

Dartford Warbler

Sylvia undata

Category A

Rare migrant and winter visitor.

42 records

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 (Snow & Perrins 1998).



Dartford Warbler at Abbotscliffe (Phil Smith)

There was a significant increase in Britain between the 1998-91 breeding atlas and the most recent atlas, 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). There has since been a steady recovery, with an estimated 2,200 territories in Britain in 2017 (Holling *et al.* 2019).

In 2001 a small colony was located at Hemsted Forest in Kent, the first confirmed breeding in the county since 1891, but only persisted until the following year when the recently planted habitat became unsuitable (Clements *et al.* 2015). It has since bred intermittently in the Dungeness area, with a single pair in 2018. It is otherwise a scarce passage migrant and winter visitor in the county (KOS 2020).

It was first recorded locally at Tolsford Hill (near Etchinghill) in 1985 when P. Miller saw one on the 3rd November but a seven year wait then ensued 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 has thereafter 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.



Dartford Warbler at Abbotscliffe (Ian Roberts)

Following a couple of very cold winters at the end of the decade there was a reduction in numbers and a contraction in range nationally, and there were no local records in the five years between 2010 and 2014. Milder conditions since have enabled the Dartford Warbler to slowly recover and there was a welcome return to the area in 2015 with two recorded, with others in 2016, 2017, 2020, 2021 (which overwintered) and an exceptional total of seven birds in 2022.

The records by year are shown in figure 1.

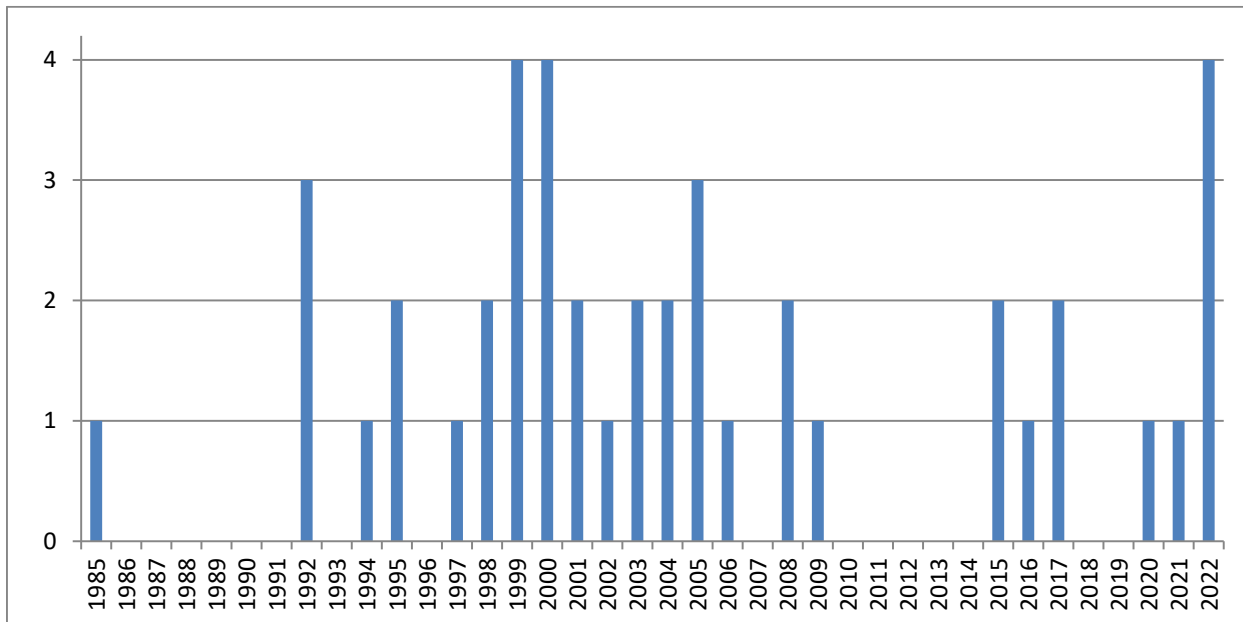


Figure 1: Dartford Warbler records at Folkestone and Hythe

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.

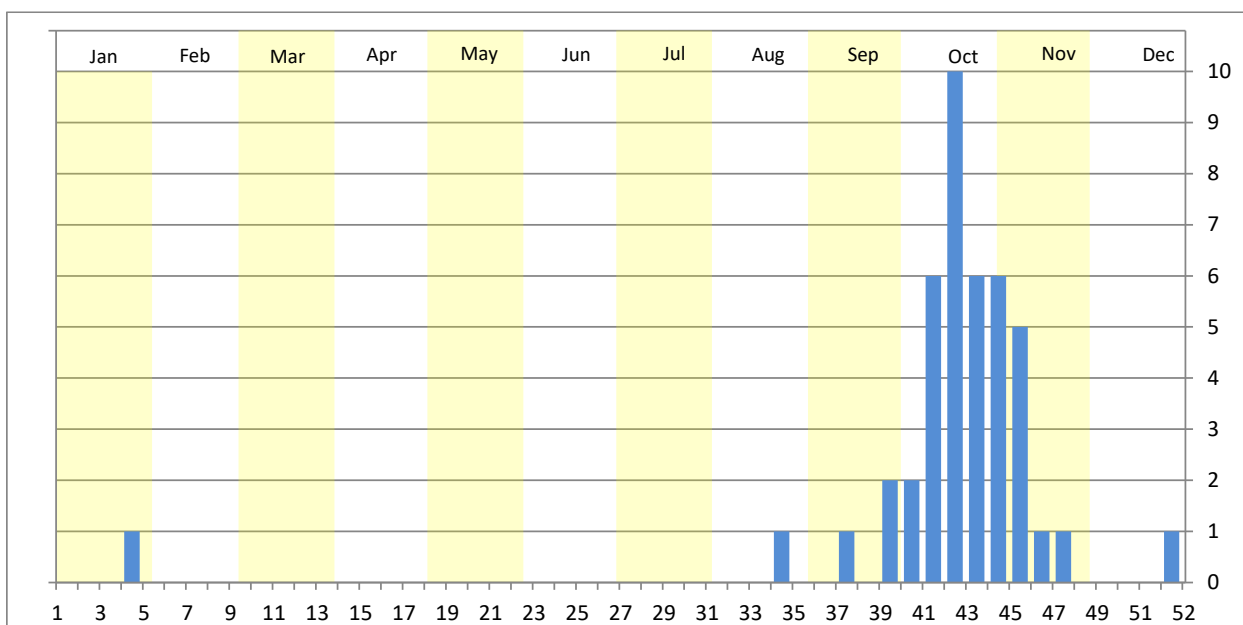


Figure 2: Dartford Warbler records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

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



Dartford Warbler at Abbotscliffe (Paul Edmondson)



Dartford Warbler at Abbotscliffe (Phil Smith)

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



Dartford Warbler at Abbotscliffe (Phil Smith)

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

References

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Acknowledgements

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