

Water Pipit

Anthus spinoletta

Category A

Very rare vagrant.

8 records,
9 birds

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds in mountainous regions of central and southern Europe, often at considerable elevations above or at the edge of the tree line. In winter moves to lower ground throughout inland central Europe, north-west to Belgium and the Netherlands, with small numbers regularly in southern England.



Water Pipit at Samphire Hoe (Geoff Burton)

Kent status (KOS 2022):

It is an uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor to the county, and particularly to the Stour Valley.

Ticehurst (1909) noted that “up till 1897 only some seven or eight specimens had been obtained in the whole of England, though probably from its similarity in autumn and winter to the much commoner Rock Pipit it had frequently been overlooked”. Since then it had been found to be a “regular visitor to the [East Sussex] coast on migration” and he speculated that it was being overlooked in Kent. He was able to only document one record of one that was shot at Littlestone in 1905.

Harrison (1953) was able to add fewer than ten further records and concluded that it was irregular in its appearance in the county and was “less inclined to believe that it is frequently overlooked” than Ticehurst. Taylor *et al.* (1981) oversaw a marked change in status, noting that “birds of this race have been recorded almost annually and with increased frequency since 1967”, with the majority occurring on spring passage during March and April, and a small number wintering in the Stour Valley.

The first local record was found by Paul Howe and Rob Lee at Copt Point on 30th March 1985.



Water Pipit at Samphire Hoe (Geoff Burton)

Up until this time the Water Pipit had been considered to be a race of Rock Pipit but shortly after the first local occurrence the British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee, on the recommendation of its taxonomic working group, decided to treat the Rock Pipit as three separate species: Rock Pipit (*A. petrosus*), Water Pipit (*A. spinoletta*) and Buff-bellied Pipit (*A. rubescens*) (BOURC 1986).

On the same date, 23 years after the first, one was found by Geoff Burton at Samphire Hoe on the 30th March 2008 and the third record quickly followed, when Dylan Wrathall saw one at Botolph's Bridge on the 26th October 2008. A further individual lingered at Samphire Hoe between the 17th January and 21st March 2010.



Water Pipit at Donkey Street (Brian Harper)

In 2017 one was found by Ian Roberts at Donkey Street on the 5th November 2017, where it remained until at least the 17th November, with one (quite possibly the same bird) seen there on the same date the following year, where it lingered into January 2019. Later in 2019 two (possibly involving a returning bird) were seen there on the 7th December, with one of these being seen intermittently until mid-March 2020, and one was seen again from October 2020 until early April 2021, but none have been seen there since. It is difficult to be certain how many individuals were involved in this series, and they have been treated as separate records in the statistics. The records by year are shown in figure 1.

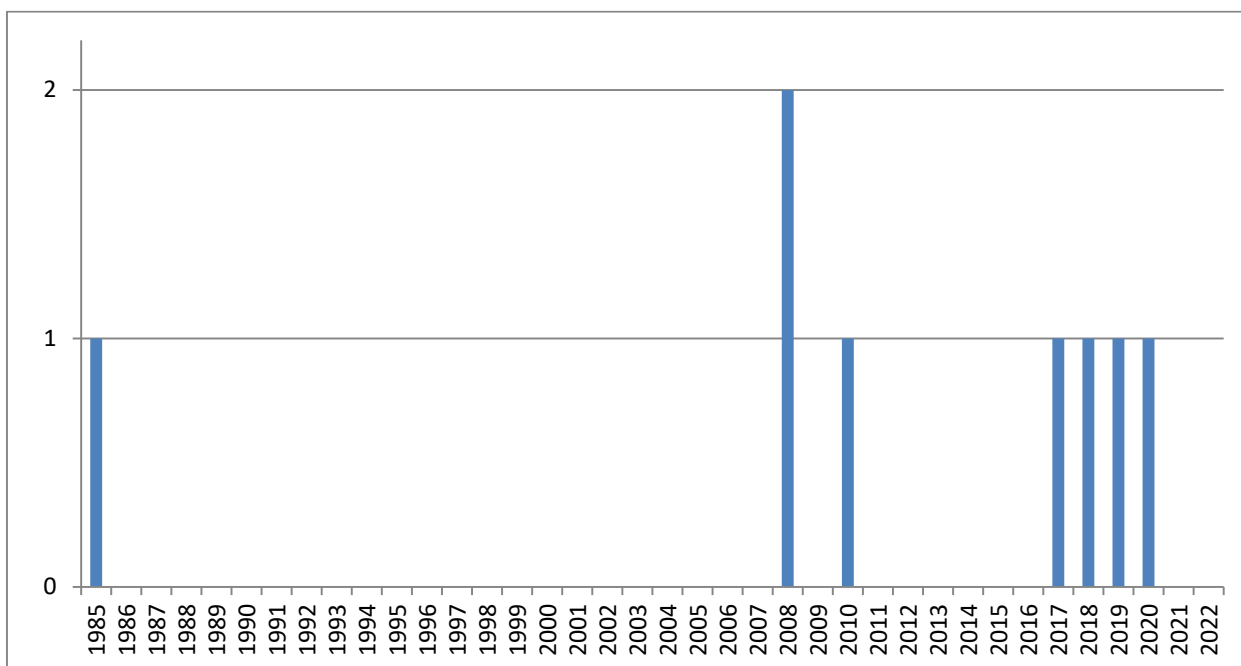


Figure 1: Water Pipit records at Folkestone and Hythe

The first two records occurred on 30th March (week 13), with two in late October (week 43/44), two in early November (weeks 45 and 46), one in early December and a long-stayer which was found in January (week 3), as demonstrated by figure 2.

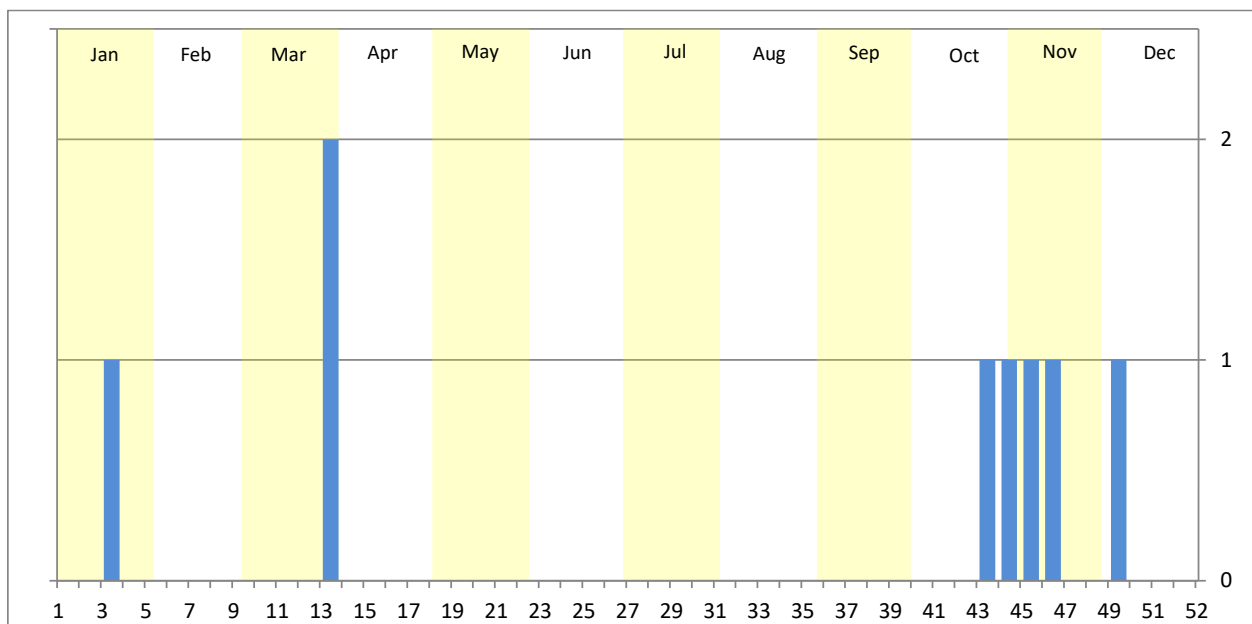


Figure 2: Water Pipit records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

There have been three coastal records, at Copt Point and Samphire Hoe (2), and the others were inland along the canal cutting near Botolph's Bridge and in the Donkey Street/Willop Sewer area. Figure 3 shows the distribution of records by tetrad.



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

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1985** Copt Point, one, 30th March (P. Howe, R. Hollingsworth)
- 2008** Samphire Hoe, one, 30th March to 2nd April, photographed (G. J. A. Burton, I. A. Roberts, P. Holt, D. E. Smith)
- 2008** Botolph's Bridge, one, 26th October (D. Wrathall)
- 2010** Samphire Hoe, one, 17th January to 21st March, photographed (G. J. A. Burton, P. Holt, I. A. Roberts)
- 2017** Donkey Street, one, 5th to at least 17th November, photographed (B. Harper, I. A. Roberts)
- 2018** Donkey Street, one, 5th November to at least 1st January 2019, photographed (B. Harper, I. A. Roberts), probably same as above

- 2019** Donkey Street, two, 7th December, with presumably one of the same at the Willop Basin on the same day (B. Harper) and at Donkey Street from 1st January to 15th March 2020 (B. Harper, I. A. Roberts), and one probably same as above
- 2020** Donkey Street, one, 30th October, intermittently to 5th April 2021 (B. Harper, I. A. Roberts, J. J. Thompson), probably same as above

References

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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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