

## The Way Ahead – part 2 by Nigel Jarman

Back in 1999, fellow Bockhill birder, Brendan Ryan produced his top 10 potential twitches for the coming year(s) for Geoff Burton's "Bulletin of the Kent Lister's Club" (for those of you with only short-term memory retention, this was a two-volume work based on the glory years of Kent birding between 1997 and 1999). This seminal work has now joined the ranks of other cyber-based information, and the Kent Listers page is now found on the KOS website at: <https://bit.ly/3nRYvF5>

The aim of this short article is two-fold: to see how successful Brendan was in his predictions and suggest my own top 10 for the rest of the decade i.e. up to 2030.

To remind you, Brendan's 10 were:

**Pied-billed Grebe** – Brendan scored straight away with one at Singleton Lake, Ashford from 21 Feb to 23 Mar 1999. Still the only Kent record.

**Little Bittern** – five subsequent records: the well-twitched bird at Stodmarsh 1 – 6 Jun 1999, Oare Marshes 28 Jun 2000, a dead individual at Hoo 19 Jul 2002, a rather more obliging bird at Dungeness 11 – 18 May 2003 (all males); with a female at Sevenoaks WR 15 Sep 2012.

**Lesser Scaup** – a first winter male at Scotney entertained both Kent and Sussex listers (being the first for both counties) from 17 Nov 2004 to 14 Mar 2005. It subsequently turned up at Bough Beech on 16 Mar 2005.

**Surf Scoter** – five records, all fly-bys, 20 Apr 1999 at Dungeness, three in 2000: Dungeness on 24 May, North Foreland on 21 Oct and Dungeness again on 13 Dec, plus another at Dungeness 2 May 2017. They are obviously out there somewhere...

**Citrine Wagtail** – the Sandwich female was finally accepted, bringing the score to two: Sandwich Bay 8 – 10 May and Bough Beech 29 May, both 1990. Two subsequent records – another female at Sandwich Bay 21 May 2009 and a 1<sup>st</sup> wint. at Swalecliffe 2 Oct 2017.

**Red-throated Pipit** – surprisingly only two more records: one at Motney Hill on 8 Nov 1999 and a summer plumaged bird at Bockhill on 4 May 2006.

**River Warbler** – still no Kent records, but with nearly 20 in the UK since 1999 and one at Beachy Head 30 May 2008 and a singing bird in Norfolk 2-16 July 2010, there must be a chance.

**Black-throated Thrush** – the May 1993 Denge Marsh bird remains the only record.

**Red-eyed Vireo** – still only the two Dungeness records of 84 and 86.

**Little Bunting** – five records since 1999: 14 Oct 2001 at Bockhill, 16 Nov 2003 at Littlestone, 23 Apr 2008 at Dungeness – all too brief to be twitchable. A bird at Sandwich Bay 30 Apr-5 May 2012 allowed many listers to add it to their lists, plus another briefly at Oare 28 Nov 2013.

So, Brendan scored 4 out of 10 (Pied-billed Grebe, Little Bittern, Lesser Scaup and Little Bunting) in terms of twitchable birds that we could add to our Kent lists. To be fair, three other species did put in an appearance (Surf Scoter, Citrine Wagtail and Red-throated Pipit) but decided they didn't want anyone but the finders to see them.

During the intervening years we have all added some great, and surprising species, to our Kent lists, but as ever, there is always that talk of "I still need..." and "there hasn't been a...for a while"; so, what are my predictions?

**Little Swift** – no Kent records. There have now been 26 (up to 2020) UK records. This species is slowly extending its range northwards, perhaps as a result of climate change. The nearest breeding population is in southern Spain and spring overshoots between April and June account for 19 of the records, spread throughout the UK, so Kent's turn must be soon.

BBRC categorises them as "Rare, about one about every 1-2 years".

**Roller** – Five Kent records since 1962, the last one a fly-through at Worth Marshes 12 May 2014. With over 127 modern records it can only be a matter of time, although perhaps the lack of suitable heathland habitat in Kent is holding us back compared to say Norfolk and Suffolk with 9 and 6 records respectively, accounting for 15% of the records?

BBRC category: "About 1-2 per year; stable".

[**Crag Martin** – I did have this on my original hand-scrawled list, but will take it out on the basis of the Kingsdown Nov-Dec 2020 bird].

**Buff-bellied Pipit** – no Kent records. This is a species in many rarity-hunter's sights and a particular favourite of mine, although recent records from inland reservoirs (where Rock and/or Water Pipits get immediate scrutiny) may provide Kent's first, rather than a coastal location which is the preferred habitat in the Northern Isles.

BBRC category: "About 1-2 per year; recent increase". A total of 52 (2020) so far in the UK, although with records in Lincolnshire Dec 2005, Oxfordfordshire Oct 2007, London Dec 2012 and Cheshire Dec 2013, this bird can turn up anywhere.

**Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin** – one Kent record at The Wicks 12 Sep 1951. With the recent events in Norfolk in 2020 and Cornwall in 2021...who knows? Not very likely; but a species we would all like to see.

BBRC category: "Extremely rare, last in 1972 & 1980". A total of seven so far.

**Pied Wheatear** – three Kent records, the last one at Sheerness 23 Oct 1994 (the only twitchable individual). For some reason Kent doesn't seem to do very well for rare Wheatears, apart from Deserts of course and a gettable Pied would certainly please those that weren't privy to the gen on the Reculver or Foreness birds of 86 and 87, or available the afternoon of 23 Oct 94.

BBRC category: "About 2-3 per year; stable". A total of 83.

**Lanceolated Warbler** – no Kent records. The key stat is the number that have occurred in England, which is only 14, including during the 1990's 10 records away from Shetland, with three from Bardsey and seven on the east coast from Northumberland to Norfolk. However, true to form from 2000 to 2007, all but one of the 33 recorded were on the Northern Isles, with Scilly claiming its long overdue first in Sep 2002.

BBRC category: "About 4 per year; stable". 160 modern records, most of which have obviously been on the Northern Isles, particularly Shetland and Fair Isle.

**Syke's Warbler** – no Kent records. With 19 records now and birders becoming more familiar with the field characteristics of this split from Booted Warbler (of which Kent has had nine) and the most recent record from Norfolk in 2021, there must be hope that the next one could be in Kent.

BBRC category: "Rare, about one every two years".

**“North” Eastern Crowned Warbler** – no Kent records. With only four records, this one is a bit of a long-shot, but who doesn't like a Phyllosc? The three twitchable birds have all been in the NE, hence the addition to the name – Durham Oct 2009, and Cleveland Oct 2013 and Yorkshire Oct 2016. The other involved a bird trapped in Hertfordshire. There was also one at Katwijk, Holland Oct 2007. Interestingly, the first two records were both originally identified as Yellow-browed Warblers.

**Surf Scoter** – The BB Report on scarce migrant birds has the 1990-2019 trend as “stable”, so eventually this species should fall. The only problem with finding a bird that could be twitchable is the reduced number of Common Scoter, and particularly flocks, that winter off the Kent coast. The Rye Bay flock drifting to Dungeness is the best bet. A number of birds have turned up on reservoirs so Bough Beech might produce the goods one day.

**Red-eyed Vireo** – another from Brendan's list which surely must fall? And finally put to rest that 1984 Dungeness individual suppressed for a week on the RSPB reserve! Could that happen now?

BBRC category: “About 3-4 per year; stable”. There have now been 160 (up to 2020)

As part of the research for this note, I have looked at a lot of county lists and it is interesting to see what has, or hasn't, occurred; but that can wait for another article....

Nigel Jarman  
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