

Woodchat Shrike

Lanius senator

Category A

Very rare vagrant

3 records

Breeds mainly around the Mediterranean coast, also extending northwards into France, however there has been a major long-term contraction in its range southwards and a severe reduction in numbers. It has become extinct as a breeding species in Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, east Germany, Austria and Poland. France has seen a marked retreat southwards in recent decades.

The underlying cause of the decline is thought perhaps to be climatic change, though additional factors include loss and degradation of habitat through afforestation and intensified farming techniques, also drought in the Sahel winter quarters. Winters in sub-Saharan Africa north of the equator.

This species has a relatively long history in Kent, with the first record dating back to 1835, and six further nineteenth century records, including one in Folkestone Warren. There have been another 56 to the end of 2011. Apart from an unusual record on 24th February 1891, county records fall between the 19th April and 8th October. There have been sightings in almost all weeks in between so a distinction between spring and autumn records is fairly arbitrary, but the majority (61%) arrived between April and June, with a peak between mid-May and mid-June.

The Dungeness area has accounted for almost a third of the county records but the others have been widely scattered, with sightings at some 36 locations, some of which are well inland.

The first record for the Folkestone and Hythe area relates to one noted by Ticehurst in his *A History of the Birds of Kent* (1909) as being caught in the Warren, near Folkestone in 1888, and which appeared in the *Zoologist* 1892, p.349: "Mr. W. Oxenden Hammond of St. Albans Court, Wingham, writes: – 'As to the Woodchat, about three years ago I heard from a bird-catcher at Dover that he had just caught one. I went at once to see it, and learn about it. The bird was in beautiful plumage, all the feathers, tail and wings, perfectly clean. The owner told me that his men had taken it in the warren near Folkestone. That when they saw the bird it entered a dense clump of bramble, going to the bottom, and that they enclosed it in the bramble, and so caught it. I look on it with a certain amount of suspicion.' This bird is in Mr. Hammond's collection".

The Hammond collection is now in Canterbury Museum, having been bequeathed to it 1903. The subject of Mr. Hammond's suspicion however is unclear!

The first modern record involved a first-summer male at Brockhill Country Park on the 23rd May 1991 which spent the day hunting on the bushy slope south of the lake, and was enjoyed by many observers.

The only other record was of one, though to have been a female, found by Mark Kennett at Church Hougham on the 13th June 1996. The records by year are given in figure 1.



Woodchat Shrike at Canterbury Museum
(Philip Hadland)

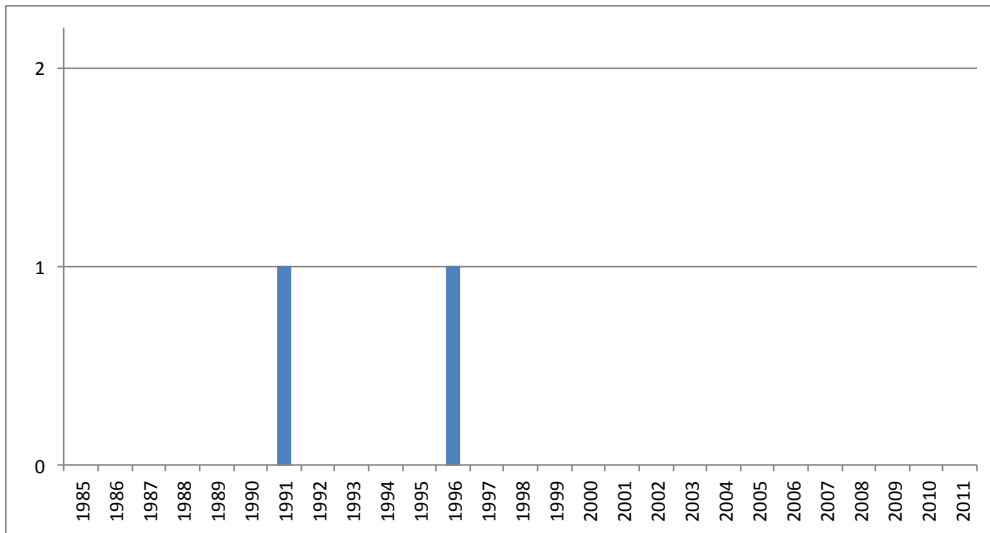


Figure 1: Woodchat Shrike records since 1985 at Folkestone and Hythe

The records by week are shown in figure 2. Both records are within the peak arrival period for the species in Kent.

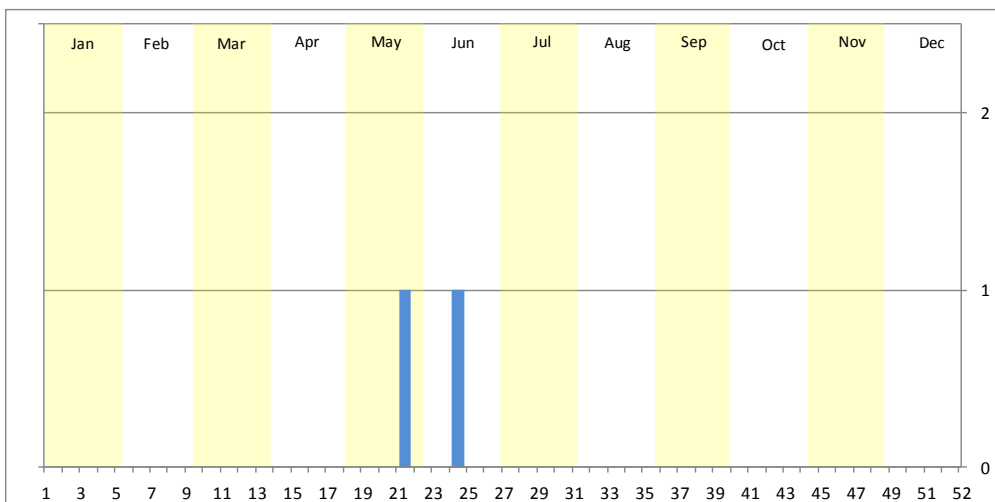


Figure 2: Woodchat Shrike records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Confirmation of the area records follow:

1888 Folkestone Warren, one, caught, date unknown, now in Canterbury Museum, specimen photographed (per Ticehurst)

1991 Brockhill CP, first-summer male, 23rd May (P. J. Wells, R. E. Turley *et al*)

1996 Church Hougham, female, 13th June (M. D. Kennett)