

Tawny Pipit

Anthus campestris

Category A

Very rare vagrant.

12 records,
12 birds

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds in southern and central Europe, north to the Netherlands and Estonia, and eastwards across Asia to Mongolia, China, Iran and Afghanistan, also in north-west Africa. Winters along the southern edge of the Sahara from Senegal to Sudan, in the Arabian Peninsula and in the Indian subcontinent. The nearest populations to Britain (France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany) decreased in the latter decades of the twentieth century.

Kent status (KOS 2022):

It is an uncommon vagrant to the county.

British (BBRC) records to end 2020: 1,331

Kent (KOS) records to end 2020: 142

The Tawny Pipit was first noted in Britain in 1858, when one was obtained in Sussex in August, and there were a further 11 national records in the nineteenth century, including the first in Kent, which was obtained near Lydd in August 1896. This was included by Harrison (1953), although Ticehurst (1909) appears to have been unaware of it. Harrison added further records from Lydd in 1919 and the Midrips in 1950, by which time 27 had been noted in the country.

Taylor *et al.* (1981) were able to report a marked change in status in the county, with it having “become virtually an annual visitor” since 1960 and with 50 being recorded within their review period (1952-76), including ten in spring, whilst there were totals of 36 records in the 1970s and 40 in the 1980s. Nationally it also increased, with a mean of 5 per annum in the 1950s, to 14 in the 1960s, 27 in the 1970s and 35 in the 1980s, which led to it being removed from the species that the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC) considered as a national rarity at the end of 1982, when 579 had been logged (Grant *et al.* 1982).

An equally marked reversal in fortunes was evident from the 1990s, when the national annual means decreased to 29 in that decade, then 11 in the 2000s and seven in the 2010s, whilst there were just two in 2020 and 2021 (BBRC no date). In Kent there were 32 records in the 1990s, seven in the 2000s and just two since: in 2014 and 2016 (KOS no date). Following this decline, it was reinstated to the BBRC list of national rarities from 2015.

Holt *et al.* (2019) presumed that the decline in British records was linked to a reduction in the breeding population on mainland Europe, where pressures in breeding areas are thought to be primarily centred on the effects of habitat loss and/or an associated reduction in habitat quality resulting from agricultural intensification, abandonment of farmland and conversion to forestry in some areas. Climate change may also be playing a part.

The first records coincided with the commencement of regular coverage at the cliffs (where all have been recorded) in 1992, when Ian Roberts watched one arriving in off the sea on the 4th September 1992 and found another there on the 13th September, whilst Dale Gibson saw three singles (within a five day period) the following autumn, before noting the first spring record at Capel battery on the 1st June 1994 and two further autumn records on consecutive days in 1995 (with the first having been found dead). There have been four subsequent records but none since 2012.

At the time of the last record in 2012, Tawny was considered to be only marginally the rarer of the two scarce large pipits locally, but there have been 13 sightings of Richard’s Pipit since 2000 (with five since 2012) compared to just three Tawny Pipits since 2000 (and none since 2012). Both were originally removed from the BBRC list at the end of 1982 (Grant *et al.*) both since then have experienced considerably different fortunes.

The records by year are shown in figure 1.

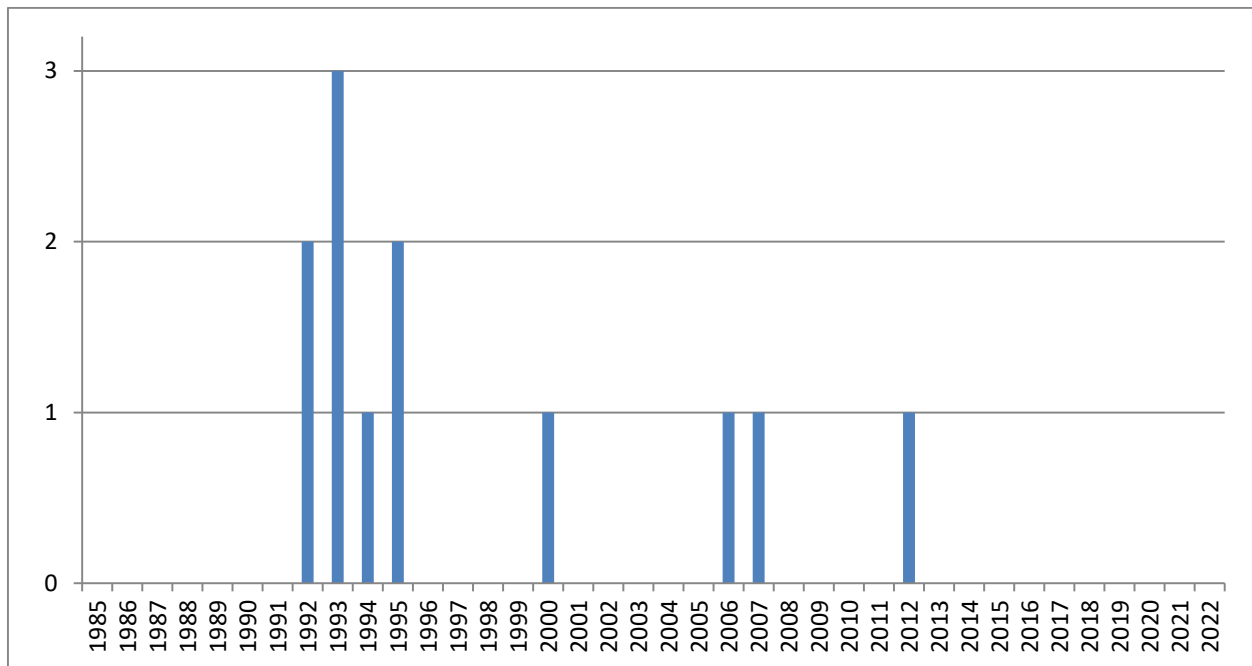


Figure 1: Tawny Pipit records at Folkestone and Hythe

There have been two spring records, both in week 22 (on 28th May and 1st June). Autumn records fall between 4th September (week 36) and 20th October (week 42), with the majority in September, as demonstrated by figure 2. Of the two large pipits, Tawny has had a mean arrival date almost three weeks earlier in the autumn (22nd September).

The records by week are given in figure 2.

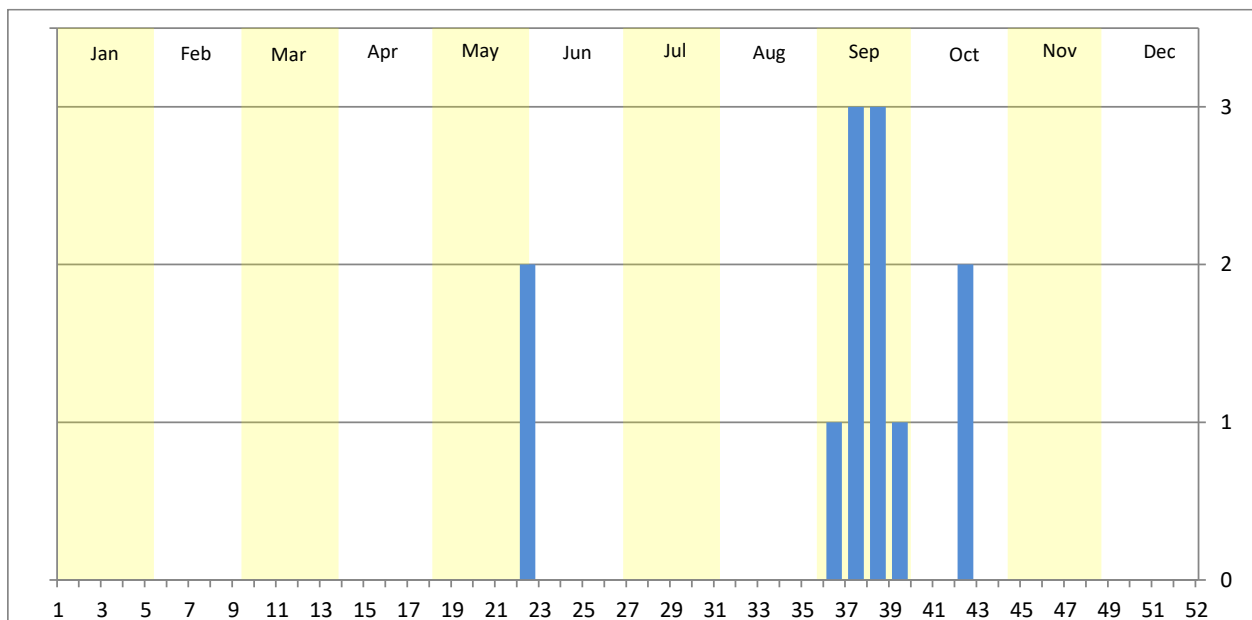


Figure 2: Tawny Pipit records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the distribution of records by tetrad. All have been recorded from the cliffs, with eight at Abbotscliffe, three at Capel-le-Ferne (two at the Battery and one at the Café) and one in fields along Crete Road West.



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

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1992** Abbotscliffe, one flew in off the sea, 4th September (I. A. Roberts)
- 1992** Abbotscliffe, one, 13th September (I. A. Roberts)
- 1993** Abbotscliffe, one flew east, 15th September (D. A. Gibson)
- 1993** Abbotscliffe, one flew west, 18th September (D. A. Gibson)
- 1993** Crete Road East, one, 19th September (D. A. Gibson)
- 1994** Capel Battery, one flew in off the sea, 1st June (D. A. Gibson)
- 1995** Abbotscliffe, one flew east, 16th September, later found dead, possibly having been killed by a Sparrowhawk (D. A. Gibson)
- 1995** Abbotscliffe, one flew west, 17th September (D. A. Gibson)
- 2000** Abbotscliffe, one flew in off the sea, 24th September, sound-recorded (D. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)
- 2006** Capel Battery, one flew in off the sea, 17th October (D. A. Gibson)
- 2007** Abbotscliffe, one in gully, then flew west, 20th October (D. A. Gibson)
- 2012** Capel-le-Ferne (Café), one flew north-east, 28th May (D. A. Gibson)

References

- British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC). Statistics. www.bbrc.org.uk/main-information/statistics (accessed 2023).
- Grant, P. J. & the Rarities Committee 1982. Rarities Committee news and announcements. *British Birds* 75: 337-338.
- Harrison, J. M. 1953. *The Birds of Kent*. Witherby, London.
- Holt, C., French, P. & the Rarities Committee 2019. Report on rare birds in Great Britain in 2018. *British Birds* 112: 556-626.
- 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 2023).
- Naylor, K. A. 2021. Historical Rare Birds. www.historicalrarebirds.info/cat-ac/tawny-pipit

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.