

## Red-backed Shrike

*Lanius collurio*

Category A

Formerly bred, now a very rare  
vagrant

9 records since 1980

Breeds across much of Europe, but has almost disappeared from Britain (with just one or two breeding pairs remaining), and has contracted its range in Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark and Iberia. Elsewhere its numbers have greatly reduced in many areas, without an apparent reduction in range. The decline is thought to probably be due to loss and fragmentation of habitat resulting from afforestation and agricultural intensification, with increased use of pesticides causing loss of food resources, and climatic change. Winters in eastern tropical and southern Africa.

Formerly a common breeding species in Kent but now just a scarce migrant.

Henry Ulyett in his *Rambles of a Naturalist Round Folkestone* (1880) includes the Red-backed Shrike 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 clearly present locally in the days when it was common in the county.

Harrison in his *The Birds of Kent* (1953) states that "this bird is, of course, a common enough summer, but it is, as was indicated by Ticehurst [in his *A History of the Birds of Kent* (1909)], very subject to considerable variations over the years. However despite this known fluctuation of its strength, there is much evidence that, compared with thirty or forty years ago, it has definitely decreased. Its prevalence is, as I see it, somewhat paralleled by the case of the Wryneck, which has also become somewhat local".

He continues that "the early writers noticed this tendency, and Ticehurst quotes Hammond as regarding it as rather less numerous in the east of the county even in 1892. Major G. E. Took expresses the opinion that it is gradually ceasing to be a breeding species in south-east Kent, stating that, in the years 1912 to 1922, the bird was found in every suitable area". Locally it was known to have bred in the bushes at Hythe Ranges in the 1920s and probably 1930s.

The more recent *Birds of Kent* (1981) charts the decline through the 1950s and states that by the late 1960s it had ceased to breed regularly, with the two last pairs doing so in 1974. It mentions that "during this period the breeding areas were widely distributed over most of the traditional haunts, from Hythe in the south to Dover..." It appears that the favoured breeding sites were south facing bushy slopes, chalk pits and extensive young larch plantations.

Pairs were still known to breed at Hythe until 1952 and at Seabrook (with a pair regularly using the area behind the former East Kent bus depot near Hospital Hill) until 1953 and a juvenile in the old pit at Nickoll's Quarry in early August 1951 might have been locally bred (possibly at Hythe Ranges). At Folkestone a pair bred near the Warren in 1956, fledging three young, and a pair which bred in the Creteway Down area in 1959 is the last mention of nesting locally.

At the end of the *Birds of Kent* review period (1976) it was still an annual passage migrant in small numbers, though scarce in spring, but is now only a scarce passage migrant in the county.

There do not appear to be any Folkestone and Hythe records from the 1960s or 1970s, but a male was seen in Folkestone Warren on the 5<sup>th</sup> May 1980. The 1990s produced five records, two in spring and three in autumn, and there have been just three since: a female at Abbotscliffe on the unusual date of 26<sup>th</sup> July 2004, a male at Hythe on the 4<sup>th</sup> September 2011 and one reported at Samphire Hoe on the 14<sup>th</sup> June 2015. The records by year since 1985 are given in figure 1.

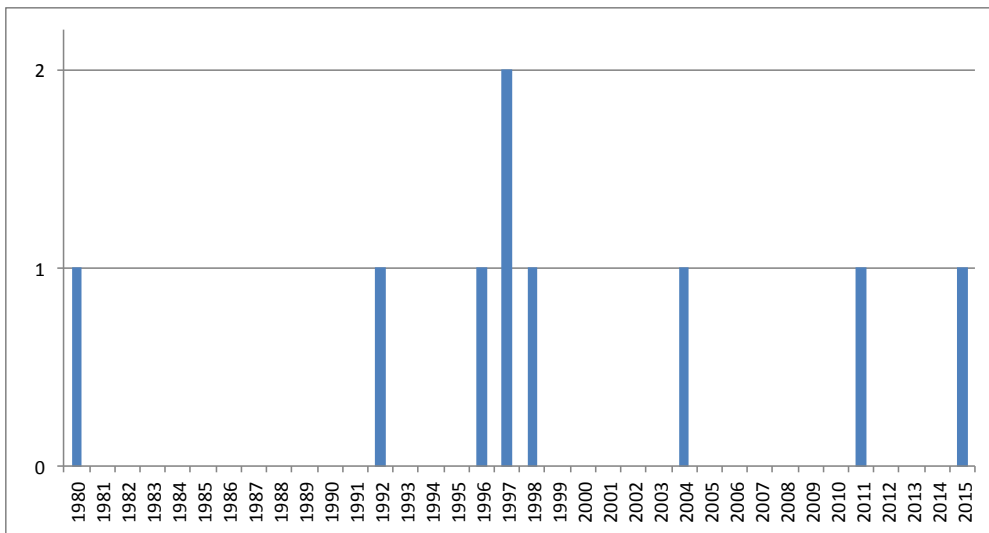


Figure 1: Red-backed Shrike records since 1980 at Folkestone and Hythe

The records by week since 1980 are shown in figure 2.

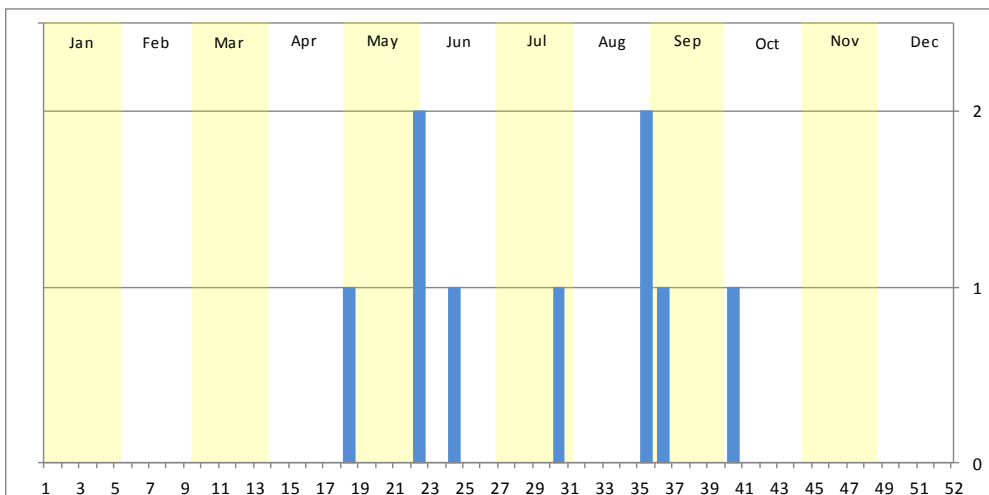


Figure 2: Red-backed Shrike records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

The full list of records since 1980 is as follows:

- 1980** Folkestone Warren, male, 5<sup>th</sup> May (R. G. W. Heselden)
- 1992** Capel-le-Ferne Gun Site, male, 30<sup>th</sup> May (J. A. Gibson)
- 1996** Capel-le-Ferne Gun Site, immature/female, 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> September (D. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)
- 1997** Church Hougham, one, 29<sup>th</sup> May (M. D. Kennett)
- 1997** Abbotscliffe, first-winter, 31<sup>st</sup> August to 1<sup>st</sup> September (D. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)
- 1998** Capel-le-Ferne Gun Site, first-winter, 4<sup>th</sup> October (D. A. Gibson, J. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)
- 2004** Abbotscliffe, female, 26<sup>th</sup> July (I. A. Roberts)
- 2011** Hythe, adult male, in garden near St. Leonard's Church briefly then flew east, 4<sup>th</sup> September (A. Lean)
- 2015** Samphire Hoe, one, 14<sup>th</sup> June (reported)