

# Osprey

*Pandion haliaetus*

Category A

Scarce passage migrant.

The Osprey has a very wide distribution, stretching from western Europe eastwards across Russia to the Pacific coast, thence patchily southwards to the Mediterranean, Red Sea, and Gulf coasts, Himalayas, and Australia. It also breeds in North America south to Central America and the West Indies. Persecution, disturbance and loss of nest-sites caused extinctions in many parts of its European range in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries but there has been some recovery, aided by protection, since the 1950s when it recolonised Scotland. It is a summer visitor in the northern part of its range wintering mainly in sub-Saharan Africa (Snow & Perrins, 1998).



Osprey at Hythe (Ian Roberts)

Numbers in Britain continue to increase and Holling *et al* (2019) reported on a record breeding year in 2017, when around 240 pairs bred, although this was still thought likely to underestimate the Scottish population. A small number are now breeding in England (c.20 pairs) and Wales (c.6 pairs). In Kent it is a regular passage migrant, with occasional summer records (KOS, 2020).

The first area record was observed by Mr. F. A. C. Munns, who noticed it flying over Folkestone from the direction of Hythe on the 25<sup>th</sup> July 1949. In a letter to Harrison (1853) Mr. Munns informed him “that he saw the bird twice - once coming in from the sea, it passed above him at about fifty yards up, and on the second occasion going out to sea again”. The next was found by D. A. C. Long at the Castle Hill reservoirs on the 14<sup>th</sup> September 1967 and remained there until the 18<sup>th</sup> October. A third record, of one at Copt Point on the 5<sup>th</sup> May 1984 appears in the Kent Bird Report for that year.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> April 1991 Roger Norman saw one at Nickolls Quarry that had “apparently been grounded in torrential rain, and was seen to fly off low to the south-west”, whilst the following year Dale Gibson and Ian Roberts watched one arrive in off the sea at Capel-le-Ferne on the 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1992. Regular coverage by these observers and others since 1990 has clocked up a total of 87 sightings to date (an average of 2.8 per year).

Most sightings involve birds flying over on migration but there are three records (in addition to the one detailed above) of birds that have made protracted stays. The first frequented the Royal Military Canal at West Hythe for much of September and October 1994, and was also seen over Botolph’s Bridge and Nickolls Quarry, whilst the second favoured the canal between Scanlon’s Bridge and Red Lion Square from the 12<sup>th</sup> September to the 29<sup>th</sup> October 2005, but also ranged as far afield as Nickolls Quarry and Princes Parade.



Osprey at Princes Parade, the long-staying 2005 bird (Ian Roberts)

The third is particularly noteworthy as it was a juvenile that had fledged from the famous Loch Garten eyrie in 2008 and was fitted with a satellite transmitter. Data from this device revealed that it had arrived at the lake at Chesterfield Wood on the afternoon of the 23<sup>rd</sup> August. It remained in the area until the 26<sup>th</sup> September, when it flew due down the centre of the English Channel and south-west out into the ocean. After a flight of some 2,000 miles it met a sad demise in the midst of the North Atlantic, whilst its sibling migrated almost due south and arrived safely in West Africa.

The records by year since 1985 are shown in figure 1. There have been records in all years since 1991 except 2017, and three years have produced as many as seven records (1999, 2010 and 2012). All but two sightings refer to single birds but two arrived in off the sea at Capel-le-Ferne on the 8<sup>th</sup> May 1995 and two flew east at Abbotscliffe on the 28<sup>th</sup> September 2010.

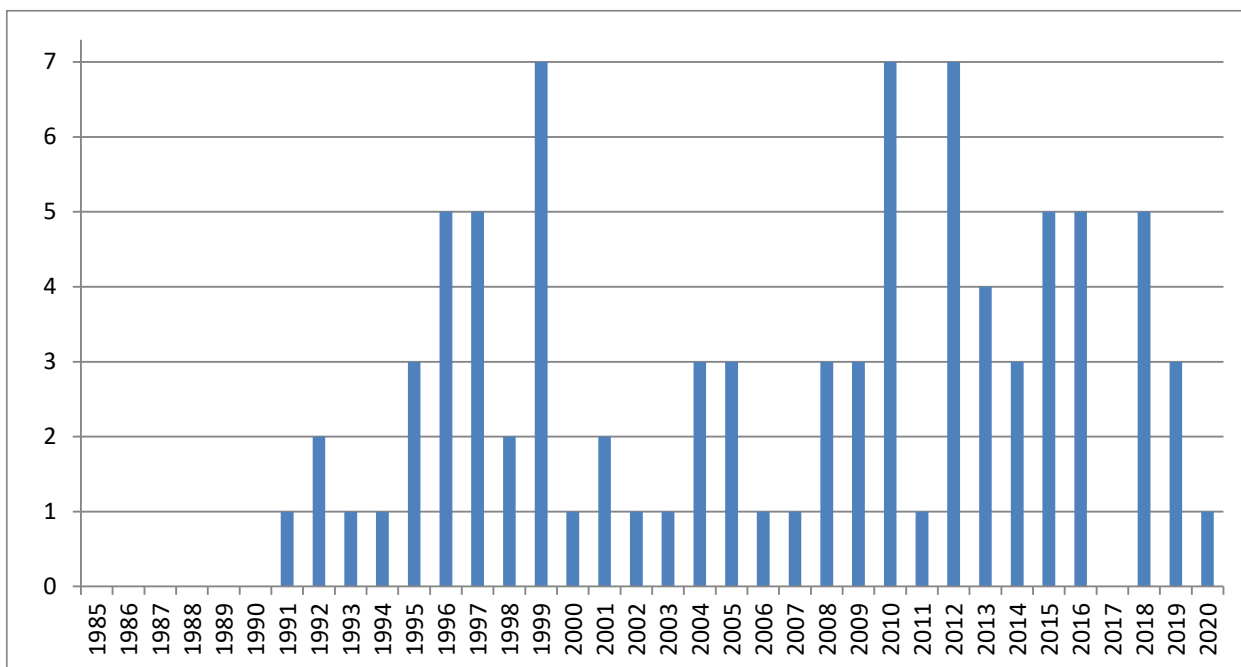


Figure 1: Osprey records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

The records by week are given in figure 2.

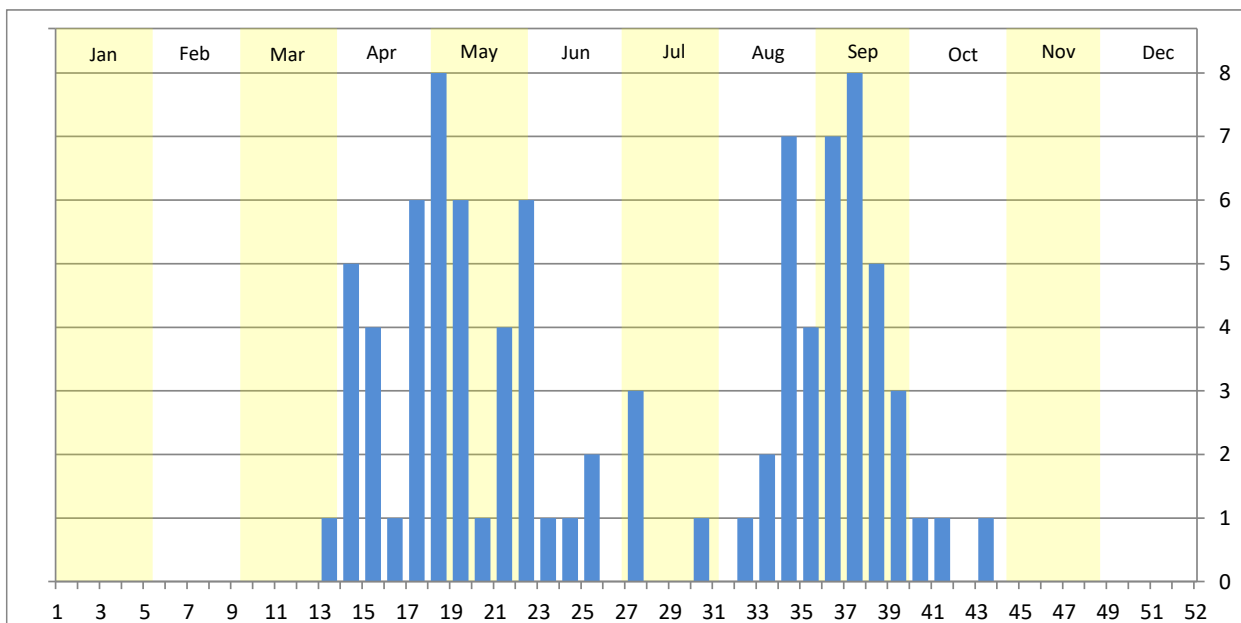


Figure 2: Osprey records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

The extreme arrival and departure dates are 28<sup>th</sup> March (1996) and 25<sup>th</sup> October (2008). There is a very even split of records between the March to June period (51%) and the July to October period (49%).

Spring passage has extended to the 19<sup>th</sup> June and autumn migrants have been noted from the 11<sup>th</sup> August, with four anomalous mid-summer records. These included the first area record (detailed above) with the others as follows: one over Folkestone on the 5<sup>th</sup> July 1998, one over Cheriton on the 4<sup>th</sup> July 2009 and one flying out to sea from Hythe on the 14<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

Figure 3 shows the distribution of all records of Osprey by tetrad.

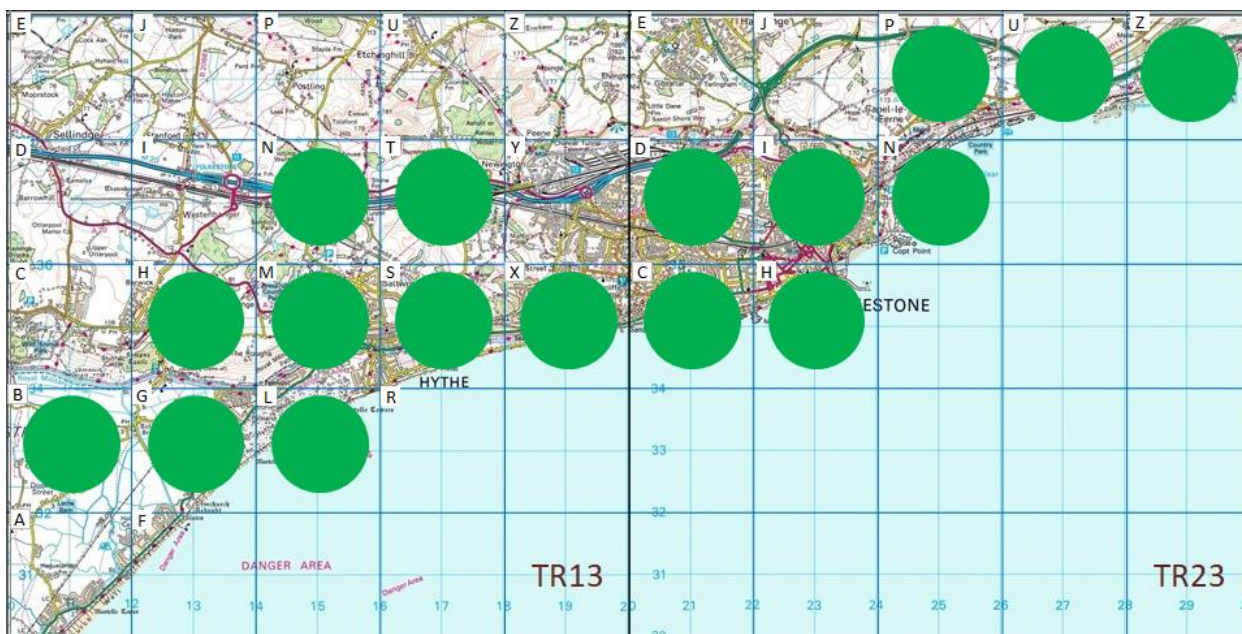
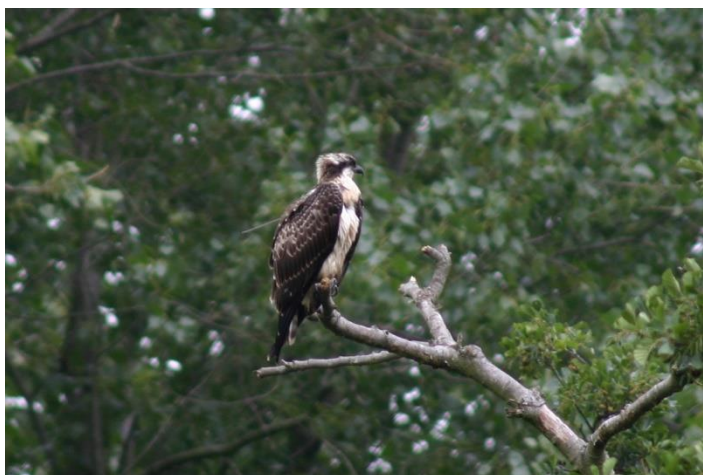


Figure 3: Distribution of all Osprey records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

There have been records from just over half (17, or 55%) of the tetrads, with records from almost all of the coastal tetrads.



Osprey at Chesterfield Wood (Ian Roberts)



Osprey at Donkey Street (Brian Harper)

### References

Harrison, J. M. 1953. *The Birds of Kent*. Witherby, London.

Holling, M. & the Rare Breeding Birds Panel, 2019. Rare breeding birds in the UK in 2017. *British Birds*, 112: 706-758

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Snow, D. & Perrins, C.M., 1998. *The Birds of the Western Palearctic*. Oxford University Press.



### ***Acknowledgements***

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Osprey at Hythe (Dale Gibson)



Osprey at Capel-le-Ferne (Ian Roberts)