

Golden Oriole

Oriolus oriolus

Category A

A very rare vagrant but has 16 records,
possibly bred. 18 birds

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds across much of Europe and Asia eastwards to Mongolia, but mostly absent from Britain, Fenno-Scandia and northern Russia. Winters in sub-Saharan Africa.

Kent status (KOS 2022):

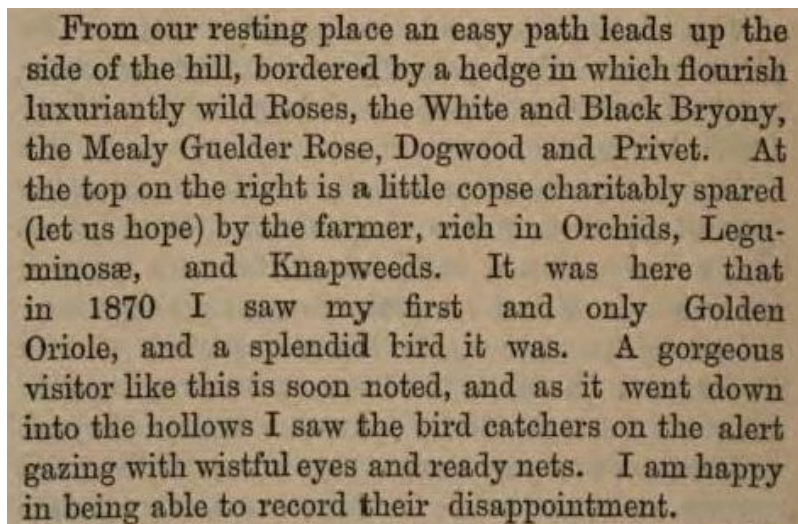
It is a declining scarce migrant to the county, mainly in spring, though has bred.

It was never numerous in Britain but probably bred regularly in Kent in the mid to late nineteenth century, in East Anglia from the late 1960s and in Kent again from the mid-1970s. The Kent population persisted until the time of the second atlas (1988-94), when confirmed breeding was recorded in three tetrads in the county, but there have been no reports since. The East Anglian breeders hung on until 2009, until the Rare Breeding Bird Panel report for 2010 (RBBP 2012) recorded no confirmed pairs for the first time since records started to be collected in 1973.

Although it remains a scarce visitor to Britain numbers have continued to decline, from a mean of 132 per annum in the 1990s to 77 per annum in the last decade (White & Kehoe 2019). It is now a declining scarce migrant in Kent.

Whilst it was widely known to many birdwatchers that the East Anglian birds had a preference for poplar plantations, it was probably much less well known that those that nested in Kent occupied mixed deciduous woodland, especially Sweet Chestnut coppice (Clements *et al.* 2015).

The first area record was an adult male seen at Sugarloaf Hill on the 21st April 1870 by Henry Ulliyett, (as recounted in his in his *Rambles of a Naturalist Round Folkestone*): "After resting awhile by the gate at the foot of the Sugar-Loaf" ...



From our resting place an easy path leads up the side of the hill, bordered by a hedge in which flourish luxuriantly wild Roses, the White and Black Bryony, the Mealy Guelder Rose, Dogwood and Privet. At the top on the right is a little copse charitably spared (let us hope) by the farmer, rich in Orchids, Leguminosæ, and Knapweeds. It was here that in 1870 I saw my first and only Golden Oriole, and a splendid bird it was. A gorgeous visitor like this is soon noted, and as it went down into the hollows I saw the bird catchers on the alert gazing with wistful eyes and ready nets. I am happy in being able to record their disappointment.

This occurrence was no doubt the basis for its inclusion in Knight and Tolputt's "list of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood" (1871), for this list is reproduced in Ulliyett's own publication.

There was an intriguing series of records in the 1950s from the Sandling Park area which may have been indicative of local breeding. The first record related to one on the 1st June 1954 which H. Schreiber stated was "near the station" at Sandling Park. The following year George Shannon noted one "calling at Hythe" at 06:00 on the 6th June and H. Schreiber noted one again near the station at Sandling Park between 07:30 and 09:00 on the same day. It is possible that the two records relate to the same individual. In 1956 H. Schreiber again recorded one near the station at Sandling Park on the 23rd May, which was "also present on the 28th May". Finally, in 1957, a female was seen by H. Schreiber in the same area on the 15th June.

The observer, who we are told “knows the species very well” points out that the Golden Oriole has been “seen or heard in the breeding season now for four successive years” (Henderson, pers. comm.).

The 1950s also provided an exceptionally late sighting at Folkestone on the 2nd November 1959. This was the latest date listed by Taylor *et al.* (1981) and is still believed to be the latest county record. The bird, seen and described by David Musson was considered to probably be an immature male:

Golden Oriole at Folkestone
2nd September 1959

(David F Musson)

“Single bird observed for about two minutes, at about 15 yards range in an apple tree. Colour: yellowish green with somewhat darker wings and tail. Not unlike Green Woodpecker in general colourings but no red on head and different habits. Underparts near white, streaked lightly with grey. Flight very undulating. Size comparison with Song Thrush. Attempted to whistle ‘wheel-a-wheoo’ but much hoarser than adult male. ? A young male”

There were two further records in the mid-1980s. The first was an autumn occurrence, seen by Russell Heselden in Folkestone Warren on the 4th August 1984, but the second, a male seen by Bob Bland and Don Taylor in Folks’ Wood (an area with much Sweet Chestnut coppice) on the 5th May 1985 was perhaps on territory, although could have been a passage bird.

The 17th May 1994 saw the only multiple arrival to date, when an immature male and two female-types were found in the gully at Abbotscliffe by Dale Gibson, with one bird remaining until the following day.

The next four records related to singles in the Capel-le-Ferne area, the first two at Capel Battery and the latter two near the Café, which were all brief fly-past sightings in May or early June and seen by Dale Gibson and/or Ian Roberts. The most recent records involved singles seen by Paul Howe at Saltwood on the 17th May 2015 and by Rob Rackliffe at Crete Road West on the 19th May 2022.

The records by year are shown in figure 1.

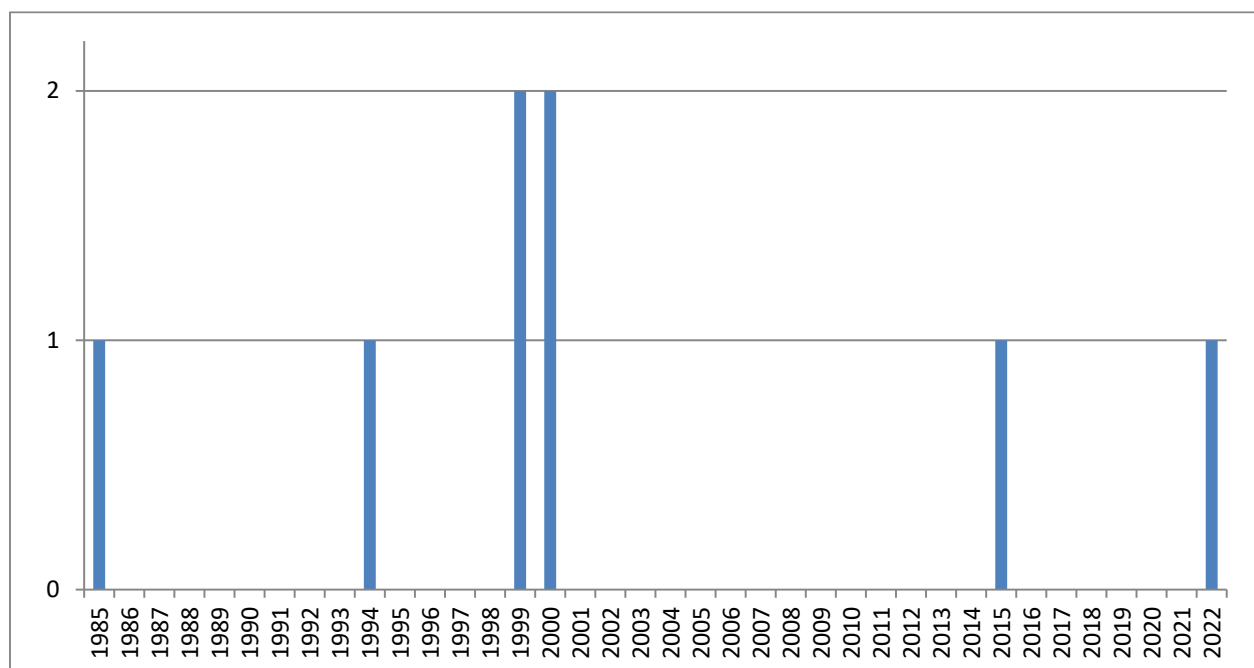


Figure 1: Golden Oriole records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

The records by week are shown in figure 2. The majority have occurred in spring, between the 21st April (week 16) and 15th June (week 24), with single records in August and November.

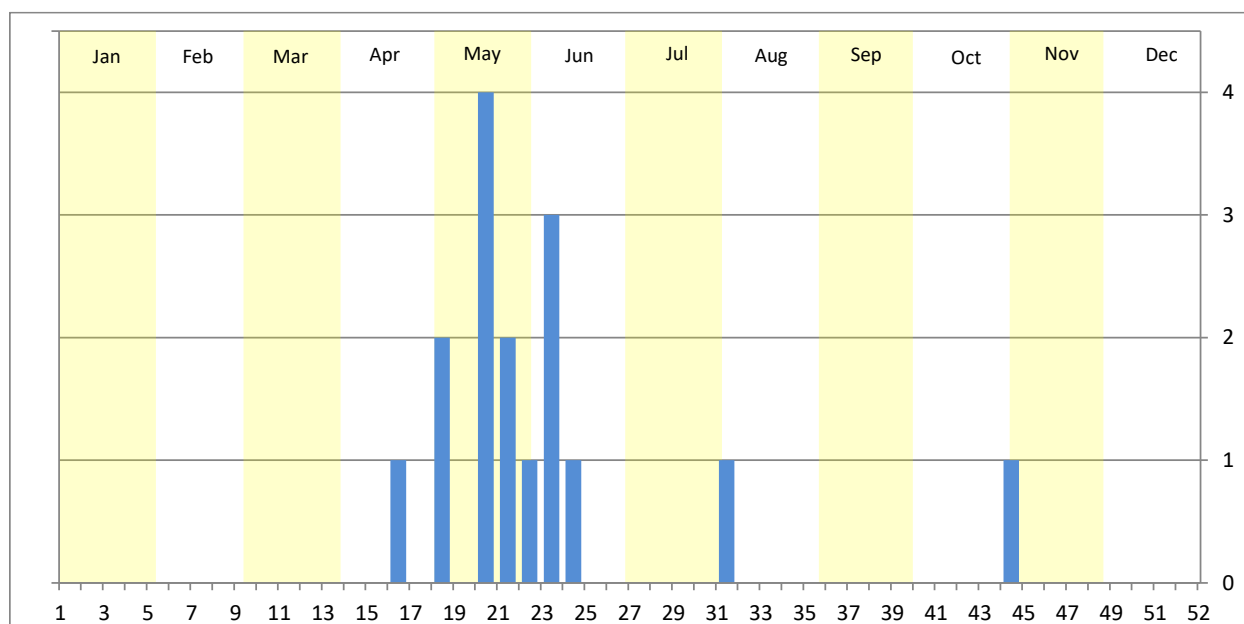


Figure 2: Golden Oriole records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the location of records by tetrad.



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

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1870** Sugarloaf Hill (Folkestone), adult male, 21st April (H. Ulliyett)
- 1954** Sandling Park, one, 1st June (H. Schreiber)
- 1955** Hythe, one, 6th June (G. R. Shannon)
- 1955** Sandling Park, one, 6th June (H. Schreiber), possibly same as above
- 1956** Sandling Park, one, 23rd May, also present on 28th May (H. Schreiber)
- 1957** Sandling Park, female, 15th June (H. Schreiber)
- 1959** Folkestone, immature male, 2nd November (D. F. Musson)
- 1984** Folkestone Warren, probably a male, 4th August (R. Heselden)
- 1985** Folk's Wood (Pedlinge), male, 5th May (R. L. Bland, D. W. Taylor)
- 1994** Abbotscliffe, three, 17th May, with one remaining to 18th May (D. A. Gibson)

1999 Capel-le-Ferne Gun Site, one flew east, 3rd May (D. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)
1999 Capel-le-Ferne Gun Site, one flew north-east, 15th May (D. A. Gibson)
2000 Capel-le-Ferne Café, one flew inland, 22nd May (D. A. Gibson)
2000 Capel-le-Ferne Café, one flew north-west, 3rd June (I. A. Roberts)
2015 Saltwood, immature male in song, then flew north, 17th May (P. Howe)
2022 Crete Road West, one, then flew north, 19th May (R. Rackcliffe)

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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](#).

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