

## Woodchat Shrike

*Lanius senator*

Category A

Very rare vagrant.

3 records,  
3 birds

*World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):*

Breeds mainly around the Mediterranean coast, also extending northwards into France, however there has been a major long-term contraction in its range southwards and a severe reduction in numbers. It has become extinct as a breeding species in the Low Countries, east Germany, Austria and Poland, whilst France has seen a marked retreat southwards in recent decades. The underlying cause of the decline is thought perhaps to be climatic change, though additional factors include loss and degradation of habitat through afforestation and intensified farming techniques.



Woodchat Shrike at Canterbury Museum  
(Philip Hadland)

Winters in sub-Saharan Africa north of the equator, where drought in the Sahel may also be contributing to its decline.

*Kent status (KOS 2022):*

It is a rare migrant to the county.

Kent (KOS) records to end 2020: 62

Ticehurst (1909) wrote that it was “a rare occasional visitor to the county on migration, generally in the spring, and has been recorded some eight or nine times. The sixth county record was the first local occurrence, in 1888: “as he informed Mr. Aplin, Hammond obtained an adult bird from a bird-catcher at Dover, which had recently been caught in a clump of brambles on the Warren at Folkestone. It is now in the Canterbury Museum”. Oliver Aplin published a review of “the status of the Woodchat in Great Britain” in *The Zoologist* (1892) and included further details from Mr. W. Hammond regarding his acquisition: “as to the Woodchat, about three years ago I heard from a bird-catcher at Dover that he had just caught one. I went at once to see it, and learn about it. The bird was in beautiful plumage, all the feathers, tail and wings, perfectly clean. The owner told me that his men had taken it in the warren near Folkestone. That when they saw the bird it entered a dense clump of bramble, going to the bottom, and that they enclosed it in the bramble, and so caught it. I look on it with a certain amount of suspicion”. It was noted this bird was in Mr. Hammond's collection. The Hammond collection is now in Canterbury Museum, having been bequeathed to it 1903. The subject and nature of Mr. Hammond's “suspicion” is unclear and Ticehurst considered it to be a valid record.

Harrison (1953) added a further four records, whilst Taylor *et al.* (1981) were able to report another 21 in the county during their review period (1952-76). It was considered to be a national rarity by the British Birds Rarity Committee up until 1990, when over 570 had occurred (Heard & Thaler, 1991). It is now a scarce migrant to Britain, with an average of 27 records per annum annually over the last decade (White & Kehoe 2022).

In Kent, as Henderson (2021) noted, “the species has appeared remarkably regularly” since the time of Taylor *et al.*, with between zero and two records each year (except for 1996, which produced three) and with a mean of 0.6 per annum. 63% of those found since 1950 have occurred in spring, between mid-April and the end of June.

The only modern records involved a first-summer male at Brockhill Country Park on the 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1991 which spent the day hunting on the scrubby slope south of the lake, and was enjoyed by many observers, and one thought to have been a female, at Church Hougham on the 13<sup>th</sup> June 1996.

The modern records by year are shown in figure 1.

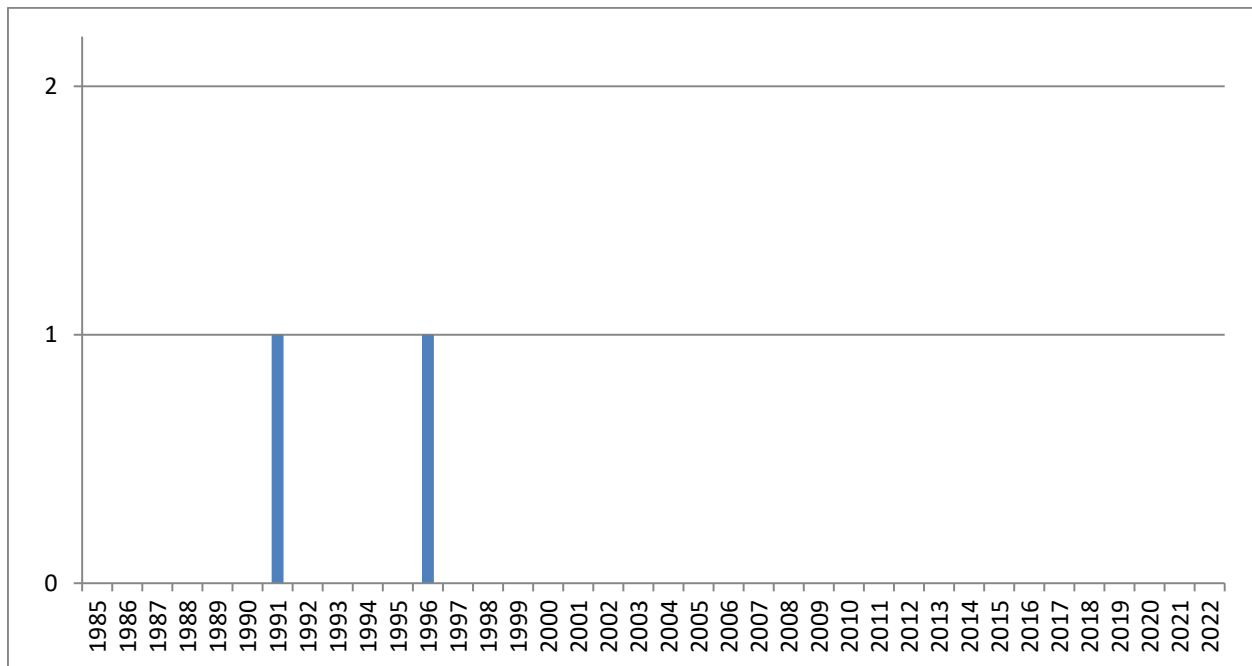


Figure 1: Woodchat Shrike records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

The modern records by week are given in figure 2. The historical record from the Warren is undated.

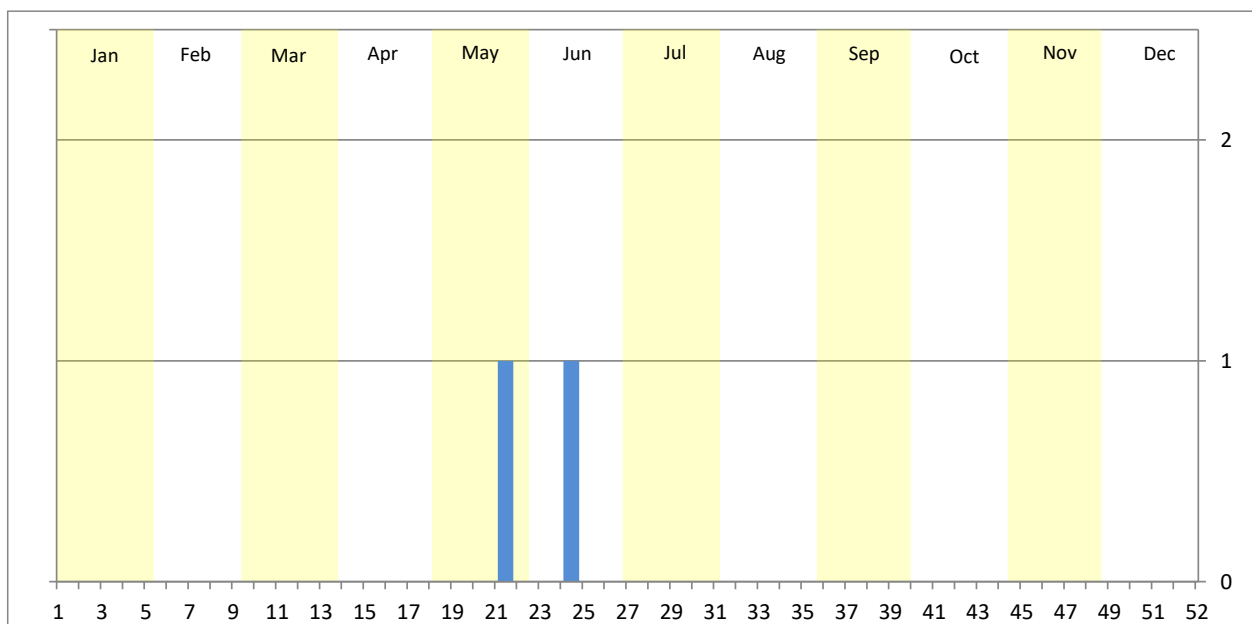


Figure 2: Woodchat Shrike records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the location of records by tetrad. The Warren record is undated and also lacks sufficient detail to enable it to be mapped to tetrad, although it would have been with TR23 N or P.



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

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1888** Folkestone Warren, one, caught, date unknown, now in Canterbury Museum, specimen photographed (per O. Hammond)
- 1991** Brockhill Country Park, first-summer male, 23<sup>rd</sup> May (P. J. Wells, R. E. Turley *et al*)
- 1996** Church Hougham, one thought to have been a female, 13<sup>th</sup> June (M. D. Kennett)

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## ***Acknowledgements***

The tetrad map images were produced from the Ordnance Survey [Get-a-map service](#) and are reproduced with kind permission of [Ordnance Survey](#).

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Woodchat Shrike at Canterbury Museum (Philip Hadland)