

## Red-footed Falcon

*Falco vespertinus*

Category A

Very rare vagrant.

4 records

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 (Snow & Perrins, 1998).

It was formerly considered as a national rarity by British Birds Rarity Committee up until 2005, when nearly 800 had occurred, including an exceptional influx of 125 in 1992 (BBRC, 2020). It is now considered to be a scarce migrant in Britain, with almost 1,000 records by 2018 and a recent average of 17 per year in the country (White & Kehoe, 2020).

It is a scarce but fairly regular vagrant in Kent, mainly in spring and early summer, with exactly 100 records to the end of 2018 (KOS, 2020), including 14 in the 1992 irruption.

The first local record, at Sandling Park in 1862, was also the earliest for the county, and was documented by William Oxenden Hammond in *The Zoologist* journal for that year:

*Occurrence 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.*

The occurrence was also recorded by Ticehurst (1909), who noted that it was shot by Major William Deedes, mounted by Mr. Charles Gordon, and was in the Deedes collection known to be on loan to the Folkestone Museum. Mr. Benjamin Turner, Major Deedes' gamekeeper, informed Ticehurst that he remembered this bird well, and that "he has seen another since, but, of course, this may have been a Hobby, though being such a good observer I should be unwilling to doubt his identification".

There have been three subsequent records, and these are shown by year in figure 1.

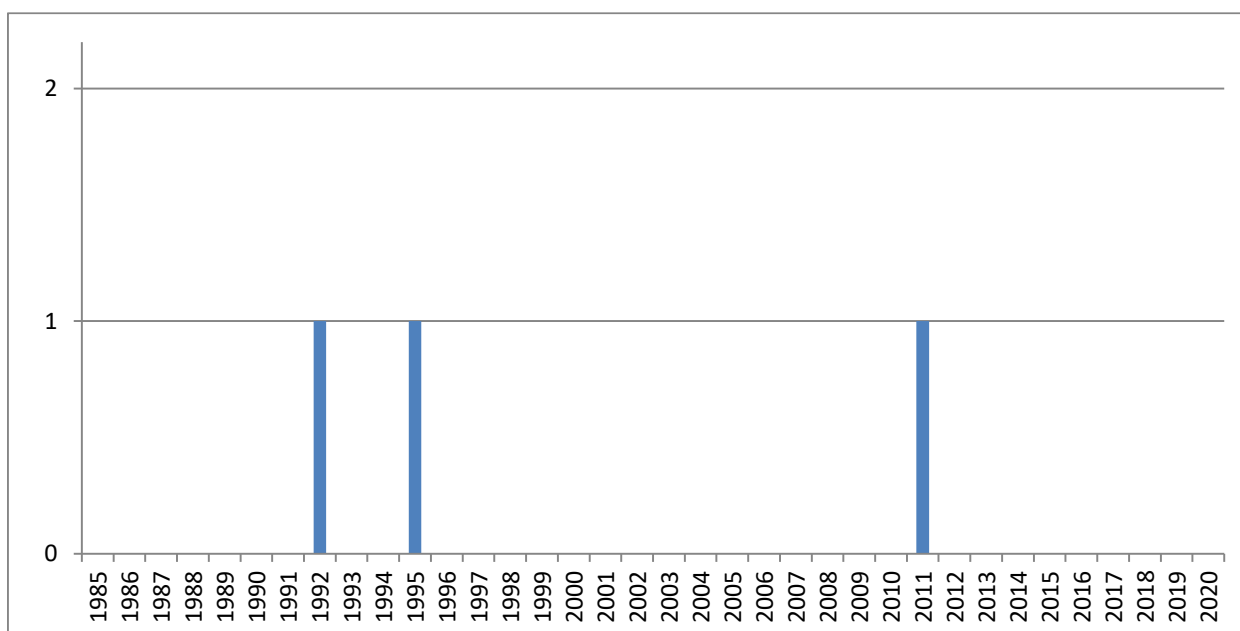


Figure 1: Red-footed Falcon records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

The first modern local record occurred during the exceptional irruption in 1992, when Ian Roberts and James Siddle watched a female arriving in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 16<sup>th</sup> May. It arrived together with another falcon which was not seen well enough to be unidentified but was quite possibly of the same species.

A second modern 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 14<sup>th</sup> May. The most recent record involved another female, seen arriving in off the sea at Copt Point by Dale Gibson on the 30<sup>th</sup> April 2011.

All modern records have been recorded between the 30<sup>th</sup> April and 16<sup>th</sup> May, as shown by figure 2.

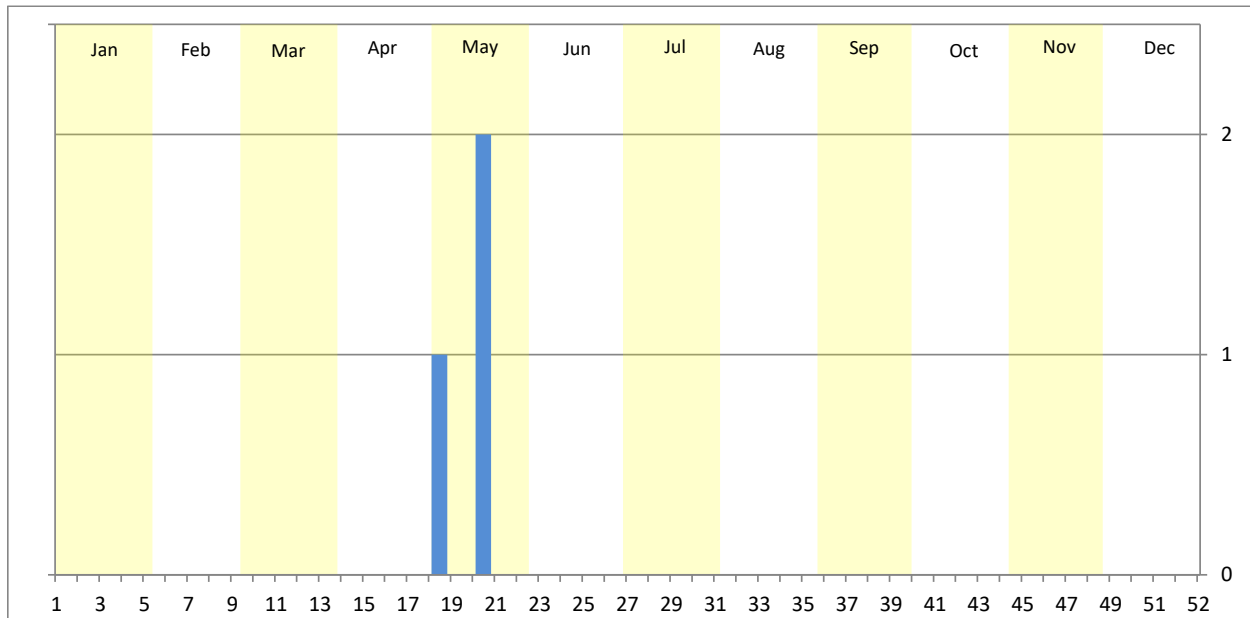


Figure 2: Red-footed Falcon records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the distribution 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, 16<sup>th</sup> May (I. A. Roberts, J. P. Siddle)
- 1995** Nickolls Quarry, female, 14<sup>th</sup> May (R. K. Norman)

**2011** Copt Point, female flew in off the sea, 30<sup>th</sup> April (D. A. Gibson)

### **References**

BBRC statistics: <https://www.bbrc.org.uk/main-information/statistics> (accessed 2020)

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Ticehurst, N. F. 1909. *A History of the Birds of Kent*. Witherby, London.

White, S. & Kehoe, C., 2019. Report on scarce migrant birds in Britain in 2017. *British Birds*, 112: 444-468.

### **Acknowledgements**

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