

# Montagu's Harrier

*Circus pygargus*

Category A

Rare migrant.

18 records,  
18 birds

*World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):*

Breeds mainly across middle latitude Europe, eastwards to southern Siberia and north-central Asia, but also south into Iberia, with western populations wintering in sub-Saharan Africa.

*Kent status (KOS 2022):*

It is a scarce passage migrant to the county, that has summered and bred in the past.



Montagu's Harrier with Kestrel 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, Canterbury and Rochester", but it was not included by Knight & Tolputt in their "List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood" (1871).

Vernon Dodd (1910) wrote a note in *British Birds* to state that "a Montagu's Harrier was shot on the 18<sup>th</sup> November, 1909, near Folkestone. Colonel Montagu said he had never known of a Montagu's Harrier in England later than October". Ticehurst however had noted that one had been shot at Staplehurst on the 10<sup>th</sup> November 1892, whilst Harrison (1953) noted a record in December and two in January and considered that these provided "the evidence of occasional wintering of this bird in mild seasons", but Taylor *et al.* (1981) warned 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.

Harrison had been able to note three breeding records in the 1940s but Taylor *et al.* only cited one unsuccessful attempt in 1952 and stated that it last summered in the county in 1963. During their review period (1952-76) there were on average, between four and five records each year, which included the first area record in 1958, when Roger Norman watched a second-year male 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) (Norman 2006, 2007).

Clements *et al.* (2015) noted an isolated instance where a single male paired with two females in north Kent in 1994 but found no evidence of breeding during the recent atlas period and concluded that the likelihood of recolonisation appeared slight. Nationally it is a very rare and declining breeding species in Britain, with Eaton *et al.* (2022) reporting that in 2020 "there was no confirmed breeding in the UK ... for the first time since 1975", and noting that "the future looks bleak for Montagu's Harriers in the UK".

The first modern record involved a male reported at Mill Point on about the 12<sup>th</sup> May 1991 and it occurred with some regularity over the next twenty years or so, with a further 16 sightings being logged up until 2013, but there have been no records since.

The records by year are shown in figure 1.

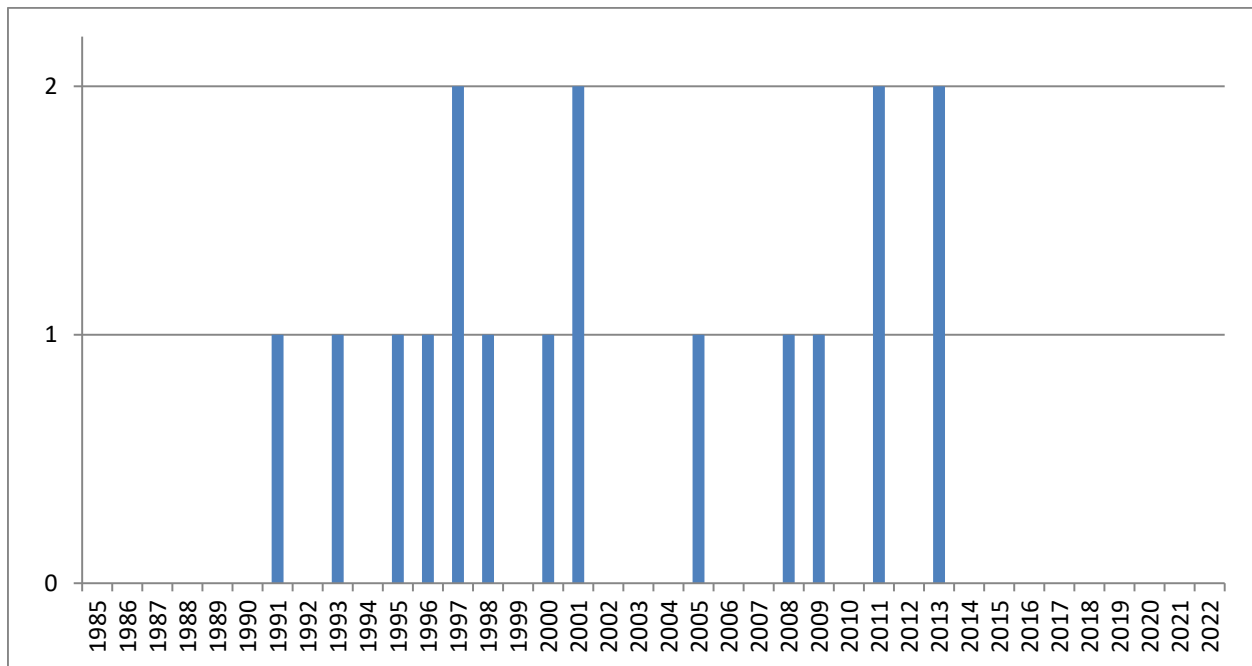


Figure 1: Montagu's Harrier records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

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

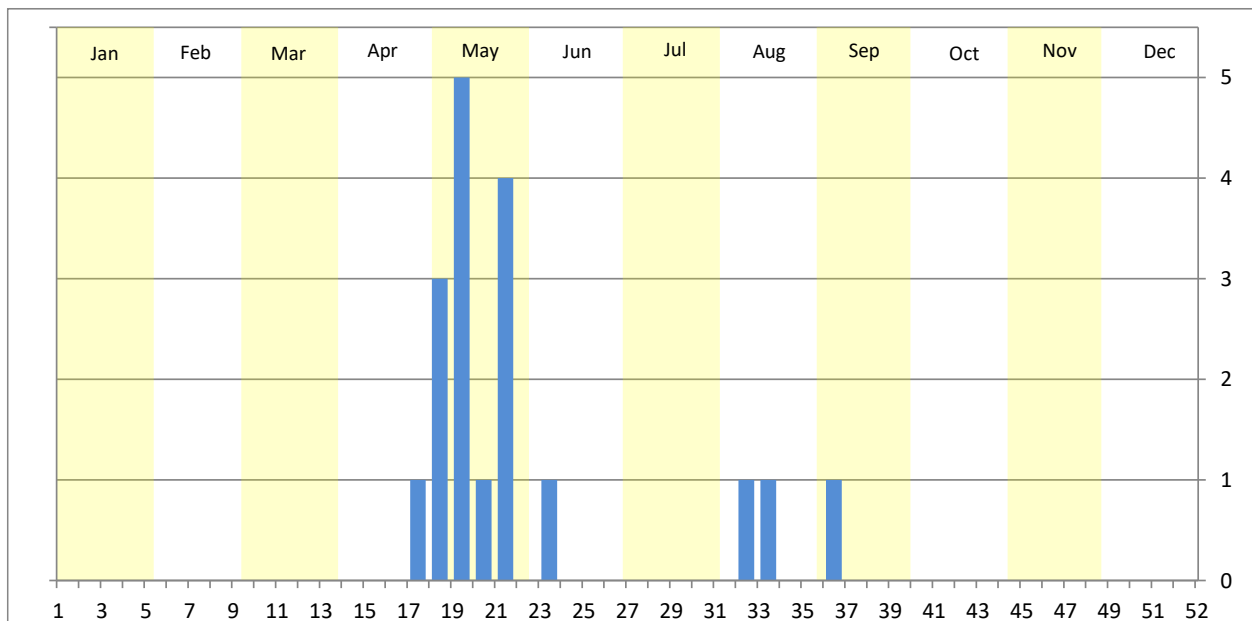


Figure 2: Montagu's Harrier records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the location of records 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.



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

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1958** Hythe Ranges, male flew north, then over Nickolls Quarry, 11<sup>th</sup> May (R. K. Norman)
- 1991** Mill Point, male on about 12<sup>th</sup> May (reported)
- 1993** Abbotscliffe, one flew south-west, 7<sup>th</sup> September (J. P. Siddle)
- 1995** Abbotscliffe, immature/female, 8<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> May, photographed (D. A. Gibson)
- 1996** Abbotscliffe, immature/female flew in off the sea, 3<sup>rd</sup> June (D. Belshaw)
- 1997** Capel-le-Ferne Café, immature/female flew east, 27<sup>th</sup> May (I. A. Roberts)
- 1997** Cheriton, one flew south-west, 12<sup>th</sup> August (D. A. Gibson)
- 1998** Capel-le-Ferne Café, female flew east, 19<sup>th</sup> May (D. A. Gibson)
- 2000** Abbotscliffe, immature/female flew in off the sea then north-west, 20<sup>th</sup> May (I. A. Roberts)
- 2001** Copt Point, one flew in off the sea, 5<sup>th</sup> May (I. A. Roberts)
- 2001** Capel-le-Ferne, immature/female flew west, 24<sup>th</sup> May (I. A. Roberts)
- 2005** Capel-le-Ferne Gun Site, male flew in off the sea, 9<sup>th</sup> May (I. A. Roberts)
- 2008** Samphire Hoe, immature/female male flew east, 9<sup>th</sup> May (I. A. Roberts)
- 2009** Folkestone, female flew east, 25<sup>th</sup> May (P. Howe)
- 2011** Copt Point, male in off the sea, 27<sup>th</sup> April (I. A. Roberts)
- 2011** Samphire Hoe, juvenile flew west, 16<sup>th</sup> August, photographed (P. Smith)
- 2013** Samphire Hoe, immature/female flew in off the sea, then north-west, 30<sup>th</sup> April (I. A. Roberts)
- 2013** Cheriton, immature/female flew north-west, 30<sup>th</sup> April (P. Howe), presumed same as above
- 2013** Princes Parade, male flew in off the sea, 2<sup>nd</sup> May (P. Howe)

## 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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Montagu's Harrier at Abbotscliffe (Dale Gibson)