

Ortolan Bunting

Emberiza hortulana

Category A

Very rare vagrant.

3 records,
3 birds

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

It has a widespread but localised distribution across Europe and Asia eastwards across central Russia to the Baikal region. It is absent as a breeding species from Iceland, Britain and Ireland, and northern and western Fenno-Scandia, and has declined in range and numbers in the rest of north-west Europe. In France there was a major contraction of the breeding range between 1960 and 1990 by when it was confined to the southern half of the country, it has ceased to breed in the Netherlands and is close to extinction in Germany and Norway. It is a long-distance migrant, wintering in sub-Saharan Africa. The decline has been attributed mainly to changes in farming methods, notably the loss of hedgerows and a lessening crop diversity.

Kent status (KOS 2022):

It was once a virtually annual passage migrant to the coasts of Kent in autumn but is becoming rarer.

Kent (KOS) records to end 2020: 108

It was first recorded in Britain in Greater London a short time before 1776, but it was not until 1822 that the next was found on a boat off Yorkshire in May. It remained a very rare bird in the nineteenth century and the first definite Kentish example, one caught at Dover in September 1874 was the twelfth national record (Ticehurst 1909). It was recorded with increasing frequency during the twentieth century and the second county record, one shot at Dover Cliffs in September 1922, was the 179th for the country, whilst by the time Harrison (1953) added a third, at Fairfield in May 1946, there had been over 250 (Naylor 2021).

Taylor *et al.* (1981) oversaw a marked increase in the county during their review period (1952-76), with 20 records involving a total of 28 birds, four in spring and the remainder in autumn. This included the first local record: "a fine male seen perched on a chain-link fence in Cheriton, between the Polo Ground and the former golf course (between Fairway Avenue and Cornwallis Avenue)" by Paul Howe on the 6th May 1972.

This increase was reflected nationally, with an annual mean of 46 per annum in the 1970s, 58 per annum in the 1980s and peaked at 72 per annum in the 1990s, when the other two local records occurred: one seen in a stubble field to the east of the Lydden Spout Battery at Abbotscliffe on the 15th September 1996, with it or another seen in the same area six days later.

Nationally it has declined since the 1990s, no doubt linked to the decrease and retraction of the European population, and there were 42 per annum in the 2000s and 30 per annum in the 2010s (White & Kehoe 2022). In Kent a total of 26 birds had been logged in both the 1980s and 1990s, decreasing to just five in the 2000s and eight in the 2010s (KOS no date). It should be noted that these relate to sight records only and do include those logged by means of the recent development of nocturnal audio recording, "in order to maintain standardisation in recording across years" (White & Kehoe). The numbers involved in nocturnal migration may be significant, in Kent a total of nine have been sound-recorded since 2017, compared to just three sight records.

The records by year since 1985 are shown in figure 1.

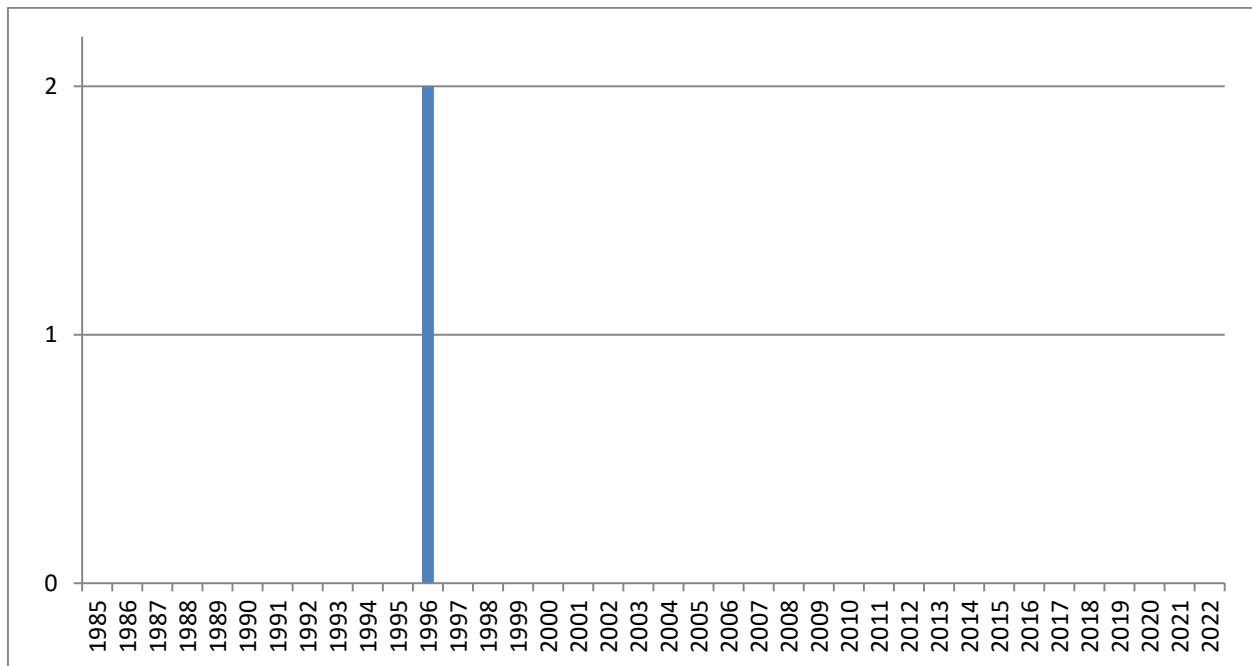


Figure 1: Ortolan Bunting records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

The records by week are given in figure 2.

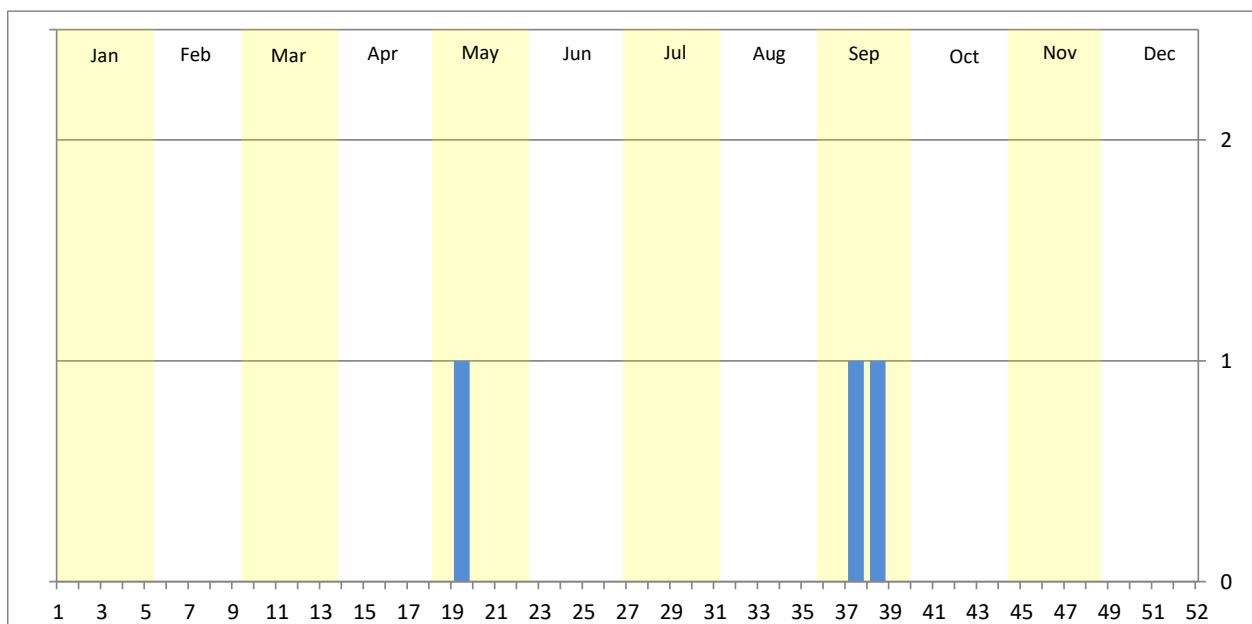


Figure 2: Ortolan Bunting records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the location of records by tetrad.



Figure 3: Distribution of all Ortolan Bunting records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The full list of records is as follows:

1972 Cheriton, male, 6th May (P. Howe)

1996 Abbotscliffe, one, 15th September (D. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts, C. G. Bradshaw *et al.*)

1996 Abbotscliffe, one, 21st September (D. A. Gibson, J. A. Gibson), possibly same as above

References

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Acknowledgements

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I am indebted to Andrew Henderson and Tim Hodge for providing access to the Kent Ornithological Society archives.