

Water Pipit

Anthus spinoletta

Category A

Very rare vagrant.

8 records

Breeds in mountainous regions of central and southern Europe, often at considerable elevations above or at the edge of the tree line. In winter moves to lower ground throughout inland central Europe, north-west to Belgium and the Netherlands, with small numbers regularly in southern England (Snow & Perrins, 1998). In Kent it is an uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor, particularly to the Stour Valley (KOS, 2020).



Water Pipit at Samphire Hoe (Geoff Burton)

The first local record was found by Paul Howe and Rob Lee at Copt Point on 30th March 1985 but there was a 23 year wait until the second, which was found by Geoff Burton at Samphire Hoe on the same date in 2008. This was quickly followed by one seen by Dylan Wrathall at Botolph's Bridge later that year on the 26th October and another at Samphire Hoe that lingered between the 17th and 21st March 2010.

In 2017 one was found by Ian Roberts at Donkey Street on the 5th November 2017, where it remained for at least two weeks, with perhaps the same bird seen there on the same date the following year, lingering into January 2019. Later in 2019 two (possibly involving a returning bird) were seen there on the 7th December, with one of these being seen intermittently until mid-March 2020, and one was seen again from October 2020.

The records by year are shown in figure 1.

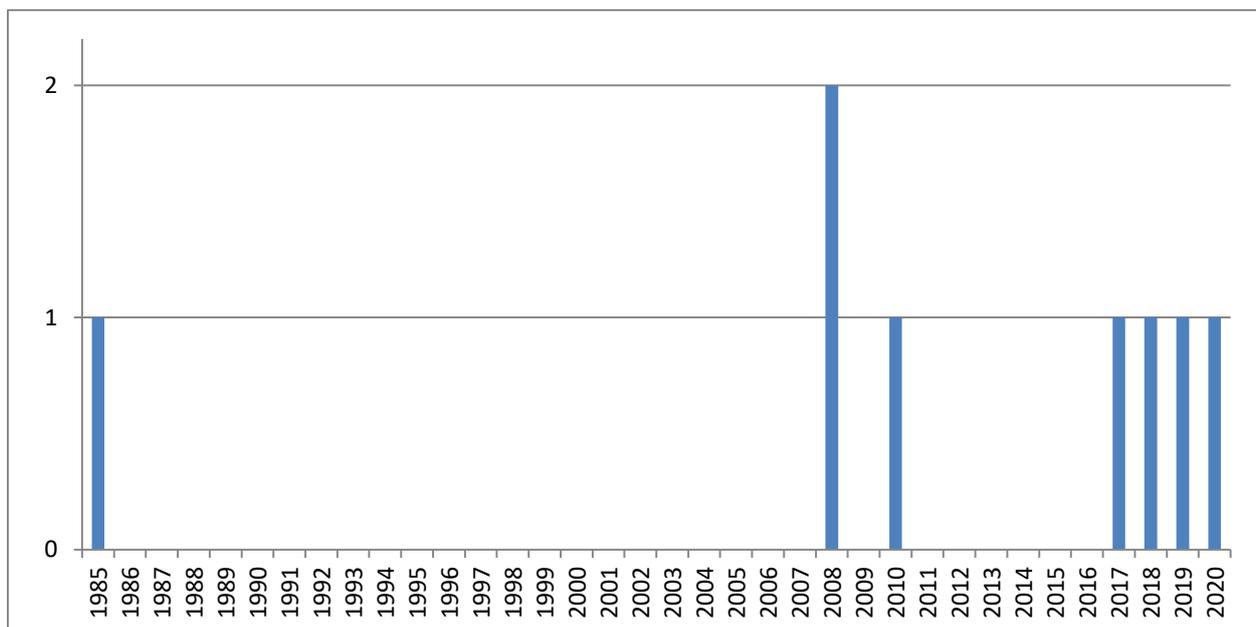


Figure 1: Water Pipit records at Folkestone and Hythe

The first two records occurred on 30th March (week 13), with two in late October (week 43/44), two in early November (weeks 45 and 46), one in early December and a long-stayer which was found in January (week 3), as demonstrated by figure 2.

There have been three coastal records, at Copt Point and Samphire Hoe (2), and the others were inland along the canal cutting near Botolph's Bridge and in the Donkey Street/Willop Sewer area. Figure 3 shows the distribution of records by tetrad.

Water Pipit at Samphire Hoe

30th March to 2nd April 2008

(Geoff J A Burton, Ian A Roberts, Paul Holt, Derek E Smith)

Circumstances of the find:

I was seawatching at Samphire Hoe on the morning of the 30th March when I received a call from Geoff Burton asking what the status of Water Pipit was at the site. I replied that it would be the first record and asked why he wanted to know, though was already anticipating the response! He stated that he was watching one now at the extreme western end of the Hoe (which happened to be almost as far from the seawatching point as it was possible to be).

After a hasty walk, and an anxious few minutes waiting for the bird to return (it had flushed when I rounded the last corner), I had excellent views of the bird. Any doubts that I might have had that it would be a *littoralis* Rock Pipit quickly vanished – it was a striking bird, with a prominent white supercilium, a blue-grey head contrasting with a browner mantle, strong white wing-bars, a strong peachy wash to the breast, no malar stripe, very little streaking underneath (just a few on the flanks), and white outer tail feathers.

I sent Paul Holt a text and he soon rang to say he was on site and on his way. PH and two volunteer wardens successfully saw the bird. It could not be relocated in the afternoon but reappeared on the beach on the 2nd April, when it was seen by PH and Derek Smith.

Description of the bird:

Size, shape, jizz: very similar to Rock Pipit. The bird was rather wary and flushed before the local Rock Pipits.

Head and upperparts: prominent white supercilium, blue-grey head contrasting with the browner mantle, strong white wing-bars, and white outer tail feathers.

Underparts: strong pinkish or peachy wash to the breast, no malar stripe, very little streaking underneath (just a few on the flanks).

Bare parts: darkish bill and legs.

References

Kent Bird Reports. Kent Ornithological Society

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

Acknowledgements

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



Water Pipit at Donkey Street (Brian Harper)



Water Pipit at Samphire Hoe (Geoff Burton)