

Goshawk

Accipiter gentilis

Category A/C3

Very rare vagrant.

15 records,
17 birds

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998, Holling et al. 2019):

Breeds across most of Europe, though relatively scarce in Britain where it probably bred regularly until the nineteenth century, but only sporadically thereafter, until regular breeding (partly due to escaped or released birds) was rediscovered from the late 1960s. Whilst still subject to persecution it is increasing, with an estimate of at least 600 breeding pairs, but perhaps nearer 1,000, in Britain. The population has more than doubled over the last 25 years. It is partially migratory in northern European populations but resident or dispersive further south.

Kent status (KOS 2022):

It is a scarce passage migrant to the county in spring and autumn, having also become a rare breeder in recent years.

Kent (KOS) records to end 2020: 85

Ticehurst (1909) considered it possible that the huge forest of Anderida (which covered much of East and West Sussex, and the Weald in Kent, extending to Lympne) “contained a pair or two” within its Kentish section in Saxon times, but “at the present time it the Goshawk is one of the rarest birds of prey that occasionally wander to the county”, listing only four definite occurrences.

Ticehurst also noted that an adult male was contained within the Tournay collection: “in the Town Hall at Hythe is housed the extensive collection of British birds formed by the late Mr. W. T. Tournay, of Brockhill Park, near Hythe. This collection was commenced about 1862, and after the owners’ death a few years since was acquired by the town of Hythe (in 1904) through the instrumentality of Mr. H. Lemmon. The collection is a very beautiful one, and the birds were admirably stuffed by the late Charles Gordon. A great many are no doubt local, but many also appear to have been obtained during the voyages in the far north and the collection is very rich in such species as the Greenland [Gyr] Falcon, King-Eider and Ivory-Gull. Since no record whatever has been kept of the local specimens, the collection is not of much value as representing the fauna of the county, but there are a few which are almost certainly local, such as the Golden Oriole and the Pallas's Sandgrouse”.

Harrison (1953) noted that he had been “advised by Mr. J. H. Girling, the present Town Clerk of Hythe, that the majority of this collection was handed over by the Council to the Folkestone Teachers’ Training College in 1947, and that there are only a few exhibits left in the Hythe Town Hall at the present time. Mr. T. W. Birch, Divisional Educational Officer, Kent Education Committee has obligingly furnished me with a list of the specimens acquired. These are now housed at the Folkestone County Grammar School for Girls, Clewer House, Coolinge Lane, Folkestone. the collection contains the following species: Little Egret, Hobby, Greenland Falcons, Goshawk, the Scops Owl and Raven. The authenticity of all of the above as actually of Kentish origin would appear, however, open to considerable doubt”. [The Scops Owl referred to, it should be noted, although contained in the Tournay collection, was not strictly part of that collection, but was presented to the Hythe Council by Mr. F. B. Ninnies and was labelled as “shot in the woods of Ashford”]. Harrison also added one further county record of Goshawk (on the Kent/Sussex boundary in 1950).

Taylor *et al.* (1981) considered that “the true status of this species is marked by the undoubted presence of some falconers’ escapes, but the [pattern] of monthly occurrences supports the view that the Goshawk is a rare passage migrant and winter visitor to Kent”.

Clements *et al.* (2015) noted that the second Kent Atlas (1988-94) referred to the presence of a pair in west Kent, but with no details of confirmed breeding. They also noted that “in recent years, Goshawks have increased in numbers in the southern counties, with a substantial population now breeding in the New Forest and with regular records of breeding in Sussex. Consequently, sightings in Kent have increased and the presence of breeding birds is increasingly likely”. “A pair was present in one area of woodland during 2012, though breeding was not suspected”.

The Kent Bird Report for 2019 noted that “a pair raised two young in mid-Kent, the first record of successful breeding in the county” whilst as regards migrants: “this species continues to be problematic for observers and record committees alike”. No other species has such a high rate of ‘not proven’ or ‘pended’ records. The peak time of occurrence in Kent is March and April, with another increase between September and November, and a small number through the winter months.

The first local record occurred in 1994, when Dale Gibson saw one flying east over Folkestone on the 8th May, followed by one at Capel-le-Ferne on the 23rd April 1997 and two there later that year on the 7th September. Further singles were seen flying west over Cheriton on the 30th November 1998 and arriving in off the sea at Copt Point on the 17th April 2000. After further records in 2006 and 2007, there have been eight records in the 12 years since 2011.

The records by year are shown in figure 1.

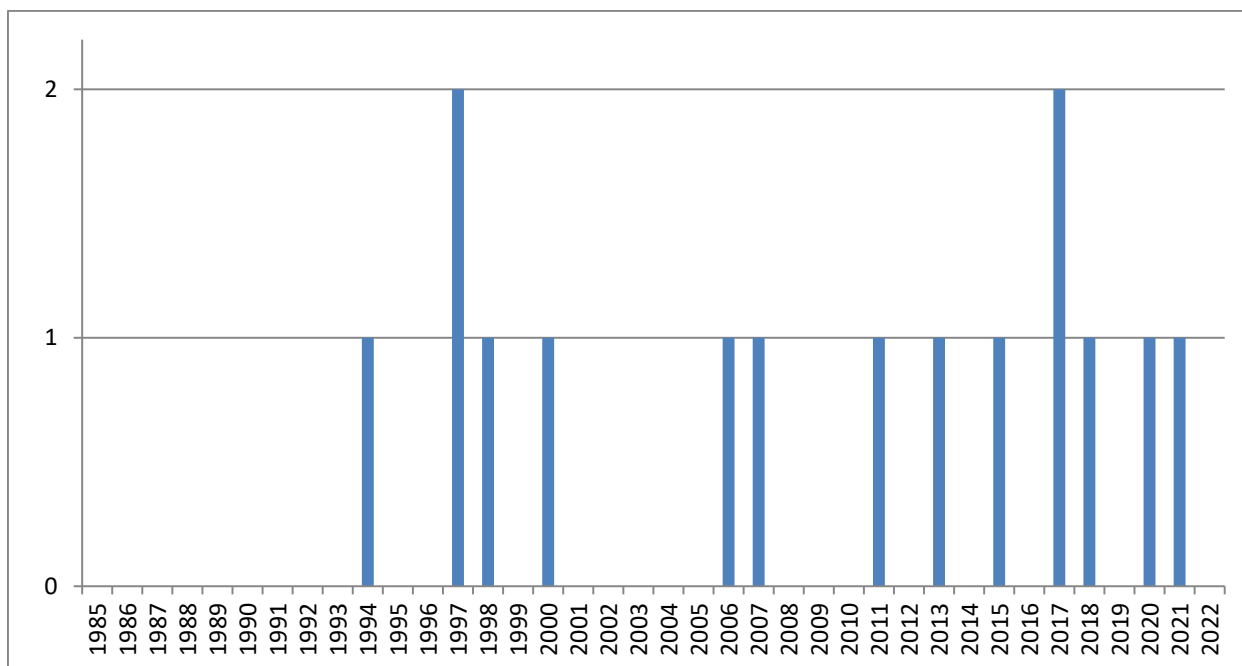


Figure 1: Goshawk records at Folkestone and Hythe

The records by week are given in figure 2. There have been four records in March, four in April, two in May, and singles in January, June, September, October and November.

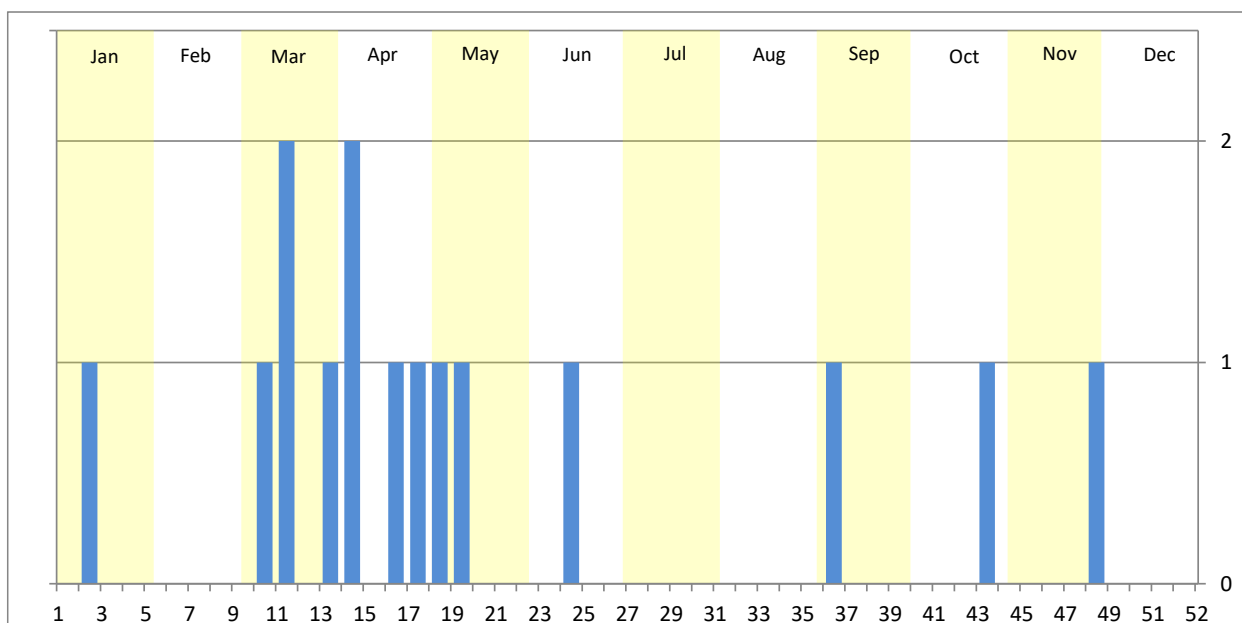


Figure 2: Goshawk records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the location of records by tetrad. There have been sightings at Cheriton/Folkestone (4), Saltwood/Brockhill Country Park (4), Capel-le-Ferne (2), Beachborough Lakes, Copt Point, Hythe, Paraker Wood and Seabrook.

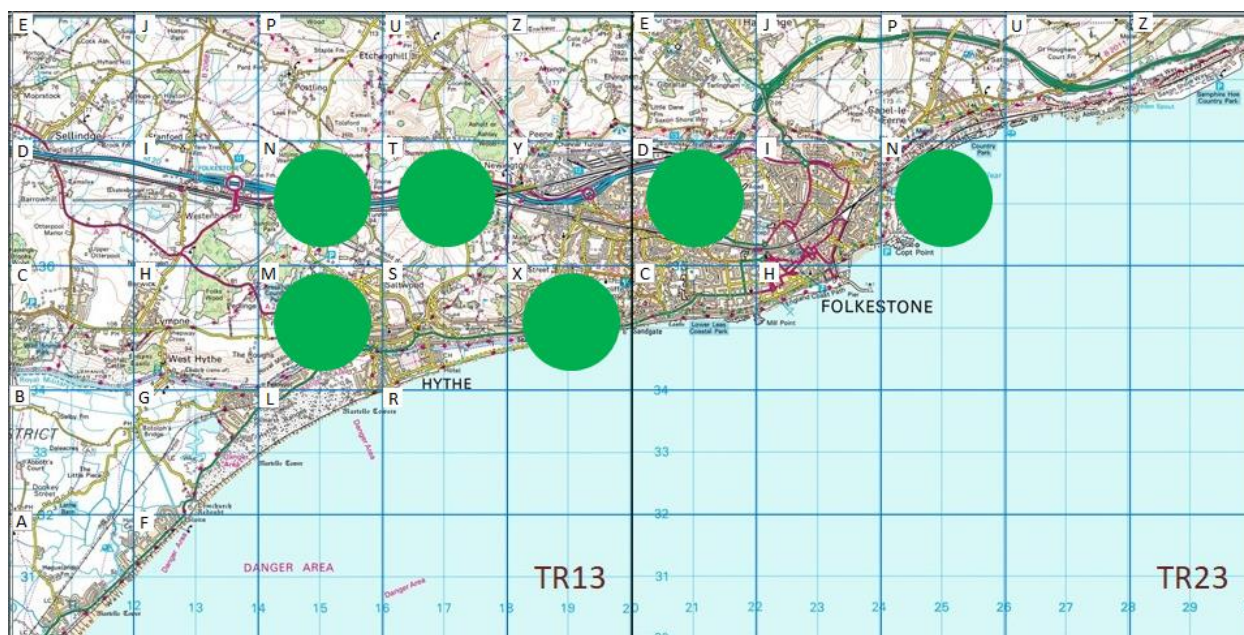


Figure 3: Distribution of all Goshawk records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1994** Folkestone, one flew east, 8th May (D. A. Gibson)
- 1997** Capel-le-Ferne, one, 23rd April (D. A. Gibson)
- 1997** Capel-le-Ferne, two, 7th September (D. A. Gibson)
- 1998** Cheriton, one flew west, 30th November (D. A. Gibson)
- 2000** Copt Point, one flew in off the sea, 17th April (D. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)
- 2006** Folkestone, female flew west, 3rd April (P. Howe)
- 2007** Folkestone, one flew west, 13th June (D. A. Gibson)
- 2011** Sandling (Saltwood), one flew east, 9th January (I. A. Roberts)
- 2013** Saltwood, female, 3rd May (P. Howe)
- 2015** Saltwood, pair flew east, 16th March (P. Howe)
- 2017** Paraker Wood, one flew west, 14th March (K. Harding)
- 2017** Beachborough Lakes, female flew south-west, 26th October (S. Tomlinson)
- 2018** Seabrook, one flew south-west, 5th March (P. Howe)
- 2020** Brockhill Country Park, one, 4th April (S. McMinn)
- 2021** Barrack Hill, Hythe, one flew west, 31st March (C. Gillard)

References

- Clements, R., Orchard, M., McCanch, N. & Wood, S. 2015. *Kent Breeding Bird Atlas 2008-13*. Kent Ornithological Society.
- Harrison, J. M. 1953. *The Birds of Kent*. Witherby, London.
- Holling, M. & the Rare Breeding Birds Panel 2019. Rare breeding birds in the UK in 2017. *British Birds* 112: 706-758.
- Kent Ornithological Society (KOS) 1953-2022. *Kent Bird Reports*. Kent Ornithological Society.
- Kent Ornithological Society (KOS). The Kent List. <https://kentos.org.uk/index.php/recording/the-kent-list> (accessed 2020).
- Snow, D. & Perrins, C.M. 1998. *The Birds of the Western Palearctic*. Oxford University Press.

Taylor, D., Davenport, D. & Flegg, J. 1981. *Birds of Kent*. Kent Ornithological Society.

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

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.