

Bluethroat

Luscinia svecica

Category A

Very rare vagrant.

5 records,
5 birds

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

The south-western races, *cyaneacula* (breeding in Spain and central Europe, eastwards from Belgium and eastern France) and *namnetum* (breeding in western France), winter in Africa, and return northwards early in spring, from late February or early March. The nominate form (breeding in Scandinavia eastwards across northern Russia), winters patchily right across the Mediterranean and over the entire African winter range of the species, and heads north somewhat later, into May. Other races extend east across central and northern Asia to north-east Siberia, western China and Alaska.



Bluethroat at Samphire Hoe (Rob Rackliffe)

Kent status (KOS 2022):

It is a rare spring and autumn passage migrant.

Kent (KOS) records to end 2020: 204

Ticehurst (1909) wrote that it was “formerly regarded as one of the rarest of visitors” to Britain but “recent experience has shown that the Bluethroat is in reality an annual visitor in varying numbers on its autumn migration from Scandinavia. This more especially applies to the east coast of England from Northumberland to Norfolk”, whereas to the south “its visits would appear to be of a more irregular character”, although he speculated that it might be under-recorded in Kent where he was only able to document about ten county records. Harrison (1953) added a further 14 county records and concluded that the white-spotted form “would appear to be far less numerous and regular in its appearance than the Scandinavian race”, with just two having been definitely identified in Kent.

Taylor *et al.* (1981) noted 17 spring records during their review period (1952-76) which fell into two distinct periods, with six between the 1st and 15th April and ten between the 16th and 29th May, with the other on the 5th May. Three of the April birds (and the one on the 5th May) were males and all of these were of the white-spotted form, whilst all the males in May were of the red-spotted form.

Taylor *et al.* also noted 97 autumn records, noting that “arrivals were often associated with falls of Scandinavian migrants during east winds” which suggested that the red-spotted form was typically involved and indeed only three autumn records were identified as the white-spotted form, although females and immatures cannot be assigned to a form. It was during this period that the first local record occurred: a female or immature seen by David Musson at Folkestone on the 22nd September 1959. Dennis Batchelor recalled seeing a Bluethroat at Abbotscliffe in the 1950s or 1960s (pers. comm.) which might relate to this record, or which could have been an additional sighting.

White & Kehoe (2022) reported that migrant numbers in Britain increased from a mean of 92 per annum in the 1970s to a peak of 186 per annum in the 1980s, before declining to 116 per annum in the 1990s, 84 in the 2000s and 75 in the 2010s. They confirmed that the white-spotted form typically arrives early in the spring (in March and April), with the red-spotted form arriving from late May into June.

The first modern record occurred almost 37 years after the first, when Chris Bradshaw found a female at Abbotscliffe on the 13th April 1996 and there have been three subsequent sightings: a singing male heard and seen briefly at Nickolls Quarry by Roger Norman on the 17th March 2002 and two singles found by Paul Holt at Samphire Hoe, a female on the 27th March 2013 and a male on the 24th March 2020.

The most recent male was confirmed as being of the white-spotted form and whilst the first male was only seen briefly, the observer considered that it “was almost certainly of this race” (Norman 2007). In view of the arrival dates of the two females, both seem very likely to also have been of this form and the 2013 bird was part of exceptional influx of into southern England in late March and early April, which involved 14 birds (12 which were white-spotted males, with just two females).

The records since 1985 are shown in figure 1.

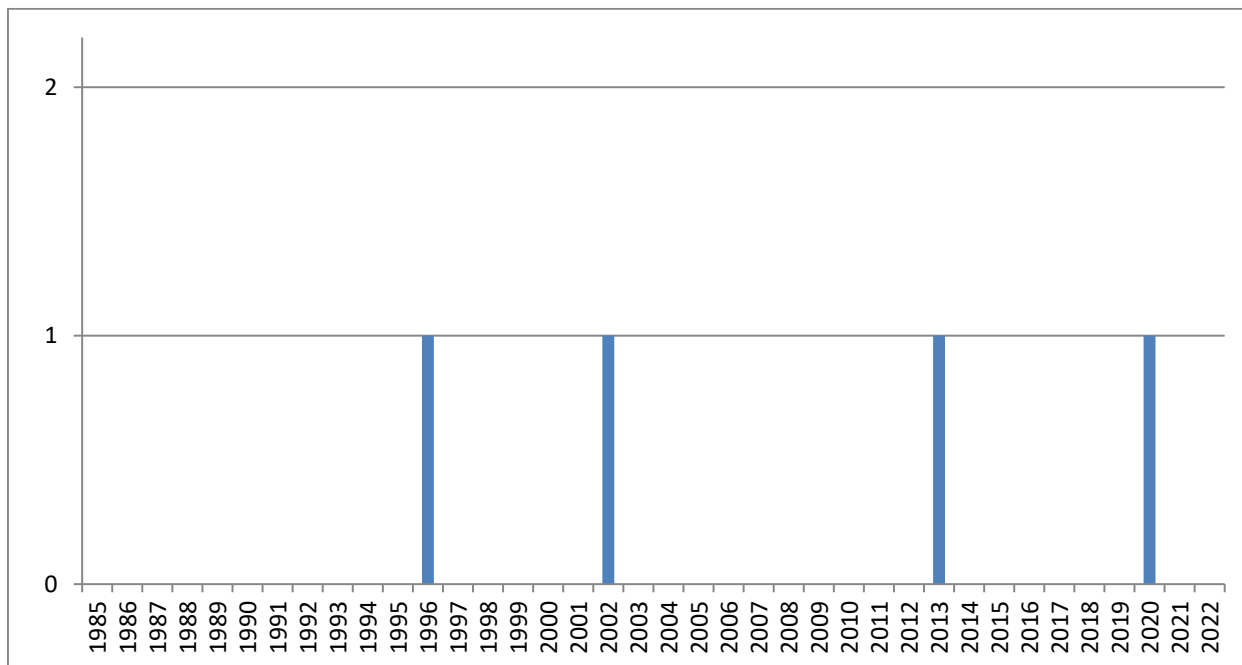


Figure 1: Bluethroat records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

The records by week are given in figure 2.

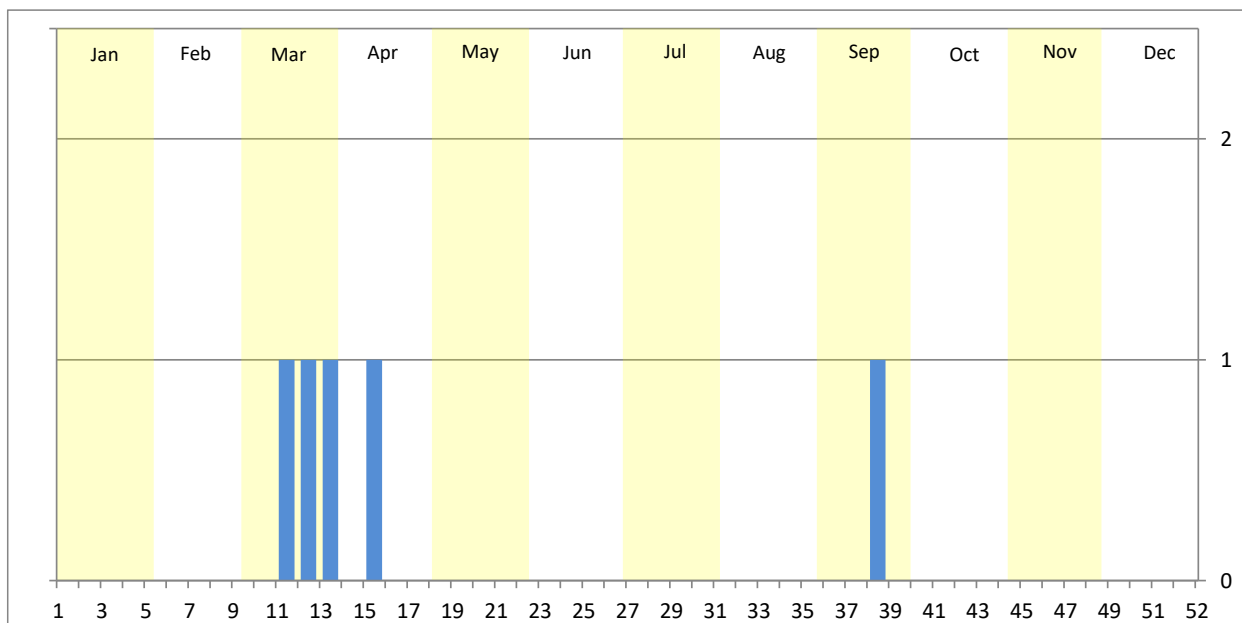


Figure 2: Bluethroat records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the location of records by tetrad.

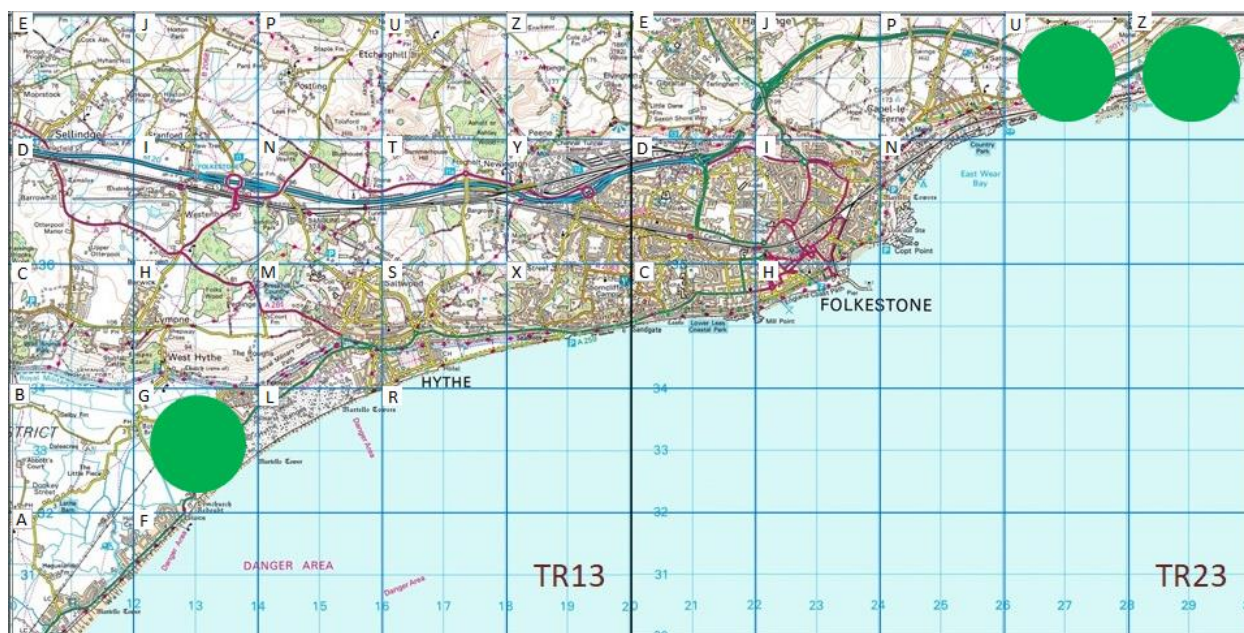


Figure 3: Distribution of all Bluethroat records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad



Bluethroat at Abbotscliffe (Mike Gould)



Bluethroat at Samphire Hoe (Tim Gutsell)



Bluethroat at Samphire Hoe (Paul Holt)



Bluethroat at Samphire Hoe (Paul Holt)

The full list of records is as follows:

1959 Folkestone, immature/female, 22nd September (D. F. Musson)

1996 Abbotscliffe, female, 13th to 14th April, photographed (C. G. Bradshaw, A. J. Sheppard, M. May *et al*)

2002 Nickolls Quarry, male, 17th March (R. K. Norman)

2013 Samphire Hoe, female, 27th March (P. Holt *et al*), presumed same 29th March to 3rd April (I. A. Roberts *et al*), photographed

2020 Samphire Hoe, male, 24th March (P. Holt), photographed



Bluethroat at Samphire Hoe (Paul Rowe)

References

Harrison, J. M. 1953. *The Birds of Kent*. Witherby, London.

Kent Ornithological Society (KOS) 1953-2022. *Kent Bird Reports*. Kent Ornithological Society.

Norman, R. K. 2007. The Birds of Palmarsh Gravel Pit. <https://folkestonebirds.com/where-to-watch> (see "Further Information" section).

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

Taylor, D., Davenport, D. & Flegg, J. 1981. *Birds of Kent*. Kent Ornithological Society.

Ticehurst, N. F. 1909. *A History of the Birds of Kent*. Witherby, London.

White, S. & Kehoe, C. 2022. Report on scarce migrant birds in Britain in 2020. *British Birds* 115: 427-451.

Acknowledgements

The tetrad map images were produced from the Ordnance Survey [Get-a-map service](#) and are reproduced with kind permission of [Ordnance Survey](#).

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