

Arctic Warbler

Phylloscopus borealis

Category A

Very rare vagrant.

1 record

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds in the subarctic from extreme north of Norway and Sweden, through Finland into northern Russia. Winters in southern south-east Asia.

Kent status (KOS 2021):

Rare vagrant.

British (BBRC) records to end 2018: 410

Kent (KOS) records to end 2020: 6

It is a rare but increasing regular visitor to Britain, almost exclusively in autumn and with a more northerly pattern of occurrence than Greenish Warbler. There had been 410 British records to the end of 2018, with an average of 12 sightings per annum over the last decade, when the British Birds Rarities Committee removed it from the list of species which it considered to be national rarities (BBRC no date; French et al. 2019).

There have however been just five records in Kent in addition to the local sighting: at Sandwich Bay on the 27th September 1984, at St. Margaret's Bay on the 14th October 1995, at Bishopstone Glen from the 1st to 7th October 1996, at Pegwell Bay on the 20th September 2016 and at Sandwich Bay on the 10th September 2017.

Whilst autumn Greenish Warblers are typically recorded between mid-August to and mid to late September, Arctic Warblers often arrive later, well into October.

The only area record concerns one found by Dale Gibson in the Orchid Field at Capel-le-Ferne in the late afternoon of the 22nd October 2009.

The record by year is shown in figure 1.

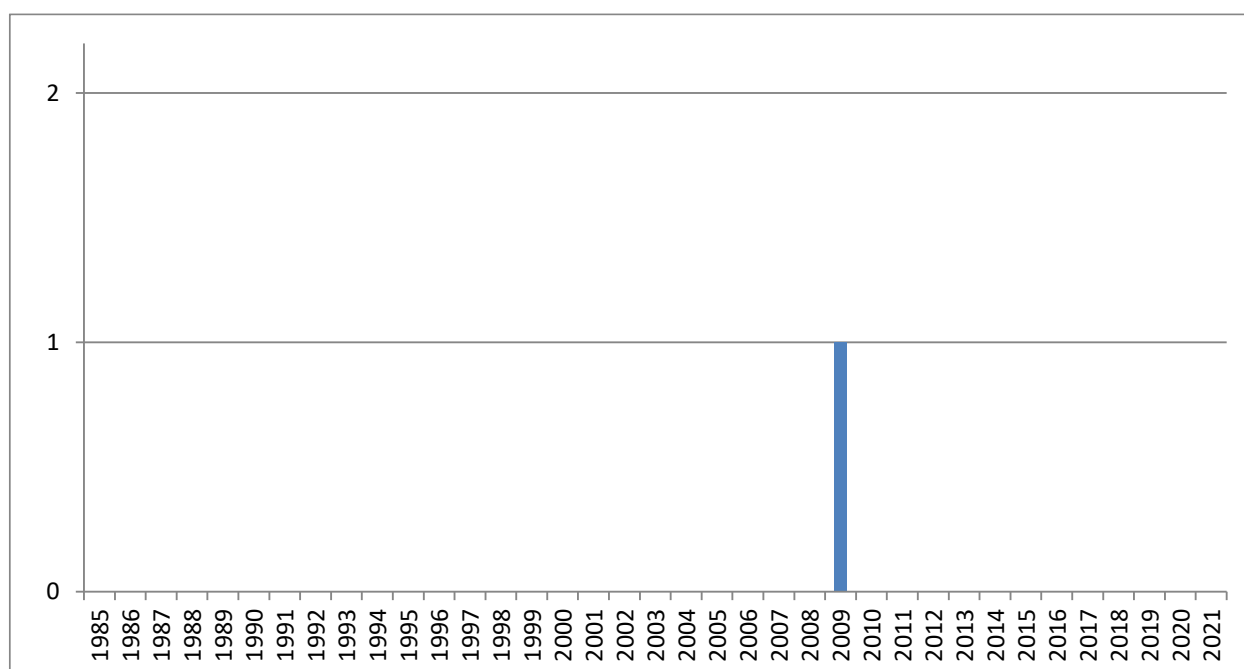


Figure 1: Arctic Warbler records at Folkestone and Hythe

The record by week is given in figure 2.

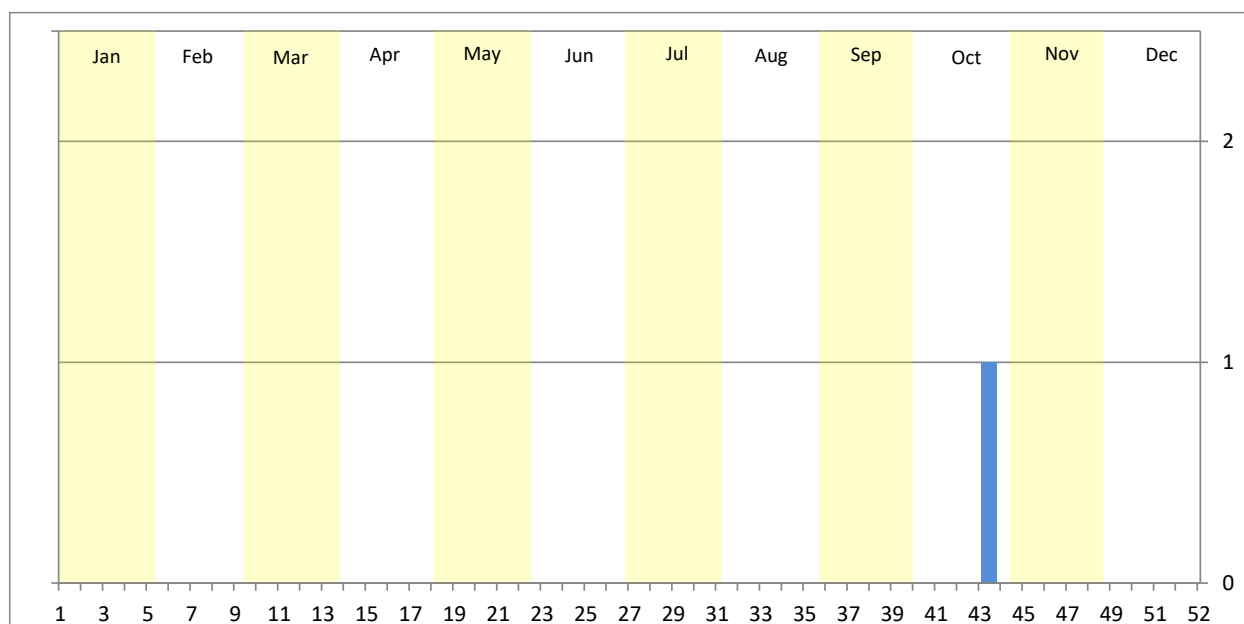


Figure 2: Arctic Warbler records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the location of the record by tetrad.

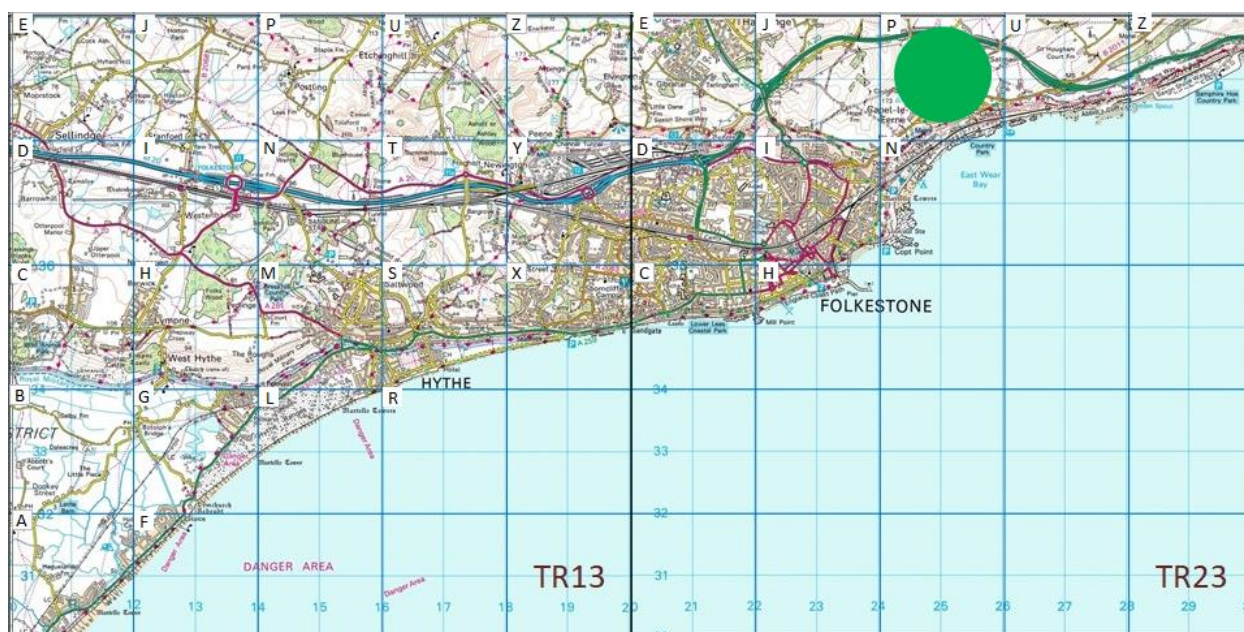


Figure 3: Distribution of all Arctic Warbler records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Confirmation of the only area record is as follows:

2009 Capel-le-Ferne Orchid Field, 22nd October (D. A. Gibson).

An account of the first area record is given below.

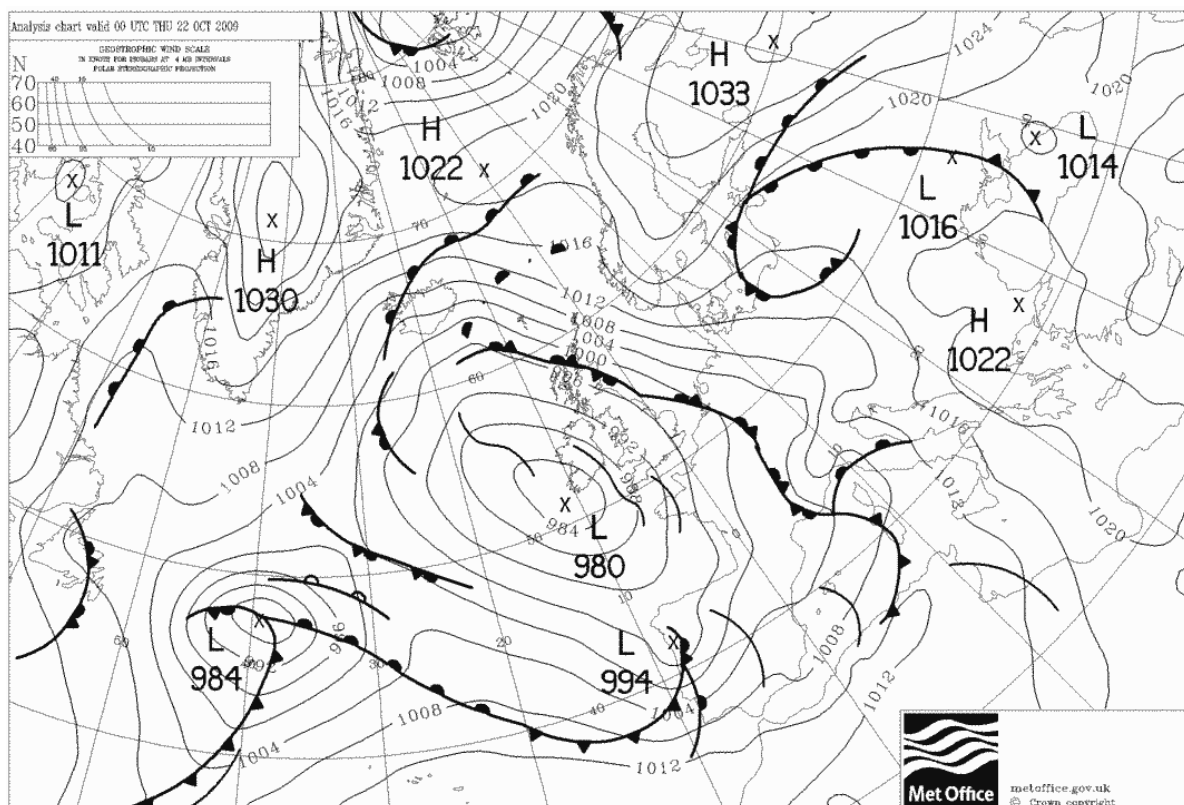
Arctic Warbler at Capel-le-Ferne (Orchid Field)

22nd October 2009

By Dale Gibson

Weather conditions:

Partially cloudy with a light southerly wind. The synoptic chart for midnight on 22nd October 2012, reproduced below, shows an area of high pressure stretching from Scandinavia eastwards into Russia.



Circumstances of the find:

On the late afternoon of 22nd October 2009 I was checking an area of trees inland of the Capel-le-Ferne Café. It regularly holds phylloscops in late autumn and I've seen two Pallas's there in the past, so it's well worth a look at that time of year. I'd only managed a Chiffchaff and a couple of Firecrests but then suddenly something clearly different appeared in a sycamore close by.

My first thoughts were Greenish/Arctic – the greenish-grey upperparts, whitish-grey underparts and long prominent supercilium pointed to this pair. However I hadn't managed to notice any wing-bars and it shot off into the canopy. The jizz was very different to Chiffchaff, it dashing about and was very difficult to get a prolonged view of.

Over about half an hour I probably managed a little under 10 minutes on the bird and frustratingly it was mainly above me, so I could not be completely certain that it had a wing-bar, though I think I did glimpse this feature. I did however get a good view of the head as it angled it down towards me a couple of times and I noted a very long, narrow supercilium which extended well back towards the nape. It had a prominent dark eye-stripe which appeared to cut off the supercilium at the bill. The bill was strong-looking and the cheeks were mottled. These gave the bird a very 'mean' look.

The bird appeared fairly large and robust compared to Chiffchaff, and it appeared long-winged. It was more robust-looking than my memories of Greenish and was subtly different in character. The legs were quite a dull pinkish-horn.

I phoned Ian Roberts and talked through the features. He was in agreement that it had to be an Arctic Warbler but, frustratingly for him, he was about 45 minutes away and the light was not likely to hold that long. Soon after that I left the area as I did not think I would see any more of use on the bird, the light was starting to go (it is quite a shaded area). We both made thorough searches of the area the next day but it could not be relocated.

Description of the bird:

Size, shape, jizz: quite a large, robust phyllosc with a long-winged appearance. It was much less hesitant than a Chiffchaff and dashed about through the trees, being quite difficult to keep track of.

Head and upperparts: long, narrow supercilium which extended well back towards the nape. Prominent dark eye-stripe which appeared to cut off the supercilium at the bill and which, combined with the mottled cheeks (and strong-looking bill) gave the bird a very 'mean' look. Head was greenish-grey, as were upperparts as far as I could discern as I mostly saw it from below. On my initial view I think I managed to note the upperpart colour without noticing wing-bar(s) and I was not able to detect this field mark for certain, though think I might have glimpsed it.

Underparts: appeared a fairly uniform whitish-grey.

Bare parts: strong, deep-based bill with a pale base to the lower mandible. Legs a dull pinkish-horn.

References

British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC). Statistics. www.bbrc.org.uk/main-information/statistics (accessed 2022).

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Snow, D. & Perrins, C.M. 1998. *The Birds of the Western Palearctic*. Oxford University Press.

Acknowledgements

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