

## Golden Oriole

*Oriolus oriolus*

Category A

Very rare vagrant, but has possibly bred 14 records

Breeds throughout much of Europe being absent or very local only in Britain, Fenno-Scandia and northern Russia. It has never been numerous in Britain but probably bred regularly in Kent in the mid to late nineteenth century, in East Anglia from the late 1960s and again in Kent from the late 1970s. There has been a recent decline in these populations, with the Rare Breeding Bird Panel report for 2010 recording no confirmed pairs for the first time since records started to be collected in 1973. Winters in sub-Saharan Africa.

A scarce spring migrant to Kent, less common in autumn, and has bred in previous years. Breeding Golden Orioles in the county favoured parkland and well wooded country, with scattered copses, shaws and open water, and Harrison in his *The Birds of Kent* (1953) records a preference for big old oak trees. The population in East Anglia however nests almost exclusively in hybrid black poplars.

The first Folkestone and Hythe record was an adult male seen on the 21<sup>st</sup> April 1870 by Henry Ulliyett, as recounted in his in his *Rambles of a Naturalist Round Folkestone* (1880): "on, over a couple of meadows and we reach the gate at the foot of the Sugar-Loaf... From here an easy path leads up the side of the hill, bordered by a hedge in which flourish luxuriantly wild roses, the white and black bryony, the mealy guelder rose, dogwood and privet. At the top on the right is a little copse charitably spared by the farmer, rich in orchids, leguminosae, and knapweeds. It was here that I saw my first and only Golden Oriole, and a splendid bird it was. A gorgeous visitor like this is soon noted, and as it went down into the hollows I saw the bird catchers on the alert gazing with wistful eyes and ready nets. I am happy in being able to record their disappointment". The record appeared in the "Science Gossip" journal in 1870.

There was an intriguing series of records in the 1950s from the Sandling Park area which may have been indicative of local breeding. The first record related to one on the 1<sup>st</sup> June 1954 which H. Schreiber stated was "near the station" at Sandling Park. The following year George Shannon noted one "calling at Hythe" at 06:00 on the 6<sup>th</sup> June and H. Schreiber noted one again near the station at Sandling Park between 07:30 and 09:00 on the same day. It is possible that the two records relate to the same individual. In 1956 H. Schreiber again recorded one near the station at Sandling Park on the 23<sup>rd</sup> May, which was "also present on the 28<sup>th</sup> May". Finally, in 1957, a female was seen by H. Schreiber in the same area on the 15<sup>th</sup> June. The observer, who we are told "knows the species very well" points out that the Golden Oriole has been "seen or heard in the breeding season now for four successive years".

The 1950s also provided an exceptionally late sighting at Folkestone on the 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1959. This was the latest date recorded in the *Birds of Kent* (1981) review period and is still believed to be the latest county record. The bird, seen and described by David Musson was considered to be an immature male. The description is given below, after the list of area records.

There were two further records in the mid-1980s. The first was an autumn occurrence, in Folkestone Warren on the 4<sup>th</sup> August 1984, and the second a male in Folk's Wood, near Pedlinge on the 5<sup>th</sup> May 1985.

The 17<sup>th</sup> May 1994 saw the only multiple arrival to date, when an immature male and two female-types were found in the gully at Abbotscliffe by Dale Gibson, with one bird remaining until the following day.

The following four records related to singles in the Capel-le-Ferne area, the first two at the Gun Site and the latter two near the Café, which were all brief fly-past sightings in May or early June. The most recent record involved an immature male singing in a garden in Saltwood in mid-May.

The records by year since 1985 are given in figure 1.

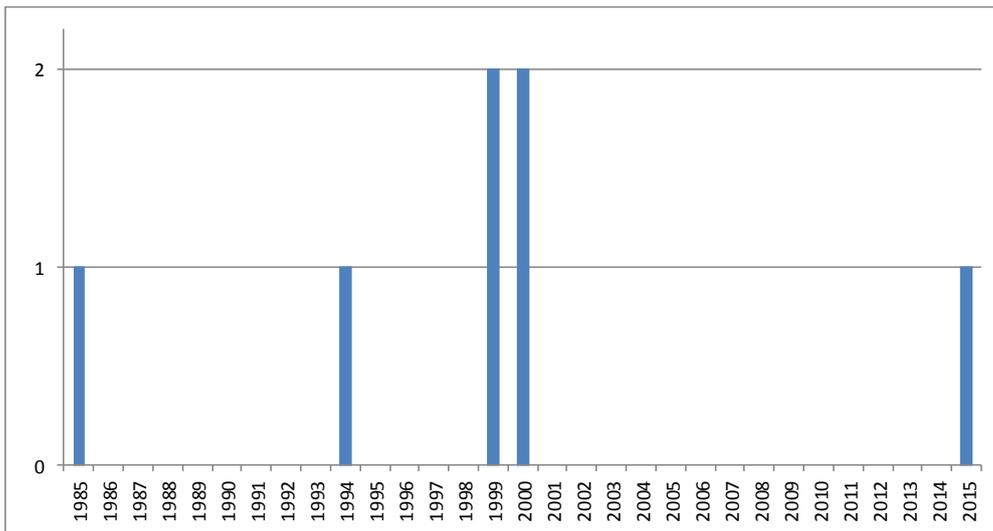


Figure 1: Golden Oriole records since 1985 at Folkestone and Hythe

The records by week are shown in figure 2. The majority have occurred in spring, between the 21<sup>st</sup> April (week 16) and 15<sup>th</sup> June (week 24), with single records in August and November.

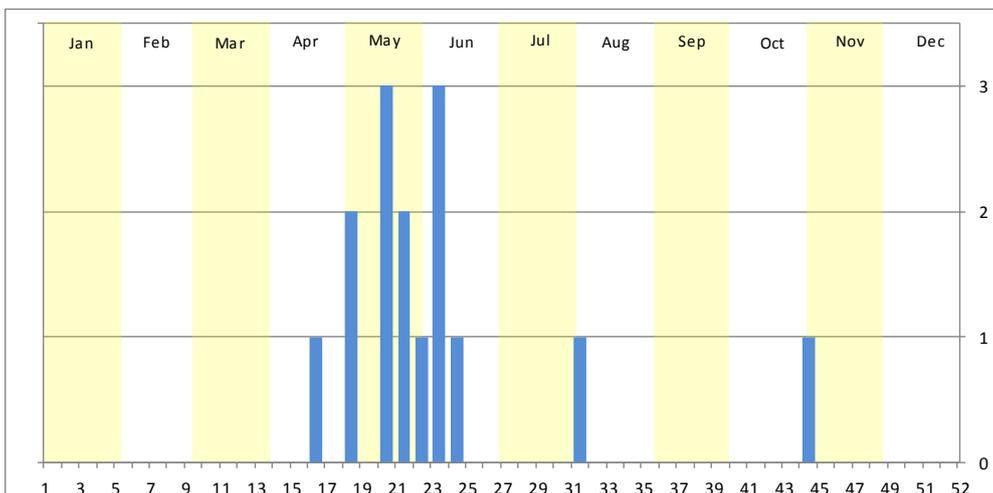


Figure 2: Golden Oriole records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1870** Sugarloaf Hill (Folkestone), adult male, 21<sup>st</sup> April (H. Ulliyett)
- 1954** Sandling Park, one, 1<sup>st</sup> June (H. Schreiber)
- 1955** Hythe, one, 6<sup>th</sup> June (G. R. Shannon)
- 1955** Sandling Park, one, 6<sup>th</sup> June (H. Schreiber), possibly same as above
- 1956** Sandling Park, one, 23<sup>rd</sup> May, also present on 28<sup>th</sup> May (H. Schreiber)
- 1957** Sandling Park, female, 15<sup>th</sup> June (H. Schreiber)
- 1959** Folkestone, immature male, 2<sup>nd</sup> November (D. F. Musson)\*
- 1984** Folkestone Warren, probably a male, 4<sup>th</sup> August (R. Heselden)
- 1985** Folk's Wood (Pedlinge), male, 5<sup>th</sup> May (R. L. Bland, D. W. Taylor)
- 1994** Abbotscliffe, three, 17<sup>th</sup> May, with one remaining to 18<sup>th</sup> May (D. A. Gibson)
- 1999** Capel-le-Ferne Gun Site, one flew east, 3<sup>rd</sup> May (D. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)
- 1999** Capel-le-Ferne Gun Site, one flew north-east, 15<sup>th</sup> May (D. A. Gibson)
- 2000** Capel-le-Ferne Café, one flew inland, 22<sup>nd</sup> May (D. A. Gibson)
- 2000** Capel-le-Ferne Café, one flew north-west, 3<sup>rd</sup> June (I. A. Roberts)
- 2015** Saltwood, immature male in song, then flew north, 17<sup>th</sup> May (P. Howe)

**\*Golden Oriole at Folkestone in November 1959 – the latest Kent record:**

“Single bird observed for about two minutes, at about 15 yards range in an apple tree. Colour: yellowish green with somewhat darker wings and tail. Not unlike Green Woodpecker in general colourings but no red on head and different habits. Underparts near white, streaked lightly with grey. Flight very undulating. Size comparison with Song Thrush. Attempted to whistle ‘wheel-a-wheoo’ but much hoarser than adult male. ? A young male”