

Red Kite

Milvus milvus

Category A, C3

Regular non-breeding visitor, mainly in spring.

Breeds fairly widely across western Europe from southern Sweden south to Italy and Spain. Northern populations are mainly migratory and southern ones generally resident. The small isolated Welsh population is largely resident, though some juveniles disperse eastwards into England in their first autumn, winter there, and return in spring. A few continental birds reach Britain during immaturity (Snow & Perrins, 1998). Since being reintroduced into England from 1989, through a hugely successful scheme centred on the Chilterns, there are now estimated to be over 4,000 breeding pairs in Britain (Woodward *et al*, 2020).



Red Kite at Folkestone Warren (Ian Roberts)

An increasingly regular visitor to Kent, particularly in late spring. In 2010 two pairs of reintroduced birds bred in Sussex for the first time and it seems likely to return to Kent as a breeding species (as it was until the eighteenth century) in the near future.

This species was once common in the county but it was already rare by the mid-nineteenth century and Ticehurst (1909) details individual records from this time. These include one that was housed in Folkestone Museum, having been shot by Mr. Benjamin Turner, the gamekeeper of Major H. W. Deedes of the Saltwood Castle estate, however it was shot just outside the area at Aldington in 1853. Harrison was also passed information by Mr. F. W. Blathwayt, that about the year 1901 Mr. Gordon, the taxidermist of Folkestone, had a Kite to set up that had been shot by a keeper of a pheasantry close to that town, however this appears to refer to one that was shot by a keeper at Swingfield (again just outside area) on the 23rd November 1899, having been in the locality for about a month. Knight & Tolputt (1871) did not include it in their list of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood.

Therefore first certain record within the Folkestone and Hythe recording area did not occur until 1987, when one flew over Capel-le-Ferne on the 12th February 1987, but it has since been seen with increasing regularity, as figure 1 demonstrates, and was no longer classified as a local rarity from the end of 2014, when a total of fifty records had been exceeded.

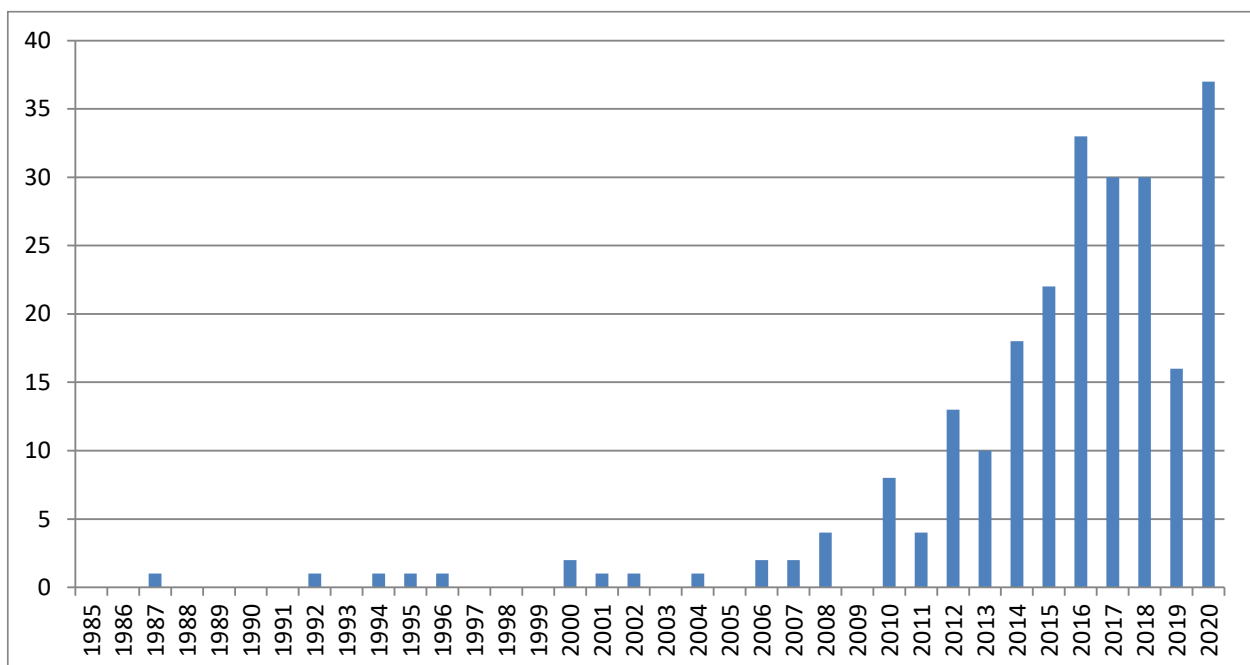


Figure 1: Red Kite records at Folkestone and Hythe

There were just four sightings in the 1990s, all recorded by Dale Gibson: singles at Folkestone on the 11th November 1992, Cheriton on the 24th June 1994, Capel-le-Ferne on the 18th May 1995 and Abbotscliffe on the 1st October 1996. On the 19th May 2000 Ian Roberts saw one flying east over Nickolls Quarry and tracked it to Seabrook where it perched in trees along the old railway embankment behind the Fountain Inn. It was found to possess a yellow wing-tag (marked with '64') that identified it as a bird that had fledged in the Chilterns the previous year. Later in 2000 Dale Gibson saw another flying over Folkestone on the 23rd October 2000.

Small numbers continued to be noted in the 2000s and a significant increase was witnessed from 2010, since when it has occurred annually and 2020 has produced the most sightings to date. The charts exclude any obvious duplicates however it is difficult in some cases when there are multiple sightings to be certain how many individuals were involved. The largest counts have involved seven at Abbotscliffe on the 16th March 2014, at Saltwood on the 1st June 2014 and Samphire Hoe on the 9th May 2018, eight at Abbotscliffe on the 24th May 2017 and 15 flying north over Beachborough on the 20th April 2018 and east over Hythe on the 2nd June 2020.

The records by week are given in figure 2 and figure 3 shows the distribution of records by tetrad.

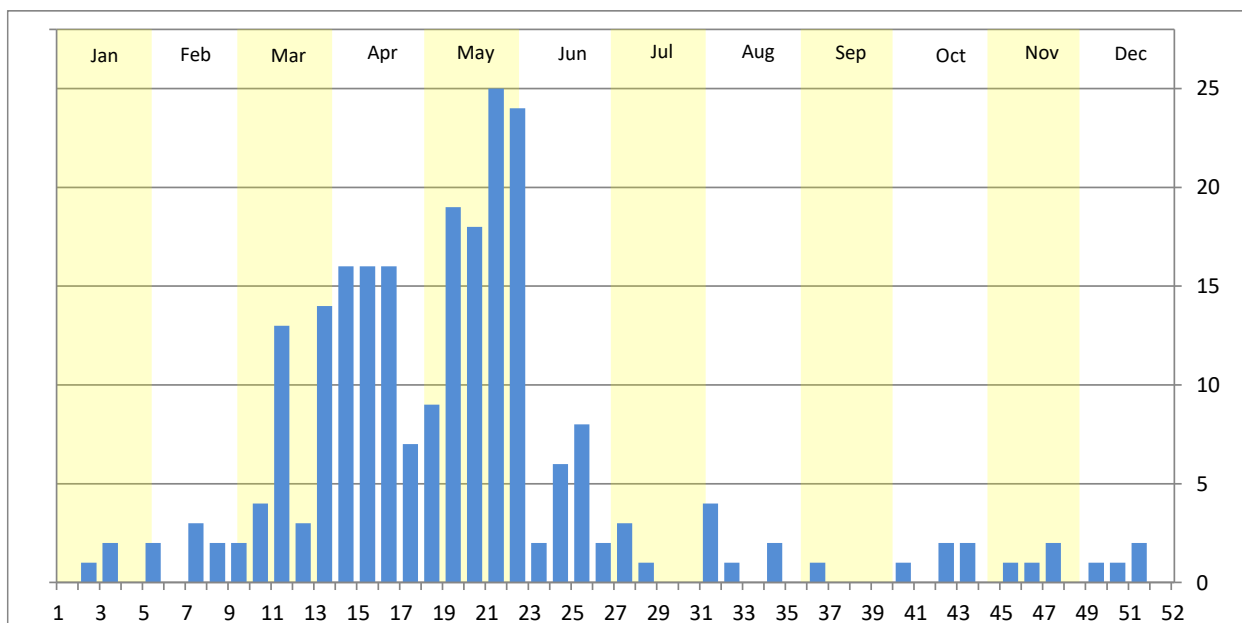


Figure 2: Red Kite records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

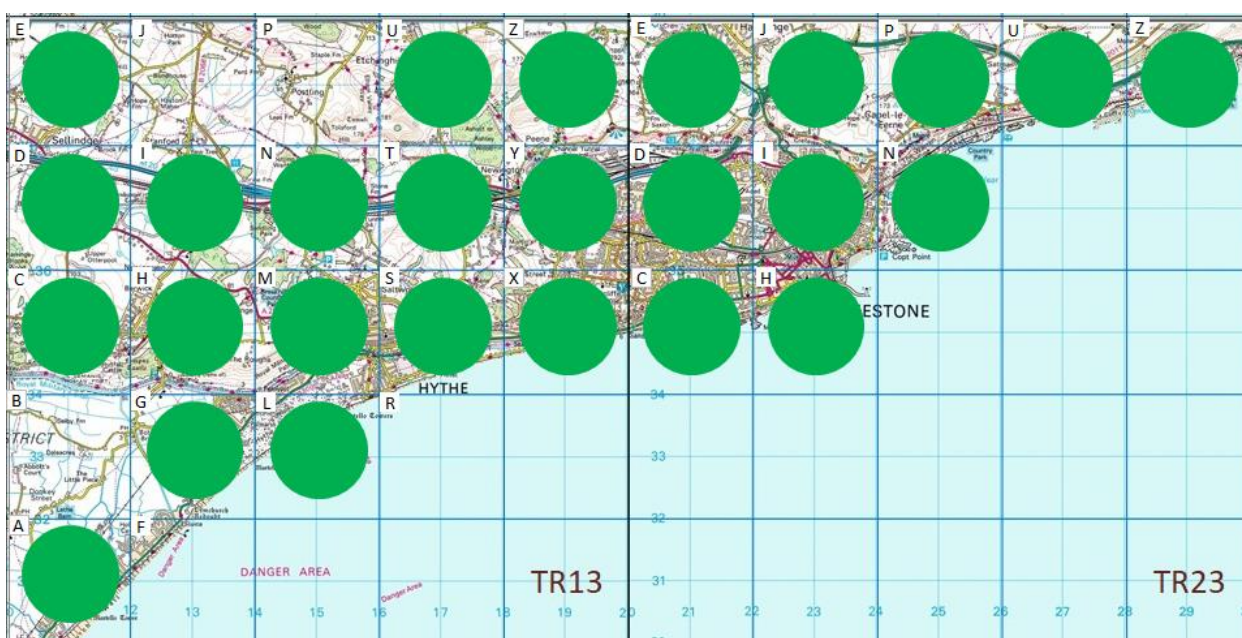


Figure 3: Distribution of all Red Kite records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Figure 2 shows a very definite spring, particularly late spring, bias but it has now occurred in all months of the year and been recorded from 26 tetrads (84%).

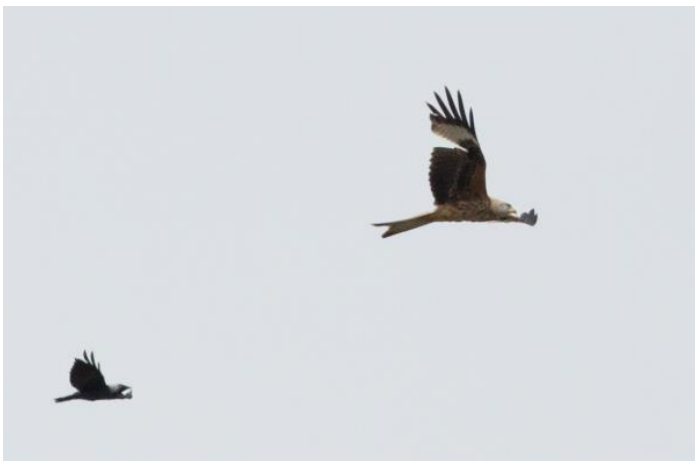


Red Kite at Samphire Hoe (Ian Roberts)



Red Kite at Cheriton (Brian Harper)

It is very likely that most records relate to the re-introduction scheme, though it is possible that the 1987 record originated from the continent, although the only recovery in Kent concerns one which had been ringed as a nestling in mid-Wales in June and found dead in the county two months later.



Red Kite at Hythe (Glenn Tutton)



Red Kite at Folkestone (Dale Gibson)

References

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Woodward, I., Aebischer, N., Burnell, D., Eaton, M., Frost, T., Hall, C., Stroud, D. & Noble, D., 2020. Population estimates of birds in Great Britain and the United Kingdom. *British Birds*: 113: 69-104.

Acknowledgements

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Red Kite at Capel-le-Ferne (Ian Roberts)