

Siberian Stonechat

Saxicola maurus

Category A

Very rare vagrant

1 record

Breeds widely across northern Asia from the northern Urals south to the northern Caspian Sea, Mongolia and northern China, east to the Kolyma basin, Okhotsk coast and northern Japan. Winters from the northern Indian subcontinent to southern China and South East Asia.

There had been 345 British records up to the end of 2010, ten of which were in Kent.

The only area record is as follows:

1991 Abbotscliffe, immature/female, 13th October (C. D. and I. A. Roberts)

An account of the first area record is given below.

Siberian Stonechat at Abbotscliffe

13th October 1991

(Colin D and Ian A Roberts)

Weather conditions:

A dry, mild day with a promising light (force 1-2) south-easterly wind and around 4/8^{ths} cloud cover.

Circumstances of the find:

The 13th October had a good feel about it and I had already logged 3 Ring Ouzels (in Abbot's Gully) by the time I reached the western end of the old rifle range at around 08:50. As I cut in towards the small bushes a chat flew up from the path and landed on some low vegetation. It immediately looked rather different from a Stonechat and I was reminded of the Siberian Stonechat which I had seen at Dungeness two years previously.

All of the visible features seemed to fit Siberian Stonechat: the pale supercilium, whitish throat, pale wing-bar and wing panel, and general paler overall colouration. Then the bird flew a couple of times and reasonable flight views were obtained, allowing the pale rump to be noted against a particularly dark and contrasting tail, and effectively confirming the identification.

I scribbled down some details and, in these days before mobile communications, had to dash off to a phone box to release the news. Returning about half an hour later I was relieved to find it still in the same area, where it remained for another 15 minutes before it began to slowly move west along the fence-line towards Abbot's Gully. It lingered in the gully for a while but then was lost to view, possibly disappearing down the cliff. In all I has spent about 50 minutes watching it, enjoying some very good views and managing to get some more comprehensive field notes.

My brother, Colin, did manage to successfully twitch the bird, but several other observers who arrived later in the morning and early afternoon were not able to relocate it.

There were 6 Common Stonechats in the area to provide comparison.

Description of the bird:

Size, shape, jizz: Little discernible difference from Common Stonechat, apart from the primary projection being adjudged to be slightly longer.

Head and upperparts: Pale off-white supercilium, less obvious than that of Whinchat. Crown and ear-coverts brown,

crown speckled darker. Mantle brown, faintly streaked dark. Wings dark brown with pale tips to primaries, pale fringes to tertiaries and secondaries (forming a prominent pale wing-panel), and pale tips to the primary coverts. There were also pale tips to the greater coverts which formed a pale wing-bar.

The rump was contrastingly pale orangey-buff, especially against the noticeably black tail (both above and below), which had a pale terminal fringe.

Underparts: Whitish throat, isabelline-buff breast, and rest of underparts pale buffish.

Bare parts: Bill and legs dark.

Comments on the record:

Whilst the bird was recorded almost 20 years ago it was not regarded as a full species until recently. The decision was published by the [BOURC](#) on 12 September 2011, with the scientific name of *Saxicola maurus* being adopted.

The record was accepted by the KOS and BBRC but due to a delay with the paperwork did not appear in their respective reports until the 1995 publications.

There had been 147 British records up to the end of 1990 but only four previously in Kent. However there were a further 5 county records to 2010. The full list of Kent records is as follows:

- Dungeness on 12th November 1986
- Foreness on 24th-26th September 1988
- Dungeness on 12th November 1989
- Foreness on 9th-10th November 1990
- **Abbotscliffe on 13th October 1991**
- Dungeness on 1st November 1993
- St. Margaret's Bay on 12th-15th October 1994
- Dungeness on 13th October 1999
- Northward Hill on 25th September to 1st October 2003
- Bockhill on 24th October 2009

All sightings have been on the coast, with nine between Foreness and Dungeness and the date was fairly typical, with three of the ten records being found on the 12th or 13th October.