

Hen Harrier

Circus cyaneus

Category A

Scarce migrant and winter visitor.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998, Eaton et al. 2022):

Breeds quite widely across northern Europe, south to northern Spain, including upland Britain. The more northern populations are migratory, partially or locally resident elsewhere. It is the least migratory harrier, with few leaving Europe for the winter. An estimated 575 pairs nest in Britain but there has been a 29% decrease in the population over the last 12 years. The Hen Harrier is unfortunately one of the most persecuted of Britain's birds.



Hen Harrier at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)

Kent status (KOS 2022):

It is a regular but declining passage migrant and winter visitor to the county.

Ticehurst (1909) noted that it nested in Kent up to the last half of the nineteenth century, when it was an irregular and infrequent autumn and winter visitor. Although breeding had long since ceased, Taylor *et al.* (1981) reported an increase in autumn and winter numbers from the mid-twentieth century and considered it to be a regular passage migrant and almost common winter visitor in suitable areas. It has since undergone a reversal of fortune to its current status.

The first area record was seen by John Perrot at Botolph's Bridge on the 2nd April 1955 but there were no further sightings until Roger Norman saw one at Nickolls Quarry on the 24th January 1979 (Norman 2007). Sightings at Copt Point on three dates in January 1983 possibly involved the same individual, whilst another was noted there on the 21st October 1984 and one was seen at West Hythe on the 27th February 1985.

After these three records in consecutive years no more were noted until 1992, but it has occurred fairly regularly since then, with a further 48 in the 31 years to 2022 (an average of 1.5 per year), as shown in figure 1. It has been erratic in its appearances though with three 'blank' years from 1999 to 2001 followed by a peak of four sightings in 2002. It has now been recorded in the most recent 12 consecutive years. There has been a total of 53 records (of 53 birds, as all have related to single individuals) to date.

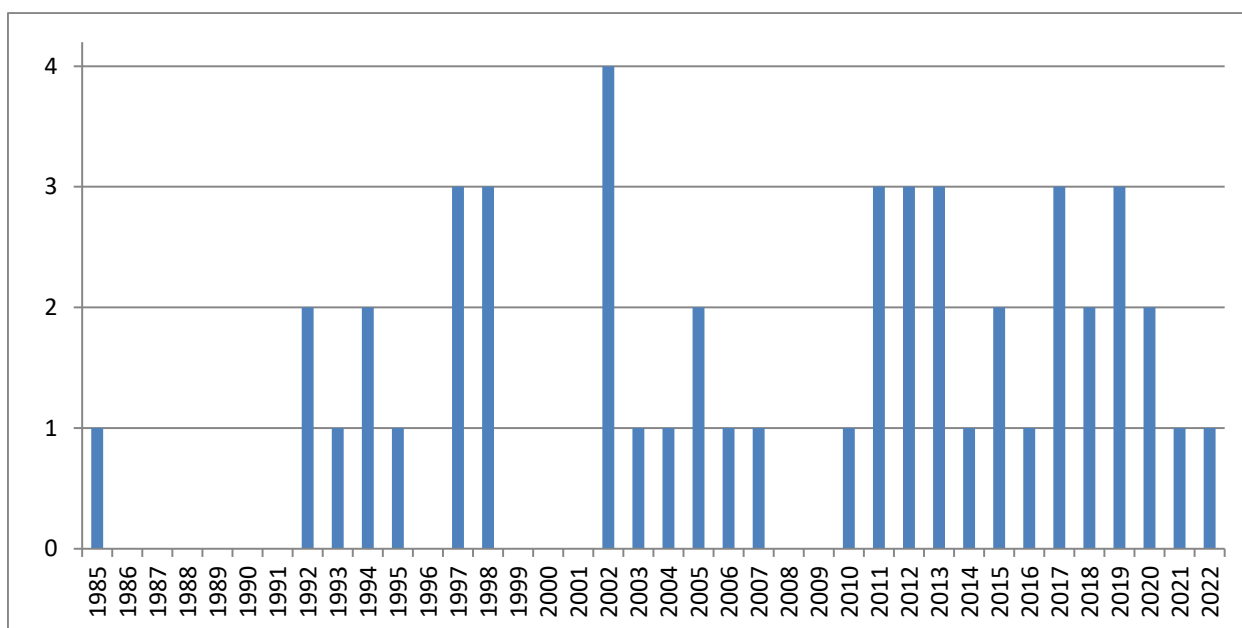


Figure 1: Hen Harrier records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

Figure 2 shows the arrival dates by week. The earliest autumn arrival was on 1st September (2020), with four further records in September and 21 in October/November. These presumably relate mostly to migrant birds as there have been just three in December. The first week of January has produced three, with three others in that month, four in February and two in March, some of which, though not all, were associated with periods of severe weather.

Eight spring migrants have been seen in April, with three particularly late birds seen in late May (1997), 3rd June (2013) and 11th June (2011).

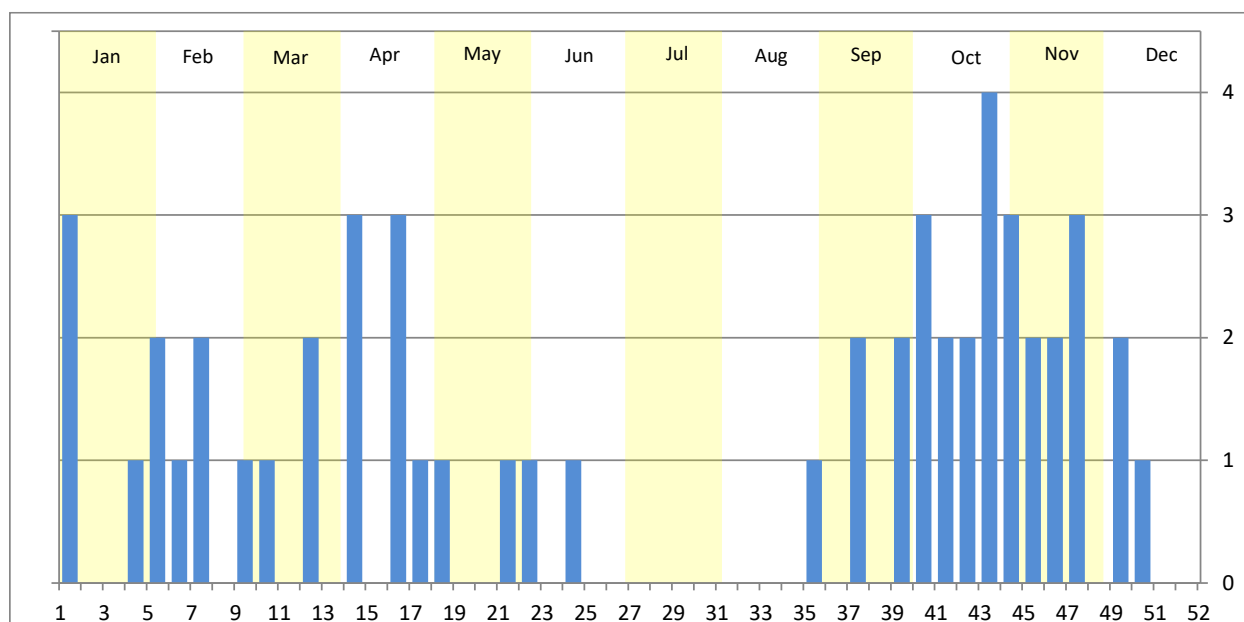


Figure 2: Hen Harrier records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

The Hen Harrier has been recorded from 14 tetrads (45%). Sightings have been fairly evenly divided between the cliffs from Copt Point to Samphire Hoe (24) and the Botolph's Bridge/Nickolls Quarry/West Hythe area (18), with others seen over Cheriton/Folkestone (5), Beachborough Lakes (2), Saltwood (2), Horton Priory and Hythe. Figure 3 shows the location of records by tetrad.



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

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1955** Botolph's Bridge, one, 2nd April (J. Perrot)
1979 Nickolls Quarry, immature/female, 24th January (R. K. Norman)
1983 Copt Point, immature/female, 4th, 15th and 18th January, presumed to be same individual (R. Hollingsworth)
1984 Copt Point, immature male, 21st October (R. Hollingsworth)
1985 West Hythe, male, 27th February (C. Lock)
1992 Nickolls Quarry, immature/female, 9th February (I. A. Roberts)
1992 Nickolls Quarry, immature/female, 29th April (R. K. Norman)
1993 Abbotscliffe, one flew in off the sea, 22nd October (D. A. Gibson)
1994 Abbotscliffe, male flew west, 2nd April (I. A. Roberts)
1994 Folkestone, male flew west, 8th October (D. A. Gibson)
1995 Copt Point, immature/female flew west, 21st November (D. A. Gibson)
1997 Cheriton, immature/female flew north-east, 18th February (D. A. Gibson)
1997 Cheriton, immature/female flew north, 16th April (D. A. Gibson)
1997 Abbotscliffe, immature/female flew out to sea, 26th May (D. A. Gibson, R. Lee, I. A. Roberts)
1998 Abbotscliffe, male flew in off the sea at 08:35, 4th October (D. A. Gibson, J. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)
1998 Capel-le-Ferne Gun Site, male flew in off the sea at 13:15, 4th October (D. A. Gibson, J. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)
1998 Folkestone Warren, immature/female, 19th November (reported)
2002 Botolph's Bridge, one, 2nd January (I. A. Roberts)
2002 Abbotscliffe, one flew west, 30th October (I. A. Roberts)
2002 Nickolls Quarry, male, 25th November (I. A. Roberts)
2002 Botolph's Bridge, one, 9th December (I. A. Roberts)
2003 Nickolls Quarry, immature/female, 18th February (I. A. Roberts)
2004 Abbotscliffe, male flew north, 9th October (I. A. Roberts)
2005 Botolph's Bridge, one flew south west over Lower Wall Road, 31st January (C. Philpott)
2005 Samphire Hoe, immature/female, 16th to 17th November, also at Abbotscliffe on the 18th (P. Holt, I. A. Roberts)
2006 Abbotscliffe, male flew in off the sea, 4th November (I. A. Roberts)
2007 Chesterfield Wood (Saltwood), immature/female flew east, 29th September (I. A. Roberts)
2010 Nickolls Quarry, immature/female, 2nd January (G. Spencer, N. Spencer)
2011 Botolph's Bridge, male, 11th June, photographed (B. Harper)
2011 Saltwood, one flew north, 22nd October (P. Howe)
2011 Botolph's Bridge, immature/female, 6th November (M. Kennett)
2012 Hougham Valley, immature/female flew east then west, 15th April (M. Kennett)
2012 Abbotscliffe, one flew out to sea, 2nd October (D. A. Gibson)
2012 Botolph's Bridge, male, 15th December (B. Harper, M. Harper, I. Roberts)
2013 Folkestone, male, flew north, 8th April (D. A. Gibson)
2013 Samphire Hoe, one flew west, 2nd June (I. A. Roberts)
2013 Samphire Hoe, male flew in off the sea, 11th November (L. Collins)
2014 Samphire Hoe, one flew west, 15th October (D. E. Smith)
2015 Lower Wall, West Hythe, male, 21st March (B. Findlay)
2015 Abbotscliffe, immature/female flew north, 16th October (M. Varley)
2016 Beachborough Lakes, male flew west, 27th September (S. Tomlinson)
2017 Capel-le-Ferne, female, 29th January (D. Richards)
2017 Abbotscliffe, immature/female flew in off the sea, 14th September (M. Varley)
2017 Hythe, immature/female flew in off the sea, 14th September (S. McMinn)
2018 Botolph's Bridge, female, 25th March, photographed (B. Harper)
2018 Beachborough Lakes, one flew south, 14th November, photographed (S. Tomlinson)
2019 Botolph's Bridge, immature/female, 27th April, photographed (B. Harper)
2019 Samphire Hoe, immature/female, 31st October (M. Varley)
2019 Horton Priory, immature/female flew south, 7th December (I. A. Roberts)
2020 Abbotscliffe, immature/female, 1st September (M. D. Kennett)
2020 Copt Point, male flew in off the sea, 22nd October (D. A. Gibson)
2021 Botolph's Bridge, male flew east, 8th March (A. Griffin)
2022 Mill Point, immature/female flew east, 22nd April (I. A. Roberts)

References

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Hen Harrier at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)



Hen Harrier at Beachborough (Steve Tomlinson)



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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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