

Woodlark

Lullula arborea

Category A

Rare passage migrant.

41 records,
50 birds

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998, Woodward et al. 2020, Holling et al. 2019):

It breeds across middle and lower latitude Europe, including southern Britain. It is migratory in the northern half of its breeding range and winters primarily within the southern half of the breeding range. An estimated 2,300 pairs breed in Britain, with the largest numbers on the lowland heathlands in Hampshire, Sussex, Surrey, Suffolk and Norfolk.



Woodlark at Samphire Hoe (Ian Roberts)

Kent status (KOS 2022):

It formerly bred in the county but is now a scarce passage migrant and winter visitor.

The Woodlark was included by Knight & Tolputt in their “List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood” (1871). However, this list covered an area of six mile radius from Folkestone town hall and this range extends further inland than the current Folkestone and Hythe boundaries and so this does not provide conclusive evidence of its occurrence here.

Ticehurst (1909) considered the Woodlark to be “one of the most local breeding species that we have, and is almost confined to the warm hillsides where there are copses and plantations on the edge of the chalk in the western half of the county”. He noted that “after the breeding season is over, the birds move about locally and are found in ... open low-lying country”, whilst “in Romney Marsh, though they have sometimes been observed, they are apparently less frequent”, and gave no indications of any local occurrences.

Harrison (1953) noted little change in status, whilst Taylor *et al.* (1981) observed that population within the county reached a peak in the 1950s (with eight pairs breeding in 1957), before declining during the remainder of their review period (1952-76), with the last breeding pair being recorded in 1969. Previous authors had noted little sign of migration, but Taylor *et al.* remarked upon “a small but significant passage from mid-March to mid-April” and in autumn a “more marked and almost annual [passage] between late August and early November”.

It was during this period that the first local records occurred, when Roger Norman and William Nevin saw one at Hythe Ranges on the 13th March 1958 and Roger saw another there on the 22nd August 1961 (Norman 2006). Meanwhile, David Musson had seen one flying west over Folkestone on the 5th November 1960.

Clements *et al.* (2015) described how it had always been a rare breeding bird in Kent, confined mainly to the greensand ridge in the western half of the county, and this small population has been subject to numerous fluctuations. Following the decline noted by Taylor *et al.* only one pair remained in the county by the time of the second atlas (1998-94), but then the Woodlark “disappeared altogether”.

However, they further noted that, following woodland damage in the great storm of 1987 and subsequent intentional management, breeding recommenced in 1992 at the traditional site at Knowle Park, Sevenoaks, with two or three pairs in most years “up to the present day” (2008-13 atlas). Unbeknown to the authors though, breeding was to cease again after 2015.

Locally, over 30 years elapsed between the sighting in 1961 and the next record, which involved one seen by Dale Gibson at Capel-le-Ferne on the 18th March 1993, whilst the same observer saw another flying north-west at Abbotscliffe on the 10th October later the same year. It has occurred with some regularity, being recorded in 21 of the 30 years since 1993, with a total of 37 sightings (and it has been noted annually since 2014). This change in status was no doubt linked to regular coverage of the cliffs, with nearly 70% of records having occurred between Capel Battery and Samphire Hoe, but there have also three at both Hythe Ranges and Nickolls Quarry, and singles at five other sites. The best year to date was 2012, which produced four records.

The records by year since 1985 are shown in figure 1.

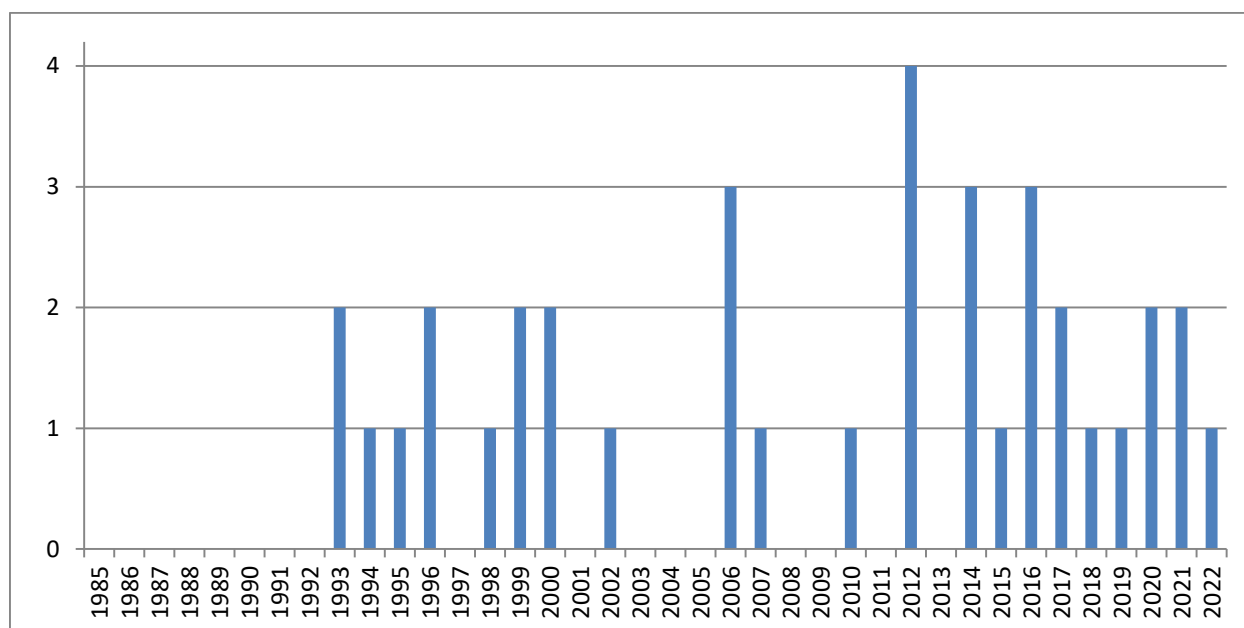


Figure 1: Woodlark records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

The records by week are given in figure 2.

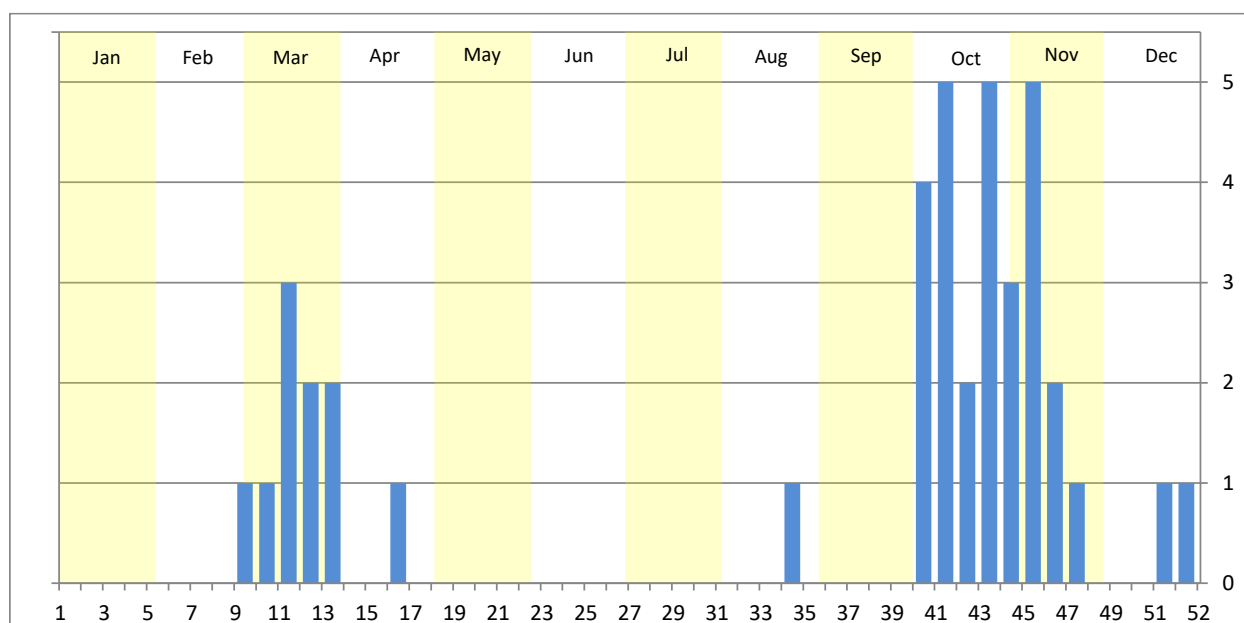


Figure 2: Woodlark records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

For every spring record to date there have been three in autumn. Those in spring have occurred between the 4th March (week 9) and 16th April (week 16). Apart from a very early record on 22nd August 1961 and two late ones in December 2014 and 2017, all other autumn records fall between the 24th September (week 39) and 19th November (week 47).

Figure 3 shows the location of records by tetrad.

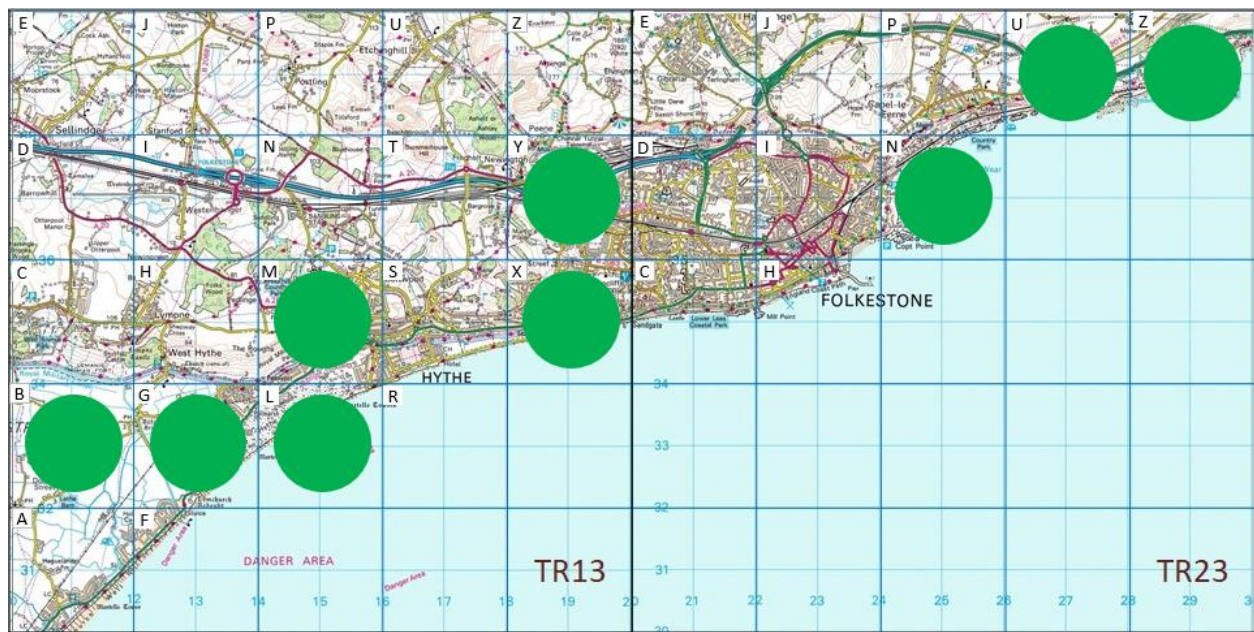


Figure 3: Distribution of all Woodlark records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1958** Hythe Ranges, one, 13th March (R. K. Norman, W. S. Nevin)
- 1960** Folkestone, one flew west, 5th November (D. F. Musson)
- 1961** Hythe Ranges, one, 22nd August (R. K. Norman)
- 1993** Capel-le-Ferne, one, 18th March (D. A. Gibson)
- 1993** Abbotscliffe, one flew north-west, 10th October (D. A. Gibson)
- 1994** Capel-le-Ferne, one, 27th October (D. A. Gibson)
- 1995** Capel-le-Ferne, one flew east, 9th October (D. A. Gibson)
- 1996** Capel-le-Ferne, one, 28th March (D. A. Gibson)
- 1996** Capel-le-Ferne, one, 17th October (D. A. Gibson)
- 1998** Abbotscliffe, two in gully, 3rd October (D. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)
- 1999** Church Hougham, one flew north, 7th October (I. A. Roberts)
- 1999** Abbotscliffe, one flew west, 7th November (I. A. Roberts)
- 2000** Nickolls Quarry, one, 5th March (R. K. Norman)
- 2000** Abbotscliffe, one, then west, 30th September (I. A. Roberts)
- 2002** Nickolls Quarry, one, 24th October (R. K. Norman)
- 2006** Samphire Hoe, one, 16th April (P. Holt)
- 2006** Abbotscliffe, one, 24th October (I. A. Roberts)
- 2006** Abbotscliffe, two flew in off the sea, 4th November (I. A. Roberts)
- 2007** Nickolls Quarry, one, 16th March (R. K. Norman)
- 2010** Abbotscliffe, one, 24th October (I. A. Roberts)
- 2012** Abbotscliffe, one flew west, 20th October (I. A. Roberts)
- 2012** Abbotscliffe, one flew west, 3rd November (I. A. Roberts)
- 2012** Abbotscliffe, one flew west, 7th November (I. A. Roberts)
- 2012** Abbotscliffe, one flew west, 15th November (I. A. Roberts)
- 2014** Abbotscliffe, one, 6th November (I. A. Roberts)
- 2014** Samphire Hoe, one, 19th to 20th November, photographed (R. Smith, P. Holt *et al*)
- 2014** Hythe Ranges, three, 28th December (S. McMinn)
- 2015** Fisherman's Beach, two, 31st October (S. McMinn)
- 2016** Abbotscliffe, two flew east, 21st March (I. A. Roberts)
- 2016** Abbotscliffe, one flew north, 23rd March (M. Varley)
- 2016** Abbotscliffe, one flew east, 25th March (I. A. Roberts)
- 2017** Samphire Hoe, one flew in off the sea, 4th March (P. Holt)
- 2017** Hythe Ranges, one, 22nd December (I. A. Roberts)

2018 Horn Street, one flew west, 11th October (P. Howe)
2019 Newington, two, 12th November (B. Harper)
2020 Donkey Street, two flew west, 10th October (I. A. Roberts)
2020 Copt Point, one flew in off the sea, 4th November (D. A. Gibson)
2021 Seabrook, one flew west, 7th October (P. Howe)
2021 Abbotscliffe, one, 8th October (M. D. Kennett)
2022 Hythe Ranges, one, 22nd October (S. McMinn)

There is an additional undated record of two at Church Hougham in the 1990s.



Wood Lark at Samphire Hoe (Paul Holt)

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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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Wood Lark at Samphire Hoe (Ian Roberts)