

Dartford Warbler

Sylvia undata

Category A

Rare migrant and winter visitor.

43 records,
50 birds

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds from southern Britain southwards through France and the Iberian Peninsula, also in Italy and northern Africa. The range and population fluctuate due to vulnerability to severe weather. It is partially migratory and dispersive: many birds remain all year on the breeding grounds, but autumn and winter records are frequent in non-breeding areas, probably mainly involving juveniles.



Dartford Warbler at Abbotscliffe (Phil Smith)

Kent status (KOS 2022):

It is an occasional breeding species in the county, also a scarce passage migrant and winter visitor.

According to Ticehurst (1909), the distribution of the Dartford Warbler in nineteenth-century Kent was on the heath and common land in the north and west of the county, including in the vicinity of Dartford, where it was first described on Bexley Heath in 1773. He doubted that it “was ever very numerous” and had “always been extremely local”, with a fluctuating population. He noted that it last bred in Kent in 1891 on Hayes Common (although this is outside of the present-day county boundary).

Harrison (1953) listed just three records over the next fifty years but Taylor *et al.* (1981) recorded 26 birds between 1957 and 1976, although there was a five year absence following the severe winter of 1962/63, which almost eliminated the British population. Taylor *et al.* considered that Kent records were “part of a post-breeding dispersal from the British breeding sites further to the west” and all but four occurred at Dungeness.

There was a significant increase in Britain between the 1998-91 breeding atlas and the most recent atlas (2007-11), with an 198% range expansion and a spread into Wales, central England and East Anglia. The latest national survey in 2006 revealed over 3,200 breeding pairs in Britain, with the species’ strongholds being the heaths of Dorset, Hampshire and Surrey (which accounted for 70% of the population). However, two successive severe winters followed and the number of reported pairs in 2010 was reduced to 19% of the 2006 population estimate (Balmer *et al.* 2013). The population has continued to fluctuate but seems to have a tendency to increase unless set back by cold winters or winter storms (Holling *et al.* 2019, Eaton *et al.* 2021).

Clements *et al.* (2015) noted that in 2001 a small colony was located at Hemsted Forest in Kent, the first confirmed breeding in the county since Ticehurst’s time, but it only persisted until the following year when the recently planted habitat became unsuitable. It has since bred intermittently in the Dungeness area, with a single pair in 2018.

It was first recorded locally on the 3rd November in 1985 when Pat Miller saw one at Tolsford Hill (near Etchinghill) with a seven year gap ensuing before the second was found by Jamie Gibson at Abbotscliffe on the 2nd October 1992, however a further two individuals followed in quick succession, with singles seen by Dale Gibson at Abbotscliffe and Capel-le-Ferne Orchid Field barely two weeks later. It then occurred with some regularity, with records in all but three years to 2009. The best years during this period were 1999 and 2000, both with a total of four records, though with individuals often being secretive and sometime quite long-staying it can be difficult to make an accurate assessment of the numbers involved. 1999 produced the first record of two seen together and 2004 saw the first winter record, in January (though there had been no reports in the preceding November or December). Overwintering was again recorded in 2005/06 and 2006/07.

Following the reduction in population by 2010 (as noted by Balmer *et al.*) there were no local records until 2015, but it has been recorded in six of the eight years since, including another over-wintering bird in 2021/22 and a record total of seven individuals in autumn 2022.

The records by year are shown in figure 1.

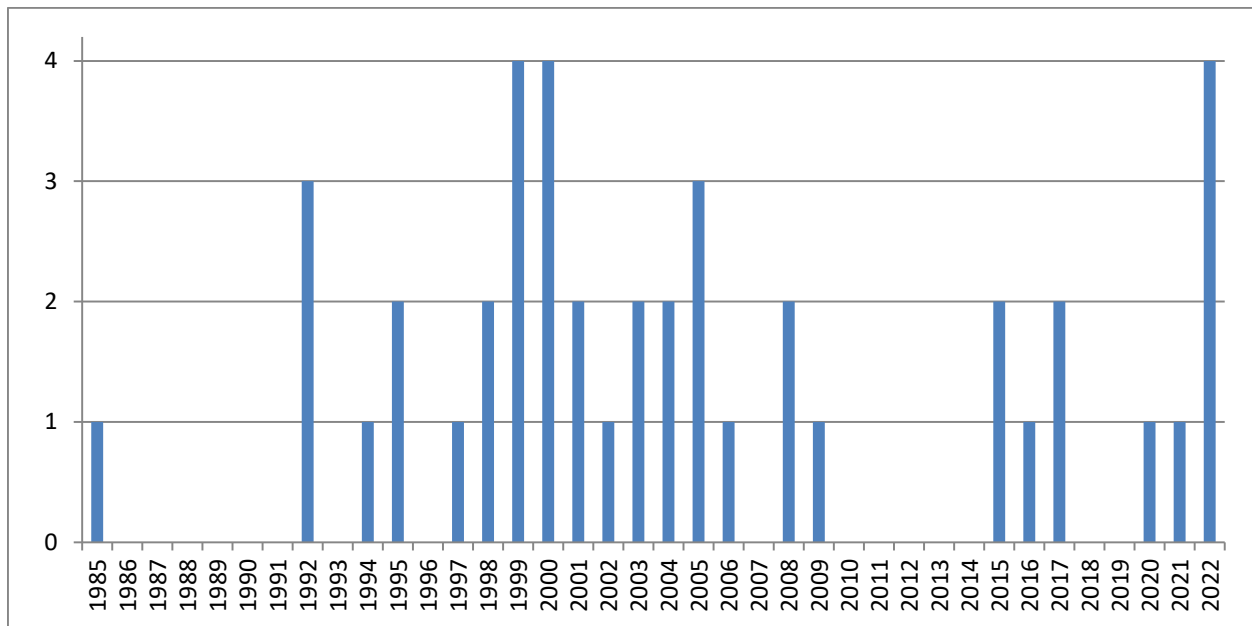


Figure 1: Dartford Warbler records at Folkestone and Hythe



Dartford Warbler at Abbotscliffe (Ian Roberts)



Dartford Warbler at Abbotscliffe (Paul Edmondson)



Dartford Warbler at Abbotscliffe (Phil Smith)

The records by week are given in figure 2. The earliest arrival date was the 21st August 2000 which is six weeks earlier than the first arrival in any other year, and perhaps indicated dispersal from a not too distant source. Further records on the 11th and 23rd September 2000 possibly relate to the same bird, though two were seen together on the 24th September. In other years all arrivals have occurred between the 2nd October (week 40) and 20th November (week 47), with the exception of singles in January 2004 and December 2017 which are presumed to have arrived earlier in the autumn.

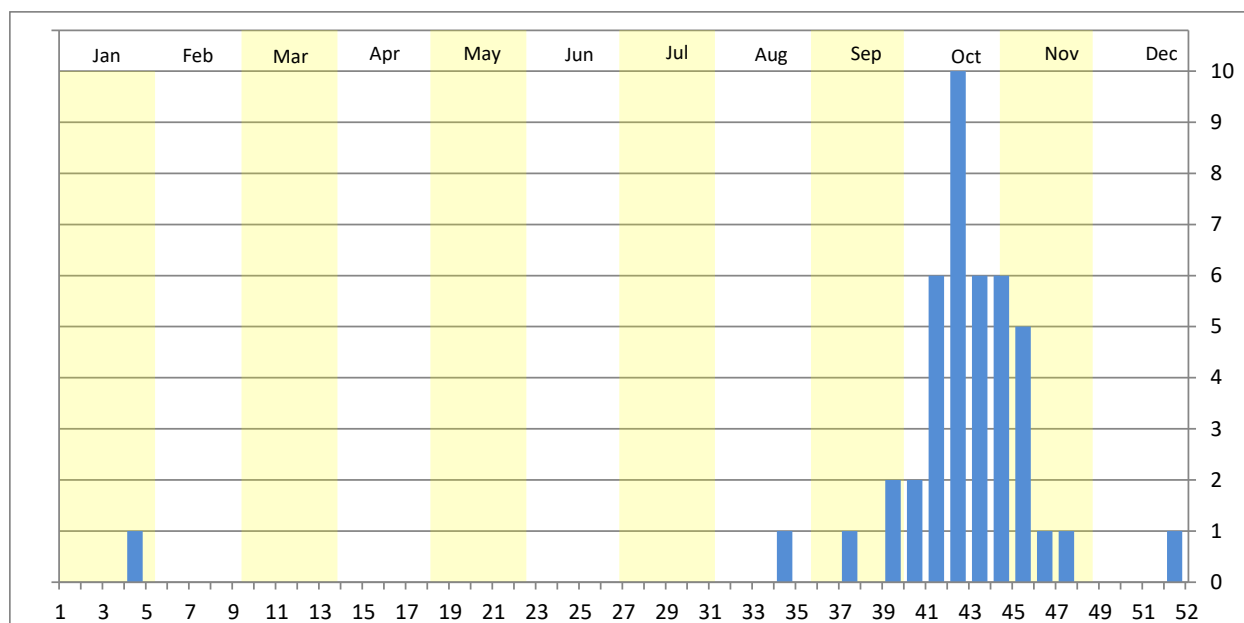


Figure 2: Dartford Warbler records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the distribution of records by tetrad. Apart from the first at Tolsford Hill and one at Capel-le-Ferne Orchid Field in 1992 all of the other 24 records up to the end of 2004 were at Abbotscliffe, but seven of the 15 since were at Samphire Hoe, with the first for Hythe Ranges noted in 2017.



Figure 3: Distribution of all Dartford Warbler records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1985** Tolsford Hill (near Etchinghill), 3rd November 1985 (P. Miller)
- 1992** Abbotscliffe, one, 2nd to 3rd October (J. A. Gibson)
- 1992** Abbotscliffe, one, 17th October (D. A. Gibson)
- 1992** Capel-le-Ferne (Orchid Field), one, 17th October (D. A. Gibson)

1994 Abbotscliffe, one, 19th October (D. A. Gibson)
1995 Abbotscliffe, one, 22nd to 25th October (D. A. Gibson)
1995 Abbotscliffe, one, 5th November (D. A. Gibson)
1997 Abbotscliffe, one, 25th October to 22nd November (I. A. Roberts, D. A. Gibson)
1998 Abbotscliffe, one, 18th October (I. A. Roberts)
1998 Abbotscliffe, one, 1st November (I. A. Roberts)
1999 Abbotscliffe, one, 17th to 18th October (I. A. Roberts, D. A. Gibson)
1999 Abbotscliffe, one, 29th October (D. A. Gibson)
1999 Abbotscliffe, one, 2nd November (I. A. Roberts), considered different to above
1999 Abbotscliffe, two, 7th November (I. A. Roberts), considered different to above
2000 Abbotscliffe, one, 21st August (I. A. Roberts)
2000 Abbotscliffe, one, 11th to 12th September (I. A. Roberts, D. A. Gibson)
2000 Abbotscliffe, one, 23rd September (I. A. Roberts)
2000 Abbotscliffe, two, 24th September, (I. A. Roberts, D. A. Gibson), one presumed to be same as above, one remaining to 13th October
2001 Abbotscliffe, one, 13th October (I. A. Roberts)
2001 Abbotscliffe, one, 21st October (M. Lawson)
2002 Abbotscliffe, one, 20th October (I. A. Roberts)
2003 Abbotscliffe, one, 14th to 30th October (I. A. Roberts)
2003 Abbotscliffe, two, 27th October (Reported), one presumed same as above
2004 Abbotscliffe, one, 24th January (I. A. Roberts)
2004 Abbotscliffe, one, 9th to 14th November (I. A. Roberts)
2005 Samphire Hoe, two, 13th to 17th October (I. A. Roberts, P. Holt)
2005 Abbotscliffe, one, 23rd October (I. A. Roberts)
2005 Samphire Hoe, one, 15th November to 1st February 2006 (P. Holt, I. A. Roberts *et al*)
2006 Samphire Hoe, one, 2nd November to 24th January 2007 (P. Holt, I. A. Roberts *et al*)
2008 Samphire Hoe, one, possibly two, 18th October, photographed (I. A. Roberts)
2008 Abbotscliffe, one, 2nd November (D. A. Gibson)
2009 Samphire Hoe, one, 1st to 4th October (P. Holt)
2015 Samphire Hoe, one, 18th to 20th October (M. Collins, P. Holt *et al*)
2015 Abbotscliffe, one, 20th to 24th November, photographed (I. A. Roberts, C. Gillard, P. Smith *et al*)
2016 Abbotscliffe, one, 26th October, photographed (I. A. Roberts)
2017 Abbotscliffe, one, 23rd October (M. Kennett)
2017 Hythe Ranges, one, 26th December (I. A. Roberts)
2020 Abbotscliffe, one, 4th November, photographed (P. Edmondson)
2021 Samphire Hoe, one, 6th November to 8th February 2022 (P. Holt, M. Collins *et al*)
2022 Abbotscliffe, one, 8th October, sound-recorded (I. A. Roberts)
2022 Abbotscliffe, two, 11th October (M. D. Kennett), considered to be different to above
2022 Abbotscliffe, three, 12th October (M. D. Kennett), considered to be different to above
2022 Abbotscliffe, one, 13th October (C. Powell), presumed same as one of above
2022 Samphire Hoe, one, 19th October (I. A. Roberts)
2022 Abbotscliffe, one, 30th October (M. D. Kennett), presumed same as one from 12th October
2022 Abbotscliffe, three, 13th November (M. D. Kennett), presumed same as 12th October

Click [here](#) to listen to a local audio recording of one calling at Abbotscliffe on the 8th October 2022 (Ian Roberts).

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Dartford Warbler at Abbotscliffe (Chris Powell)



Dartford Warbler at Samphire Hoe (Dave Clarke)

Acknowledgements

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

I am indebted to Andrew Henderson and Tim Hodge for providing access to the Kent Ornithological Society archives.