

Dartford Warbler

Sylvia undata

Category A

Rare migrant and winter visitor

36 records

Breeds in southern Britain, southern and western France, Iberia and North Africa. Partially migratory and dispersive. Many birds remain all year on the breeding grounds, but autumn and winter records are frequent in non-breeding areas, probably chiefly juveniles. A survey in 2006 revealed over 3,200 breeding pairs in Britain, with the species' strongholds being the heaths of Dorset, Hampshire and Surrey, however cold winters since appear to have significantly reduced numbers.



Dartford Warbler at Abbotscliffe (Ian Roberts)

A scarce passage migrant, winter visitor and occasional breeding species in Kent, including a single pair in 2010.

The first Folkestone and Hythe record was found by Jamie Gibson at Abbotscliffe on the 2nd October 1992 and this was quickly followed by two individuals (one there and one at Capel-le-Ferne Orchid Field) found by Dale Gibson barely two weeks later. Thereafter the species occurred with some regularity, with records in all but three years to 2009. Rare Breeding Bird Panel reports for the preceding period demonstrated an almost threefold increase in numbers of pairs across Britain from 1982 to 1992, and it would appear that a growing and spreading population had led to the appearance of the species locally. However it should be noted that the Abbotscliffe area, which produced the vast majority of the records, was not regularly watched before 1991, so some earlier occurrences might have been overlooked.

The best years during this period were 1999 and 2000, both with a total of four records, though with individuals often being secretive and sometime quite long-staying it can be difficult to make an accurate assessment of the numbers involved. 1999 produced the first record of two seen together and 2004 saw the first winter record, in January (though there had been no reports in the preceding November or December). Overwintering was again recorded in 2005/06 and 2006/07.

Following a couple of very cold winters at the end of the decade there was a reduction in numbers and a contraction in range nationally, and there were no local records in the five years between 2010 and 2014. Milder conditions since have probably enabled the Dartford Warbler to slowly recover, though data are not yet available to support this, and there was a welcome return to the area in 2015 with two recorded, with others in 2016 and 2017.

The records by year are given in figure 1.

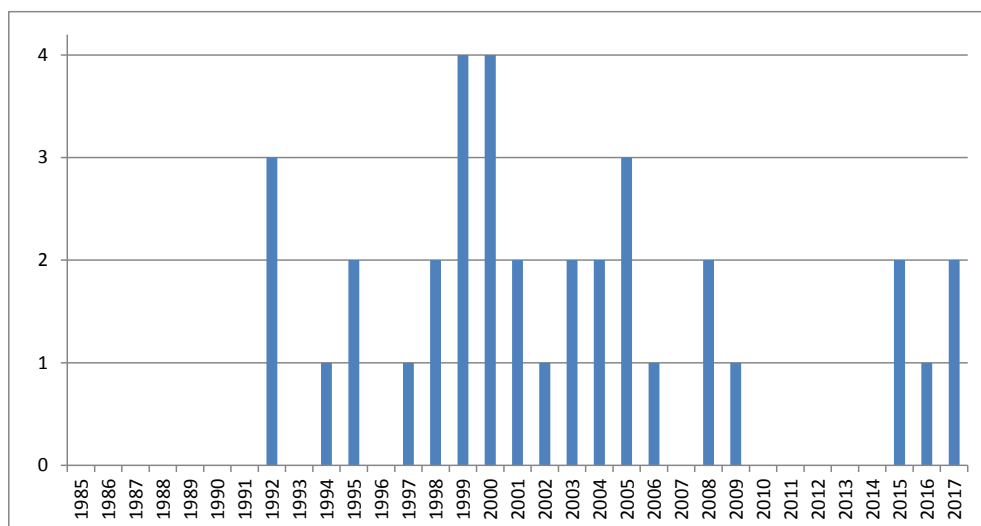


Figure 1: Dartford Warbler records at Folkestone and Hythe

The earliest arrival date was the 21st August 2000 which is six weeks earlier than the first arrival in any other year, and perhaps indicated dispersal from a not too distant source. Further records on the 11th and 23rd September 2000 possibly relate to the same bird, though two were seen together on the 24th September.

In other years all arrivals have occurred between the 2nd October (week 40) and 20th November (week 47), with the exception of singles in January 2004 and December 2017 which are presumed to have arrived earlier in the autumn. The arrival dates by week are shown in figure 2.

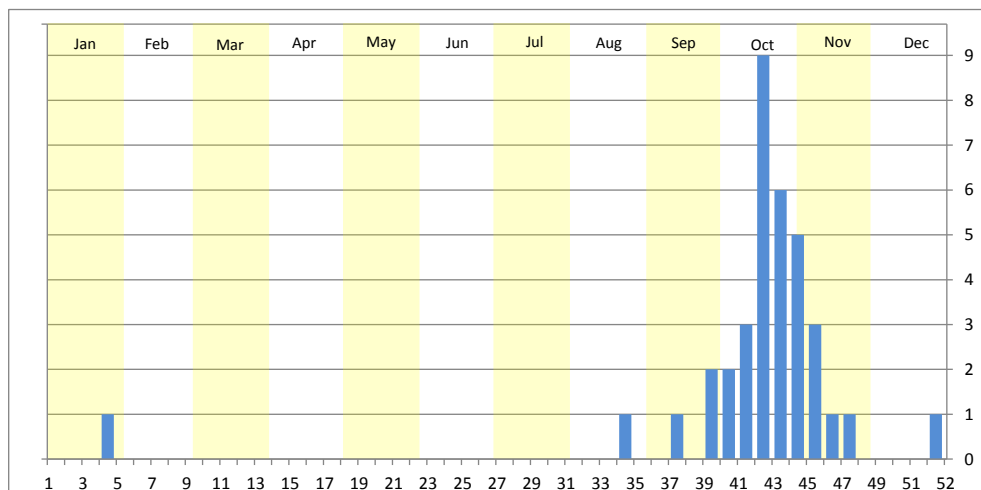


Figure 2: Dartford Warbler records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

The distribution of winter records recorded in the BTO/KOS Atlas (2007 – 2012) is shown in figure 3. This record relates to one seen at Abbotscliffe in early November 2008. Apart from one at Capel-le-Ferne Orchid Field in 1992 all the other 23 records up to the end of 2004 were at Abbotscliffe, but six of the 12 since were at Samphire Hoe, with the first for Hythe Ranges noted in 2017.

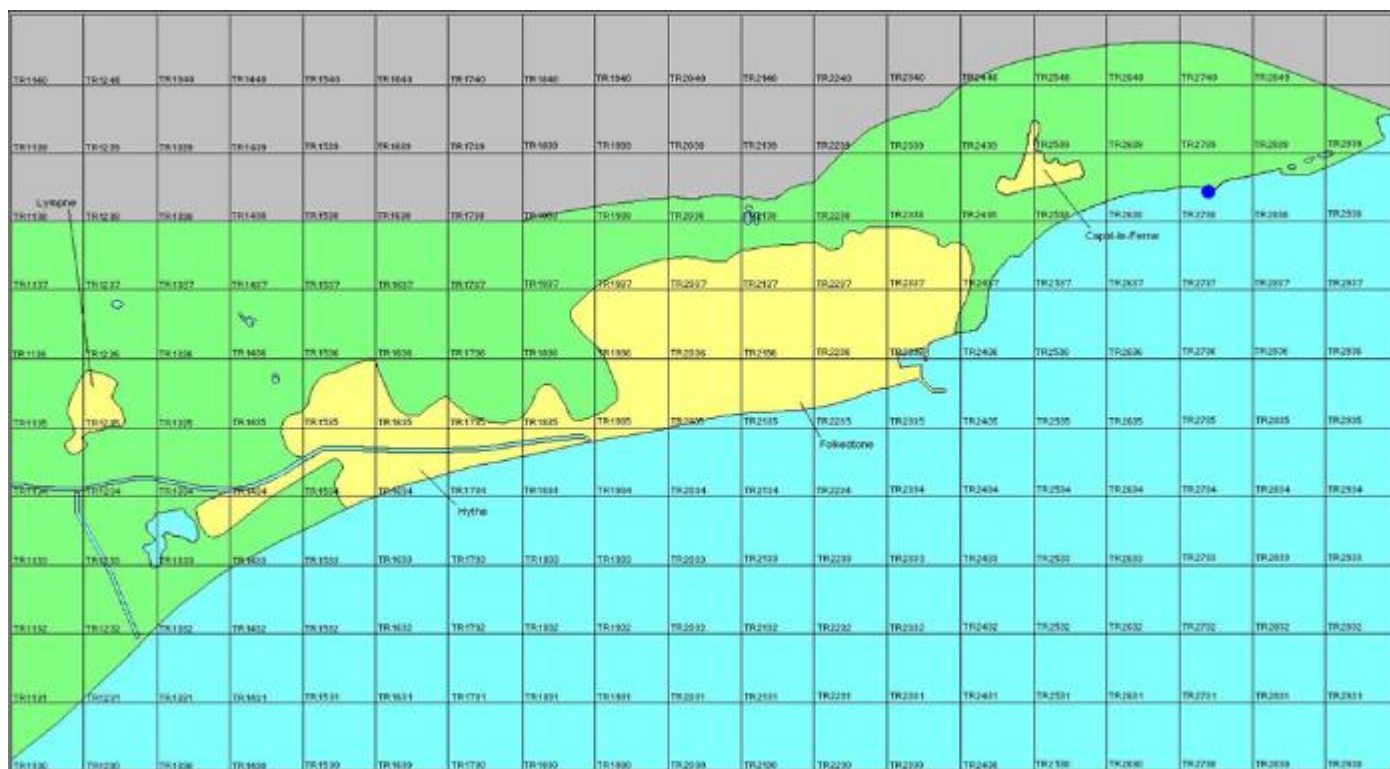


Figure 3: Wintering distribution of Dartford Warbler at Folkestone and Hythe (2007 – 2012 BTO/KOS Atlas)

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1992** Abbotscliffe, one, 2nd to 3rd October (J. A. Gibson)
- 1992** Abbotscliffe, one, 17th October (D. A. Gibson)

1992 Capel-le-Ferne (Orchid Field), one, 17th October (D. A. Gibson)
1994 Abbotscliffe, one, 19th October (D. A. Gibson)
1995 Abbotscliffe, one, 22nd to 25th October (D. A. Gibson)
1995 Abbotscliffe, one, 5th November (D. A. Gibson)
1997 Abbotscliffe, one, 25th October to 22nd November (I. A. Roberts, D. A. Gibson)
1998 Abbotscliffe, one, 18th October (I. A. Roberts)
1998 Abbotscliffe, one, 1st November (I. A. Roberts)
1999 Abbotscliffe, one, 17th to 18th October (I. A. Roberts, D. A. Gibson)
1999 Abbotscliffe, one, 29th October (D. A. Gibson)
1999 Abbotscliffe, one, 2nd November (I. A. Roberts), considered different to above
1999 Abbotscliffe, two, 7th November (I. A. Roberts), considered different to above
2000 Abbotscliffe, one, 21st August (I. A. Roberts)
2000 Abbotscliffe, one, 11th to 12th September (I. A. Roberts, D. A. Gibson)
2000 Abbotscliffe, one, 23rd September (I. A. Roberts)
2000 Abbotscliffe, two, 24th September, (I. A. Roberts, D. A. Gibson), one presumed to be same as above, one remaining to 13th October
2001 Abbotscliffe, one, 13th October (I. A. Roberts)
2001 Abbotscliffe, one, 21st October (M. Lawson)
2002 Abbotscliffe, one, 20th October (I. A. Roberts)
2003 Abbotscliffe, one, 14th to 30th October (I. A. Roberts)
2003 Abbotscliffe, two, 27th October (Reported), one presumed same as above
2004 Abbotscliffe, one, 24th January (I. A. Roberts)
2004 Abbotscliffe, one, 9th to 14th November (I. A. Roberts)
2005 Samphire Hoe, two, 13th to 17th October (I. A. Roberts, P. Holt)
2005 Abbotscliffe, one, 23rd October (I. A. Roberts)
2005 Samphire Hoe, one, 15th November to 1st February 2006 (P. Holt, I. A. Roberts *et al*)
2006 Samphire Hoe, one, 2nd November to 24th January 2007 (P. Holt, I. A. Roberts *et al*)
2008 Samphire Hoe, one, possibly two, 18th October, photographed (I. A. Roberts)
2008 Abbotscliffe, one, 2nd November (D. A. Gibson)
2009 Samphire Hoe, one, 1st to 4th October (P. Holt)
2015 Samphire Hoe, one, 18th to 20th October (M. Collins, P. Holt *et al*)
2015 Abbotscliffe, one, 20th to 24th November, photographed (I. A. Roberts, C. Gillard, P. Smith *et al*)
2016 Abbotscliffe, one, 26th October, photographed (I. A. Roberts)
2017 Abbotscliffe, one, 23rd October (M. Kennett)
2017 Hythe Ranges, one, 26th December (I. A. Roberts)



Dartford Warbler at Abbotscliffe (Ian Roberts)