

Red-footed Falcon

Falco vespertinus

Category A

Very rare vagrant.

4 records,
4 birds

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds from south-east Europe eastwards through central and southern Siberia to Mongolia, wintering in southern Africa. Occasionally irruptive, when it may breed beyond its normal range and it has done so as far west as France. It has decreased in numbers and to some extent range since the late nineteenth century due to a decline in insect prey, attributable to pesticide use and habitat changes.

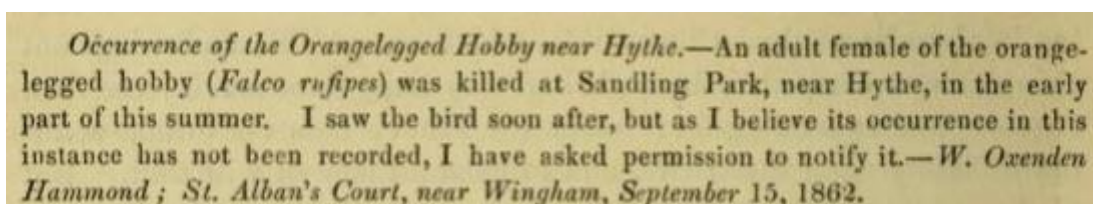
Kent status (KOS 2022):

It is a scarce but fairly regular vagrant to the county, mainly in spring and early summer.

Kent (KOS) records to end 2020: 114

Ticehurst (1909) considered it to be “almost the rarest of the falcons that visit the British Isles”, having been obtained two or three times in Kent. He notes that “the first record that can be thoroughly relied upon is one by the late Oxenden Hammond of an adult female shot by the late Major William Deedes in Sandling Park, near Hythe, in the early part of the summer of 1862. It was stuffed by the late Charles Gordon, now preserved in the Deedes collection on loan at the Folkestone Museum. Mr. Benjamin Turner, the late Major Deedes’ old gamekeeper, informs me that he remembers this bird well, and that he has seen another since, but, of course, this may well have been a Hobby, though being such a good observer I should be unwilling to doubt his identification”.

The first record was documented by Mr. Hammond in *The Zoologist* journal for that year:



Ocurrence of the Orangelegged Hobby near Hythe.—An adult female of the orange-legged hobby (*Falco rufipes*) was killed at Sandling Park, near Hythe, in the early part of this summer. I saw the bird soon after, but as I believe its occurrence in this instance has not been recorded, I have asked permission to notify it.—*W. Oxenden Hammond ; St. Alban's Court, near Wingham, September 15, 1862.*

Although Ticehurst wrote that he was unwilling to doubt the identification of a second example, it was without a date and does not appear in the documented records for the county. He was only able to add one further definite Kent record, near Gravesend in 1907.

Taylor *et al.* (1981) noted a further 15 county records to 1976 and 24 more were noted in the next 14 years to 1991, before an exceptional influx occurred in 1992, which produced a total of 125 in Britain, 17 of which were in Kent, and included the second (and first modern) area record, with Ian Roberts and James Siddle observing a female arriving in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 16th May. It arrived together with another falcon which was not seen well enough to be unidentified but was quite possibly of the same species.

The third area record followed soon after in 1995, when Roger Norman saw a female chasing prey and perching briefly on a prominent boulder at Nickolls Quarry on the 14th May (Norman 2007). It was considered to be a national rarity by the British Birds Rarity Committee up until 2005, when nearly 800 had occurred, including the 1992 influx (Fraser *et al.* 2007). It is now considered to be a scarce migrant in the country, with a recent average of 16 records per annum (White & Kehoe 2022).

There has been one subsequent area record, when Dale Gibson saw a female arriving in off the sea at Copt Point by on the 30th April 2011.

The records by year are shown in figure 1.

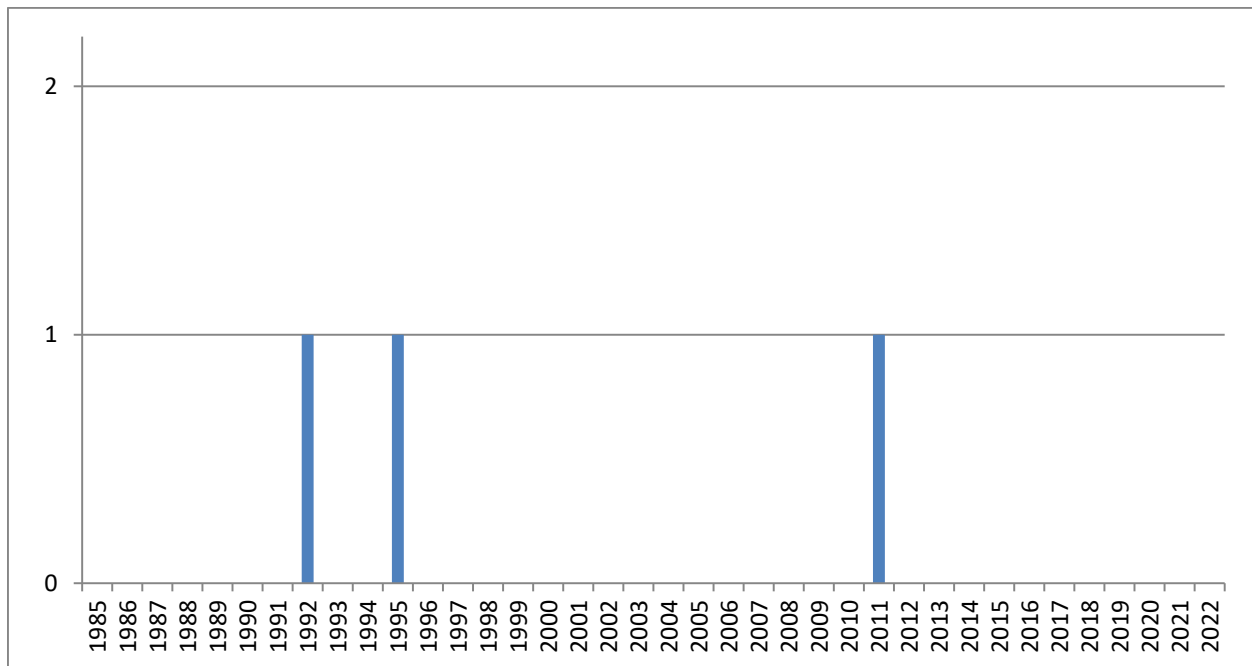


Figure 1: Red-footed Falcon records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

All modern records have been recorded between the 30th April and 16th May, as shown by figure 2. The first area record occurred in the “early part of the summer”.

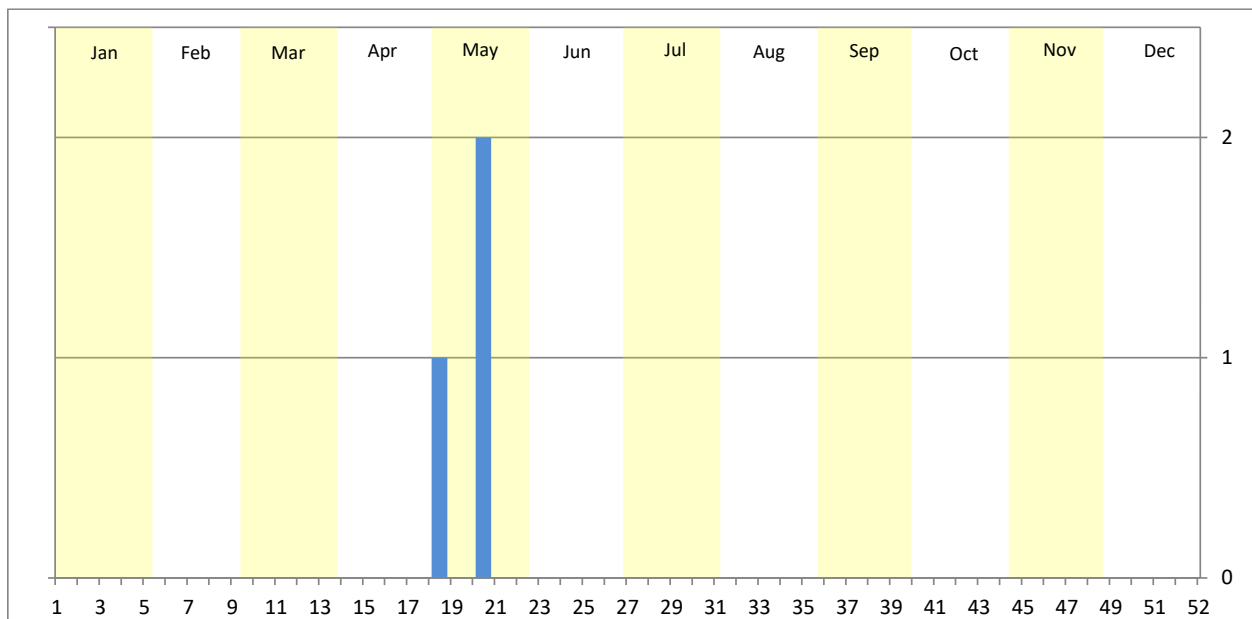


Figure 2: Red-footed Falcon records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the location of records by tetrad.



Figure 3: Distribution of all Red-footed Falcon records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The full list of records is as follows:

1862 Sandling Park, adult female shot during the early part of the summer (W. Deedes)

1992 Abbotscliffe, female flew in off the sea, 16th May (I. A. Roberts, J. P. Siddle)

1995 Nickolls Quarry, female, 14th May (R. K. Norman)

2011 Copt Point, female flew in off the sea, 30th April (D. A. Gibson)

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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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