

Montagu's Harrier

Circus pygargus

Category A

Rare migrant

18 records

Breeds mainly across middle latitude Europe but also south into Spain, with western populations wintering in sub-Saharan Africa (Snow & Perrins, 1998). A very scarce and declining breeding species in Britain, with just five pairs nesting in 2017 (Holling *et al*, 2019). It formerly bred in Kent until about the mid-twentieth century but is now a scarce but regular passage migrant, which occasionally over-summers (KOS, 2020).



Montagu's Harrier at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)

Ticehurst (1909) stated that "there is no doubt that formerly this species bred regularly ... on the North Downs, and probably also in Romney Marsh. Drainage, reclamation of waste lands and game preserving have, however, long since done their work". On the North Downs they used to breed in "gorse-fields", but no locations are given and the last two pairs that nested there were both killed in 1865. He goes on to say that "locally obtained specimens can be inspected in the museums of Folkestone, Dover..."

Harrison (1953) refers to a note to *British Birds* (vol. 3, p.307) from P. Vernon Dodd stating that "a Montagu's Harrier was shot on November 18th, 1909, near Folkestone". He continues that "Colonel Montagu said he had never known of one in England later than October". Harrison includes a number of other late autumn and winter records and Taylor *et al* (1981) warn that confusion with Hen Harrier "seems to be a possibility". In view of the vagueness of the location and the possibility of misidentification this record had not been included in the total.

The first confirmed record occurred in 1958 when a second-year male was watched by Roger Norman as it flew slowly north across the west end of Hythe Ranges, then over the old pit and west across the old airfield (at what is now Nickolls Quarry). The first modern record was in 1991, after which it occurred with some regularity for a decade or so, but there have been no sightings in the last six years, as demonstrated in figure 1.

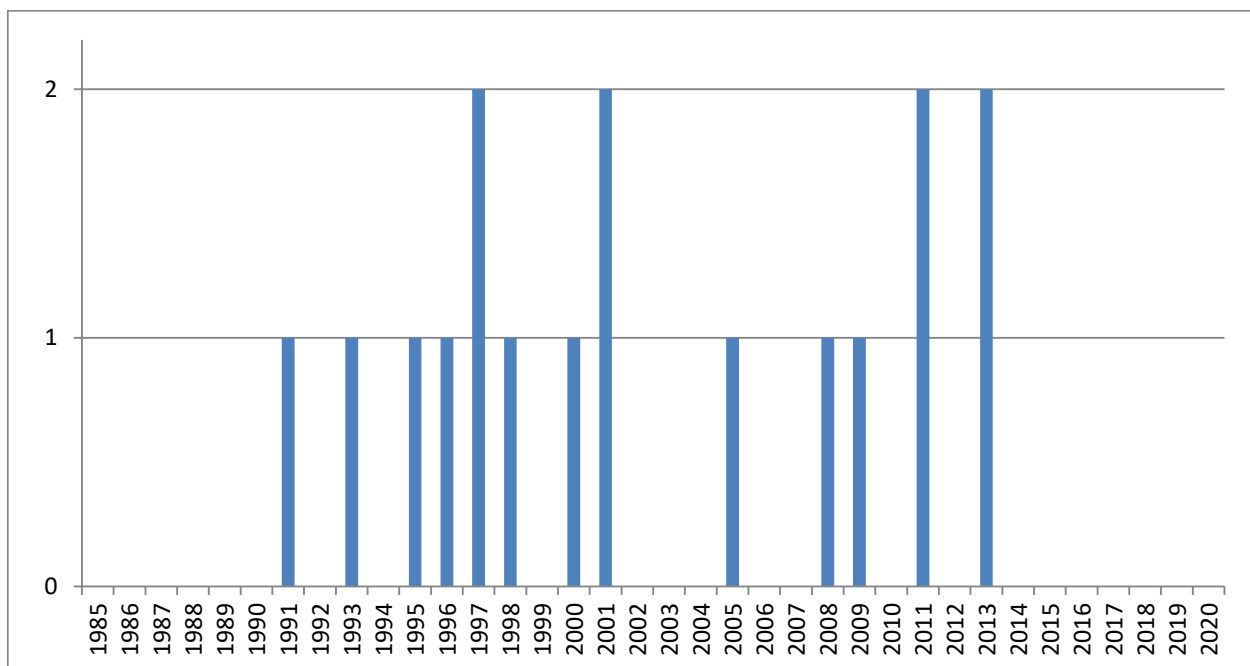


Figure 1: Montagu's Harrier records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

Figure 2 shows the arrival dates by week. The majority of records have been in spring, between 27th April (week 17) and 3rd June (week 23), with a distinct peak in week 19 when five have occurred between 8th and 12th May. There are three autumn records between mid-August and early September.

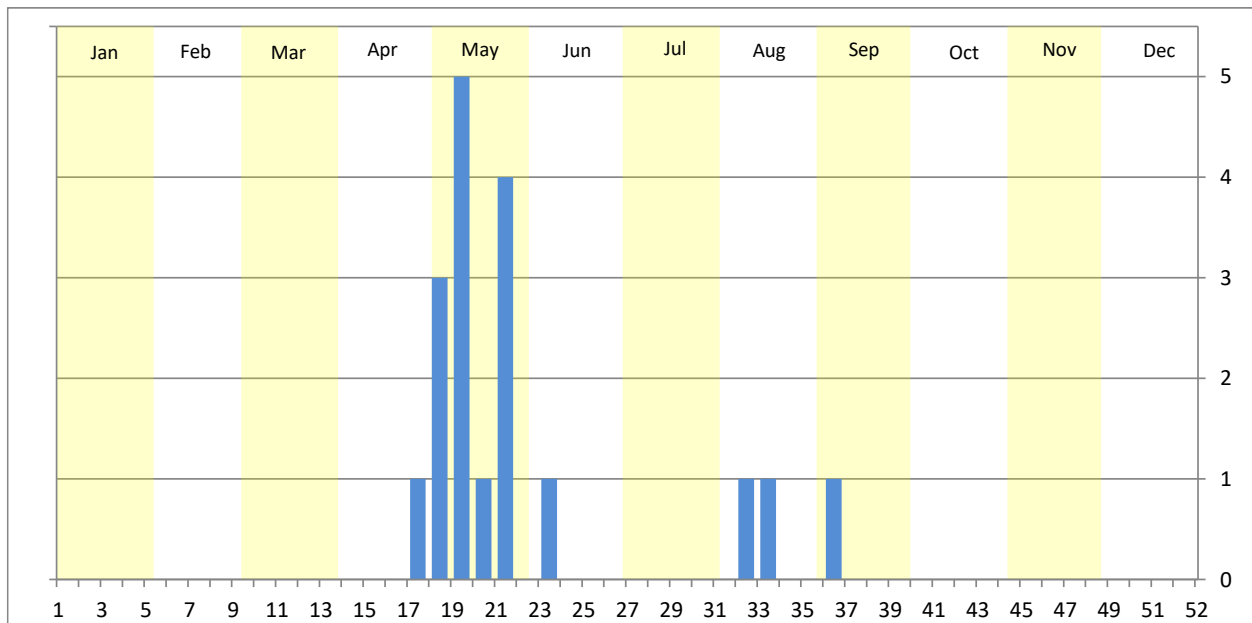


Figure 2: Montagu's Harrier records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the distribution of records by tetrad.



Figure 3: Distribution of all Montagu's Harrier records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Thirteen have been recorded along the cliffs between Copt Point and Samphire Hoe, with three at Cheriton/Folkestone and singles at Hythe Ranges, Mill Point and Princes Parade.

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1958** Hythe Ranges, male flew north, then over Nickolls Quarry, 11th May (R. K. Norman)
- 1991** Mill Point, male on about 12th May (reported)
- 1993** Abbotscliffe, one flew south-west, 7th September (J. P. Siddle)
- 1995** Abbotscliffe, immature/female, 8th to 19th May, photographed (D. A. Gibson)
- 1996** Abbotscliffe, immature/female flew in off the sea, 3rd June (D. Belshaw)
- 1997** Capel-le-Ferne Café, immature/female flew east, 27th May (I. A. Roberts)
- 1997** Cheriton, one flew south-west, 12th August (D. A. Gibson)
- 1998** Capel-le-Ferne Café, female flew east, 19th May (D. A. Gibson)
- 2000** Abbotscliffe, immature/female flew in off the sea then north-west, 20th May (I. A. Roberts)
- 2001** Copt Point, one flew in off the sea, 5th May (I. A. Roberts)

- 2001** Capel-le-Ferne, immature/female flew west, 24th May (I. A. Roberts)
2005 Capel-le-Ferne Gun Site, male flew in off the sea, 9th May (I. A. Roberts)
2008 Samphire Hoe, immature/female male flew east, 9th May (I. A. Roberts)
2009 Folkestone, female flew east, 25th May (P. Howe)
2011 Copt Point, male in off the sea, 27th April (I. A. Roberts)
2011 Samphire Hoe, juvenile flew west, 16th August, photographed (P. Smith)
2013 Samphire Hoe, immature/female flew in off the sea, then north-west, 30th April (I. A. Roberts)
2013 Cheriton, immature/female flew north-west, 30th April (P. Howe), presumed same as above
2013 Princes Parade, male flew in off the sea, 2nd May (P. Howe)

References

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Montagu's Harrier at Abbotscliffe (Dale Gibson)

Acknowledgements

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