

Tawny Pipit

Scientific name Category A
Very rare vagrant. 12 records

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 (Snow & Perrins, 1998).

The Tawny Pipit was considered as a national rarity by the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC) until it was removed from their list at the end of 1982, having accumulated a total of 579 records, with an average of 26 per annum over the preceding decade (Grant *et al*, 1982). Following a decline in records it was reinstated to the list from 2015, since when there has been an annual average of just five (Holt *et al*, 2019, BBRC, 2021).

Holt *et al* 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.

It is a rare vagrant to Kent, with 142 having been recorded but with just nine of those having occurred since 2000, and the most recent in 2016 (KOS, 2021).

It was first recorded locally in September 1992, when there were two within the space of ten days, and the following year produced three records within a five day period. The first spring record followed in 1994, and 1995 saw two different individuals on consecutive days, with the first having been found dead. The following 17 years produced only a further four sightings, although these did include the second spring record and the first two to be seen in October, and there have been none since 2012.

The records by year are shown in figure 1.

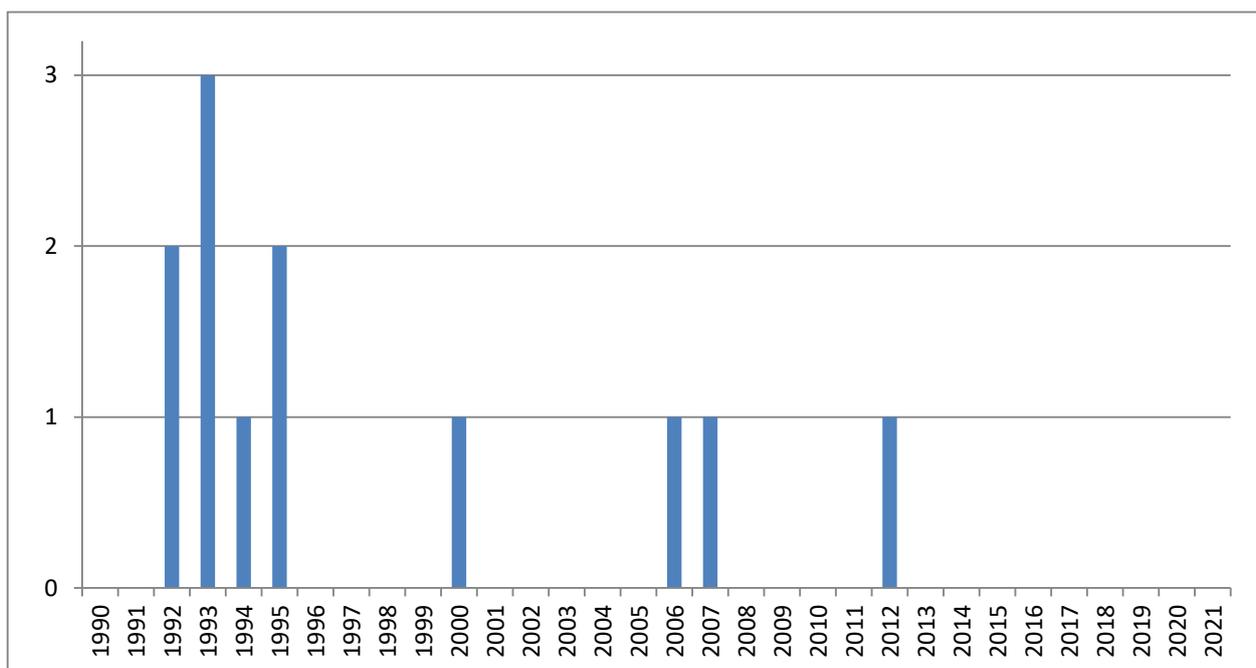


Figure 1: Tawny Pipit records at Folkestone and Hythe

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*, 1982) both since then have experienced considerably different fortunes.

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).

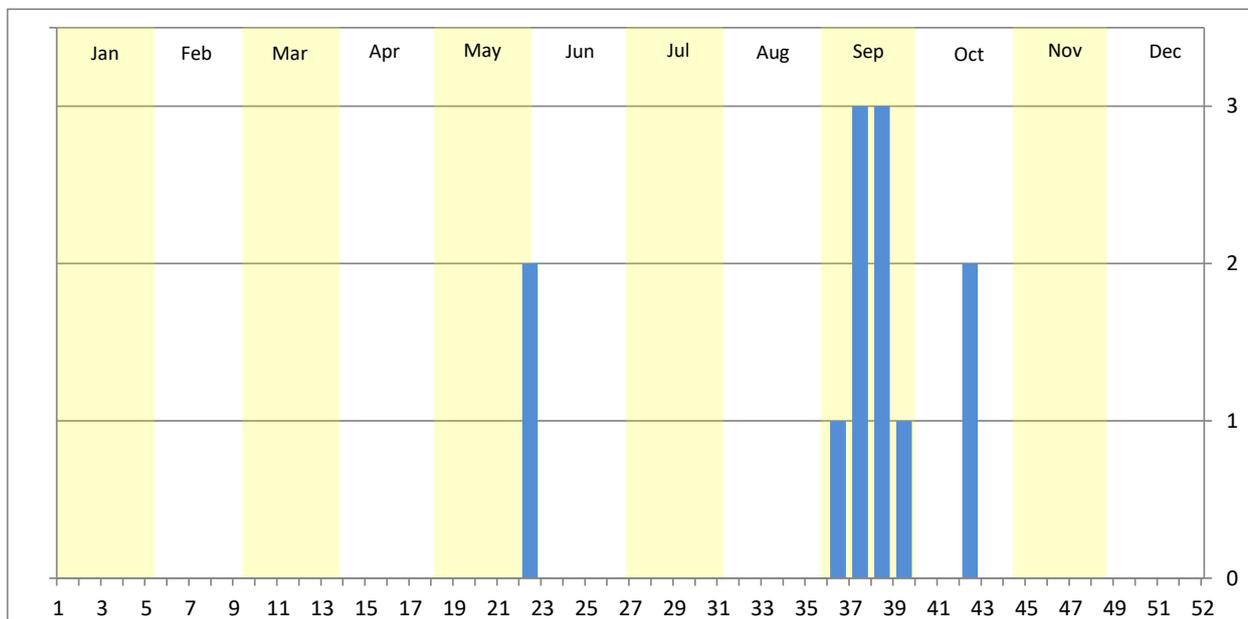


Figure 2: Tawny Pipit records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

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 Gun Site and one at the Café) and one in fields along Crete Road West.

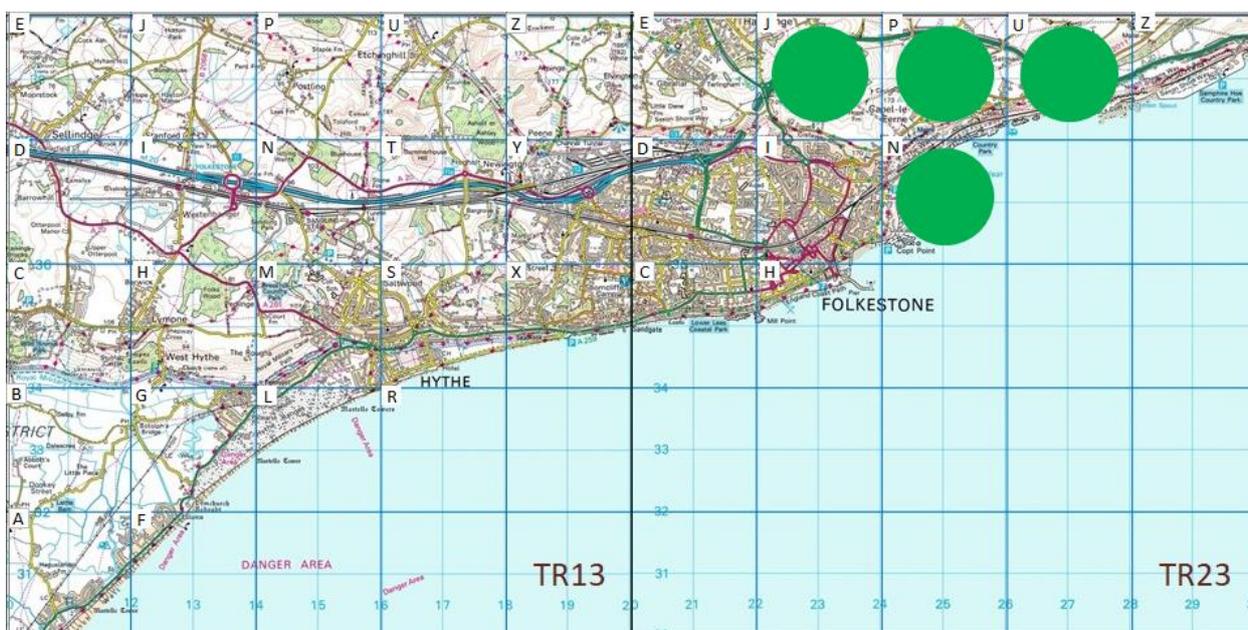


Figure 3: Distribution of all Tawny Pipit records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

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-le-Ferne (Gun Site), 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-le-Ferne (Gun Site), 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

BBRC statistics: <https://www.bbrc.org.uk/main-information/statistics> (accessed 2021)

Grant, P. J. & the Rarities Committee 1982. Rarities Committee news and announcements. *British Birds*, 75: 337-338

Holt, C., French, P. & the Rarities Committee 2019. Report on rare birds in Great Britain in 2018. *British Birds*, 112: 556-626

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Snow, D. & Perrins, C.M., 1998. *The Birds of the Western Palearctic*. Oxford University Press.

Acknowledgements

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