

## Shore Lark

*Eremophila alpestris*

Category A

Rare passage migrant.

23 records,  
57 birds

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

Breeds in high latitudes across Fenno-Scandia and Russia or high altitudes in south-east Europe, and the highly discontinuous distribution continues eastwards along the north Siberian coast and from Iran east to 120°E. The European arctic and subarctic population is wholly migratory, wintering on the coasts of the southern North Sea and western Baltic, and inland in north-central and eastern Europe. Regular wintering in eastern Britain dates from about 1870 and a comparable nineteenth century increase occurred on the German side of the North Sea, but it is not clear whether this was due to a change in the breeding range or density in Scandinavia, or an altered migration pattern



Shore Lark at Abbotscliffe (Ian Roberts)

*Kent status (KOS 2022):*

It is a passage migrant and winter visitor to the county, usually in small numbers.

Ticehurst (1909) wrote that “the Shore Lark is one of those species that has undoubtedly become more numerous as a visitor to the British Isles during the last half century”. He continued to note that “it is now in reality an annual winter visitor to the county, and particularly to the coast between Folkestone and Margate. It has often been obtained by bird-catchers near the former town”.

Of the actual specimens that Ticehurst lists, he noted that “the Folkestone Museum ... contains a female, caught on the Warren between that town and Dover”. This specimen presumably formed the basis for its inclusion in Knight & Tolputt’s “List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood” (1871).

In contrast to the increase noted by Ticehurst, Harrison (1953) suggested that there was a decrease during the first half of the twentieth century, considering it irregular in its occurrences. Taylor *et al.* (1981) wrote that “the status of the Shore Lark appears to have changed comparatively little” during their review period (1952-76), although they did note some exceptional influxes in the early 1970s. It was during their review period that the first dated local records occurred, when Geoffrey Munns saw one at very close range from a car at Hythe on the 30<sup>th</sup> January 1963 and another at the western end of Hythe Ranges on the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1968 (Norman 2006).

However, almost 30 years elapsed before the Hythe area produced the next area record, when one was found by Ian Roberts on the golf course by the Hotel Imperial on the 17<sup>th</sup> November 1996, and yet just two years later an arrival on an unprecedented scale was noted, with fifteen records totalling some 50 individuals from the 6<sup>th</sup> October into December 1998. The bulk of the apparent passage occurred in October and, apart from five at Samphire Hoe, all were at Abbotscliffe. There appeared to be a considerable turnover of birds with a number seen flying over, and peak day counts of four on the 12<sup>th</sup> October, six the next day, eight on the 15<sup>th</sup> October, 11 on the 18<sup>th</sup> October and 7 on the 1<sup>st</sup> November. This was part of a larger influx to the east coast of England in general, which included a count of over 200 at one site in Norfolk, and the heaviest autumn passage ever recorded in Kent, with probably over 150 individuals involved, around a third of which were logged locally.

There have been only three subsequent records, two at Abbotscliffe in October 2010 (singles on the 10<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> and on the 24<sup>th</sup>) and one near the Dymchurch Redoubt in the first week of November 2015.

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

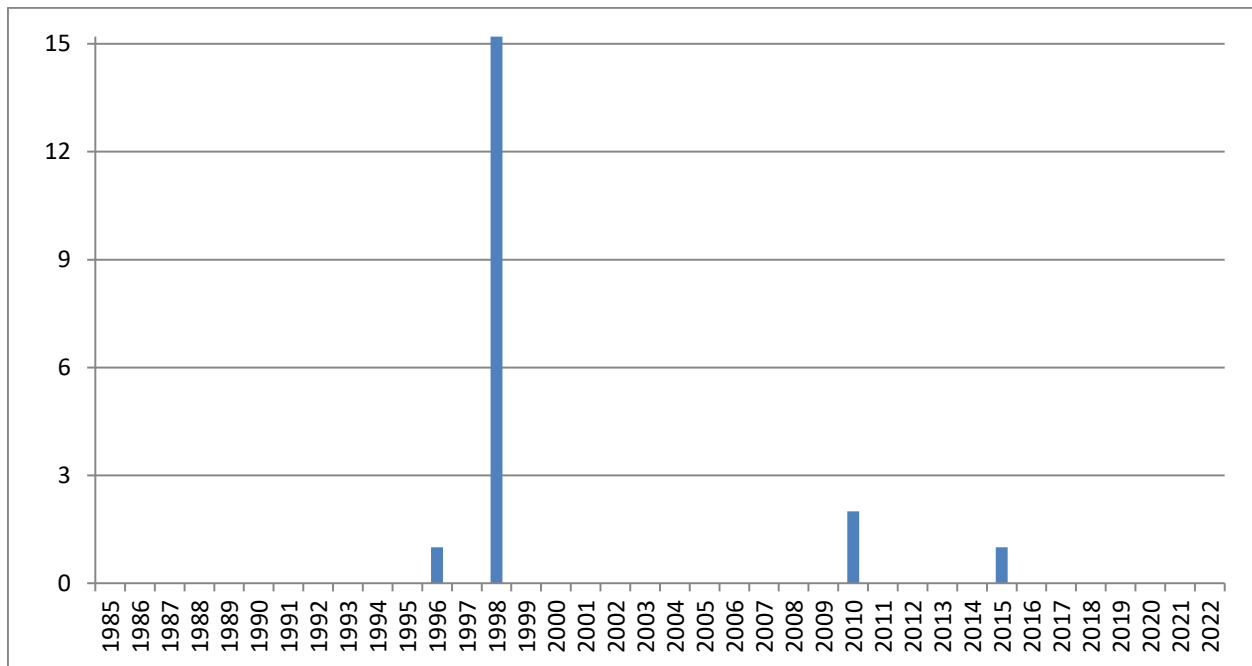


Figure 1: Shore Lark records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

The records by week are given in figure 2. Most records have occurred in the period from 6<sup>th</sup> October (week 40) to 17<sup>th</sup> November (week 46), with two records in December and one in January.

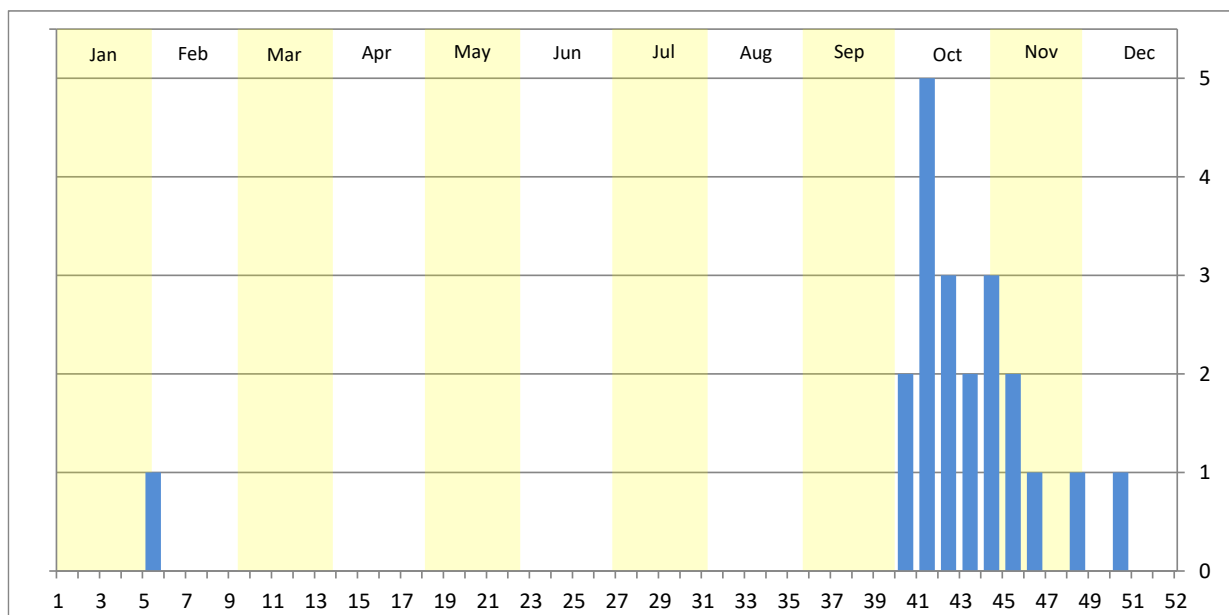


Figure 2: Shore Lark records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Figure 3 shows the location of records by tetrad.



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

The full list of records is as follows:

- <1909 Folkestone Warren, one (per N. Ticehurst)
- 1963 Hythe, one, 30<sup>th</sup> January (G. F. A. Munns)
- 1968 Hythe Ranges, one, 9<sup>th</sup> November (G. F. A. Munns)
- 1996 Hythe, one, 17<sup>th</sup> November (I. A. Roberts, D. A. Gibson)
- 1998 Abbotscliffe, one on cliff near gully, 6<sup>th</sup> October (D. A. Gibson)
- 1998 Abbotscliffe, one in gully, 7<sup>th</sup> October (D. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts, P. Lightman)
- 1998 Abbotscliffe, one, 9<sup>th</sup> October (I. A. Roberts)
- 1998 Abbotscliffe, three, 10<sup>th</sup> October (D. A. Gibson, J. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)
- 1998 Abbotscliffe, four, 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> October (D. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)
- 1998 Abbotscliffe, two additional birds, 13<sup>th</sup> October (D. A. Gibson)
- 1998 Abbotscliffe, eight flew in/west, 15<sup>th</sup> October (I. A. Roberts)
- 1998 Abbotscliffe, 11, five in gully field and six flew west, 18<sup>th</sup> October (D. A. Gibson, J. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)
- 1998 Abbotscliffe, two flew west, 19<sup>th</sup> October (I. A. Roberts)
- 1998 Abbotscliffe, two in gully field, 24<sup>th</sup> October (I. A. Roberts)
- 1998 Abbotscliffe, one flew west, 29<sup>th</sup> October (D. A. Gibson)
- 1998 Abbotscliffe, seven, two in field and five flew east, 1<sup>st</sup> November (I. A. Roberts, J. A. Gibson)
- 1998 Samphire Hoe, one, 9<sup>th</sup> November (D. E. Smith)
- 1998 Samphire Hoe, additional two reported in November (Reported)
- 1998 Abbotscliffe, two in gully field, 2<sup>nd</sup> to about mid-December (D. A. Gibson)
- 1998 Samphire Hoe, two, 12<sup>th</sup> December (Reported)
- 2010 Abbotscliffe, one in gully, 10<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> October, possibly since the 9<sup>th</sup>, photographed (I. A. Roberts, M. Kennett, P. Edmondson)
- 2010 Abbotscliffe, one at eastern end, 24<sup>th</sup> October (I. A. Roberts, D. A. Gibson)
- 2015 Near Dymchurch Redoubt, one, first week of November, photographed (A. J. South)

### 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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Shore Lark at Abbotscliffe (Ian Roberts)



Shore Larks at Abbotscliffe (Dale Gibson)



Shore Lark near Dymchurch Redoubt (Andrew South)