

Crag Martin

Ptyonoprogne rupestris

Category A

Very rare vagrant.

1 record

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds in north-west Africa and across the Iberian Peninsula, north to southern Germany and eastwards through the Mediterranean Basin into central Asia and northern China. European populations are mostly resident but Asian populations are migratory, wintering in north-east Africa, and north-west India to China.

Kent status (KOS 2021):

Very rare vagrant.

British (BBRC) records to end 2020: 14

Kent (KOS) records to end 2020: 0



Crag Martin at Samphire Hoe (Phil Sharp)

The Crag Martin was first recorded in Britain in Cornwall in June 1988, with a further 13 sightings to 2020, including four in the last three years. It expanded its breeding range in the 1980s, colonising several new countries including Switzerland, Austria, Bulgaria and Romania and that decade also saw the first records for Sweden and Finland, followed in the 1990s by the first in Belgium, the Netherlands and Denmark.

Despite its spread it remains extremely rare in Britain, perhaps because the population in Europe appears to be mainly sedentary, though birds from the nearest breeding areas, in southern France and southern Germany, move south after the breeding season. Returning birds may lead to the occasional spring overshoot (and the five records between April and June appear to conform to that pattern) but some Asian breeders are migratory and the five records in October/November may perhaps have their origins in that continent (BBRC no date; Holt *et al.* 2020; Holt *et al.* 2021).

The single area record relates to a bird that had previously been present at Kingsdown from the 21st November until it was seen flying south at 07:40 on the 28th November, arriving at Samphire Hoe 48 minutes later, where it was first seen by Martin Collins and Barry Woolhouse, before performing well for an admiring crowd throughout the day until it flew off high to the north-east at 15:30, later arriving to roost at Kingsdown. It repeated this behaviour from the 29th November to the 2nd December, feeding for a time at Samphire Hoe before returning to Kingsdown.



Crag Martin at Samphire Hoe (Steve Ashton)

The record by year is shown in figure 1.



Figure 1: Crag Martin records at Folkestone and Hythe

The record by week is given in figure 2.

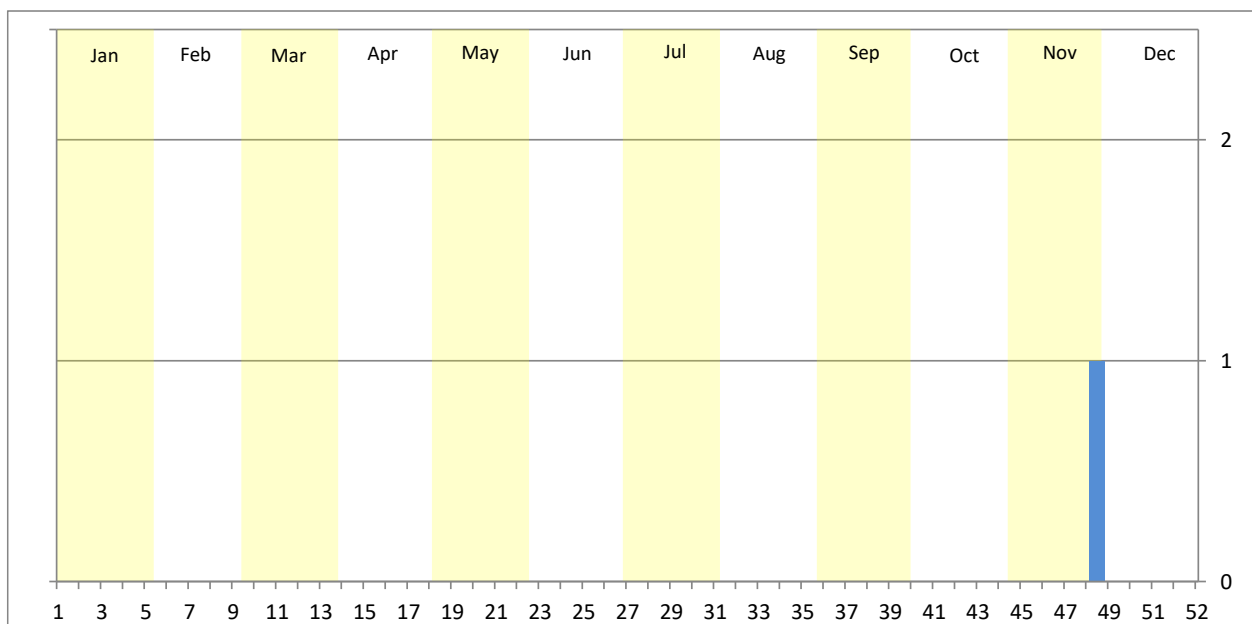


Figure 2: Crag Martin records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the location of the record by tetrad.

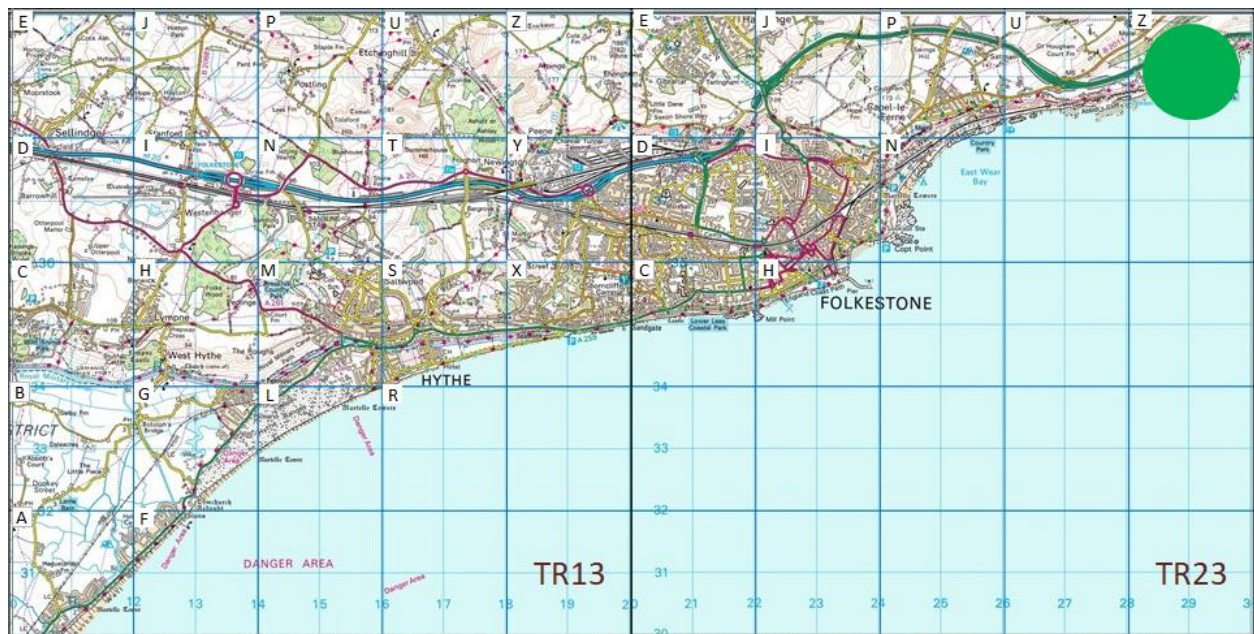


Figure 3: Distribution of all Crag Martin records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Confirmation of the only area record is as follows:

2020 Samphire Hoe, first-winter, 28th November to 2nd December, photographed, video recorded (M. Collins, B. Woolhouse *et al.*).



Crag Martin at Samphire Hoe (Steve Ashton)

An account of the first area record is given below.

Crag Martin at Samphire Hoe 28th November to 2nd December 2020

By Martin Collins

Circumstances of the find:

On the morning of the 28th November 2020 Martin Collins and Barry Woolhouse arrived at Samphire Hoe with the intention of surveying the colour-ringed Stonechats that are present on site. At around 08:28, very soon after reaching the 'back track' that runs along the foot of the cliffs, they noticed a hirundine flying around the cliff by 'gate scrub'. Alarm bells sounded immediately but Martin waited until the tail spots had been clearly noted before concluding on the identification as a Crag Martin. He immediately put the news out via Twitter and birders quickly began to arrive.

It was soon established that this was the same individual that had previously been present at Kingsdown from the 21st November and had been seen there at 07:40 on the 28th November, when it flew south, and was found at Samphire Hoe 48 minutes later. It performed well for an admiring crowd throughout the day until it flew off high to the north-east at 15:30, later arriving to roost at Kingsdown. It repeated this behaviour from the 29th November to the 2nd December, feeding for a time at Samphire Hoe before returning to Kingsdown.

Description of the bird:

Size and shape: A chunky hirundine, larger, and with a bulkier body, than House or Sand Martin and with broader wings. The tail was only had a slight fork, which was noticeable when the tail was closed.

Head: The head was mostly dark brown, with a paler throat. The short bill and eye were black.

Upperparts: The mantle was also brown but a shade paler than the head. The wing coverts were darker brown with paler fringes and the remiges were darker brown with paler inner webs. The tail was dark brown with around four distinctive white spots either side of the plain central tail feathers, about midway down the tail.

Underparts: The underparts were pale brown, with blackish underwing coverts and the underside of the tail largely matched the patterning above.

Comments on the record:

The sighting was accepted by the BBRC and appears in their report for 2020 (Holt *et al.* 2021).



Crag Martin at Samphire Hoe (Steve Ashton)



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Crag Martin at Samphire Hoe (Mike Buckland)

References

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- Kent Ornithological Society (KOS). 1953-2021. *Kent Bird Reports*. Kent Ornithological Society.
- Holt, C., French, P. & the Rarities Committee 2020. Report on rare birds in Great Britain in 2019. *British Birds* 113: 585-655.
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- Snow, D. & Perrins, C.M. 1998. *The Birds of the Western Palearctic*. Oxford University Press.

Acknowledgements

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Crag Martin at Samphire Hoe (Phil Sharp)