

Woodchat Shrike

Lanius senator

Category A

Very rare vagrant.

2 records

Breeds mainly around the Mediterranean coast, also extending northwards into France, however there has been a major long-term contraction in its range southwards and a severe reduction in numbers.

It has become extinct as a breeding species in the Low Countries, east Germany, Austria and Poland, whilst France has seen a marked retreat southwards in recent decades. The underlying cause of the decline is thought perhaps to be climatic change, though additional factors include loss and degradation of habitat through afforestation and intensified farming techniques.



Woodchat Shrike at Canterbury Museum
(Philip Hadland)

Winters in sub-Saharan Africa north of the equator, where drought in the Sahel may also be contributing to its decline (Snow & Perrins, 1998). There have been an average of 28 records per year in Britain over the last decade, mainly in April and May (White & Kehoe, 2019), and a total of 63 Kent records to then end of 2019 (KOS, 2020).

The first area record relates to one noted by Ticehurst (1909) as being caught in the Warren, near Folkestone in 1888, and which appeared in the *Zoologist* 1892, p.349: "Mr. W. Oxenden Hammond of St. Albans Court, Wingham, writes: – 'As to the Woodchat, about three years ago I heard from a bird-catcher at Dover that he had just caught one. I went at once to see it, and learn about it. The bird was in beautiful plumage, all the feathers, tail and wings, perfectly clean. The owner told me that his men had taken it in the warren near Folkestone. That when they saw the bird it entered a dense clump of bramble, going to the bottom, and that they enclosed it in the bramble, and so caught it. I look on it with a certain amount of suspicion.' This bird is in Mr. Hammond's collection".

The Hammond collection is now in Canterbury Museum, having been bequeathed to it 1903. The subject and nature of Mr. Hammond's suspicion however is unclear!

The only modern record involved a first-summer male at Brockhill Country Park on the 23rd May 1991 which spent the day hunting on the scrubby slope south of the lake, and was enjoyed by many observers. Confirmation on the modern record by year is given in figure 1.

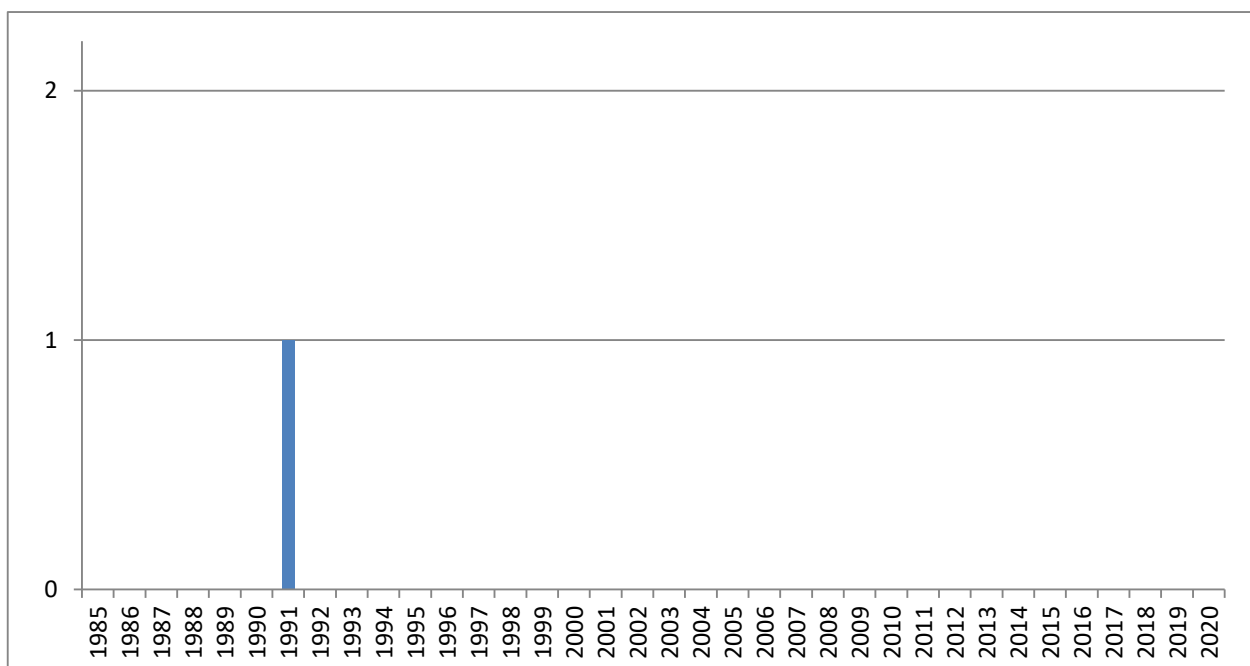


Figure 1: Woodchat Shrike records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

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

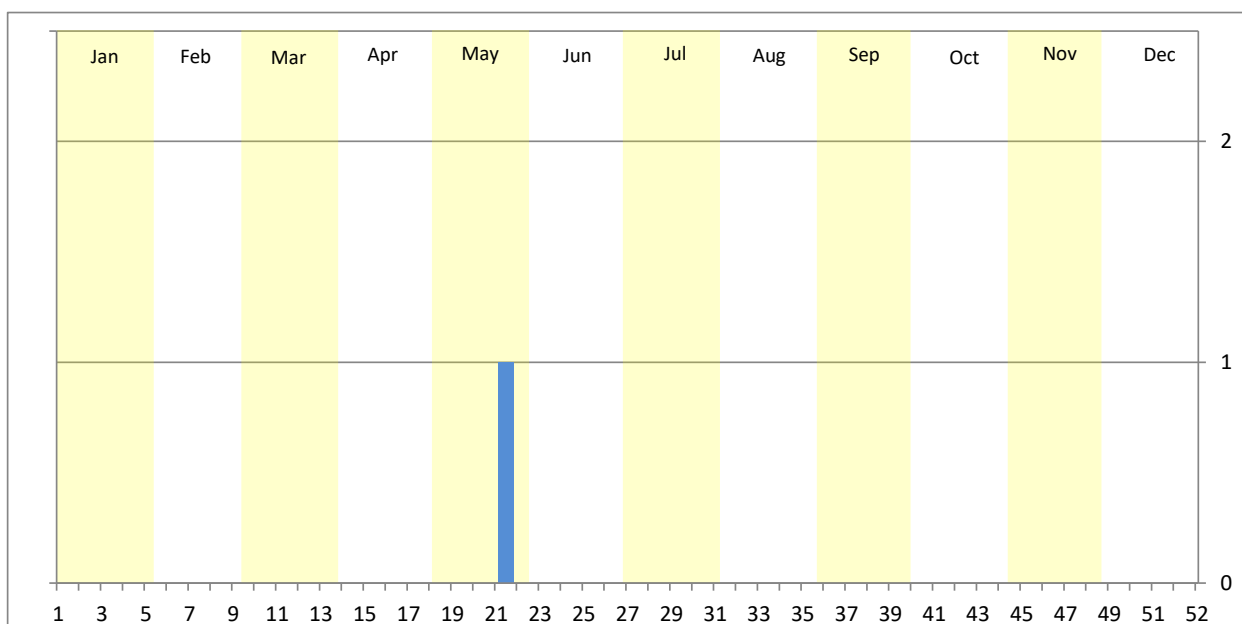


Figure 2: Woodchat Shrike records at Folkestone and Hythe by week



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

The Warren record is undated and also lacks sufficient detail to enable it to be mapped to tetrad, although it would have been with TR23 N or P.

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1888** Folkestone Warren, one, caught, date unknown, now in Canterbury Museum, specimen photographed (per Ticehurst)
- 1991** Brockhill CP, first-summer male, 23rd May (P. J. Wells, R. E. Turley *et al*)

References

Kent Bird Reports. Kent Ornithological Society

KOS Kent list: <https://kentos.org.uk/kent-list> (accessed 2020)

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

White, S. & Kehoe, C., 2019. Report on scarce migrant birds in Britain in 2017. *British Birds*, 112: 444-468.

Acknowledgements

The tetrad map images were produced from the Ordnance Survey [Get-a-map service](#) and are reproduced with kind permission of [Ordnance Survey](#).

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Woodchat Shrike at Canterbury Museum (Philip Hadland)