

Rough-legged Buzzard

Buteo lagopus

Category A

Very rare vagrant

15 records

Breeds in high latitudes in subarctic and arctic Fenno-Scandia and Russia, largely in low-lying, treeless, tundra areas. In years favourable for prey, spills over into wooded tundra and even taiga, but, in contrast to Common Buzzard, at all seasons strongly prefers open terrain with good distant visibility and rough low-growing vegetation favourable to prey species. Winters from the Baltic southwards to the Alps, Carpathians, northern Black Sea, and north Caucasus. A few cross the north sea to eastern Britain (Snow & Perrins, 1998).



Rough-legged Buzzard at Nickolls Quarry (Ian Roberts)

A rare passage migrant and winter visitor to Kent (KOS, 2020).

The species was included in Knight and Tolpitt's "List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood" (1871). This list covered an area of six mile radius from Folkestone town hall. This range extends further inland than the current Folkestone and Hythe area, so it is not conclusive evidence of local occurrence.

Harrison (1953) stated that on the 22nd December 1926 "the late Dr Arnold McMillan received one which had been shot at Beachborough, near Folkestone" which is first confirmed local occurrence. The next occurrence was when one was seen by H. Schreiber at Sandling Park on the 15th October 1957.

Another was seen in the Saltwood area by C. V. Nuttman on the 7th January 1974 and according to a local farmer and one of his farmhands it had been present in the area since about late October, and they last reported in on the 1st February, whilst C. V. Nuttman saw it again over a nearby wood on the 6th February. The bird was described as being about a mile north of Saltwood.

There have been a further 12 records since 1985, including eight in the last ten years, as shown in figure 1. The best year to date was 2011 with three records involving four birds, including the only the second one that has lingered – a popular juvenile which frequented the Nickolls Quarry area for at least six weeks in November/December.

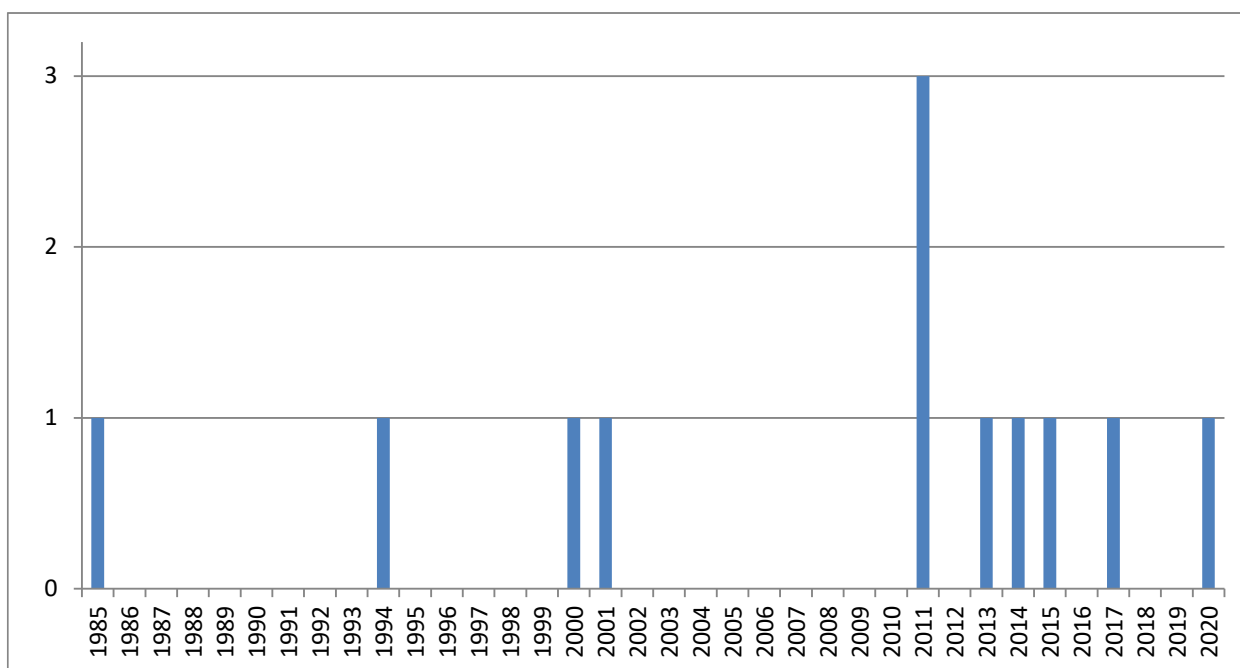


Figure 1: Rough-legged Buzzard records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

The records by week are given in figure 2. The first record has been omitted as the date of occurrence is uncertain. Five (36%) records have related to spring migrants in April/May, with 7 (50%) in autumn and the other two in winter (although one of those had probably arrived in late October).

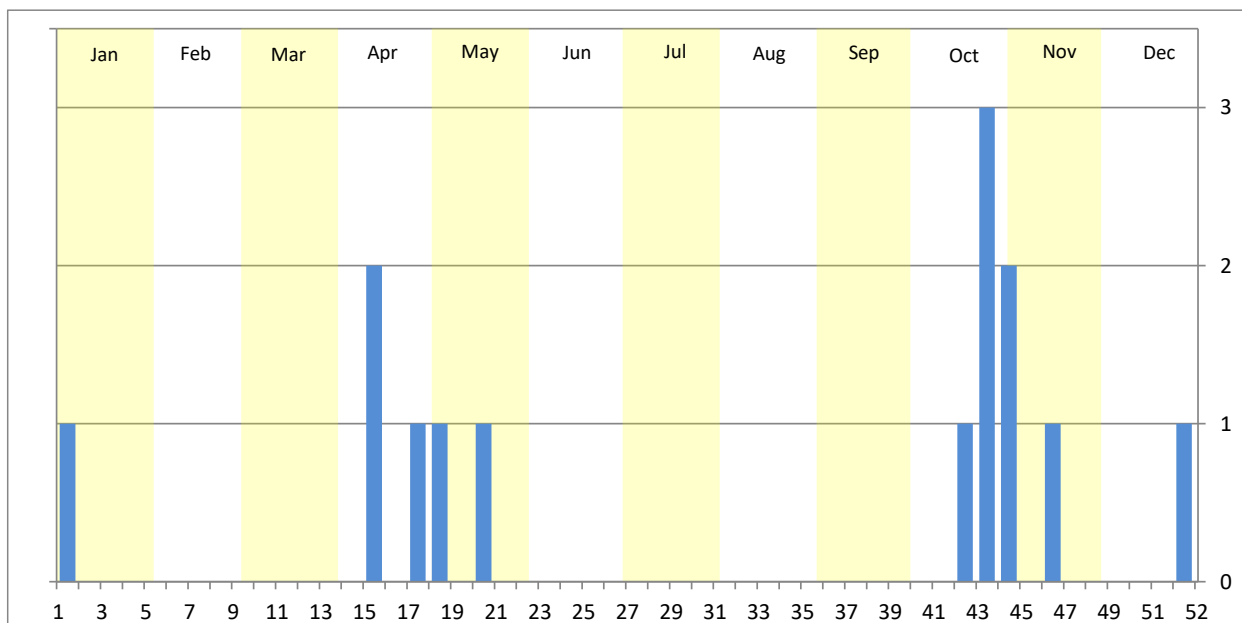


Figure 2: Rough-legged Buzzard records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the distribution of records by tetrad

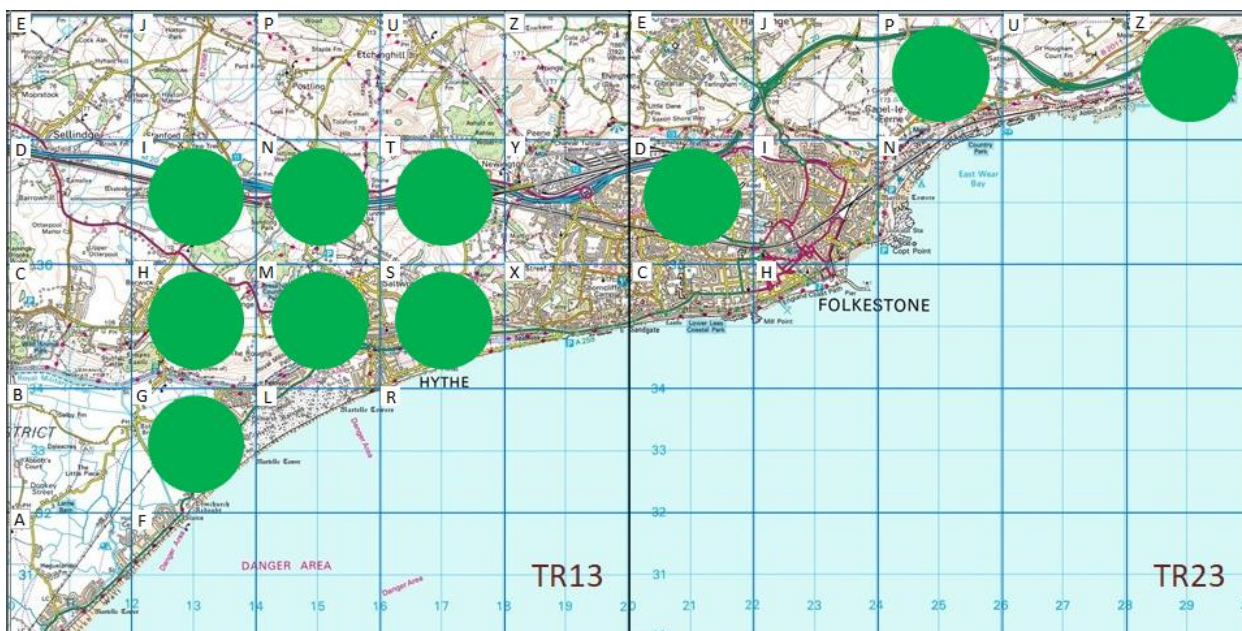


Figure 3: Distribution of all Rough-legged Buzzard records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Records have been quite well-distributed, with four in the Saltwood/Sandling area, three at the cliffs between Capelle-Ferne and Abbotscliffe, two at Cheriton/Folkestone and singles at Nickolls Quarry, Folkestone Racecourse (Westenhanger), Hythe, Beachborough and Church Hougham.

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1926** Beachborough, one, shot sometime before 22nd December (per A. McMillan)
- 1957** Sandling Park, one, 15th October (H. Schreiber)
- 1974** Saltwood, one, 7th January, thought to have been present from late October and reported until 1st February, also seen nearby on 6th February (C. V. Nuttman)
- 1985** Folkestone, one flew in off the sea, 29th December (D. Leach, per D. L. Davenport)

- 1994** Abbotscliffe, one landed in Church Wood then flew inland, 26th October (D. A. Gibson)
- 2000** Cheriton, one flew north north-east, 4th May (D. A. Gibson)
- 2001** Abbotscliffe, one flew north, 14th November (I. A. Roberts), later seen over Church Hougham
- 2011** Hythe, two flew north-east, 25th April (I. A. Roberts)
- 2011** Capel-le-Ferne Café, one flew west, 14th May, photographed (D. A. Gibson)
- 2011** Nickolls Quarry, juvenile, 1st November to at least 19th December, possibly to 23rd December, photographed (I. A. Roberts, B. Harper *et al*)
- 2013** Church Hougham, one flew west, 29th October (per Rare Bird Alert)
- 2014** Saltwood, one flew north, 13th April (P. Howe)
- 2015** Sandling, one, 24th October (B. Harper)
- 2017** Saltwood, one, 25th October (B. Green)
- 2020** Folkestone Racecourse (Westenhanger), one, 10th April (P. Sharp)



Rough-legged Buzzard at Nickolls Quarry (Ian Roberts)



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References

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

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Knight, V. and Tolputt, F., 1871. List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood, *Folkestone Natural History Society Annual Report*, 1871

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

Acknowledgements

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Rough-legged Buzzard at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)