

# Hen Harrier

*Circus cyaneus*

Category A

Scarce migrant and winter visitor. 53 records

Breeds quite widely across northern Europe, south to northern Spain, including upland Britain. The more northern populations are migratory, partially or locally resident elsewhere. It is the least migratory harrier, with few leaving Europe for the winter (Snow & Perrins 1998).

An estimated 575 pairs nest in Britain but there has been a 29% decrease in the population over the last 12 years (Holling *et al.* 2019). The Hen Harrier is unfortunately one of the most persecuted of Britain's birds.



Hen Harrier at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)

Ticehurst (1909) noted that it nested in Kent up to the last half of the nineteenth century, when it was an irregular and infrequent autumn and winter visitor. Although breeding had long since ceased, Taylor *et al.* (1981) reported an increase in autumn and winter numbers from the mid-twentieth century and considered it to be a regular passage migrant and almost common winter visitor in suitable areas. It has since undergone a reversal of fortune and is now a regular but sadly declining passage migrant and winter visitor to the county, being particularly uncommon inland (KOS 2020).

The first area record was seen by John Perrot at Botolph's Bridge on the 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1955 but there were no further sightings until Roger Norman saw one at Nickolls Quarry on the 24<sup>th</sup> January 1979. Sightings at Copt Point on three dates in January 1983 possibly involved the same individual, whilst another was noted there on the 21<sup>st</sup> October 1984 and one was seen at West Hythe on the 27<sup>th</sup> February 1985.

After these three records in consecutive years no more were noted until 1992, but it has occurred fairly regularly since then, with a further 48 in the 31 years to 2022 (an average of 1.5 per year), as shown in figure 1. It has been erratic in its appearances though with three 'blank' years from 1999 to 2001 followed by a peak of four sightings in 2002. It has now been recorded in the most recent 12 consecutive years.

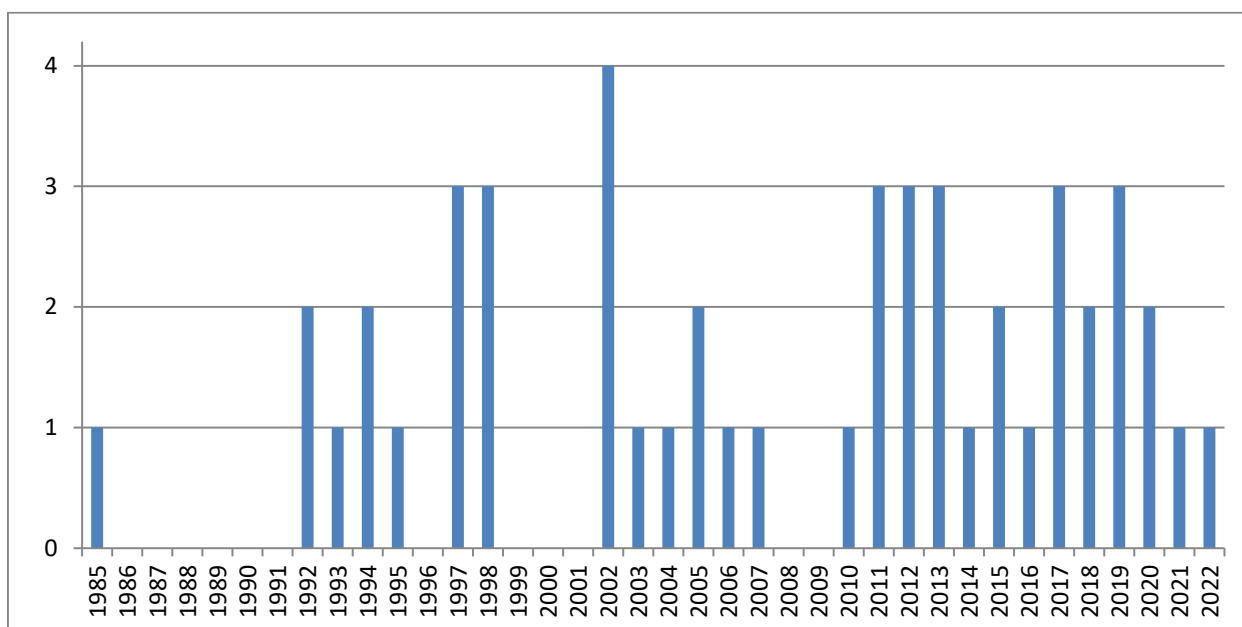


Figure 1: Hen Harrier records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

Figure 2 shows the arrival dates by week. The earliest autumn arrival was on 1<sup>st</sup> September (2020), with four further records in September and 21 in October/November. These presumably relate mostly to migrant birds as there have been just three in December. The first week of January has produced three, with three others in that month, four in February and two in March, some of which, though not all, were associated with periods of severe weather.

Eight spring migrants have been seen in April, with three particularly late birds seen in late May (1997), 3<sup>rd</sup> June (2013) and 11<sup>th</sup> June (2011).

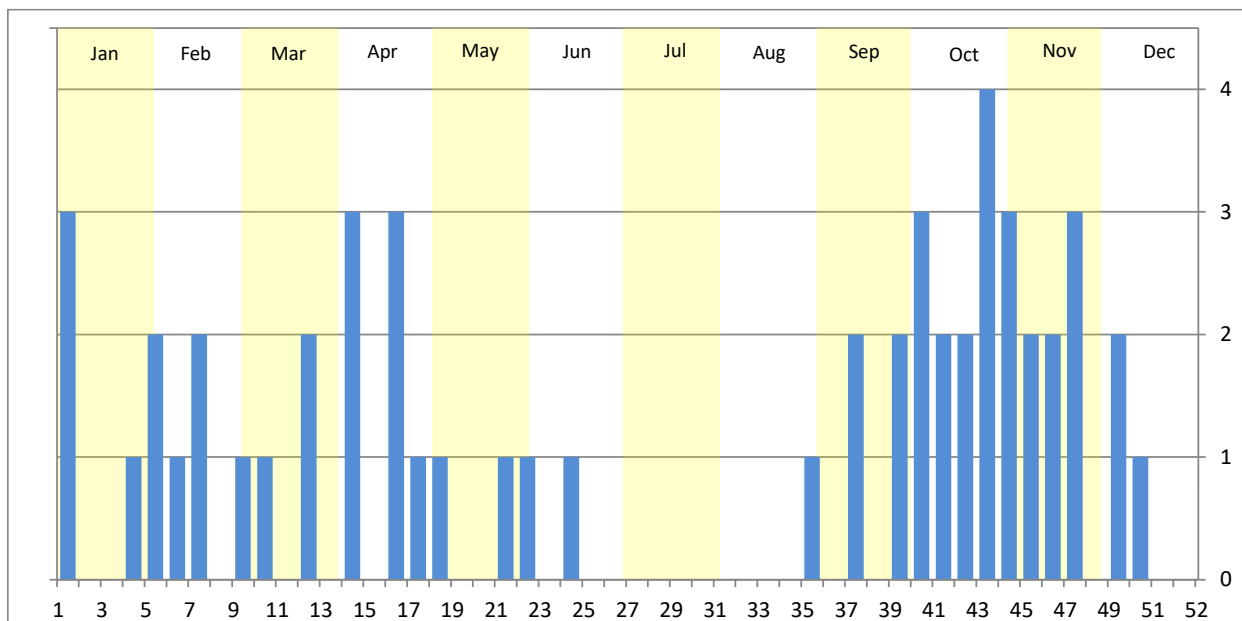


Figure 2: Hen Harrier records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the distribution of records by tetrad.



Figure 3: Distribution of all Hen Harrier records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The Hen Harrier has been recorded from 14 tetrads (45%). Sightings have been fairly evenly divided between the cliffs from Copt Point to Samphire Hoe (24) and the Botolph’s Bridge/Nickolls Quarry/West Hythe area (18), with others seen over Cheriton/Folkestone (5), Beachborough Lakes (2), Saltwood (2), Horton Priory and Hythe.

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1955** Botolph's Bridge, one, 2<sup>nd</sup> April (J. Perrot)
- 1979** Nickolls Quarry, immature/female, 24<sup>th</sup> January (R. K. Norman)
- 1983** Copt Point, immature/female, 4<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> January, presumed to be same individual (R. Hollingsworth)
- 1984** Copt Point, immature male, 21<sup>st</sup> October (R. Hollingsworth)
- 1985** West Hythe, male, 27<sup>th</sup> February (C. Lock)
- 1992** Nickolls Quarry, immature/female, 9<sup>th</sup> February (I. A. Roberts)
- 1992** Nickolls Quarry, immature/female, 29<sup>th</sup> April (R. K. Norman)
- 1993** Abbotscliffe, one flew in off the sea, 22<sup>nd</sup> October (D. A. Gibson)
- 1994** Abbotscliffe, male flew west, 2<sup>nd</sup> April (I. A. Roberts)
- 1994** Folkestone, male flew west, 8<sup>th</sup> October (D. A. Gibson)
- 1995** Copt Point, immature/female flew west, 21<sup>st</sup> November (D. A. Gibson)
- 1997** Cheriton, immature/female flew north-east, 18<sup>th</sup> February (D. A. Gibson)
- 1997** Cheriton, immature/female flew north, 16<sup>th</sup> April (D. A. Gibson)
- 1997** Abbotscliffe, immature/female flew out to sea, 26<sup>th</sup> May (D. A. Gibson, R. Lee, I. A. Roberts)
- 1998** Abbotscliffe, male flew in off the sea at 08:35, 4<sup>th</sup> October (D. A. Gibson, J. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)
- 1998** Capel-le-Ferne Gun Site, male flew in off the sea at 13:15, 4<sup>th</sup> October (D. A. Gibson, J. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)
- 1998** Folkestone Warren, immature/female, 19<sup>th</sup> November (reported)
- 2002** Botolph's Bridge, one, 2<sup>nd</sup> January (I. A. Roberts)
- 2002** Abbotscliffe, one flew west, 30<sup>th</sup> October (I. A. Roberts)
- 2002** Nickolls Quarry, male, 25<sup>th</sup> November (I. A. Roberts)
- 2002** Botolph's Bridge, one, 9<sup>th</sup> December (I. A. Roberts)
- 2003** Nickolls Quarry, immature/female, 18<sup>th</sup> February (I. A. Roberts)
- 2004** Abbotscliffe, male flew north, 9<sup>th</sup> October (I. A. Roberts)
- 2005** Botolph's Bridge, one flew south west over Lower Wall Road, 31<sup>st</sup> January (C. Philpott)
- 2005** Samphire Hoe, immature/female, 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> November, also at Abbotscliffe on the 18<sup>th</sup> (P. Holt, I. A. Roberts)
- 2006** Abbotscliffe, male flew in off the sea, 4<sup>th</sup> November (I. A. Roberts)
- 2007** Chesterfield Wood (Saltwood), immature/female flew east, 29<sup>th</sup> September (I. A. Roberts)
- 2010** Nickolls Quarry, immature/female, 2<sup>nd</sup> January (G. Spencer, N. Spencer)
- 2011** Botolph's Bridge, male, 11<sup>th</sup> June, photographed (B. Harper)
- 2011** Saltwood, one flew north, 22<sup>nd</sup> October (P. Howe)
- 2011** Botolph's Bridge, immature/female, 6<sup>th</sup> November (M. Kennett)
- 2012** Hougham Valley, immature/female flew east then west, 15<sup>th</sup> April (M. Kennett)
- 2012** Abbotscliffe, one flew out to sea, 2<sup>nd</sup> October (D. A. Gibson)
- 2012** Botolph's Bridge, male, 15<sup>th</sup> December (B. Harper, M. Harper, I. Roberts)
- 2013** Folkestone, male, flew north, 8<sup>th</sup> April (D. A. Gibson)
- 2013** Samphire Hoe, one flew west, 2<sup>nd</sup> June (I. A. Roberts)
- 2013** Samphire Hoe, male flew in off the sea, 11<sup>th</sup> November (L. Collins)
- 2014** Samphire Hoe, one flew west, 15<sup>th</sup> October (D. E. Smith)
- 2015** Lower Wall, West Hythe, male, 21<sup>st</sup> March (B. Findlay)
- 2015** Abbotscliffe, immature/female flew north, 16<sup>th</sup> October (M. Varley)
- 2016** Beachborough Lakes, male flew west, 27<sup>th</sup> September (S. Tomlinson)
- 2017** Capel-le-Ferne, female, 29<sup>th</sup> January (D. Richards)
- 2017** Abbotscliffe, immature/female flew in off the sea, 14<sup>th</sup> September (M. Varley)
- 2017** Hythe, immature/female flew in off the sea, 14<sup>th</sup> September (S. McMinn)
- 2018** Botolph's Bridge, female, 25<sup>th</sup> March, photographed (B. Harper)
- 2018** Beachborough Lakes, one flew south, 14<sup>th</sup> November, photographed (S. Tomlinson)
- 2019** Botolph's Bridge, immature/female, 27<sup>th</sup> April, photographed (B. Harper)
- 2019** Samphire Hoe, immature/female, 31<sup>st</sup> October (M. Varley)
- 2019** Horton Priory, immature/female flew south, 7<sup>th</sup> December (I. A. Roberts)
- 2020** Abbotscliffe, immature/female, 1<sup>st</sup> September (M. D. Kennett)
- 2020** Copt Point, male flew in off the sea, 22<sup>nd</sup> October (D. A. Gibson)
- 2021** Botolph's Bridge, male flew east, 8<sup>th</sup> March (A. Griffin)
- 2022** Mill Point, immature/female flew east, 22<sup>nd</sup> April (I. A. Roberts)

## 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](#).



Hen Harrier at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)



Hen Harrier at Beachborough (Steve Tomlinson)



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