

Pallas's Warbler

Phylloscopus proregulus

Category A

Very rare vagrant.

5 records

Breeds in southern Siberia from the Baikal region east to Ussuriland, north-eastern China and south to northern Mongolia. Winters in eastern China and throughout Indochina south to central Thailand. It was previously a rare vagrant to Europe but has become a regular autumn visitor, becoming increasingly frequent since the 1960s (White & Kehoe, 2019, Snow & Perrins, 1998).

It was first recorded in Britain in 1896 when one was shot in Norfolk, but there were no further records until 1951, after which it was noted with increasing regularity, with the first influx in 1968 when 17 occurred, and there have been annual records since 1974, with an impressive arrival of 127 in 1982.



Pallas's Warbler at Pond Hill Road (Brian Harper)

The British Birds Rarities Committee removed it from the list of species which they considered to be a national rarity at the end of 1990, by which time a total of 552 had been logged (Lansdown *et al*, 1990, BBRC, 2021). Notwithstanding another record influx of 313 in 2003, its overall trend in occurrence in Britain now appears to have stabilised at around 70-80 records per annum, although annual variability remains high (Fraser & Rogers, 2006, White & Kehoe, 2019).

It is a scarce but annual late autumn migrant to Kent, although with some indication of a decline in recent years, and occasionally overwinters (KOS, 2020).

The first two local records occurred during a record influx of at least 35 individuals into the county in 1996, with one found by Dale Gibson at Abbotscliffe on the 16th October and the other found by Ian Roberts at Capel-le-Ferne on the 10th November. The next two area records, singles found by Ian Roberts at Capel-le-Ferne on the 23rd October 2000 and by Paul Holt at Samphire Hoe on the 21st October 2012, were also fairly typical as regards dates and locations, being autumn sightings at coastal sites.



Pallas's Warbler at Pond Hill Road (Brian Harper)

The most recent record however was a far more unusual winter bird, which was found by Martin Sutherland at Pond Hill Road on the 24th January 2014 and lingered into March. Sightings in the winter (or spring) months have become more frequent in Britain in recent years, as is the case with Yellow-browed Warbler, and there have been two previously in Kent – at River, near Dover in January to April 2004 and at Wouldham, near Snodland in April 2007.

The records by year are shown in figure 1.

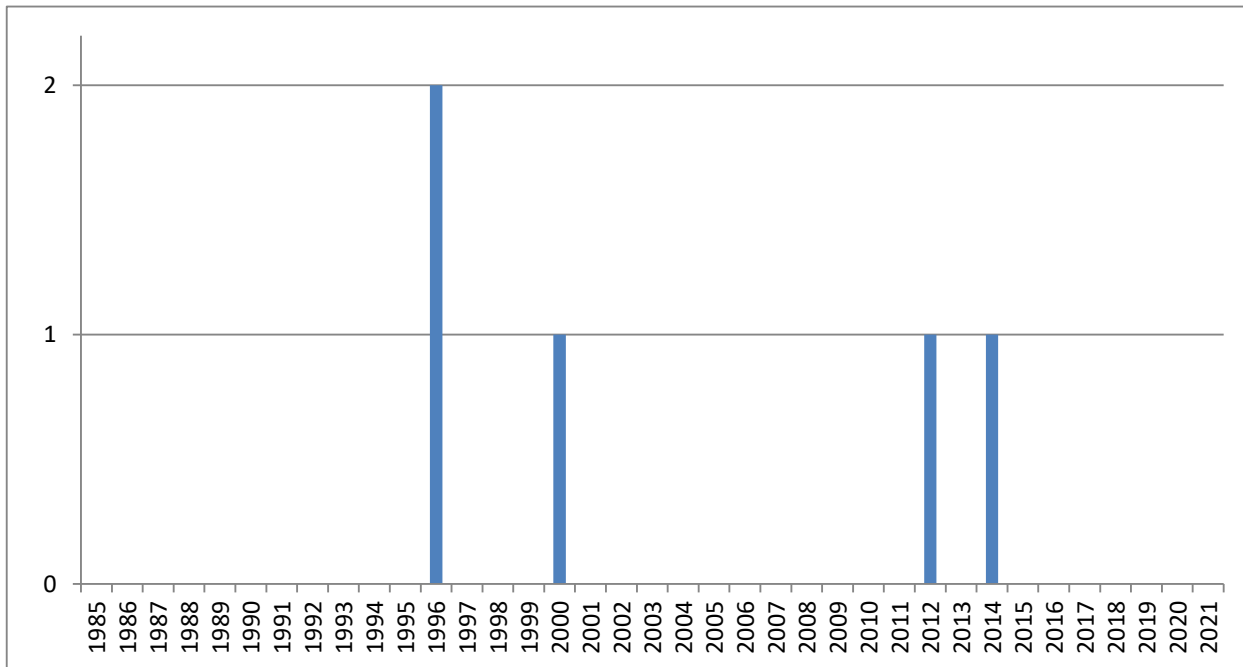


Figure 1: Pallas's Warbler records at Folkestone and Hythe

There have been four typical late autumn sightings, occurring between 16th October (week 42) and 10th November (week 45), and one found in January, as shown in figure 2.

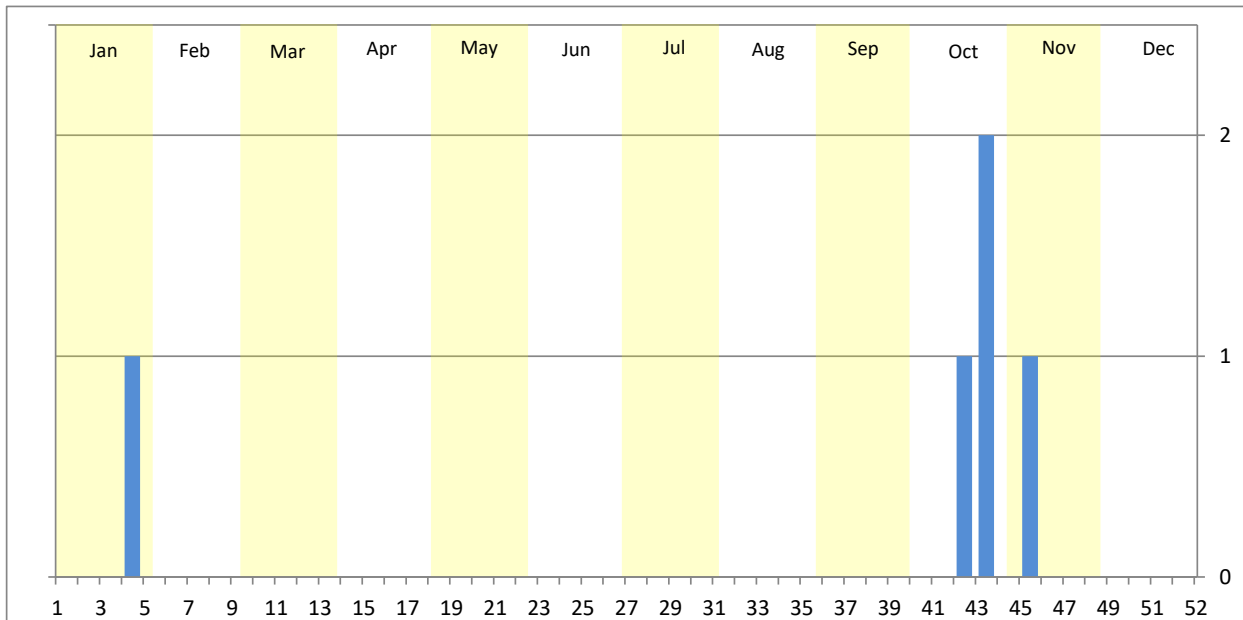


Figure 2: Pallas's Warbler records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

All the autumn records were at the cliffs, with two at Capel-le-Ferne, one at Abbotscliffe and one at Samphire Hoe, but the most recent was inland, at Pond Hill Road (and ranged between TR13 X and TR13 Y), as demonstrated by figure 3.



Figure 3: Distribution of all Pallas's Warbler records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad



Pallas's Warbler at Pond Hill Road (Brian Harper)

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1996** Abbotscliffe, one, 16th October (D. A. Gibson, J. A. Gibson)
- 1996** Capel-le-Ferne, one, 10th November (I. A., A. F. & P. M. Roberts, D. A. Gibson)
- 2000** Capel-le-Ferne, one, 23rd October, video-recorded (I. A. Roberts, D. A. Gibson)
- 2012** Samphire Hoe, one, 21st to 22nd October (P. Holt *et al*)
- 2014** Pond Hill Road, Cheriton, one, 24th January to 1st March, photographed (M. Sutherland *et al*)

As the first two Folkestone and Hythe records occurred in quick succession an account of the first and second area records are given below.

Pallas's Warbler at Abbotscliffe**16th October 1996**

(Dale A Gibson, Jamie A Gibson)

Weather conditions:

Force 3-4 west south-west wind. Dry, after early showers had cleared.

Circumstances of the find:

It was a quiet morning at Abbotscliffe, with just one Brambling and Siskin before I reached Abbot's Gully at 9 a.m. I noticed a tit flock feeding in the sheltered bushes in the gully, and as I scanned through I noticed what looked initially like a Firecrest. However, when I got a better look, I could see it was Folkestone's first Pallas's Warbler. I made my way down into the gully and got superb views, and took the following description. Jamie Gibson managed to see it later in the morning, but Ian Roberts was unsuccessful at lunch-time in the freshening south-westerly wind.

Description of the bird:

Head and upperparts: The head was olive, with a broad yellowish supercilium (especially in front of the eye), a dark eye-stripe, and a thick pale yellowish crown stripe. The rest of the upperparts were also olive, with pale yellowish tips to the tertials, and two yellowish wing-bars. The pale off-white rump band was particularly obvious when the bird was hovering.

Underparts: The underparts were clean white.

Pallas's Warbler at Capel-le-Ferne**10th November 1996**

(Ian A, Anthony F and Patricia M Roberts, Dale A Gibson)

Weather conditions:

A dry, overcast day with a light north-westerly breeze.

Circumstances of the find:

At about 1:10 p.m. on 10th November, I was returning from an unproductive morning spent at Abbotscliffe, along a sheltered lane that runs along the back of some gardens in the village. I was aware of a tit flock in some small trees on one side of the path but paid them little attention until I noticed a warbler with them. It was only a few feet away, and my initial impression was that it was a Pallas's or Yellow-browed. As I raised my bins it flew away down the path flashing a yellow rump. I fetched A. F. and P. M. Roberts and over the next 20 minutes or so we had superb views as it fed very close, and below eye level, mainly in one small sycamore. Dale Gibson saw it later in the afternoon. I took the following description.

Description of the bird:

Size, shape, jizz: A small compact warbler which looked large-headed. It was very active and hovered frequently.

Head and upperparts: The head was greenish-olive, with yellowish-white supercilia and central crown stripe, and dark green lateral crown stripes and eye-stripes. The rest of the upperparts were greenish-olive, with yellowish-white tips to the median and greater coverts, forming a double wing-bar, and tertials. The wings were darker, with olive fringes. It had a yellowish rump.

Underparts: The underparts were clean silky white.

Comments on the records:

Both records were accepted by the KOS rarities committee and appear in the Kent Bird Report for that year.

The mid-1990s saw an exceptional sequence of record-breaking years in Kent. The previous best year in the county was 1980, when 8 were recorded, before a remarkable total of 18 occurred in 1994. This was however surpassed in 1995, when 26 individuals were logged, and was bettered still further in 1996 with at least 35 records.

The graph shows the arrival dates of Pallas's Warblers in Kent in 1996, with the Folkestone and Hythe records highlighted in red. There were two distinct 'waves' of arrival – one between the 13th and 24th October and the other between the 8th and 17th November, and the Folkestone area received arrivals from both. Nearly two-thirds of the records were from the south of the county, from Bockhill round to Dungeness, including one just outside the Folkestone and Hythe area at the Western Heights, Dover.

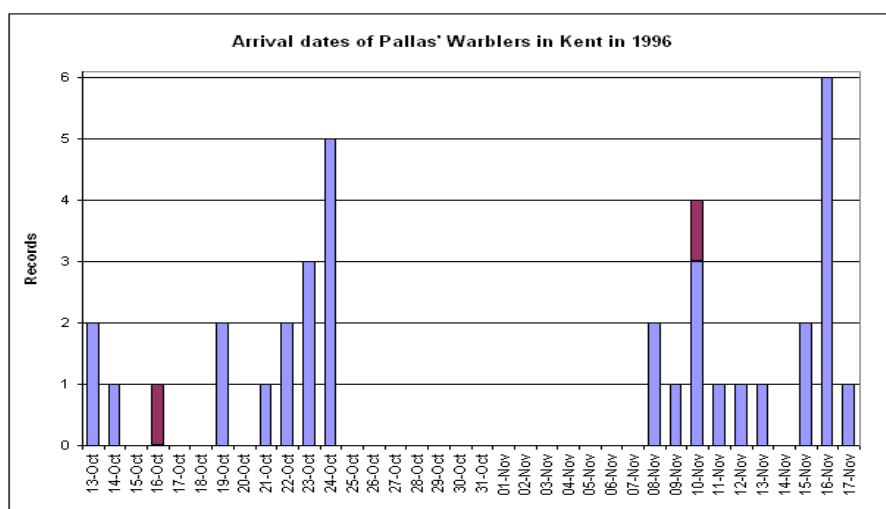


Figure 4: Arrival dates of Pallas's Warbler in Kent in 1996

References

BBRC statistics: <https://www.bbrc.org.uk/main-information/statistics> (accessed 2021)

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Acknowledgements

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