

# Wryneck

*Jynx torquilla*

Category A

Formerly bred, now a rare passage migrant. 30 records (of 31 birds) since 1980

*World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998, Holling et al. 2010):*

Breeds across much of Europe, eastwards across southern Siberia and north-central Asia to Japan, thence south to central China. It is now absent in Britain following a long-term decline, with the last confirmed breeding in England in 1985 and Scotland in 2002, and decreases have also been witnessed in north-west France, Belgium and the Netherlands. It is mainly migratory, with European breeders wintering in small numbers or irregularly in the Mediterranean basin or Middle East, otherwise in Africa south of the Sahara.



Wryneck at Abbotscliffe (Ian Roberts)

*Kent status (KOS 2022):*

Having formerly bred in the county it is now only a scarce passage migrant.

Knight and Tolputt (1871) included the Wryneck in their "List of species recorded in the neighbourhood of Folkestone", within a radius of six miles from the town hall. Whilst this range extends further inland than the current Folkestone and Hythe area, so is not conclusive evidence of occurrence here, the species was widespread and probably fairly common locally in the nineteenth century. Ticehurst (1909) described the Wryneck as plentiful and generally distributed throughout the county, particularly in gardens, coppices and old orchards.

Harrison (1953) suggested some decline, particularly in the east and south-east of the county between 1919-47, but cited evidence that pointed to a slight increase in the numbers of breeding pairs in some localities between 1948-52. The decline of the Wryneck as a breeding species in England since is well documented, with the majority of the breeding records during the later years of the decline occurring in Kent. During the review period (1952-76) of Taylor *et al.* (1981) the vast majority of breeding records were north of a line linking Sevenoaks with Hythe, an area predominantly of chalk and greensand. Breeding was quite widespread within this area.

Locally the stronghold at this time appears to have been at Hythe, where probable breeding was recorded in 1952-55, before confirmed, probable and possible breeding was recorded there during the Kent Ornithological Society's Wryneck survey in 1956 (KOS 1957). In 1957 a total of five pairs were proved to have bred in the Hythe area, with further instances of probable and possible breeding there.



Wryneck at Abbotscliffe (Ian Roberts)



Wryneck at Abbotscliffe (Paul Edmondson)

In 1958 three pairs were confirmed to have bred, with another pair possibly breeding, and in the following year birds were noted by William Nevin to have returned on the 25<sup>th</sup> March, with three of the four pairs again raising broods successfully. Three pairs bred again in 1960, and in 1961 there were a total of six definite breeding pairs recorded at Hythe by William Nevin and George Shannon.

Elsewhere, one was recorded at West Hythe in April 1952 and in the spring of 1953 “Wrynecks were much in evidence in the neighbourhood of Sandgate and the curious call - a high pitched ‘Quee-quee-quee-quee’ could be heard on most days during May and early June” (Rowland 1954).

A pair possibly bred at Folkestone in 1955, a nest with young was found by Roger Norman in an orchard off Castle Road, Saltwood, in June 1957 and a pair probably bred at Folkestone in 1960 and 1961, whilst one recorded at Folkestone on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1961 is the earliest spring record for Kent. A single bird at Hythe Ranges on the 28<sup>th</sup> August 1957 was presumably a migrant (Norman 2006).



Wryneck at Abbotscliffe (Elliot Ranford)

Across Kent at this time a decline in numbers was noted to have “accelerated markedly”. The Kent Bird Report for 1962 mentions “fewer breeding pairs reported” with “a small number of records” from six sites, including Hythe. The 1963 report indicates “a further decrease in the number of breeding pairs, with a total of six definite pairs reported from the Hythe, Canterbury and Maidstone districts”, whilst warning that the “species is obviously declining rapidly”, and the British Trust for Ornithology enquiry in 1964 found only one definite pair in Kent, which was at Hythe. Wrynecks were again recorded at Hythe in April 1965 but there were no further reports of breeding and, apart from a single pair in the west of the county in 1973, there has been no conclusive evidence of proven breeding in the county since 1968.

Rowland (1968) summed up the local position concisely: “a visitor would almost certainly hope to see the Wryneck, but unfortunately this area is rapidly losing its nesting Wrynecks. Ten years ago Wrynecks were nesting in suitable holes in fruit trees or nesting boxes all over the district”. The last records from this period refer to one found dead at Hythe on the 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1971 and one at Abbotscliffe in 1974.

It is now only a scarce passage migrant in Kent and there have been 30 records in the Folkestone and Hythe area since 1980, as shown in figure 1. The four records in 1984 were part of an exceptional influx into the county, with a minimum of 38 recorded in Kent during the autumn, and 2020 also produced four sightings, whilst 2021 saw the first multiple arrival in modern times. The recent total of 21 records in 18 years, should offer some encouragement to observers hoping to encounter this enigmatic species locally.

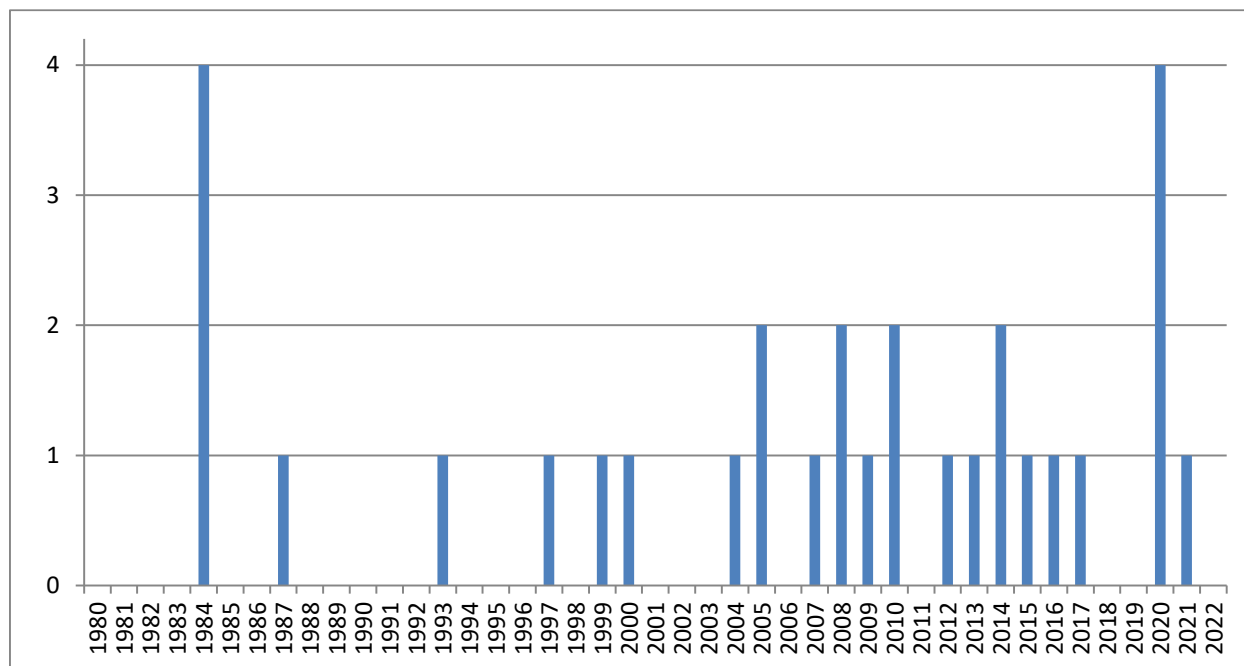


Figure 1: Wryneck records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1980

The arrival dates since 1980 are shown in figure 2. There have only been three spring records, on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> April and 8<sup>th</sup> May (weeks 15, 16 and 19), and the rest in autumn between the 13<sup>th</sup> August (week 33) and 8<sup>th</sup> October (week 41), with a distinct peak in late August and early September, particularly week 36.

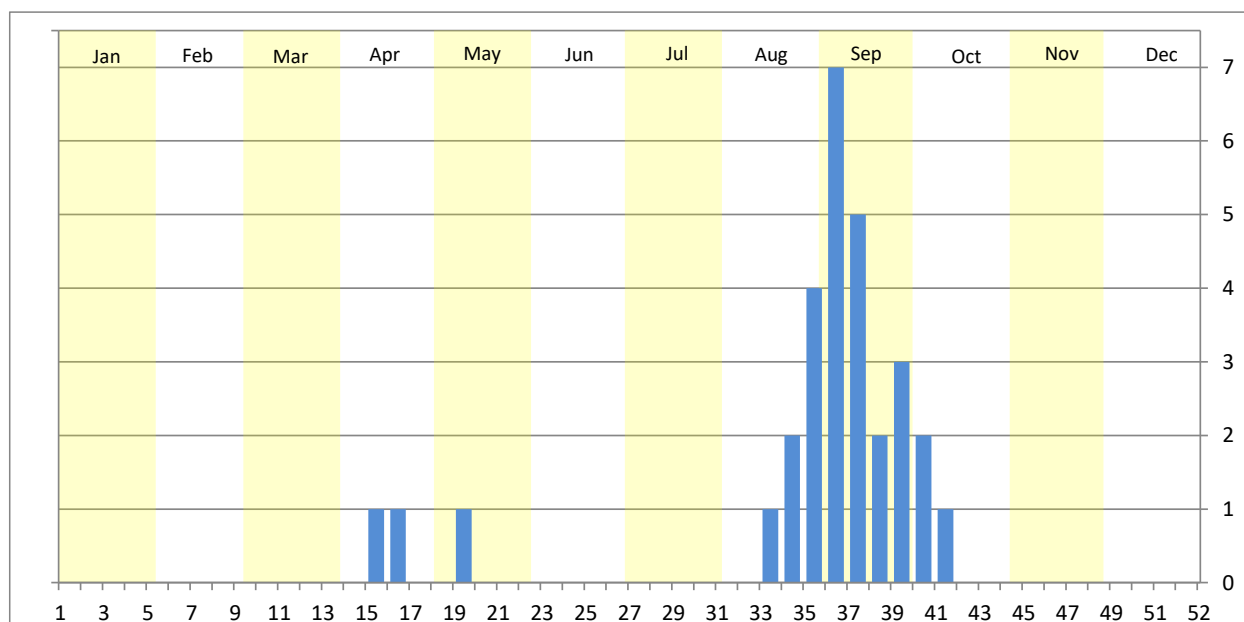


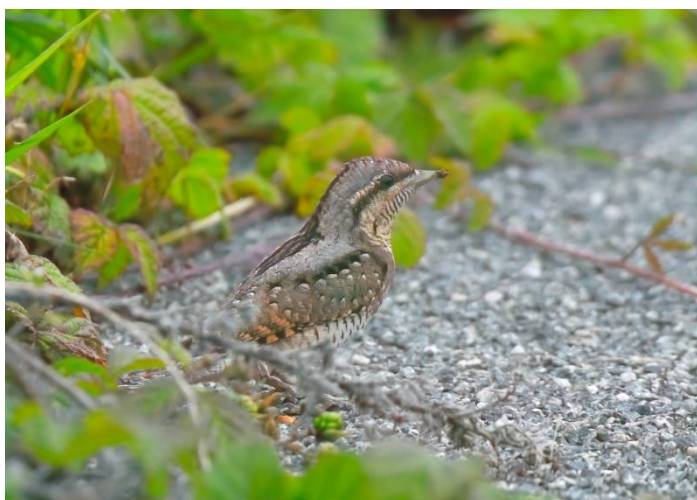
Figure 2: Wryneck records at Folkestone and Hythe by week since 1980



Figure 3 shows the location of records by tetrad. Historic records were concentrated in the Hythe area but the majority of recent records are from the cliffs, with ten at Abbotscliffe, six at Capel-le-Ferne and five at Samphire Hoe, and with the others at Copt Point (4), Cheriton (2), Crete Road East, Radnor Park (Folkestone) and Sandgate.



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



Wryneck at Abbotscliffe (Elliot Ranford)



Wryneck at Abbotscliffe (Karl Price)



Wryneck at Abbotscliffe (Russ Blackman)



Wrynecks at Abbotscliffe (Ian Roberts)

The full list of records since 1980 is as follows:

- 1984** Capel-le-Ferne, one, 13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> August (reported)  
**1984** Copt Point, one, 27<sup>th</sup> August (reported)  
**1984** Copt Point, one, 10<sup>th</sup> September (R. Hollingsworth)  
**1984** Copt Point, one, 12<sup>th</sup> September (R. Hollingsworth), possibly same as above  
**1987** Copt Point, one, 5<sup>th</sup> September (reported)  
**1993** Capel Battery, one, 24<sup>th</sup> September (D. A. Gibson)  
**1997** Abbotscliffe, one, 21<sup>st</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> September (D. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)  
**1999** Abbotscliffe, one, 31<sup>st</sup> August (D. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)  
**2000** Capel-le-Ferne Café, one, 8<sup>th</sup> October (D. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)  
**2004** Samphire Hoe, one, 31<sup>st</sup> August (P. Holt)  
**2005** Abbotscliffe, one, 8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> September, photographed (I. A. Roberts *et al*)  
**2005** Capel-le-Ferne Café, one, 2<sup>nd</sup> October, photographed (I. A. Roberts)  
**2007** Samphire Hoe, one, 26<sup>th</sup> August, photographed (G. J. A. Burton, I. A. Roberts)  
**2008** Abbotscliffe, one, 8<sup>th</sup> September (reported)  
**2008** Samphire Hoe, one, 22<sup>nd</sup> September (per D. E. Smith)  
**2009** Capel Battery, one, 18<sup>th</sup> April (D. A. Gibson)  
**2010** Radnor Park (Folkestone), one, 9<sup>th</sup> April (reported)  
**2010** Samphire Hoe, one, 5<sup>th</sup> September, possibly killed by a train (P. Coleman)  
**2012** Crete Road East, one, 4<sup>th</sup> September (P. Edmondson)  
**2013** Capel-le-Ferne, one, 2<sup>nd</sup> October (D. Chesterman)  
**2014** Cheriton, one caught by cat, kept overnight then released, 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> September (R. Laker)  
**2014** Sandgate, one, 10<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> September (per K. Privett)  
**2015** Abbotscliffe, one, 27<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> September, photographed (M. D. Kennett, I. A. Roberts)  
**2016** Samphire Hoe, one, 22<sup>nd</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> August, photographed (N. Hando, P. Smith, M. D. Kennett)  
**2017** Shearway Business Park (Cheriton), one, 29<sup>th</sup> September (J. Varley)  
**2020** Abbotscliffe, one, 8<sup>th</sup> May, photographed (P. Edmondson, I. A. Roberts)  
**2020** Abbotscliffe, one, 6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> September, photographed (I. A. Roberts, P. Holt, P. Smith *et al*)  
**2020** Abbotscliffe, one, 10<sup>th</sup> September (P. Edmondson), possibly same as above  
**2020** Abbotscliffe, one, 29<sup>th</sup> September (P. Edmondson)  
**2021** Abbotscliffe, two, 28<sup>th</sup> August to 1<sup>st</sup> September, with at least one to 6<sup>th</sup> September (I. A. Roberts *et al*)

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Wryneck at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



Wryneck with Pied Flycatcher at Samphire Hoe (Ian Roberts)  
Autumn records are often associated with arrivals of other Scandinavian migrants

## ***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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