

Long-eared Owl

Asio otus

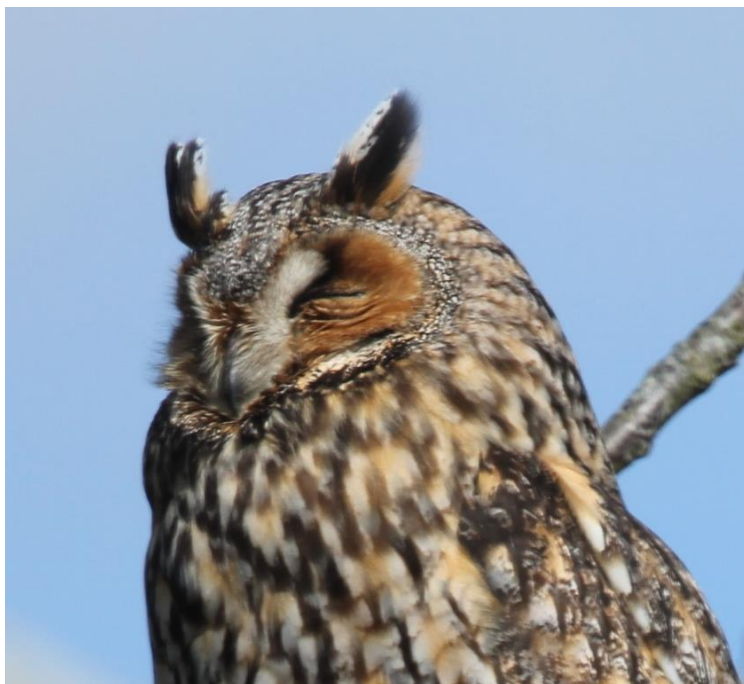
Category A

Very rare vagrant

16 records

Breeds widely throughout Europe. The more northern, Fenno-Scandian, populations are mainly migratory, moving south-west to south in autumn, some as far as Spain, southern France and Italy. These mainly migratory populations are subject to fluctuation linked to rodent numbers, with oscillations in breeding numbers and clutch sizes related to the density of vole populations. As a consequence, the numbers of autumn migrants are much larger in some years than in others.

A scarce breeding species in Kent, also a passage migrant and winter visitor, with occasional large influxes.



Long-eared Owl at Nickoll's Quarry (Brian Harper)

Henry Ulyett in his *Rambles of a Naturalist Round Folkestone* (1880) includes the Long-eared Owl in the list of species recorded in the neighbourhood of Folkestone, within a radius of six miles from the town hall, however this range extends further inland than the current Folkestone and Hythe area, so is not conclusive evidence of occurrence here.

The first definite record locally is of one seen by the late Bob Scott at Folkestone in April 1969, with another reported in Folkestone Warren in April 1983, and a further 14 since 1990, including four in 2016, as shown in figure 1.

Whilst most records clearly relate to spring or autumn migrants, there is an intriguing report of one seen by range wardens on Hythe Ranges on some evenings in May 1992, and Roger Norman flushed single owls (either this species or Tawny) from dense scrub during breeding surveys in 1991 and 1995. Workmen on the Ranges however report finding a Tawny Owl nest in 1992, so either Long-eared or Tawny Owl could have been involved. Two of the more recent records were seen nearby at Nickolls Quarry in late May 2013 and near the Hythe Redoubt in June 2016. It is just possible that this secretive species does perhaps occasionally breed locally.

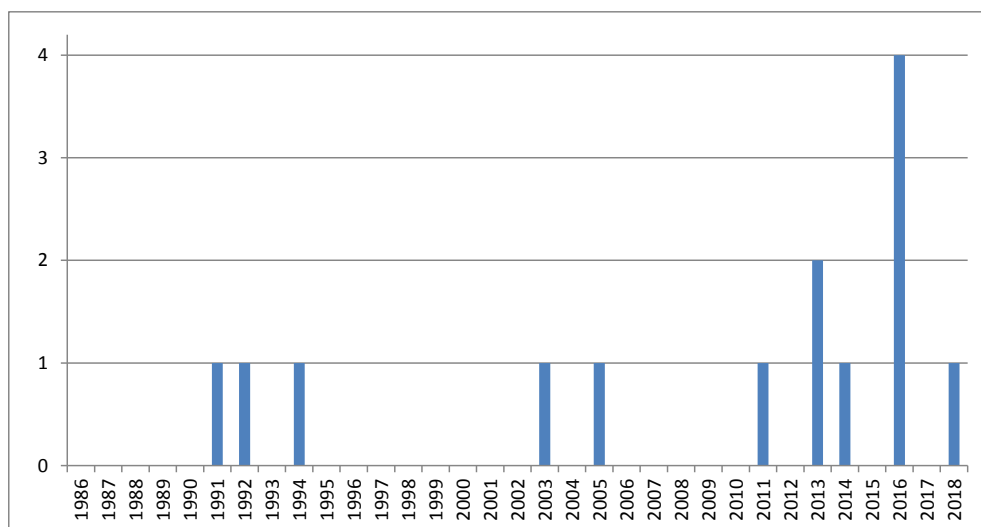


Figure 1: Long-eared Owl records since 1985 at Folkestone and Hythe

Aside from the May and June records mentioned above (one of which was undated), there have been five sightings in spring between the 18th March (week 11) and 24th April (week 17), six in autumn, between the 17th October (week 42) and 15th November (week 46), and one in January as shown in figure 2.

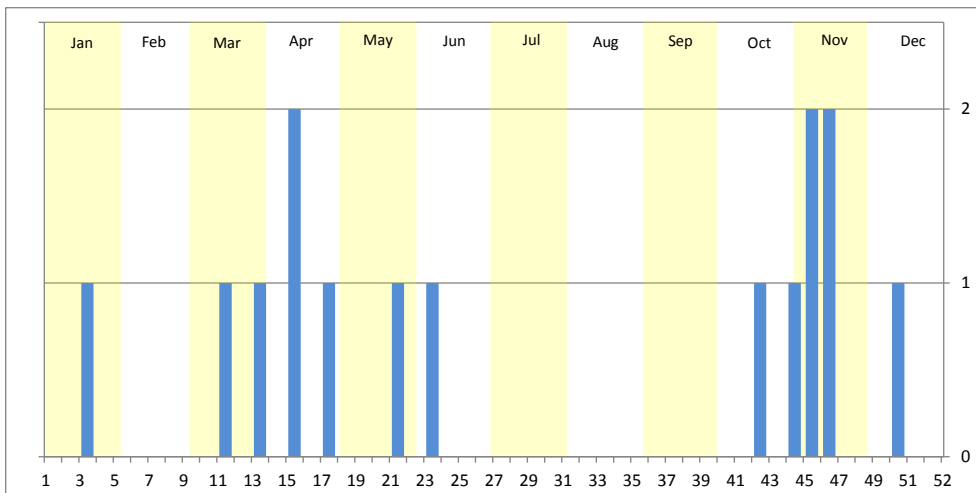


Figure 2: Long-eared Owl records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

The distribution of winter records recorded in the BTO/KOS Atlas (2007 – 2012) is shown in figure 3. The single record shown relates to one at Abbotscliffe in November 2011. The other records are from Samphire Hoe (4), Folkestone Warren (2), Botolph's Bridge, Copt Point, Cheriton, Folkestone, Folkestone Downs and the Hythe Ranges, Hythe Redoubt and Nickolls Quarry sightings referred to above.

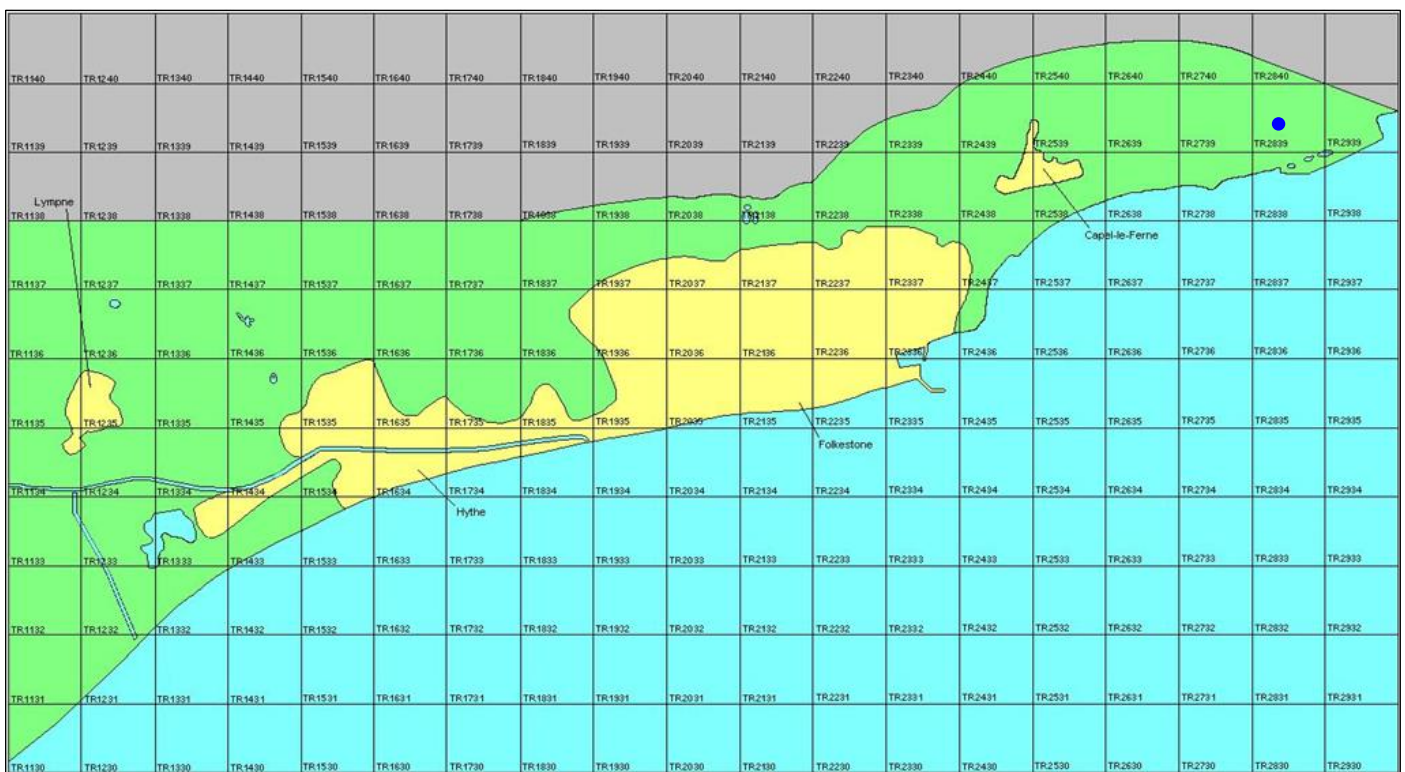


Figure 3: Wintering distribution of Long-eared Owl at Folkestone and Hythe (2007 – 2012 BTO/KOS Atlas)

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1969** Folkestone, one, 15th April (R. E. Scott)
- 1983** Folkestone Warren, one, 24th April (R. Heselden, R. Hollingsworth, P. Howe)
- 1984** Folkestone Warren, one, 18th March (J. Chantler, P. Chantler, N. Jarman)
- 1991** Copt Point, one, 5th November (D. A. Gibson)
- 1992** Hythe Ranges, one, reported on May evenings (per R. K. Norman)
- 2003** Samphire Hoe, one, 29th October, photographed (P. Holt, I. A. Roberts *et al*)
- 2005** Samphire Hoe, one, 7th November, photographed (P. Holt)
- 2011** Abbotscliffe, one, 15th November (M. Kennett)
- 2013** Cheriton, one, 17th January, photographed (D. Clarke)
- 2013** Nickoll's Quarry, one, 22nd May, photographed (B. Harper, I. A. Roberts)

2014 Folkestone Downs (Creteway Down), one, 17th October (M. Varley)

2016 Botolph's Bridge, one, 30th March, photographed (I. A. Roberts, J. Tomsett, B. Harper *et al*)

2016 Near Hythe Redoubt, one, 4th June (A. South)

2016 Samphire Hoe, one, 11th November, photographed (per P. Holt)

2016 Postling Wents, one, 9th December (Stephanie Lea)

2018 Samphire Hoe, one, 10th April, photographed (P. Smith, P. Holt, M. Kennett *et al*)



Long-eared Owl at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)



Long-eared Owl at Samphire Hoe (Paul Howe)



Long-eared Owl at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)