

Hen Harrier

Circus cyaneus

Category A

Scarce migrant and winter visitor 51 records

Breeds quite widely across northern Europe, south to northern Spain, including upland Britain. The more northern populations are migratory, partially or locally resident elsewhere. It is the least migratory harrier, with few leaving Europe for the winter (Snow & Perrins, 1998).

An estimated 575 pairs nest in Britain but there has been a 29% decrease in the population over the last 12 years (Holling *et al*, 2019). The Hen Harrier is unfortunately one of the most persecuted of Britain's birds.



Hen Harrier at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)

Ticehurst (1909) noted that it nested in Kent up to the last half of the nineteenth century, when it was an irregular and infrequent autumn and winter visitor. Although breeding had long since ceased, Taylor *et al* (1981) reported an increase in autumn and winter numbers from the mid-twentieth century and considered it to be a regular passage migrant and almost common winter visitor in suitable areas. It has since undergone a reversal of fortune and is now a regular but sadly declining passage migrant and winter visitor to the county, being particularly uncommon inland (KOS, 2020).

The first area record was seen by John Perrot at Botolph's Bridge on the 2nd April 1955 but there were no further sightings until Roger Norman saw one at Nickolls Quarry on the 24th January 1979. Sightings at Copt Point on three dates in January 1983 possibly involved the same individual, whilst another was noted there on the 21st October 1984 and one was seen at West Hythe on the 27th February 1985.

After these three records in consecutive years no more were noted until 1992, but it has occurred fairly regularly since then, with a further 46 in the 29 years to 2020 (an average of 1.6 per year), as shown in figure 1. It has been erratic in its appearances though with three 'blank' years from 1999 to 2001 followed by a peak of four sightings in 2002. It has now been recorded in the most recent 11 consecutive years.

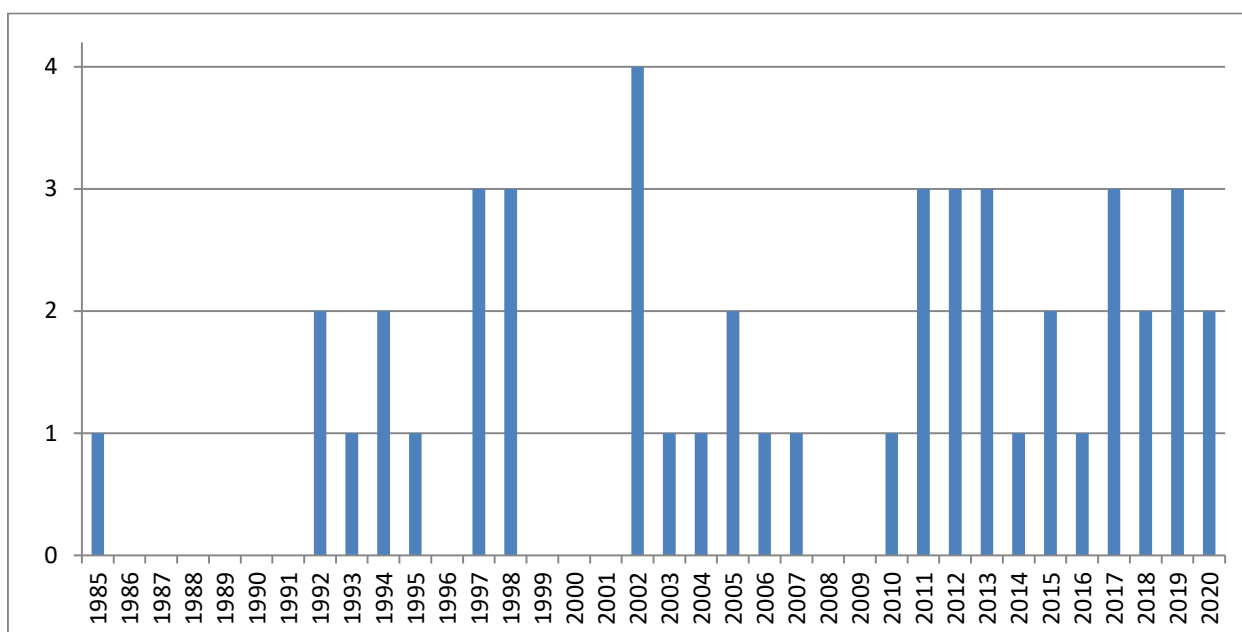


Figure 1: Hen Harrier records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

Figure 2 shows the arrival dates by week. The earliest autumn arrival was on 1st September (2020), with four further records in September and 21 in October/November. These presumably relate mostly to migrant birds as there have been just three in December. The first week of January has produced three, with three others in that month, four in February and two in March, some of which, though not all, were associated with periods of severe weather.

Seven spring migrants have been seen in April, with three particularly late birds seen in late May (1997), 3rd June (2013) and 11th June (2011).

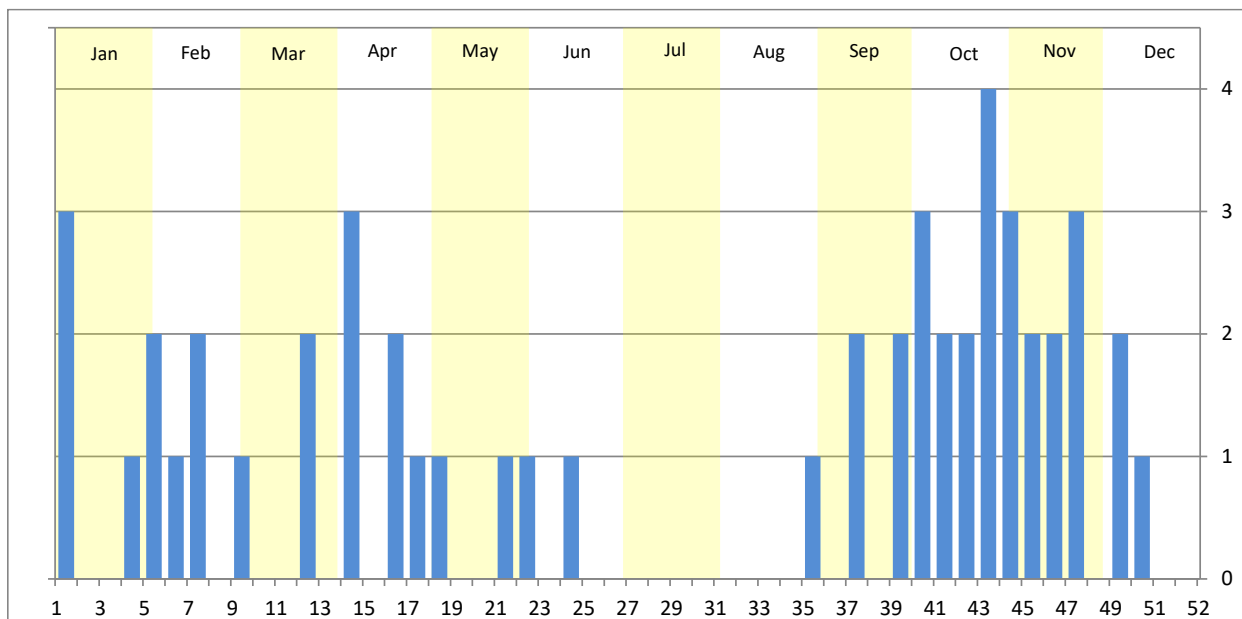


Figure 2: Hen Harrier records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the distribution of records by tetrad.

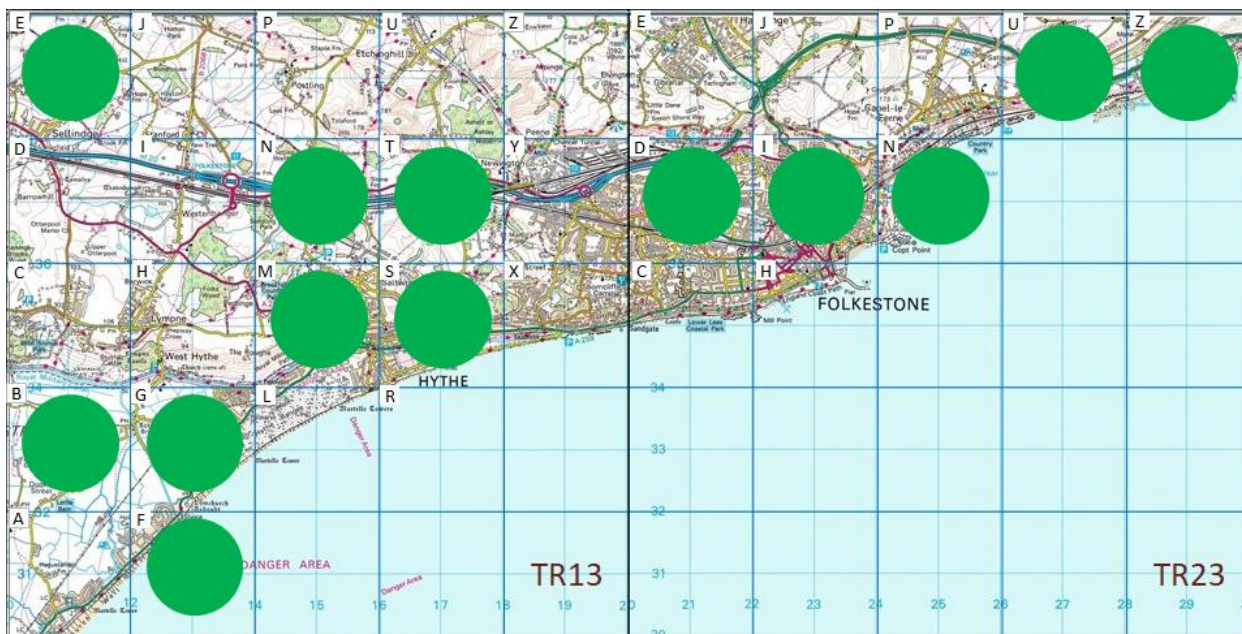


Figure 3: Distribution of all Hen Harrier records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The Hen Harrier has been recorded from 13 tetrads (42%). Sightings have been fairly evenly divided between the cliffs from Copt Point to Samphire Hoe (24) and the Botolph’s Bridge/Nickolls Quarry/West Hythe area (17), with others seen over Cheriton/Folkestone (4), Beachborough Lakes (2), Saltwood (2), Horton Priory and Hythe.

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1955** Botolph's Bridge, one, 2nd April (J. Perrot)
- 1979** Nickolls Quarry, immature/female, 24th January (R. K. Norman)
- 1983** Copt Point, immature/female, 4th, 15th and 18th January, presumed to be same individual (R. Hollingsworth)
- 1984** Copt Point, immature male, 21st October (R. Hollingsworth)
- 1985** West Hythe, male, 27th February (C. Lock)
- 1992** Nickolls Quarry, immature/female, 9th February (I. A. Roberts)
- 1992** Nickolls Quarry, immature/female, 29th April (R. K. Norman)
- 1993** Abbotscliffe, one flew in off the sea, 22nd October (D. A. Gibson)
- 1994** Abbotscliffe, male flew west, 2nd April (I. A. Roberts)
- 1994** Folkestone, male flew west, 8th October (D. A. Gibson)
- 1995** Copt Point, immature/female flew west, 21st November (D. A. Gibson)
- 1997** Cheriton, immature/female flew north-east, 18th February (D. A. Gibson)
- 1997** Cheriton, immature/female flew north, 16th April (D. A. Gibson)
- 1997** Abbotscliffe, immature/female flew out to sea, 26th May (D. A. Gibson, R. Lee, I. A. Roberts)
- 1998** Abbotscliffe, male flew in off the sea at 08:35, 4th October (D. A. Gibson, J. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)
- 1998** Capel-le-Ferne Gun Site, male flew in off the sea at 13:15, 4th October (D. A. Gibson, J. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)
- 1998** Folkestone Warren, immature/female, 19th November (reported)
- 2002** Botolph's Bridge, one, 2nd January (I. A. Roberts)
- 2002** Abbotscliffe, one flew west, 30th October (I. A. Roberts)
- 2002** Nickolls Quarry, male, 25th November (I. A. Roberts)
- 2002** Botolph's Bridge, one, 9th December (I. A. Roberts)
- 2003** Nickolls Quarry, immature/female, 18th February (I. A. Roberts)
- 2004** Abbotscliffe, male flew north, 9th October (I. A. Roberts)
- 2005** Botolph's Bridge, one flew south west over Lower Wall Road, 31st January (C. Philpott)
- 2005** Samphire Hoe, immature/female, 16th to 17th November, also at Abbotscliffe on the 18th (P. Holt, I. A. Roberts)
- 2006** Abbotscliffe, male flew in off the sea, 4th November (I. A. Roberts)
- 2007** Chesterfield Wood (Saltwood), immature/female flew east, 29th September (I. A. Roberts)
- 2010** Nickolls Quarry, immature/female, 2nd January (G. Spencer, N. Spencer)
- 2011** Botolph's Bridge, male, 11th June, photographed (B. Harper)
- 2011** Saltwood, one flew north, 22nd October (P. Howe)
- 2011** Botolph's Bridge, immature/female, 6th November (M. Kennett)
- 2012** Hougham Valley, immature/female flew east then west, 15th April (M. Kennett)
- 2012** Abbotscliffe, one flew out to sea, 2nd October (D. A. Gibson)
- 2012** Botolph's Bridge, male, 15th December (B. Harper, M. Harper, I. Roberts)
- 2013** Folkestone, male, flew north, 8th April (D. A. Gibson)
- 2013** Samphire Hoe, one flew west, 2nd June (I. A. Roberts)
- 2013** Samphire Hoe, male flew in off the sea, 11th November (L. Collins)
- 2014** Samphire Hoe, one flew west, 15th October (D. E. Smith)
- 2015** Lower Wall, West Hythe, male, 21st March (B. Findlay)
- 2015** Abbotscliffe, immature/female flew north, 16th October (M. Varley)
- 2016** Beachborough Lakes, male flew west, 27th September (S. Tomlinson)
- 2017** Capel-le-Ferne, female, 29th January (D. Richards)
- 2017** Abbotscliffe, immature/female flew in off the sea, 14th September (M. Varley)
- 2017** Hythe, immature/female flew in off the sea, 14th September (S. McMinn)
- 2018** Botolph's Bridge, female, 25th March, photographed (B. Harper)
- 2018** Beachborough Lakes, one flew south, 14th November, photographed (S. Tomlinson)
- 2019** Botolph's Bridge, immature/female, 27th April, photographed (B. Harper)
- 2019** Samphire Hoe, immature/female, 31st October (M. Varley)
- 2019** Horton Priory, immature/female flew south, 7th December (I. A. Roberts)
- 2020** Abbotscliffe, immature/female, 1st September (M. D. Kennett)
- 2020** Copt Point, male flew in off the sea, 22nd October (D. A. Gibson)

References

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Acknowledgements

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Hen Harrier at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)



Hen Harrier at Beachborough (Steve Tomlinson)



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