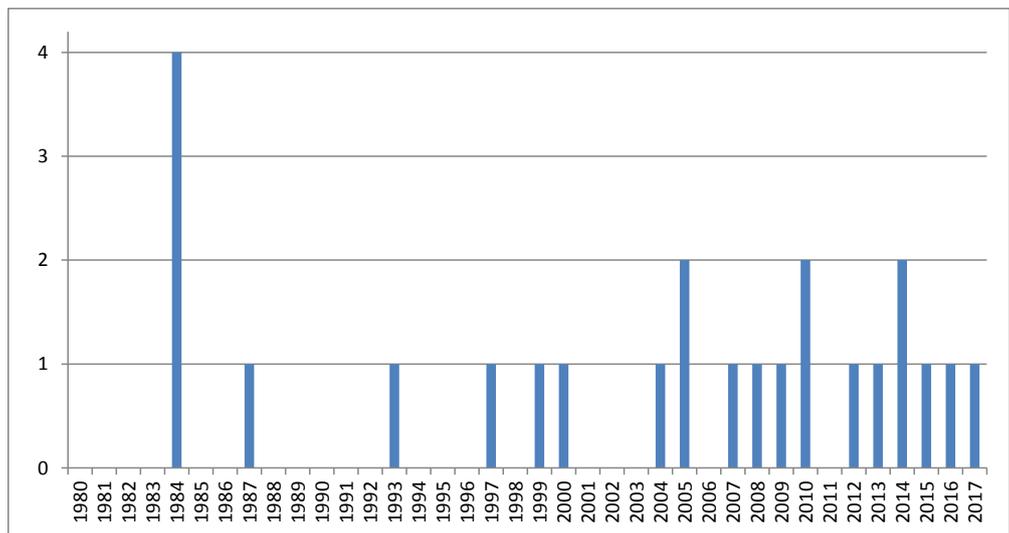


Figure 1: Wryneck records since 1980 at Folkestone and Hythe

The arrival dates since 1980 are given in figure 2. There were only two spring records, on the 9th and 18th April (weeks 15 and 16), and the rest in autumn between the 13th August (week 33) and 8th October (week 41), with a distinct peak in late August and early September, particularly week 36.

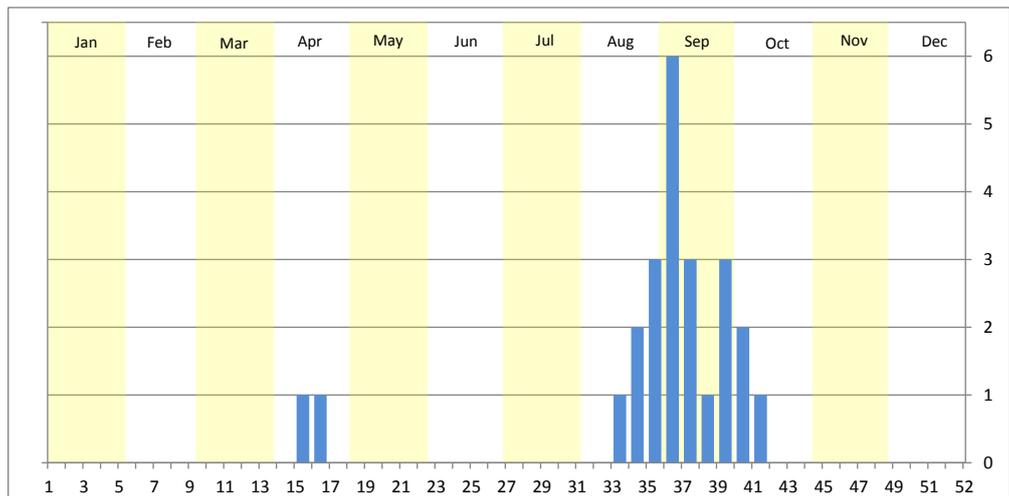


Figure 2: Wryneck records since 1980 at Folkestone and Hythe by week

The majority of records are from the cliffs, with five at Capel-le-Ferne and Abbotscliffe, and four at Samphire Hoe, with three at Copt Point and singles at Cheriton, Radnor Park (Folkestone) and Sandgate.

The full list of records since 1980 are as follows:

- 1984** Capel-le-Ferne, one, 13th to 16th August (reported)
- 1984** Copt Point, one, 27th August (reported)
- 1984** Copt Point, one, 10th September (R. Hollingsworth)

- 1984** Copt Point, one, 12th September (R. Hollingsworth), possibly same as above
- 1987** Copt Point, one, 5th September (reported)
- 1993** Capel-le-Ferne Gun Site, one, 24th September (D. A. Gibson)
- 1997** Abbotscliffe, one, 21st to 22nd September (D. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)
- 1999** Abbotscliffe, one, 31st August (D. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)
- 2000** Capel-le-Ferne Café, one, 8th October (D. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)
- 2004** Samphire Hoe, one, 31st August (P. Holt)
- 2005** Abbotscliffe, one, 8th to 9th September, photographed (I. A. Roberts *et al*)
- 2005** Capel-le-Ferne Café, one, 2nd October, photographed (I. A. Roberts)
- 2007** Samphire Hoe, one, 26th August, photographed (G. J. A. Burton, I. A. Roberts)
- 2008** Abbotscliffe, one, 8th September (reported)
- 2009** Capel-le-Ferne Gun Site, one, 18th April (D. A. Gibson)
- 2010** Radnor Park (Folkestone), one, 9th April (reported)
- 2010** Samphire Hoe, one, 5th September, possibly killed by a train (P. Coleman)
- 2012** Crete Road East, one, 4th September (P. Edmondson)
- 2013** Capel-le-Ferne, one, 2nd October (D. Chesterman)
- 2014** Cheriton, one caught by cat, kept overnight then released, 9th to 10th September (R. Laker)
- 2014** Sandgate, one, 10th to 11th September (per K. Privett)
- 2015** Abbotscliffe, one, 27th to 28th September, photographed (M. D. Kennett, I. A. Roberts)
- 2016** Samphire Hoe, one, 22nd to 24th August, photographed (N. Hando, P. Smith, M. D. Kennett)
- 2017** Shearway Business Park (Cheriton), one, 29th September (J. Varley)



Wryneck with Pied Flycatcher at Samphire Hoe (Ian Roberts)
Autumn records are often associated with arrivals of other Scandinavian migrants