KOS News

The Newsletter of the Kent Ornithological Society

Number 534 September 2021

Fledgling Cetti's Warbler by Terry Laws

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Editorial

September has arrived, full of the promise of autumn passage and the possibility of something unusual! Even without the heart-stoppers there is something magical about this time of year as our summer visitors pack up and start the journey south. Locally there have been good numbers of Wheatears, Whinchats and even a couple of showy Redstarts, a species which is adept at the unobtrusive. Needless to say, I have seen none of these, but this morning there was a Chiffchaff calling in the gloom as I went to open my chicken house, the first so far this autumn. Alongside the southward drift of summer visitors, we are now filled with anticipation for the first signs of those winter visitors fleeing the harsher conditions farther north. In recent years many of our iconic winter birds such as Smew and Bewick's Swans have declined in number, largely because the warmer conditions in northern Europe mean they are content to 'short stop' and find a winter home around the Baltic in areas denied to them in the past. This is a common experience across the region and can be attributed to the creep of climate change, affecting winter birds as much as summer ones.

In the last issue there was a thought-provoking and slightly controversial paper by Chris Wheeler challenging the widely held view that our summer migrants were not, as many people believe, arriving earlier. I included it in the hope that it might attract a response, as I for one felt that there was more to this argument than meets the eye, a look through my own notebooks spanning over fifty years of birding certainly supported the view that summer migrants are arriving earlier in recent years, but the analysis if such nebulous data as arrival dates is complicated and I hoped that someone with a critical eye and a sharp analytical mind would look at this question in more detail. Fortunately, Andrew Henderson was already looking critically at historic Kent data (as can been seen in this issue) and could not resist the challenge. It is worth reading his response as it is curious and interesting, proving once again that few things in nature are as straightforward as they at first appear.

For my part, I am heading for a quiet autumn, hoping the gods will be kind and allow me out on a short leash for my birthday at the end of October. Is a Pallas' warbler too much to hope for??

Keep safe!
Good birding

Norman

News and announcements

LOW-TIDE COUNTS. WANTED.

Volunteers to count shore birds along the Swale from Whitstable to Shellness. Each month volunteers count the main roosts of waterbirds at hight tide.

These core counts give population estimates which contribute to county, national and international monitoring programmes. Once every ten years or so we try to count the birds at low tide throughout the winter to see where the birds are feeding. This information is vital to understand and protect the intertidal areas where the shore birds feed. For example, information from low-tide counts was used this year to oppose the expansion of oyster trestles on the intertidal area at Whitstable.

The counts are straightforward. The Swale is divided into more than sixty sectors and the counts can be done two hours either side of low tide on any day in the month from September to March.

If you are interested in helping with these counts please contact me, Brian Watmough brianrwat@yahoo.co.uk

HERONRY CENSUS.

Counters were able to return to most heronries this year after many counts were missed in 2020 because of Covid restrictions. The good news is that at least six pairs of Cattle Egret have nested this year at two heronries in the north of the county and young birds are now being reported from around Kent. Although not all counts are in yet it seems that numbers of Grey Heron and Little Egret are down from 2019.

Thanks to all the observers who have submitted records. We received details of a heronry in the Stour Valley with nests which had not previously been recorded although the woodland owners say that it has been occupied for several years.

So please keep an eye out for herons and report any colonies to me, Brian Watmough brianrwat@yahoo.co.uk

Rare Breeding Birds in Kent

The Kent Ornithological Society, like other county bird clubs, coordinates records of rare breeding birds and submits them to the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP). However, this is not straightforward. At a time when birders are being exhorted to be careful about publishing records of rare breeding birds on social media, we suspect that many observations are not reported. There are several ways in which you can help monitor rare birds and not risk publicising breeding locations.

1. Ensure you follow the bird watchers code, https://www.bto.org/sites/default/files/u10/downloads/taking-part/health/bwc.pdf and do not disturb the bird.
2. Always follow the RBBP guidelines for reporting on social media, RBBP_-Guidance_on_reporting_Rare_Breeding_Birds.pdf
3. Submit your records to BirdTrack (BirdTrack | BTO - British Trust for Ornithology), there is the ability to mark records as sensitive, and there is a filter so that records of rare and scarce birds will not be shown online. Your observations will be secure.
4. You can e-mail in confidence the county recorder Barry Wright umbrellabirds66@gmail.com or the county RBBP coordinator Brian Watmough brianrwat@yahoo.co.uk.

In Kent there are about 30 species for which KOS collates the records and submits to the national RBBP. The table below shows for each rare breeding bird in Kent the totals submitted to national RBBP, the population estimates in the Kent Atlas and the estimated UK population (British Birds 113, February 2020, 69-104). Whilst we have reasonable records for some species, for others we are at present unable to adequately monitor the county populations. We need more information, not just on the presence of birds but also evidence of breeding. The RBBP considers birds as possible, probable or confirmed breeders based on the standard BTO breeding codes.

RBBP SPECIES IN KENT

SPECIES	KENT 2018	KENT ATLAS 2008-13	UK POPULATION
Eurasian Bittern	7	4	191
Black-necked Grebe	1	0-10	55
Wigeon	3	0-10	200
Pintail	2	0-5	27
Garganey	6	10-20	105
Shoveler	102	50-100	1100
Common Pochard	94	150-200	720
Little Egret	149	100-150	1100
Black-winged Stilt	1	-	3
Avocet	240	150-300	1950
Little Ringed Plover	13	10-15	1250
Little Tern	11	0-10	1450
Mediterranean Gull	161	300-500	1200
Common Quail	2	0-50	355
Spotted Crake	0	-	27
Honey Buzzard	4	0-2	33-69
Marsh Harrier	41	80-100	590-695
Peregrine Falcon	20	30-40	1750
Hobby	34	250-300	2050
Turtle Dove	158	2000-3000	3600
Long-eared Owl	7	5-10	1800-6000
Short-eared Owl	3	0-5	620-2200
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	29	150-200	600-1000
Marsh Warbler	3	0-2	8
Savis Warbler	0	0-1	5
Black Redstart	10	2-15	58
Bearded Tit	50	100-500	695
Woodlark	1	2-10	2300
Hawfinch	5	50-70	500-1000

Please submit records of any of the above species during the breeding season, especially if breeding is suspected, observing the guidelines given above.
Please contact Brian Watmough (brianrwat@yahoo.co.uk) if you are interested in more information.

The KOS Turtle Dove Survey 2021

The KOS Survey of Turtle Doves in Kent during 2021, in collaboration with the **RSPB/RBBP/Natural England and BTO**, who conducted a national survey, is now complete. Details of the survey can be found at http://kosturtledoves.birdsurvey.org.uk/

Many thanks to all those who took part in the survey. A total of 300 squares were allocated out of 340, almost 90%, which is an excellent response. It's now time for volunteers to return their results if they haven't already done so. Thanks to those that have – a huge number of forms have been received and results are being entered into a summary spreadsheet, along with useful data on other target species. These data will be shared with RSPB and it is hoped that a county population estimate will be available in the coming months, once all records have been obtained and the data analysed.

Note that the details for returning survey results have changed.
Please return survey maps and summary forms to Nicole Khan, Operation Turtle Dove, RSPB Swale Office, John Roberts Business Park, Pean Hill, Whitstable CT5 3BJ or scanned copies may be emailed to nicole.khan@rspb.org.uk
These details may well be different to those on forms that you've printed off, so please check.
Any problems please contact kosturtledoves@birdsurvey.org.uk

Additional Turtle Dove Records

Please submit all records of Turtle Doves, not recorded as part of the survey, to BirdTrack. Please try and give full details including date, accurate location (preferably 6-figure OS reference), number of birds, whether singing bird or pair etc plus any other relevant comments such as brief description of habitat. These casual records will be considered when the population estimate is calculated from the full survey results and will be important for the Society records and contribution to RBBP.

JNCC Seabird Count 2015/21 – survey of urban Gulls in Kent 2021

This survey covered our urban nesting Gulls, which comprise the large numbers of Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls nesting on the roofs of our coastal towns and inland, particularly on factory roofs in industrial estates. Full details of the Seabird Count can be found at http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-7413
This is the final year of the urban Gull survey which is now complete.

There were two arms to the survey in Kent: a survey of 'repeat sites', which are those where Gulls were surveyed during the last seabird census, and a survey of randomly selected squares, aimed to assess the expansion of breeding ranges since the last census.

Repeat (and potentially new) Sites

A good number of sites were covered including many of the coastal towns, such as Faversham, Seasalter-Herne Bay, Dover, Folkestone, Hythe and Dymchurch-Greatstone, and inland towns such as Maidstone, the Medway Towns and Canterbury. Areas that were not fully covered were Dartford-Gravesend, Sittingbourne, Sheerness, Ashford and the Thanet towns.

In essence, the survey of repeat sites involved counting all Gulls breeding in the towns (if present) from suitable vantage points. Although this was possible for towns such as Dover and Folkestone, with surrounding high ground, this was not possible for Thanet. It is hoped that an estimate may be possible using data from the random squares that were counted (see below).

Random Square Survey

The random square survey involved making ground-based counts as above for a range of 1km squares across Kent. Some of these were in or around towns with known breeding birds, but many were in more remote areas or small towns/villages. The idea of the survey was to check buildings in such areas for the presence of breeding Gulls, however unlikely, to assess the spread of populations since the last census.

During 2020, when survey work was curtailed due to Covid, the JNCC contracted out the surveying of all random squares across the UK that had not been covered in 2019, so full coverage has been achieved for Kent.

For both surveys the recording period was end-April to mid-June (although later records were acceptable if young hadn't fledged). One highlight of the survey was the observation of a pair of Great Black-backed Gulls with nest and chick at Dover. This is a rare breeding species in Kent which nested for the first time in 2003 since the last recorded breeding in 1843!

Although the JNCC Seabird Count is now complete, it would seem desirable to complete the survey of repeat sites for those towns listed above to provide a full inventory of urban Gull sites for Kent. It is hoped to carry out this survey work next year. If anyone would like to help, please contact Murray Orchard at murray.orchard@live.co.uk

It is hoped to provide a full summary of Kent results from the JNCC Seabird Count in a future Kent Bird Report.

APPEAL FOR 2020 AND 2021 BREEDING RECORDS

As a result of Covid-19, many reserve wardens and staff were furloughed during the spring of 2020 and normal staffing did not return early in the current breeding season. One result of this was that the usual monitoring of breeding birds did not take place this year. Despite the closure of hides and visitor centres, it was usually still possible for people to visit these reserves. If anyone has records of confirmed breeding noted during such visits, particularly for species of conservation concern, please can you submit them to the KOS Recorder (Barry Wright) or BirdTrack (www.birdtrack.net) etc. These

might involve a brood of Pochard or Shoveler, or waders with young, or recently fledged Bearded Tits. Please search your notebooks/blogs etc. All such records will help to assess the 2020 breeding season. Thank you.

Surveys

Current surveys are usually posted on the KOS website, for further information please contact Murray Orchard at murray.orchard@live.co.uk

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KOS – Sightings database

We have had some technical and security issues with the sightings database that is accessed from the KOS website. This is an external application developed by another society and is not controlled or managed by the KOS. After we became aware of a weakness in the database's security that meant that Kent Bird Report. We have already commissioned work to create a new reporting tool but this could take some time develop and put in place.

In the meantime, we would urge existing users of the database to use other applications like BirdTrack or eBird to report their sightings. Records uploaded to these applications are passed on to the KOS. We are also looking to provide a template excel spreadsheet that will allow observers to report their sightings to the Area Recorders.

We apologise for the inconvenience that this may cause observers.

Brendan Ryan (Honorary Secretary KOS)

We would like to encourage members to contribute items or photographs for inclusion in the newsletter, especially regarding birds in Kent. If you are interested, I am always happy to offer advice or assistance to aspiring authors. To facilitate page composition text needs to be presented as a Word document, photos or illustrations as j-peg files.

Norman McCanch (Editor) : nvmccanch@hotmail.com

We like to keep in touch with all our members, so if you change address, email address or phone numbers please remember to inform our membership secretary, Chris Roome. He can be contacted at:

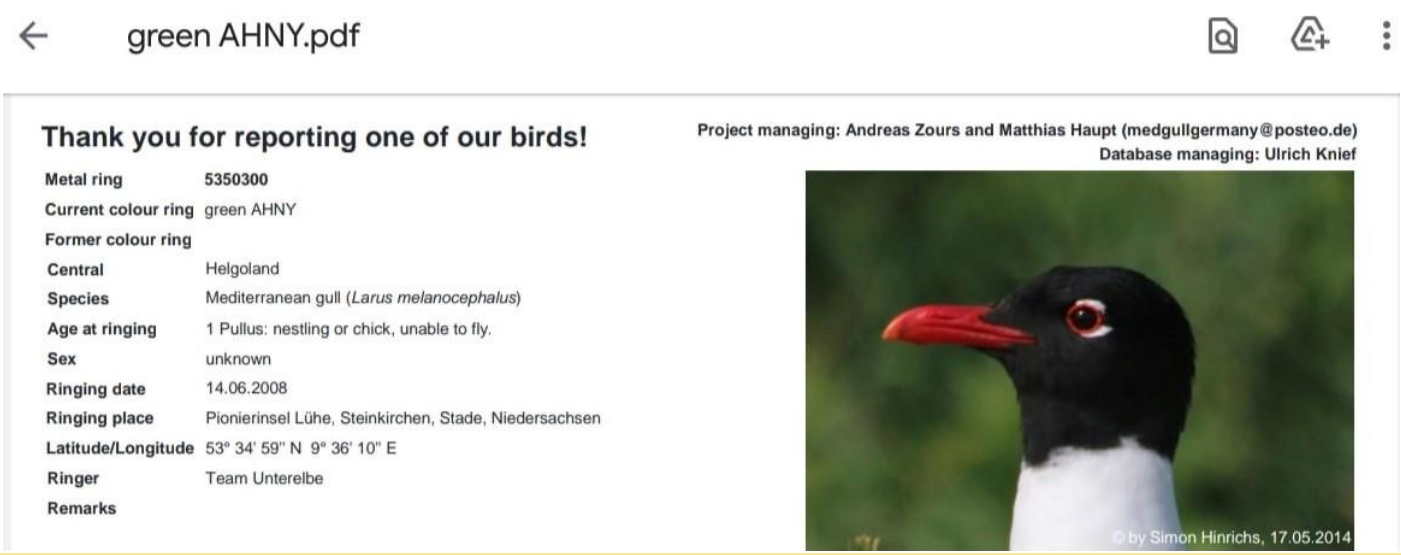
Chris Roome, Rowland House, Station Rd., Staplehurst TN12 0PY

Tel: 01580 891686 e-mail: chrisroome105@icloud.com

Articles

A colour ringed Mediterranean Gull on Dymchurch Beach

In early August saw an adult Mediterranean Gull on Dymchurch Beach which was wearing a colour ring code: AHNY. I reported the sighting and subsequently heard that the bird was originally ringed as a chick in 2008 at the Elbe Estuary, Germany, This making this bird 13 years old!


green AHNY.pdf

Thank you for reporting one of our birds!

Metal ring	**5350300**
Current colour ring	green AHNY
Former colour ring	
Central	Helgoland
Species	Mediterranean gull (*Larus melanocephalus*)
Age at ringing	1 Pullus: nestling or chick, unable to fly.
Sex	unknown
Ringing date	14.06.2008
Ringing place	Pionierinsel Lühe, Steinkirchen, Stade, Niedersachsen
Latitude/Longitude	53° 34' 59'' N 9° 36' 10'' E
Ringer	Team Unterelbe
Remarks	

Project managing: Andreas Zours and Matthias Haupt (medgullgermany@posteo.de)
Database managing: Ulrich Knief

Adam Buckland, July 2021

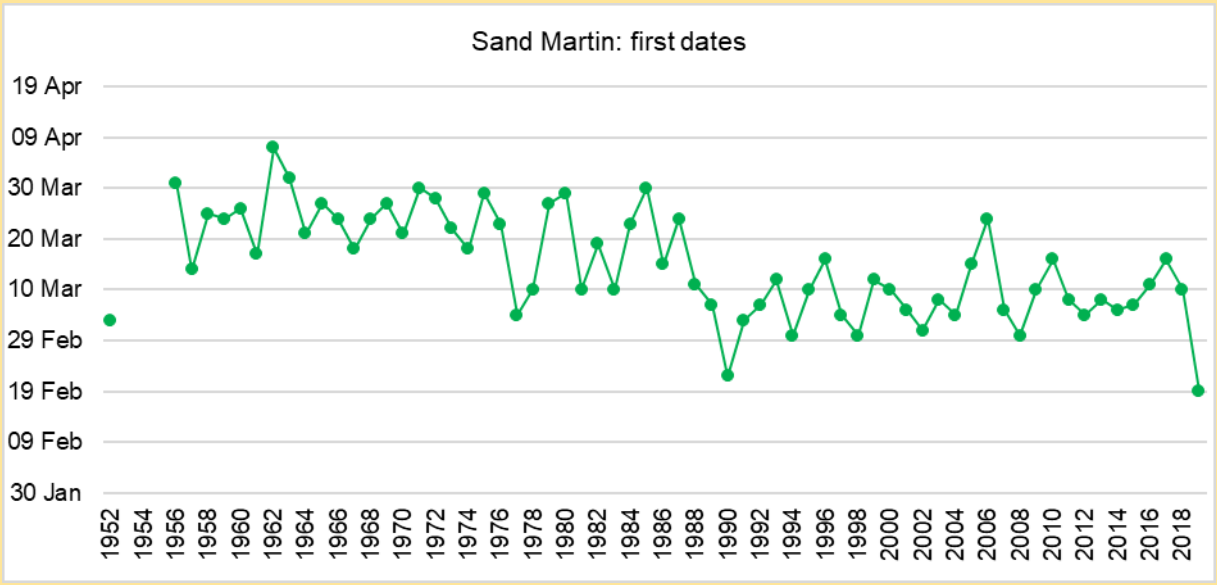
Summer migrant arrival dates – further analysis

The July 2021 newsletter included an article by Chris Wheeler “Summer Migrants – Are They Arriving Earlier?”. His view is that there is insufficient evidence to support repeated claims, for example by the RSPB and in published literature, that they are. He showed data extracted from early twentieth century studies, and from series of Norfolk and Kent bird reports (in the case of Kent covering 60 years), to demonstrate his point. My reaction was that this was

nonsense – don't we all know birds have been arriving earlier? – so I started to look at the material more closely. I have ended up convinced that I was right, so far as the period since 1952 is concerned, but have started to wonder about longer-term trends.

Trends from 1952 onwards

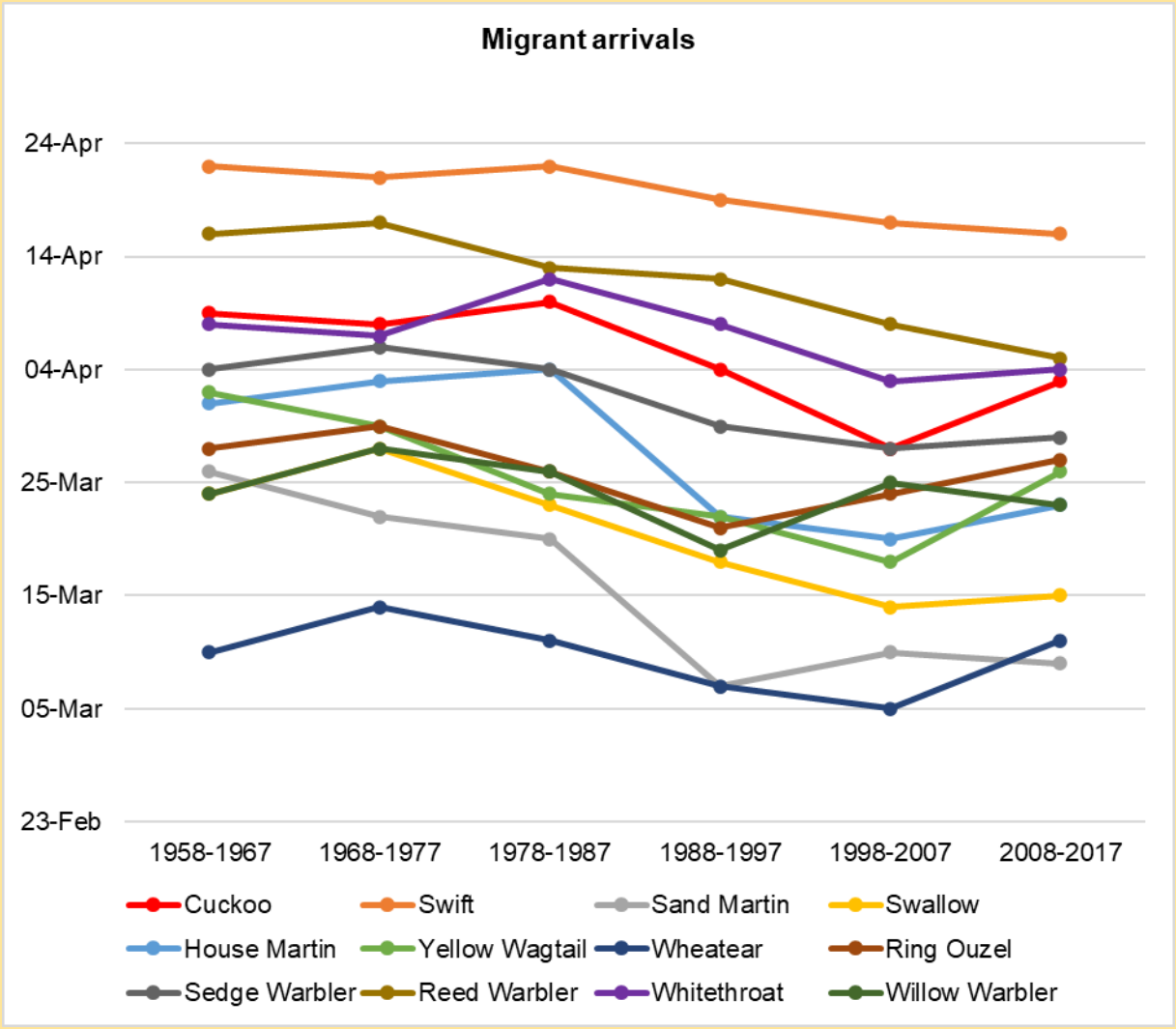
The newsletter appeared just as I was completing data extraction from Kent Bird Reports for Sand Martin, Swallow and House Martin which, among other things, convinced me that there had been marked shifts in first arrival dates, in all cases becoming earlier. As an example, here is a chart showing Sand Martin first dates.



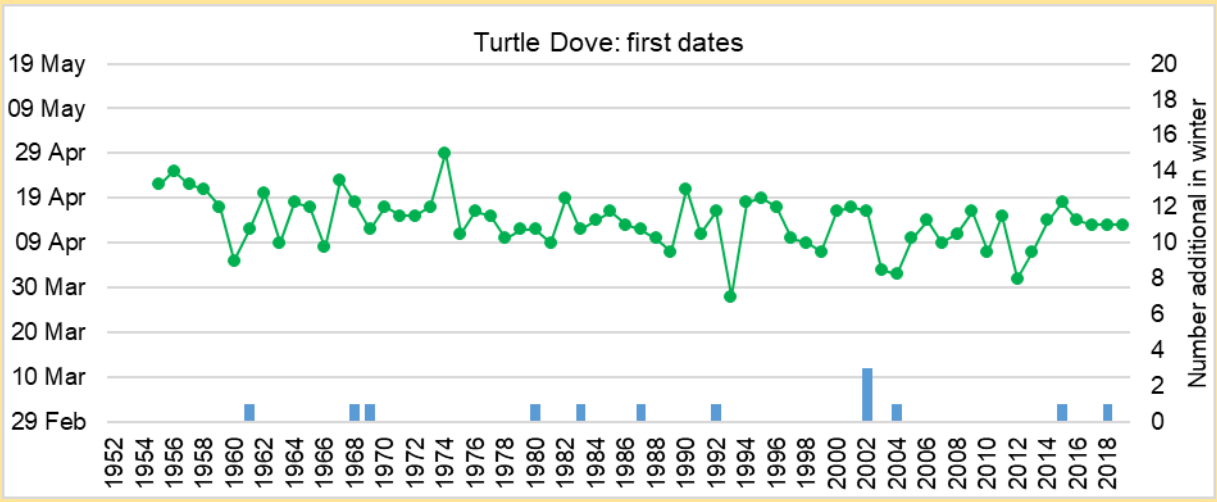
The average first date during 1952-1985 was 22nd March (with only two dates out of 34 on or before 10th March) while during 1986-2019 it was 8th March (with 20 out of 34 on or before 10th March). To me – and I suspect most other birders – this is clear support for our perception that arrival dates for many species are earlier than they were. There is not room to show all the examples that I have but one particularly striking one is that for Sandwich Tern, included in the 2019 Kent Bird Report published in August 2021.

Looking at the Kent data shown by Chris Wheeler, I realised that most of his twelve species showed trends towards earlier arrival. His table showed averages for six ten-year periods, and I have reproduced them as the chart below. In a few cases, my own calculations give slightly different results. I think this is partly because the calculations did not take leap years into account, which can shift averages by a day. But, while mid-winter records can justifiably be omitted, I think Chris may also have left out a few genuine early arrivals. I don't think it makes much difference to the overall patterns, though.

The chart is not easy to read, with so many species included, but I think the general downward slope from left to right is clear. The difference between the first period (1958-1967) and the last (2008-2017) is greatest for Sand Martin (17 days) but strong also for Reed Warbler (11 days) and Swallow and House Martin (9 days each). Only for one species (Wheatear) is the last period later than the first, and then by only one day (and, even then, a trend line fitted to the full data set shows a tendency towards earlier arrival).



Species vary in the strength of the shift towards earlier arrival but the majority of species that I have looked at, using Kent data, do show it. Turtle Dove is an example.



Turtle Dove, which was not one of those included in Chris Wheeler's article, has average first dates that have become very gradually earlier over the period 1952-2019: the average for 1952-1985 was 15th April, while for 1986-2019 it was 11th April. That's a change of only four days – but it is still a change.

Thus, it seems entirely reasonable that most birders perceive first dates of summer migrants to have become earlier, and a little strange to argue that the statistically tested changes in the paper than Chris quoted (*Ibis* 158: 481-195) were somehow wrong. Most birders' memories do not extend back much more than the 40 years of the *Ibis* paper, though some reach the 60 years of Chris's article and perhaps even the 68 years shown in my charts of Sand Martin and Turtle Dove.

However, Chris was more concerned to draw attention to the apparent similarities of arrival dates now and in the early twentieth century. I'll turn to looking at that now but would point out that there can't be any living birders for whom 1907 is a memory (I know Chris can claim a few extra years than me, but not that many I think). So, I do not think it's fair to suggest that current birders' perceptions and the *Ibis* paper are at fault in detecting a change towards earlier arrival.

Longer term trends

The sources that Chris used for early twentieth century arrival dates were the dates given by W Eagle Clarke (1912) as the "usual dates of 1st arrival, England" and the first dates in the reports for 1905 and 1907 of the British Ornithologists' Club's Migration Committee (these were based on reports from observers largely in England and Wales).

I have extracted the same data, and also those for the other Migration Committee reports. I believe that there was a series of nine of the latter, covering the years from 1905 to 1913; there was to have been a tenth and a summary report, but I assume that plan was abandoned because of the Great War. I've listed the sources at the end of this article, giving each a letter for ease of referencing.

The table below shows, for the twelve species that Chris selected, his average dates for sources a, b & d (in the column labelled CEW), then the same data extracted by me (shown in red) from sources a, b & d, followed by my data for sources a-d and a-j. Finally (in blue) a simplified version of Chris's Kent data, showing the averages for two 30-year periods.

	CEW	Sources	Sources	Sources	Kent	Kent
	a b d	a b d	a-d	a-j	1958-1987	1988-2017
Cuckoo	31 Mar	30 Mar	01 Apr	30 Mar	09 Apr	01 Apr
Swift	23 Apr	19 Apr	20 Apr	20 Apr	21 Apr	17 Apr
Sand Martin	19 Mar	19 Mar	19 Mar	19 Mar	22 Mar	08 Mar
Swallow	23 Mar	23 Mar	25 Mar	21 Mar	25 Mar	15 Mar
House Martin	03 Apr	02 Apr	03 Apr	02 Apr	02 Apr	21 Mar
Yellow Wagtail	21 Mar	20 Mar	23 Mar	26 Mar	29 Mar	22 Mar
Wheatear	13 Mar	13 Mar	12 Mar	09 Mar	11 Mar	07 Mar
Ring Ouzel	18 Mar	17 Mar	18 Mar	11 Mar	28 Mar	24 Mar
Sedge Warbler	04 Apr	04 Apr	03 Apr	06 Apr	04 Apr	29 Mar
Reed Warbler	14 Apr	15 Apr	14 Apr	15 Apr	15 Apr	08 Apr
Whitethroat	05 Apr	05 Apr	03 Apr	02 Apr	09 Apr	05 Apr
Willow Warbler	25 Mar	25 Mar	23 Mar	18 Mar	26 Mar	22 Mar

First of all, a couple of minor points. My average dates for sources a, b & d are very similar to Chris's; most differences are probably due to the fact that he calculated averages during a leap year, and I did it in a non-leap year, and neither of us made corrections for the extra day. There is one discrepancy of more than one day, for Swift. I suspect that Chris entered the first date for Scotland (rather than England) from Eagle Clarke's data – when I insert the Scottish date, my average changes to 22 Apr.

My second minor point is that, although I don't know why Chris used only the 1905 and 1907 data, it doesn't make a great difference if you include more of the nine reports (compare the three red columns). That is the case, even though there's plenty of variation between years. The average across the twelve species ranges from 21st March in 1913 to 2nd April in 1908: then as now there were early and late springs.

The interesting (to me) finding from this analysis is that between the early twentieth century and 1958-1987, the majority of species do indeed appear to have moved arrival dates later, but by 1988-2017 that had reversed, and most were arriving earlier. I've summarised that in the table below which shows (shaded yellowish and shown as negative numbers) changes in mean arrival dates to later in the year, and (shaded greenish) changes in mean arrival dates to earlier in the year. For the early twentieth century, I've used my data for sources a, b & d. None of this has been tested statistically, but I suggest that a change of three days of less may not be significant, whereas changes of four or more are more likely to be genuine. I have varied the yellowish and greenish shading to reflect this, the paler shading covering the smaller changes.

Change of arrival dates (days) Later = yellowish. Earlier = greenish		
	Early 20th C to 1958-1987	Early 20th C to 1988-2017
Cuckoo	-9	-1
Swift	-1	3
Sand Martin	-3	11
Swallow	-2	8
House Martin	1	13
Yellow Wagtail	-8	-1
Wheatear	2	6
Ring Ouzel	-10	-6
Sedge Warbler	0	6
Reed Warbler	0	7
Whitethroat	-4	0
Willow Warbler	-1	3

Before finishing, I'd like to mention a few miscellaneous points. First, while Chris's selection of species was mostly fine, I wonder why Ring Ouzel was included: it has never been numerous in Kent in spring and, as a result, first dates in the county will have been sensitive to chance arrivals and encounters. Species such as Garden Warbler or Spotted Flycatcher might have been better choices.

There are many reasons why assessing migration dates by using first reported dates is unsatisfactory (though I agree with Chris that alternatives such defining the peak migration date are difficult or impossible). Factors affecting whether first arrivals are detected include: the numbers of birds involved (the fewer there are, the less likely one will be seen); the numbers of observers (with few observers, more birds will escape detection); and the geographical spread of recording.

The early twentieth century data were derived from sightings across England and Wales, not just Kent, and so may have been more prone to include early arrivals in the south-west. Incidentally, I've been unable to find how Eagle Clarke derived his "usual dates of first arrival": were they from his own observations or from an earlier nineteenth century study? Numbers of observers were far smaller in those early days, even though the help of lighthouse and lightship personnel was instigated. As Chris pointed out, the 1905 survey involved some 15,000 records covering 29 species. It sounds a lot, but to put in into a modern context, the KOS received 1,182 records of Whitethroat alone for April-May 2019 – and that was just Kent. Kent was under-represented at least early on in the BOC Migration Studies: the 1905 report includes a plea for more observers in the county.

Weather conditions from year to year can have big effects on migration timing of course. And those conditions will affect species differently, depending on the triggers that initiate migration and the routes followed.

The uncertainties and potential biases introduced by these factors make it difficult to regard using first dates from casual observations as a wholly reliable way of determining migration times. But it's the best we have that is easily available, and probably gives as good an approximation to identifying any changes as any other available method.

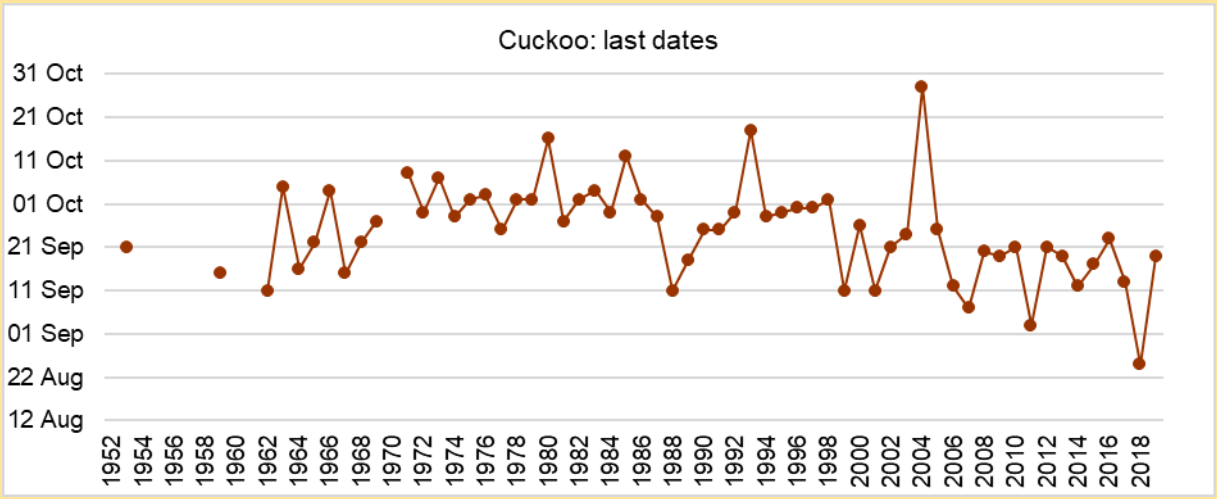
Conclusions

In his article, Chris said that "for most of the species the dates of first arrivals do show a high degree of consistency over the 112 years, particularly noticeable in the cases of Wheatear, Whitethroat and Willow Warbler". I do think this statement, and then going on to concentrate on those three species, was disingenuous. Even over the longest period, from early twentieth century (sources a, b & d) to 2008-2017, nine of the twelve species showed earlier arrival in the modern period, and of the other three I would discount Ring Ouzel as being unreliable because of the small numbers occurring in Kent. Those nine species included Wheatear, Whitethroat and Willow Warbler, though with only small changes involved.

Chris did not draw attention to shifts towards later arrival in Cuckoo and Yellow Wagtail. That for the wagtail reduces or disappears when a longer modern period is considered or the full nine years of BOC reports is included, but the data do give more support to Cuckoo arriving later. Is it significant that these are species that have been rapidly declining in Kent?
It's my view, and I believe of most birders, and supported by proper statistical studies rather than this amateur playing with numbers, that arrival dates have become earlier for many summer migrants over the past 60 or so years. That is

illustrated by the analyses I've done, by the data Chris himself presented, and given statistical support by the *Ibis* paper. More interestingly, though, there does seem to be evidence from the historic data that arrival dates for quite a few species at the start of the twentieth century were earlier than those during 1958-1987.

This raises the possibility that there are periodic advances and retreats in migration timing, for whatever reason. Even over the comparatively short period of 68 years, I have been noticing some such patterns, though mainly for last dates, as in the example below for Cuckoo in Kent. Departure dates appear to get later from the 1950s to 1980s, and then become earlier again. (Apologies for the gaps in the records in the early years, which can't be filled until the record cards are again available.)



Returning to arrival dates, after the shift towards later arrival for most of the twelve species during 1958-1987, there has been a clear reversal of that trend. The majority of the twelve species were arriving earlier during 1988-2017 than in the early twentieth century.

But… a final observation. If you go back to the table of ten-year periods in Chris's article, or the Migrant Arrivals chart in this one, you will see that for eight of the twelve species, first dates were later in 2008-2017 than in 1998-2007. Does this mean that the trend towards earlier arrival has reversed? Only time will tell.

Andrew Henderson

	Sources
a	W. Eagle Clarke (1912) *Studies in Bird Migration*. Volume 1. Gurney & Jackson, London.
b	W.R. Ogilvie-Grant (ed.) (1906) Report of the immigrations of summer residents in the spring of 1905. *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club*, vol. 17 pp. 1-127.
c	W.R. Ogilvie-Grant (ed.) (1907) Report of the immigrations of summer residents in the spring of 1906. *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club*, vol. 20 pp. 1-189.
d	W.R. Ogilvie-Grant (ed.) (1908) Report of the immigrations of summer residents in the spring of 1907: also notes on the migratory movements and records received from lighthouses and light-vessels during the autumn of 1906. *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club*, vol. 22 pp. 1-202.
e	W.R. Ogilvie-Grant (ed.) (1909) Report of the immigrations of summer residents in the spring of 1908: also notes on the migratory movements and records received from lighthouses and light-vessels during the autumn of 1907. *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club*, vol. 24 pp. 1-235.
f	W.R. Ogilvie-Grant (ed.) (1910) Report of the immigrations of summer residents in the spring of 1909: also notes on the migratory movements and records received from lighthouses and light-vessels during the autumn of 1908. *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club*, vol. 26 pp. 1-347.
g	W.R. Ogilvie-Grant (ed.) (1911) Report of the immigrations of summer residents in the spring of 1910: also notes on the migratory movements and records received from lighthouses and light-vessels during the autumn of 1909. *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club*, vol. 28 pp. 1-313.
h	W.R. Ogilvie-Grant (ed.) (1912) Report of the immigrations of summer residents in the spring of 1911: also notes on the migratory movements and records received from lighthouses and light-vessels during the autumn of 1910. *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club*, vol. 30 pp. 1-332.
i	W.R. Ogilvie-Grant (ed.) (1913) Report of the immigrations of summer residents in the spring of 1912: also notes on the migratory movements and records received from lighthouses and light-vessels during the autumn of 1911. *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club*, vol. 32 pp. 1-335.
j	W.R. Ogilvie-Grant (ed.) (1914) Report of the immigrations of summer residents in the spring of 1913: also notes on the migratory movements and records received from lighthouses and light-vessels during the autumn of 1912. *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club*, vol. 34 pp. 1-343.

Hirundines and Swifts

We the spirits of the air
That of human things take care,
Out of pity now descend
To forewarn what woes attend.

Sand Martins by Robin Elliot

The hirundines (swallows and martins) and swifts are unrelated but ecologically convergent aerial insectivores. They are birds that many people strongly associate with summer, even if they are not sure whether they're looking at a swallow or a swift. All four species breeding in Kent are declining and perhaps that is telling us something.

This article looks at a few facets of the status in Kent of the four common species (Swift, Sand Martin, Swallow and House Martin): arrival and departure dates, breeding numbers and distribution, and where and when the largest numbers have been recorded. It also comments on how changes in the numbers and focus of birdwatchers has affected the quality of the records collected by the KOS. At the end, there's a short section on hybrids, before a separate summary of the status of rarer species.

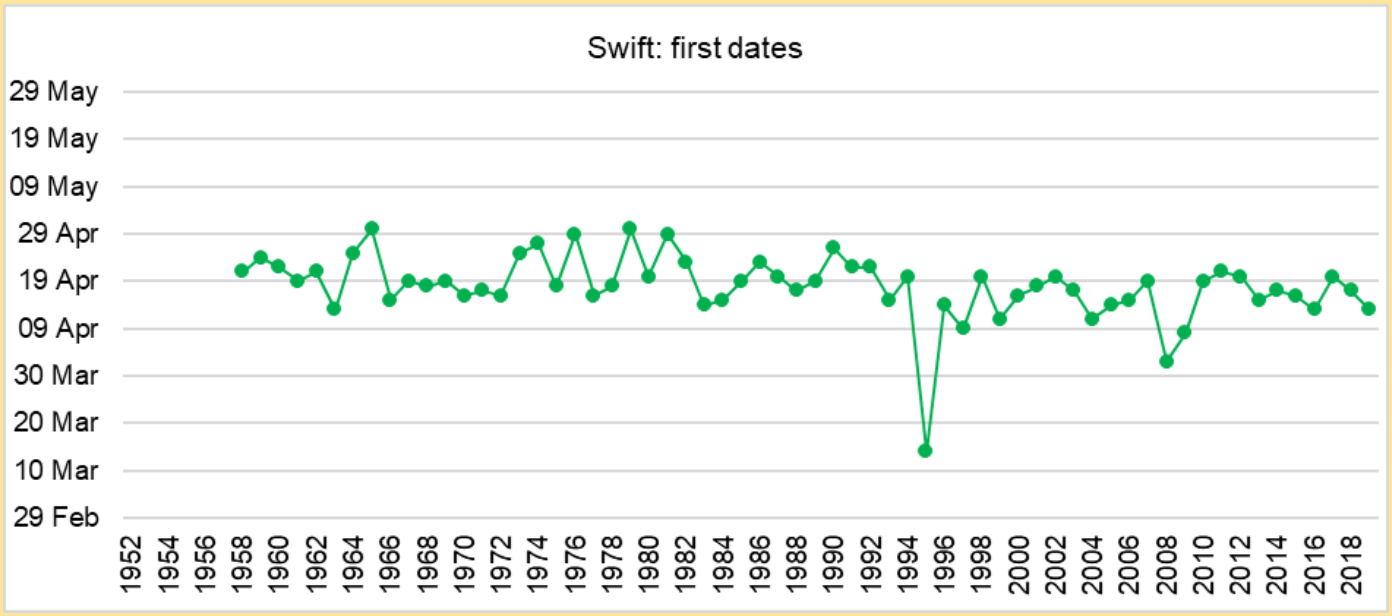
Arrivals and departures

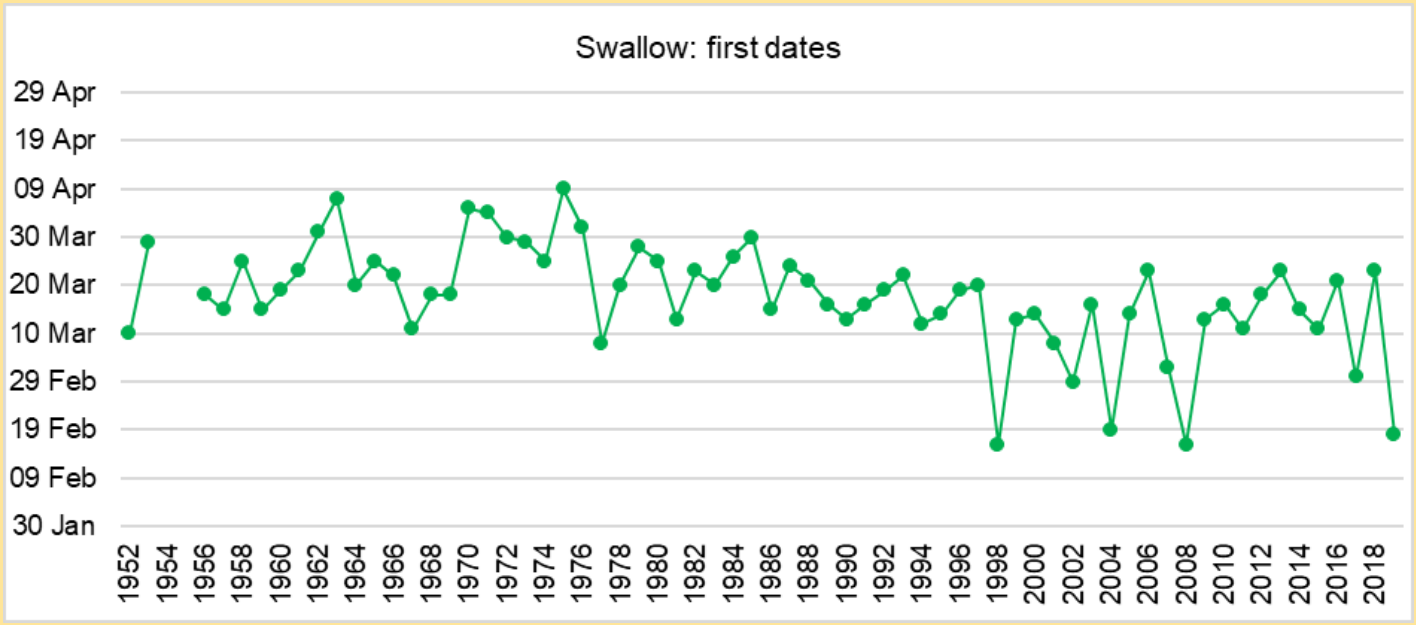
In common with many summer migrants, the first sightings each year of all four species are earlier than when the KOS was formed in 1952, as shown in the table below and in the series of charts on the next page (Swift, Swallow and House Martin). For a chart for Sand Martin, see the separate article in this newsletter (**Summer migrant arrival dates**). The Kent Bird Reports (KBRs) fail to mention the first and last dates in a few cases, all in the 1950s – thus the gaps in the charts.

		1952-1968	1969-1985	1986-2002	2003-2019
Swift	First	20 April	20 April	16 April	15 April
	Last	14 October	23 October	27 October	19 October
Sand Martin	First	23 March	21 March	8 March	8 March
	Last	28 October	31 October	27 October	25 October
Swallow	First	21 March	25 March	13 March	10 March
	Last	25 November	27 November	27 November	3 December
House Martin	First	3 April	2 April	23 March	18 March
	Last	25 November	26 November	28 November	18 November

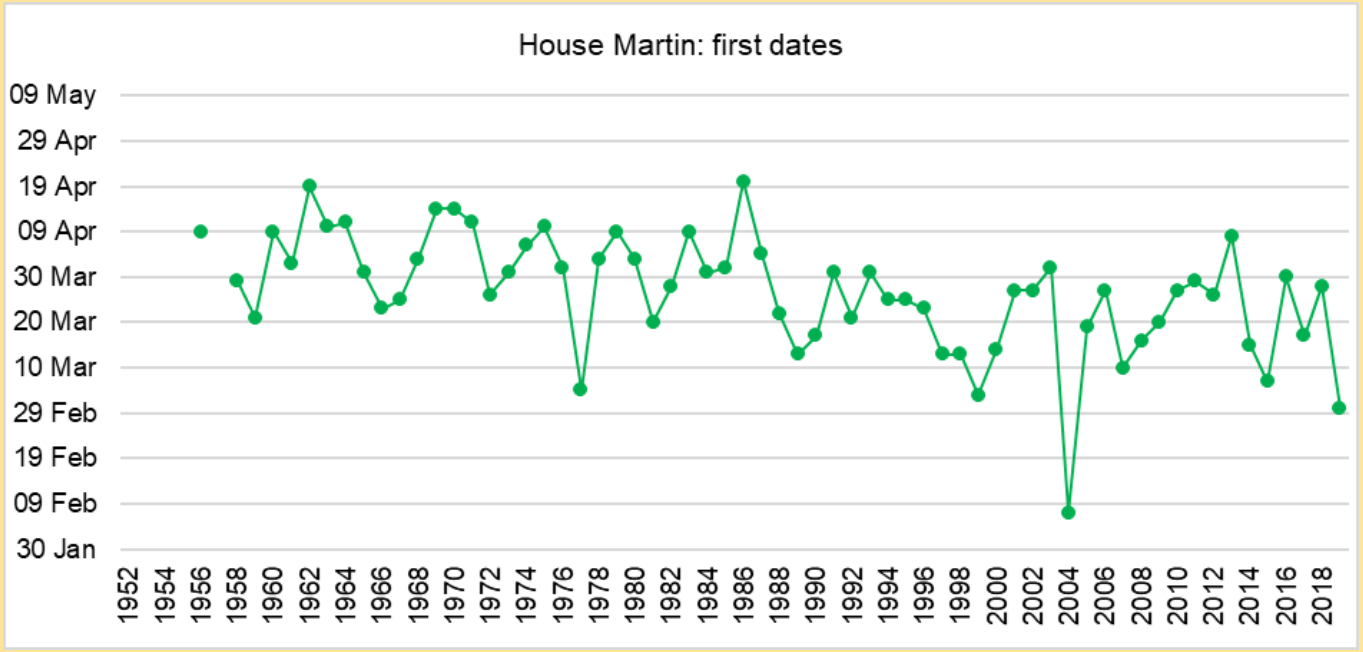
There is plenty of variation from year to year, presumably related to weather conditions on migration, but the pattern is clear. The trend towards earlier arrival is least marked for Swift (five days change between the first and last of the four 17-year periods in the table) and strongest for Sand Martin (15 days).

There has been no clear shift in the timing of the last sightings, however. Swallow does perhaps show a tendency towards later departure but the others, if anything, show latest last sightings in the middle periods of the table above. It is noticeable that, especially for Swift and Sand Martin, last dates are highly variable between years (Swift ranges from 20th September to 29th December, Sand Martin from 29th September to 9th December).





Swallow by Dennis Tayler



House Martin by Mike Puxley

The earliest arrivals for the four species have been as follows:

Swift	Exceptionally, one at Sandwich Bay on 15th-16th March 1995. The next earliest were two at Sandwich Bay on 2nd April 2008 and one at Quex Park on 9th April 2009.
Sand Martin	Two at Walmer on 19th February 2019 and one at Seasalter on 22nd February 1990.
Swallow	There have been records on 16th February in 1998 (two at Foreness) and 2008 (one at Galloways, Dungeness), plus one at Walmer on 18th February 2019 and one at Graveney on 19th February 2004.
House Martin	Exceptionally, four at coastal locations between Folkestone and Sandwich Bay on 7th February 2004. The next earliest were singles at Dungeness on 2nd March and Foreness on 3rd March 2019, with others in the first week of March in 1977 and 1999.

The latest dates for the four species have been as follows:

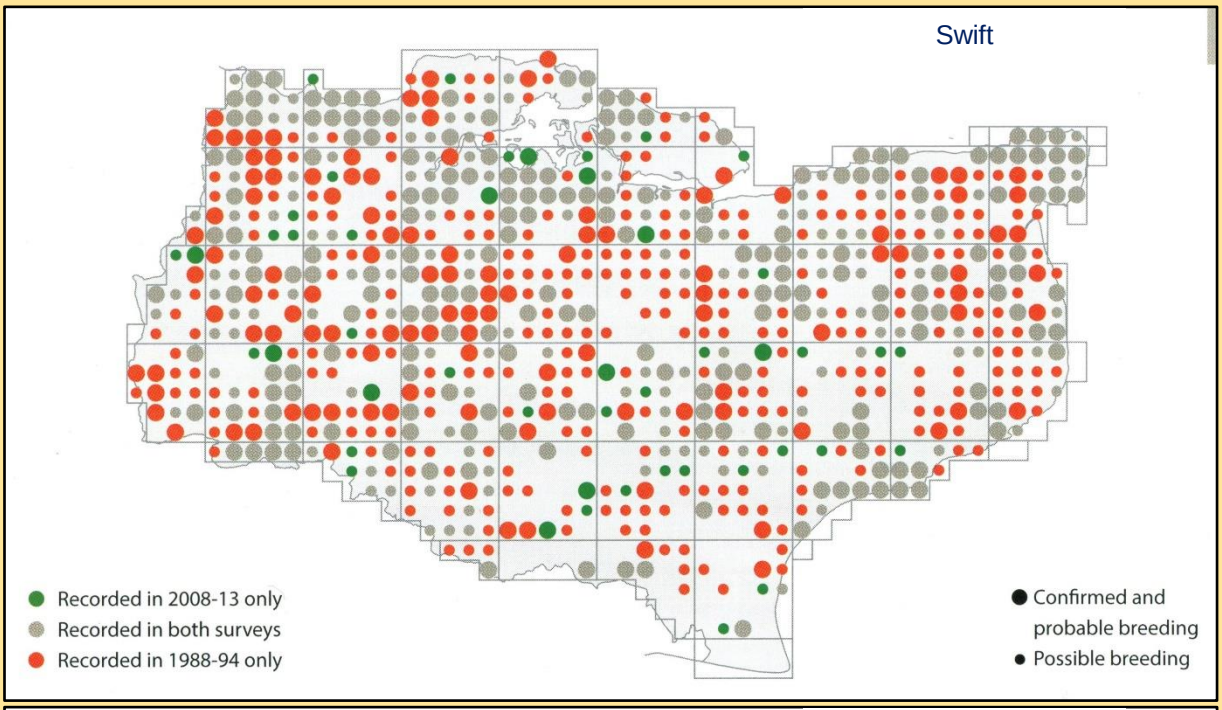
Swift	The most extreme date was of one at Bearsted on 29th December 2015. This was published in the KBR, but we do not know who was the observer (if it was you, please let us know). There were other records at Sandwich Bay and Thanet on 6th-9th December that year. Other December records have been on 5th December in 1985 (one at Bough Beech) and 1994 (one at Allhallows). We trust that all these late records were Common Swifts, and not Pallid!
Sand Martin	The two December records were one at Cliffe on 9th December 1984 and one at Sandwich Bay on 1st December 1991.
Swallow	There have been December records, of up to six birds, in 30 of the 68 years. The latest in the year, by over a week, was one at Sandwich Bay on 28th December 2003, but note that there have also been January records: one at Foreness on 2nd-4th January 2016 and one at Walpole Bay on 21st January 2014. The latter is only a month before the 'earliest' date and perhaps it won't be long before wintering Swallows become a regular feature.
House Martin	There have been December records, of up to six birds, in 18 of the 68 years. The latest were two at Foreness on 30th December 2000 and one at Minster and Sarre on 24th December 1999.

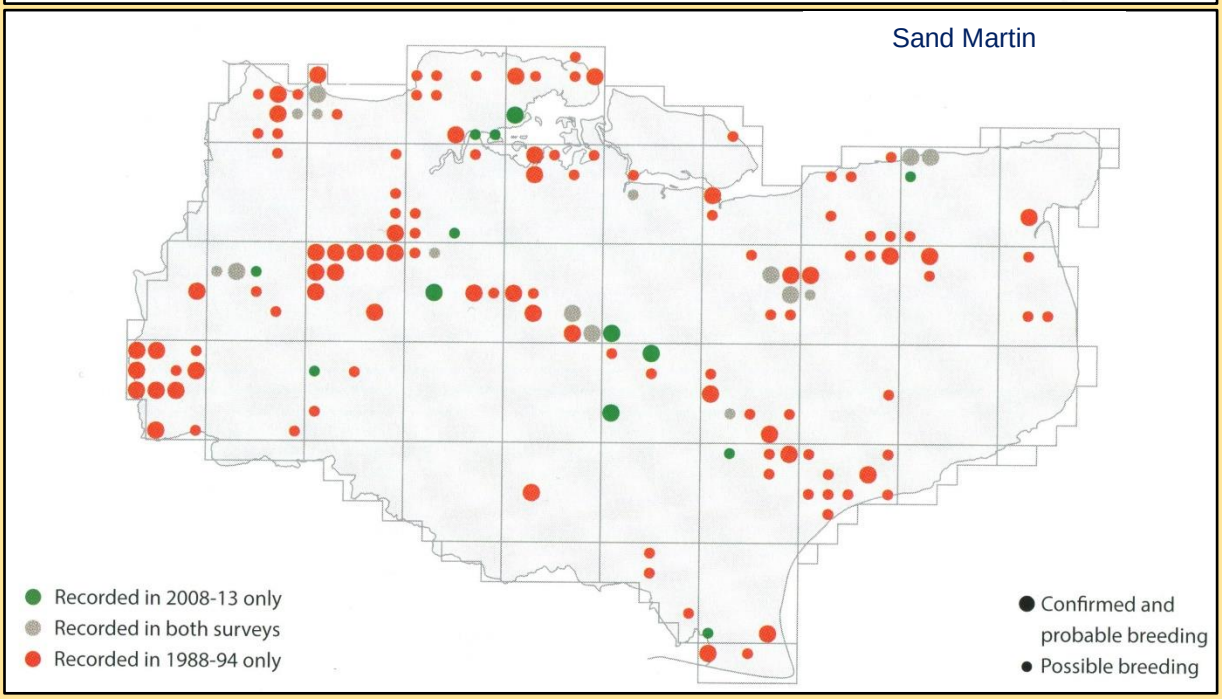
Breeding distribution

The next two pages show the breeding distribution maps from the Kent Breeding Bird Atlas 2008-13. I won't waste space by repeating much of what is written in the Atlas (still available from the KOS website https://kentos.org.uk/kent-breeding-bird-atlas/) but want to draw attention to the preponderance of red dots on the maps for Swift, Sand Martin and House Martin (and I hope that the mapped dot colours don't cause problems for those with deuteranomaly). Those red dots are where the species was found during 1988-94 but not during 2008-13.

The reduction from the first period to the second represents a loss of the species as a breeding bird in 47% of tetrads (2x2km squares) for Swift, 79% for Sand Martin and 31% for House Martin. Those figures are the ones for probable/confirmed breeding, but the percentages don't change much if tetrads with possible breeding are included.

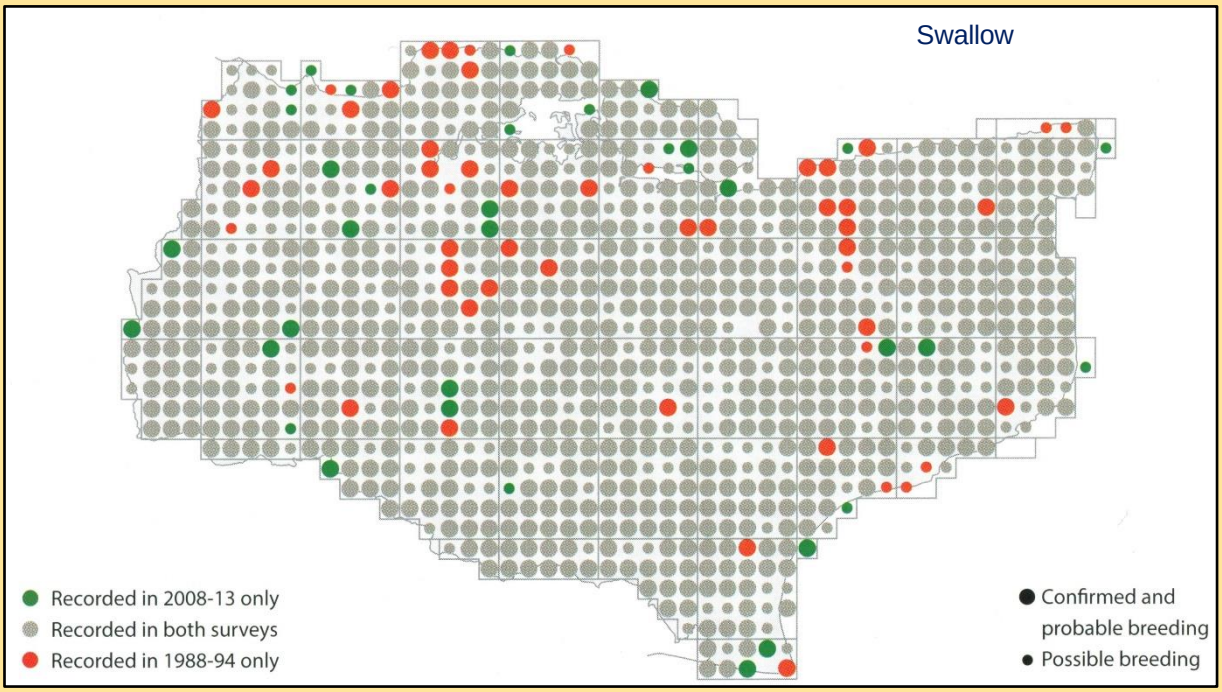
The change is less for Swallow, being a reduction of 18% for 'probable/confirmed breeding' and only 2% when 'possible breeding' is included.

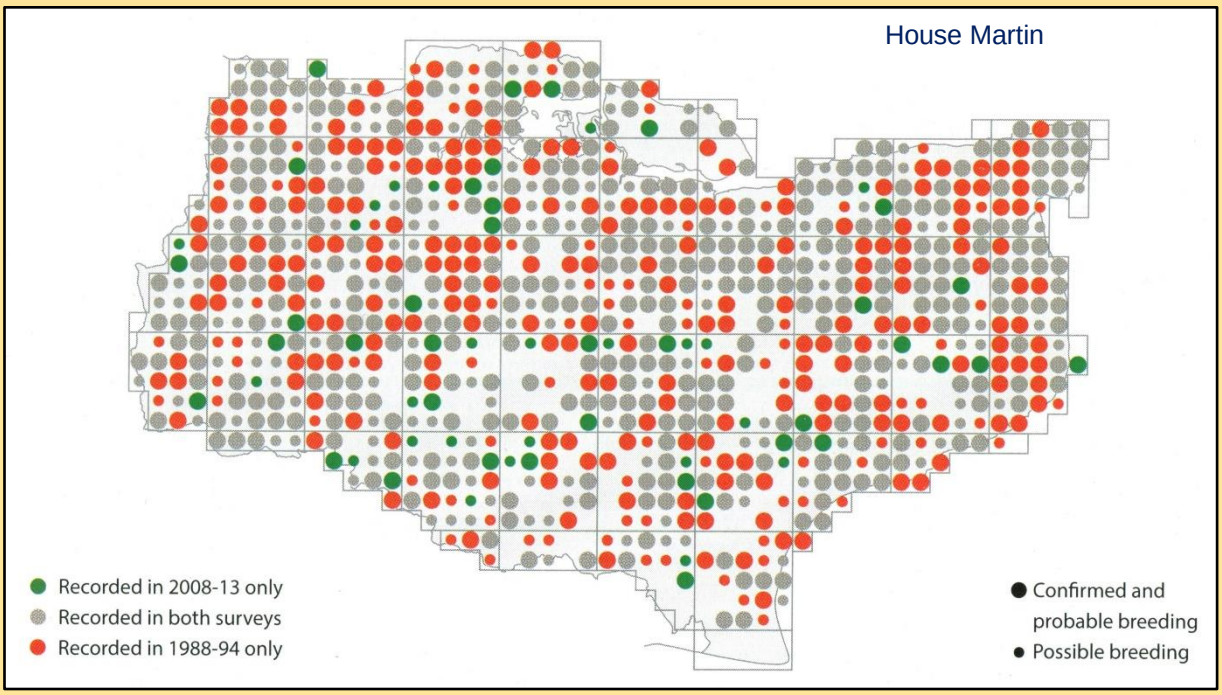




The range contraction for Sand Martin has been the greatest of the species considered here. In the years 2008-2019, KOS received counts for only one colony, at Bishopstone cliffs where there have recently been up to about 200 active nest holes. There has never been a co-ordinated count of Sand Martin colonies in Kent but summing the peak counts

at all colonies for which counts were reported in the 1970s gives a total of 3,100 nests. The Atlas estimate for the period 2008-13 was 500-1500 nests but perhaps even that would now be an over-estimate. There have been a number of calls in KBRs for more colony counts; is there perhaps someone who might co-ordinate a county-wide survey?





The population estimates (pairs) in the 2008-13 Atlas for the other species were as follows:

Swift	3,000-7,000
Swallow	10,000-20,000
House Martin	4,000-8,000

The county estimates were the proportion of BBS totals found in Kent applied to the national estimates for each species, additionally informed by colony counts in the case of Sand Martin. However, as implied by the word ‘guess’ being included in three of the four Atlas accounts, these totals are far from certain!

Reliable BTO Breeding Bird Survey trends are available for Kent for Swift and Swallow. A graph for Swift is included in the 2019 Kent Bird Report: it shows a steady decline of about 70% between 1994 and 2019, a similar trend to those for south-east England and England as a whole. That for Swallow, which will be included in a future KBR, follows a

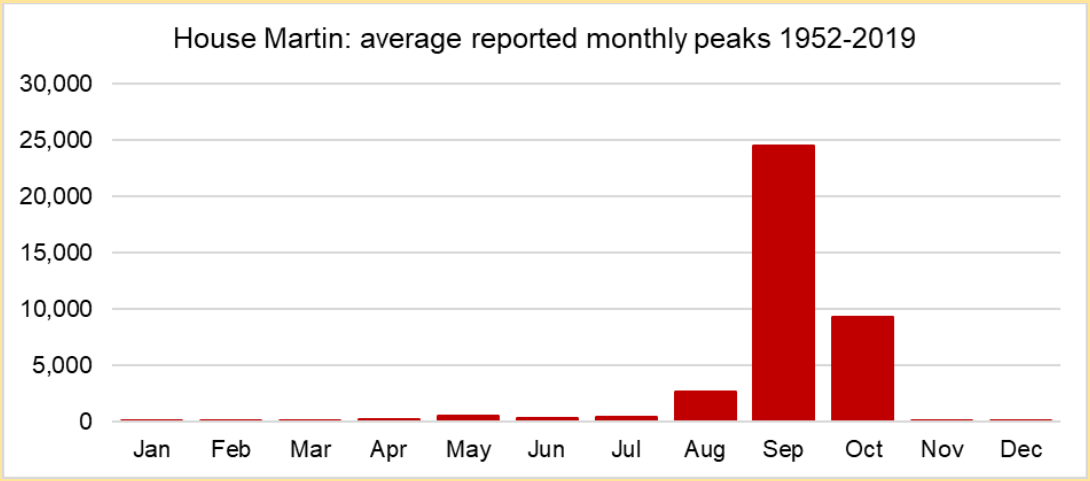
fairly level course from 1994 to about 2015 and then a decline, again in parallel to wider trends, suggesting a population at the end of the period down about 20% on the start.

Concentrations

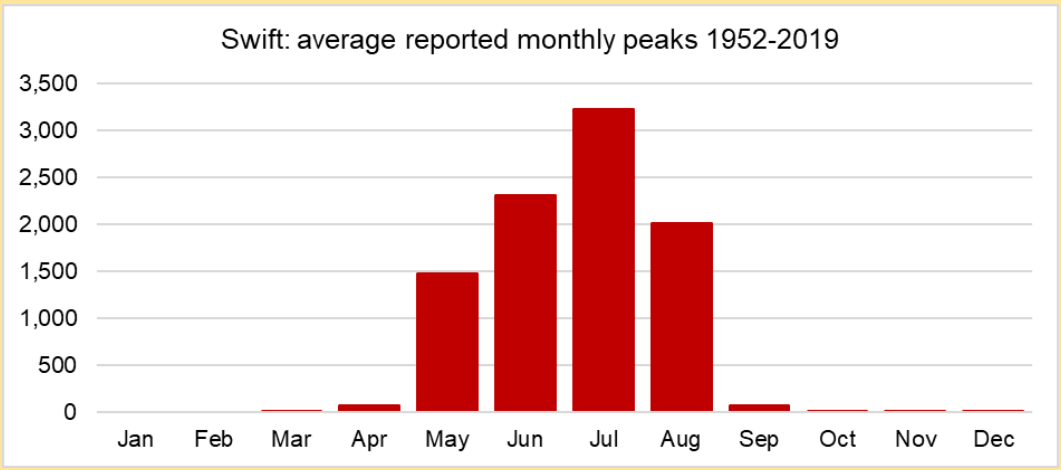
I'd like to turn now to the big counts of these four species in Kent. There are difficulties in doing this in a way that describes the true pattern of numbers present at any one time, largely because birders tend not to report every small count of common species (thank goodness, as KOS would be overwhelmed), and concentrations of large numbers tend to occur only at restricted locations and times of year.

This problem, of the bias towards 'interesting' records in casual bird reporting, is why the more systematic schemes such as the Breeding Bird Survey or the ringers' Constant Effort Sites Scheme are so valuable. Some valuable analyses could be made of records at places like the bird observatories, where recording effort is more consistent but, even there, there have been changes in focus over the years (e.g., from ringing to observation, or from land-based watching to seawatching) and, regrettably, there seems to have been little attempt to use the huge mass of data that is held.

Here, I am reporting a very quick analysis of the largest counts reported in Kent Bird Reports from 1952 to 2019. I extracted the highest count mentioned for each month and noted details of any totals above a certain threshold (5,000 for Swallow and House Martin, 2,000 for Swift and Sand Martin) or the annual maximum if no count exceeded the threshold. It would have been possible to do something a little more thorough if I had used the KOS computerised database, which covers the most recent 20 years. I do not think it would have provided any more information on the biggest counts, but it *might* have avoided the impression given by this chart.



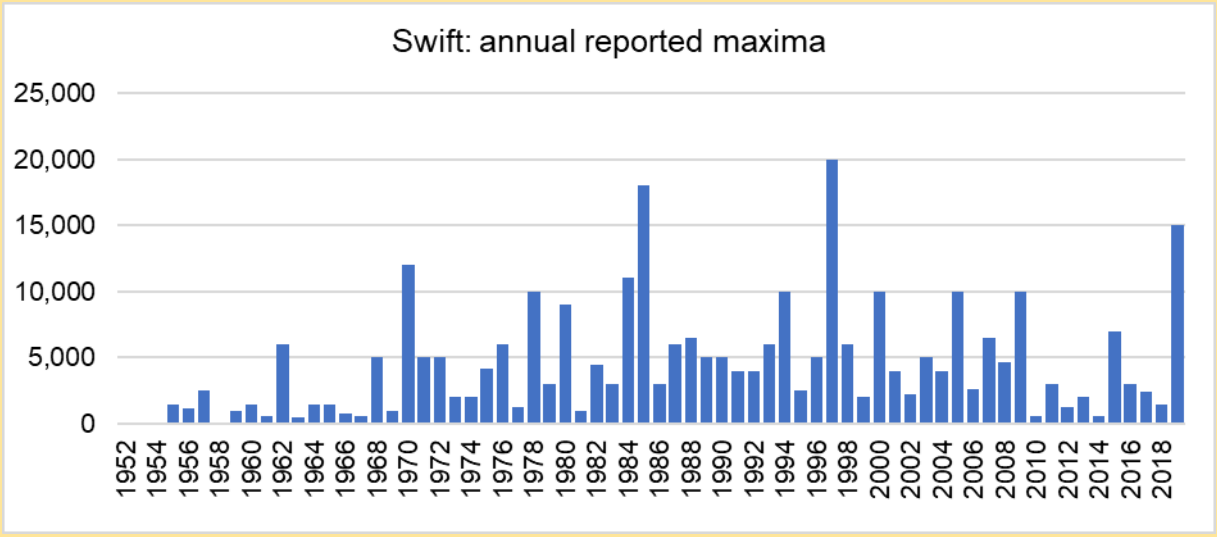
This appears to show that there are very few House Martins in Kent except during a short period in autumn. This is obviously not the case: the 2008-13 Atlas estimated 4,000-8,000 pairs in the county, implying up to 16,000 birds plus their young, yet the average monthly peak for reports during May-July is around 440 birds! It's just that they are well dispersed. The pattern for Swallow is similar but in the cases of Sand Martin and especially Swift they are less restricted temporally.

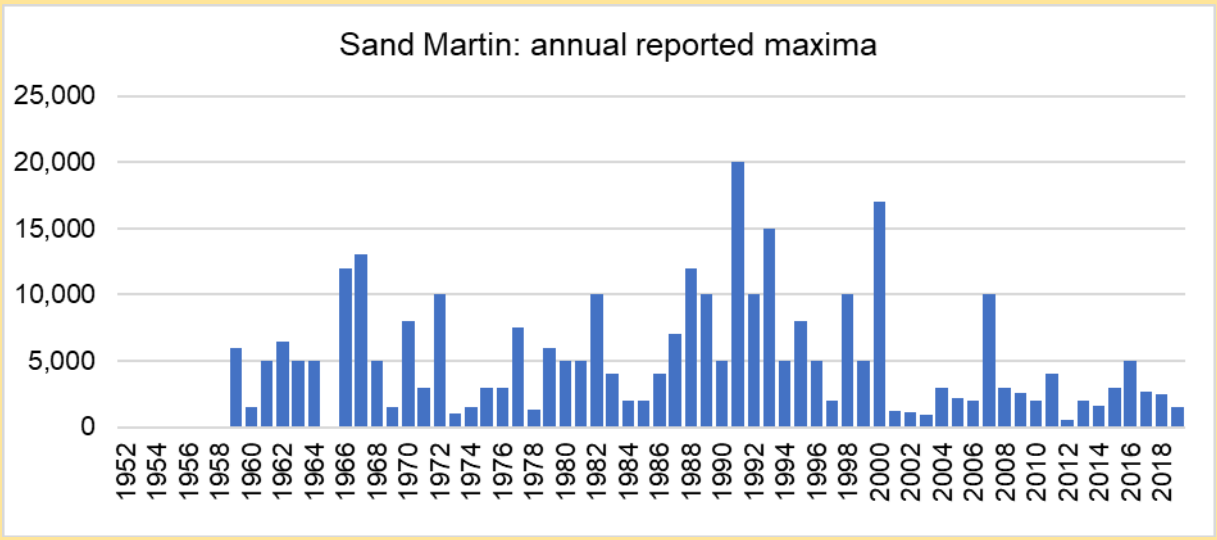


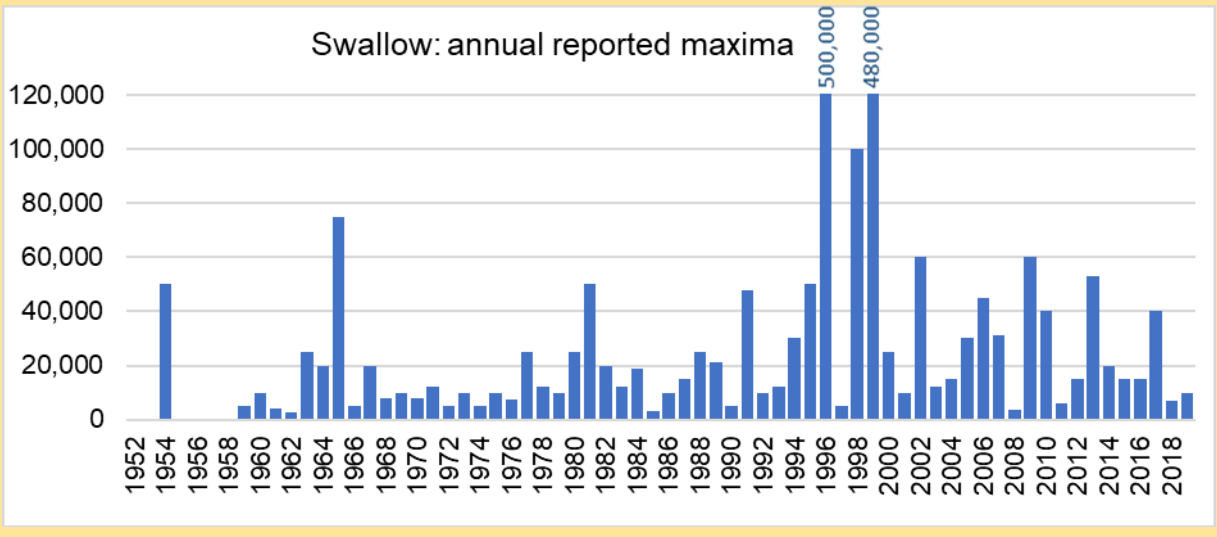
For Swallow and House Martin, most large counts are of birds seen on autumn passage, typically in coastal locations such as Dungeness, Bockhill, Sandwich Bay and Thanet, though there have been some noteworthy roost counts of

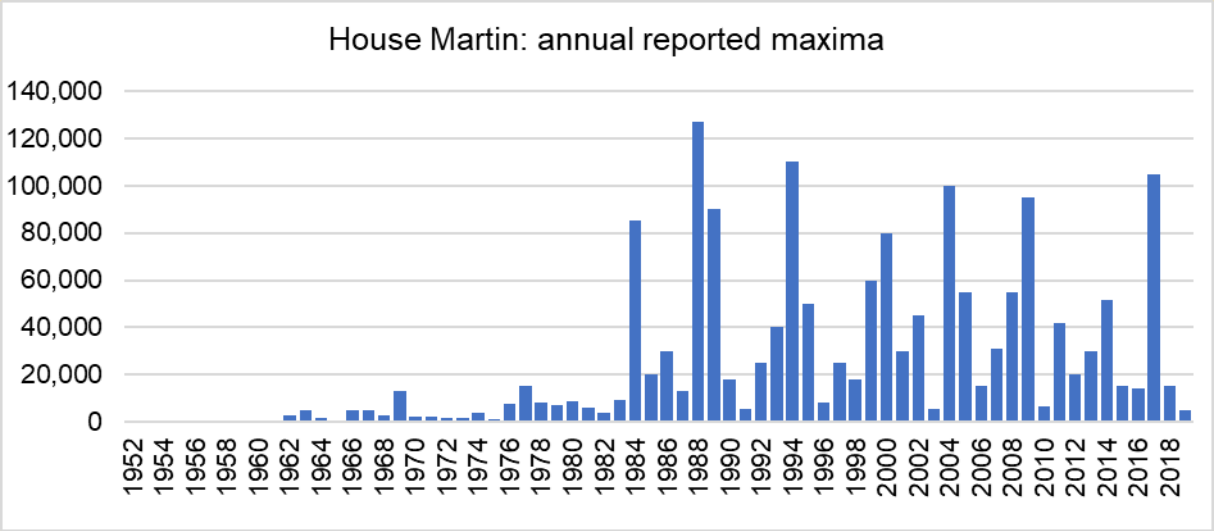
Swallow (see below). For Sand Martin, there are more large roost counts, including at inland locations such as Burham and Stodmarsh, and including some in spring. For Swift, large concentrations can be seen throughout their presence in Kent, including feeding flocks over wetlands, birds moving ahead of storms in mid-summer, and those on passage in spring and especially early autumn.

The size of the largest counts varies enormously from year to year. The next series of charts (beware differing y-axes) shows the single highest count in Kent reported in the KBR each year. Note that sometimes, especially in the 1950s, no counts were mentioned in the KBR. Below, I'll give details of a few of the very highest counts of each species, and also suggest a few reasons why these charts show the patterns they do.









What can one make of these charts? Not a lot in my opinion but I would suggest the following contribute to the patterns shown.

In the case of Swift, people have, throughout most of the 68 years, tended to note large congregations, feeding over water bodies or moving ahead of storms, and the same applies to big roost counts of Sand Martin and Swallow (which tend to occur in late summer and autumn). Passage movements, though, tended not to be recorded in the early days. Unfortunately, it's often not clearly stated what sort of counts were being made, so I can't produce definite statistics on that, but it's pretty clear from looking though the KBRs.

Counting of visible passage did sometimes happen in the early years but evidently not often. Presumably passage did occur but there were fewer birders to make counts and, as Martin Sutherland pointed out to me, in the old days there were enough birds to be found in the bushes that one didn't bother (or have time) to look at what was simply flying over.

The pattern for House Martin, which doesn't form communal roosts where they can be counted, illustrates the onset of the tendency of birders to record visible passage. You can see the sudden start of this activity in the 1980s. Surely there must have been House Martin passage before that!

Sand Martin and Swallow also show more frequent high counts from the 1980s onwards, and perhaps Swift also does though it's more obscured. But, of course, the likelihood that counts will be high depends on the populations remaining large and we know that breeding populations have been declining for at least Swift, Sand Martin and House Martin. And if you look at the pattern of high counts from the 1990s onwards, ignoring the 'noise' of really big counts, there does appear to be a trend towards smaller numbers for all four species, most apparent for Sand Martin.

The average annual peak count for all four species was markedly lower in 2010-2019 than in 2000-2009. For Swallow it was down by 24%; for the others by between 38% and 42%. There hasn't been a count of Sand Martins exceeding 5,000 for over ten years.

These counts are the totals seen at a single location on a single date. Yet often the birds are not passing that spot in a narrow stream but are spread out over a 'broad front' – though it's hard for anyone watching at a fixed location to know how wide the movement is. Also, movement can last for more than one day. There have been attempts to estimate the overall numbers moving through, notably in the Swallow passage of 25th-26th September 1999 (there was a KOS newsletter article by Mike Gould, Mike Roser & Murray Wright in the December 1999 issue, pulling together several observers' reports). At Seasalter alone, it was thought that 960,000 Swallows flew west on a two-mile front, moving at about 48,000/hour during ten hours on each day. Extrapolation of counts at various locations, which suggested that the movement on the 26th at least affected the whole county, resulted in estimates of at least 5 million and possibly a lot more moving on that one day. That total may well have exceeded the entire estimated British population. Presumably movements like that involve continental birds; certainly, the typical directions of movement at different locations suggest that birds arrive in Kent from the north-east and move west, concentrated at the north and south coasts, before moving out to sea from Dungeness or heading further south-west. Exactly when such movements occur, and the size of them, will depend on a multitude of factors, not least the weather both here and on the continent.

The following tables list the highest single location counts of each species on single dates. The most remarkable count of the lot, as it involved birds in one location, is that of Swallows going to roost in a maize crop at Sandwich Bay on 15th September 1996. There had been heavy passage the previous evening (see table) but, in the words of the SBBO report, this "*proved to be a mere precursor to what would follow the next day. On the 15th, a couple of hours before*

dusk the first birds began to arrive at the roost and numbers began to grow and grow, until the sky was black and the noise was deafening. 500,000 was the conservative estimate but there could easily have been a million hirundines in the air all together". I have treated this in table and chart as 500,000 and would like to correct the misleading statements in the 1996 Kent Bird Report, which gives the figure as one million Swallows but also suggests that there were half a million Sand Martins. I've checked this with SBBO and it's confirmed that the roost was all of Swallows.

Swift: counts of 10,000 or more

1970	1st-2nd July	Broomfield, nr Herne Bay	12,000-14,000
1978	6th August	Sandwich Bay	10,000
1984	27th June	Foreness	11,072
1985	2nd August	Dungeness	18,000
1994	19th June	Sandwich Bay	10,000
1997	27th June	Dungeness	20,000
2000	10th July	St Margaret's Bay	10,000
2005	9th July	Walland Marsh	10,000
2009	4th August	Dungeness	10,000
2019	27th July	St Margaret's Bay	15,000

Sand Martin: counts of 10,000 or more

1966	5th September	Murston	12,000
1967	During August	Murston	13,000
1971	19th August	Murston	10,000
1982	29th August	Stodmarsh	10,000
1988	4th September	Dungeness	12,000
1989	29th August	Dungeness	10,000
1991	8th September	Lower Stoke	20,000
1992	10th September	Dungeness	10,000
1993	19th August	Grain	15,000
1993	30th August	Palmarsh	6,000-10,000
1998	17th July	Pegwell Bay	10,000
2000	17th July	Pegwell Bay	17,000
2007	27th August	Dungeness	10,000

Swallow: counts of 50,000 or more

1954	19th September	Cottington, nr Deal	50,000
1965	13th September	Dungeness	75,000
1981	6th October	Dungeness	50,000
1995	22nd September	Sandwich Bay	50,000
1996	14th September	Sandwich Bay	50,000
1996	15th September	Sandwich Bay	500,000
1998	19th September	Dungeness	100,000
1999	25th September	Seasalter	480,000
1999	25th September	Reculver	75,000
1999	25th September	Dungeness	50,000
1999	26th September	Seasalter	480,000
1999	26th September	Foreness	80,000
2002	29th September	Sandwich Bay	60,000
2009	21st September	Minnis Bay	60,000
2013	23rd September	Sandwich Bay	53,000

House Martin: counts of 80,000 or more

1984	8th October	Sandwich Bay	85,000
1988	11th September	Foreness	100,000
1988	12th September	Minnis Bay	127,000
1989	24th September	Dungeness	90,000
1994	28th September	Minnis Bay	110,000
1994	28th September	St Margaret's Bay	100,000
1994	29th September	Foreness	80,000
2000	2nd October	Birchington	80,000
2004	28th September	Pegwell Bay	100,000
2009	21st September	Minnis Bay	95,000
2017	20th September	Sandwich Bay	105,000
2017	29th September	Bockhill	100,000

The largest counts for Swallow (13th September-6th October) and House Martin (11th September-8th October) are clearly within the period of peak autumn passage, while those for Swift (19th June-6th August) and Sand Martin (17th July-10th September) cover wider spans including summer movements and departure movements of Swifts, and post-breeding gatherings and passage movements of Sand Martins.

Most of the locations where high counts are made are on or close to the coast. This is partly because that's where birders concentrate, but also because birds on passage concentrate there, being reluctant to move out to sea.

Conclusions

There seems little doubt that all four of these species are declining at present. Swallow started to decline fairly recently but the others have been on a downhill trend for years. This is certainly confirmed for our locally-breeding birds by surveys such as the BBS, and there are strong indications that it applies more widely, in Britain and abroad.

Nevertheless, huge numbers can be seen occasionally, especially on autumn passage though the size of such movements can vary enormously depending on weather conditions. Birders' interest in and recording of visible passage of hirundines and many other species have grown over the years. More areas are watched regularly, and counting is more assiduous. This lack of consistency in recording does create difficulties in interpreting the patterns of counts: we have to 'read between the lines' a lot and be cautious in reaching conclusions. But I suspect that most people will agree that all four species are declining.

The causes of the declines may include:

Loss of nest sites: Swifts can lose sites when buildings are refurbished; House Martin nests and associated mess are unpopular with some householders; reduced numbers of sand quarries and grading of vertical slopes for safety reasons has definitely affected Sand Martins in Kent. It's worth remembering, by the way, that before the arrival of humans and their buildings, all four species must have been far more limited in suitable nest sites. We still have Sand Martins nesting in natural locations (clay cliffs and riverbanks) and there are a few handfuls of House Martins nesting on the chalk cliffs. But when did you last come across Swifts or Swallows at a natural nest site?
Climate change: Earlier arrival in Europe may mean there is a mismatch between the birds' breeding cycle and insect availability. Climate change and associated habitat degradation may be reducing suitable feeding areas in wintering grounds and on migration.
Prey availability: Habitat change, and the localised and diffuse effects of pesticides and other agricultural chemicals (and perhaps other factors such as artificial light) have reduced the abundance of invertebrates in Britain and Europe, and there may well also be similar effects in Africa.

The relative importance of these and perhaps other causes of change may well vary between species. My own view is that prey availability, here and/or in Africa, is likely to be the most significant factor. There has been a fair bit of research into long-term trends of invertebrate abundance but there are so many species, many as yet undescribed, and – compared to birds – so few people studying them, that or knowledge is dangerously limited. A recently published book by Dave Goulson (*Silent Earth: Averting the Insect Apocalypse*) covers this and other aspects of the contribution of insects to the well-being of the natural world and to humans and has been well-reviewed; an article derived from it appeared in *The Observer* newspaper on 25th July this year and can be found online.

Hybrids

There have been several reports of presumed hybrid hirundines in Kent over the years, mostly of Swallow x House Martin. It is possible that others have not been reported, and I haven't yet managed to acquire full details of some including the most recent ones, in 2019-2021. Summaries of what I do have are given in the tables below.

Swallow x House Martin hybrids seem to be relatively common, while those involving Sand Martin are rarer. From what I have been able to discover, most examples that have been seen were juveniles, so the Sandwich Bay birds of 2019-2021 are of particular interest – it seems possible that one or more may even be breeding in the area.

Photographs of the 2014 Dungeness bird can be found online, e.g., on Martin Casemore's blog at http://ploddingbirder.blogspot.com/2014/09/hybrid.html. More on the bird at Waterham, including photographs, is in the 1995 KBR.

Photographs of the Sand Martin x House Martin hybrid trapped at Sandwich Bay in 2014 are in Alan Woodcock's blog at http://snodlandblogspotcom.blogspot.com/2014/09/. Description of another, trapped in Cheshire in 2013, together with additional discussion of hirundine hybrids, including photos of a House Martin x Sand Martin in Lincolnshire, can be found in a paper by Dunning, Hanmer & Christmas (2014) Ringing & Migration 29: 86-89, available online. It's worth noting that the Sandwich Bay bird was largely brown above like a Sand Martin and with a whitish rump with

scattered brown feathers, while that in Cheshire was blue-black on the head, neck, wings and tail and with a brown back and rump with a few white feathers.

Swallow x House Martin

1991	One was trapped and ringed at Stodmarsh of 24th August
1995	One was trapped and ringed at Waterham, near Graveney, on 2nd October. There is a photograph of this one in the 1995 KBR.
1996	One was seen at Dungeness on 15th September.
2004	One was seen at Reculver on 24th September.
2014	One was trapped and ringed at Dungeness on 27th September.
2019-21	Two were present on St George's Golf Course, Sandwich Bay, in May 2019 and one, an adult, was trapped on 17th May 2019. At least one bird returned in 2020 and 2021

Sand Martin x House Martin

2014	One was trapped and ringed at Sandwich Bay on 27th September (note this was the same day as a Swallow x House Martin hybrid at Dungeness).

With thanks to the many people who have counted and reported these birds over the years. Steffan Walton kindly looked up old SBBO records for me, Robin Mace checked one or two key points on the KOS database, and Chris Powell sent the 1999 newsletter article from his near-complete collection.

Andrew Henderson

Scarce and rare swifts and hirundines

As a follow-on to the article about the commoner swifts, swallows and martins, here are summaries of the occurrence in Kent of the rarer species.

White-throated Needletail

White-throated Needletail by Don Taylor

The one Kent record was of a bird at Wierton Hill reservoir, near Boughton Monchelsea, on 26th May 1991. It was a great reward for Don Taylor, found by him on his local patch (see D Taylor, 1992, White-throated Needletail at Wierton, *Kent Bird Report 1991* 40: 92). Seen by only seven people, it sensibly departed before the hordes arrived.

Alpine Swift

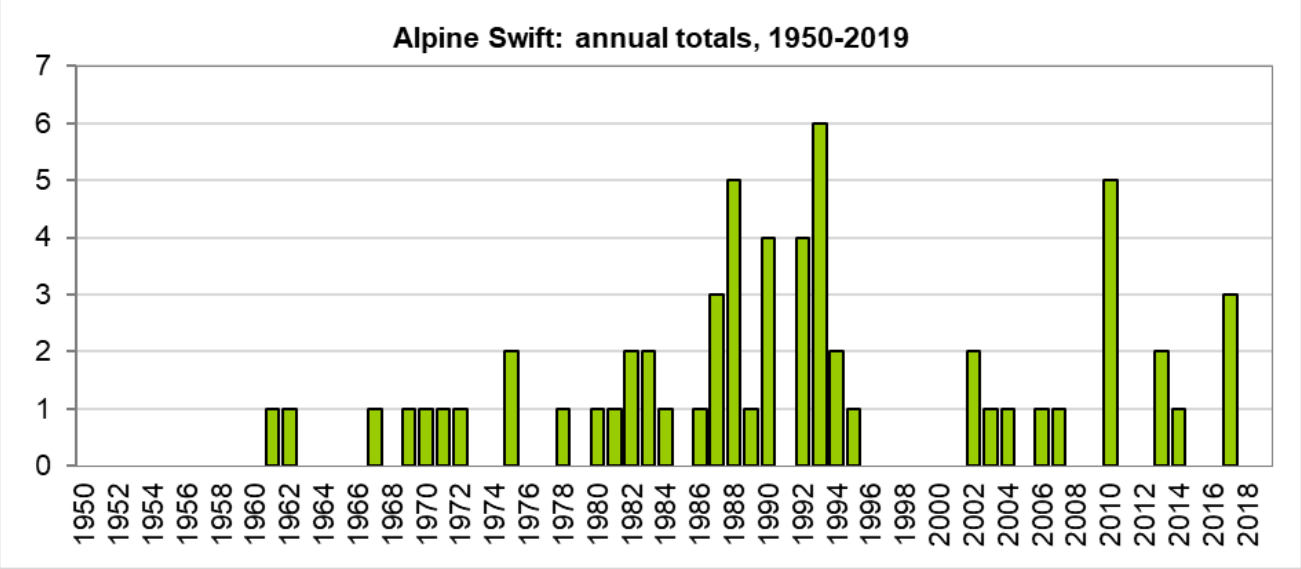
Alpine Swift by Steve Ashton

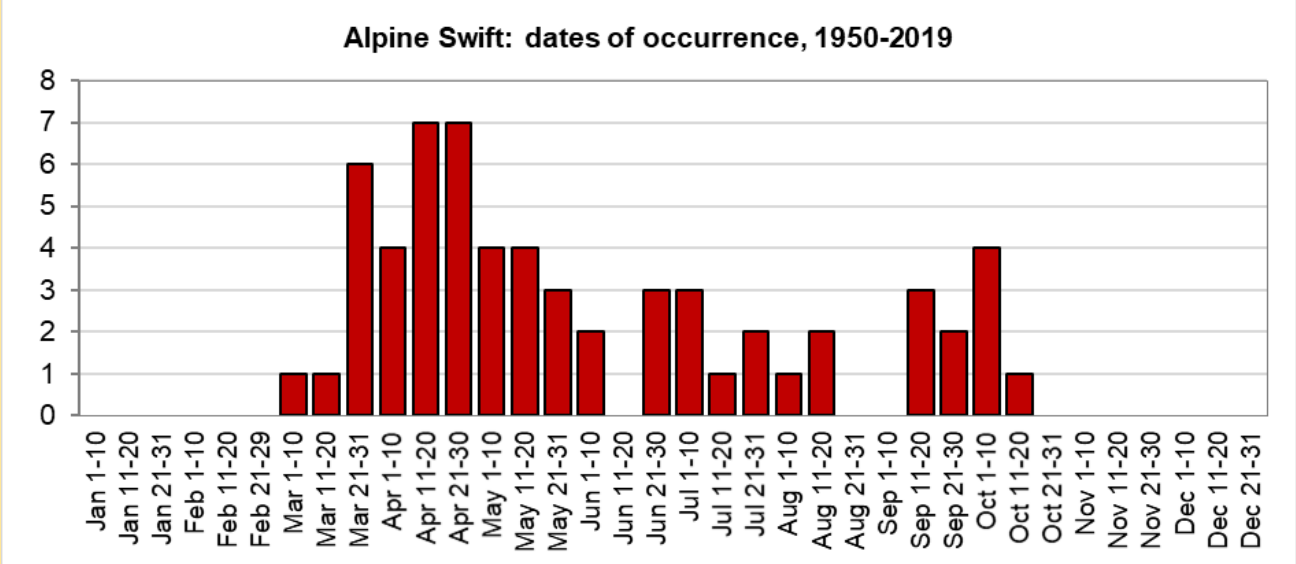
The first record of Alpine Swift in Kent was of one caught after flying indoors at Dover on 20th August 1830. There is, as with many other species, a fair amount of uncertainty about the sequence and dates of some of the early records but our current tally includes six records involving 14 individuals in the period up to 1951, and a further 61 individuals since then.

I should mention some amazing records in 1915, of 100 at Kingsdown on 15th July plus further sightings of five on both 22nd July and 3rd August. These were accepted uncritically by James Harrison in his Birds of Kent but often caused eyebrow-raising until eventually they were reviewed by Phil Chantler, after which they were removed from the Kent record. For more details, see P Chantler, 2001, *Kent Bird Report 1999* 48: 176-182. The birds were reported by A H Mathew. At the time of Phil's research, he could find little about A H Mathew (1852-1919) but there is now a substantial Wikipedia page about him, the first Archbishop of the "Old Roman Catholic Church" that he founded himself. I understand the content of the Wikipedia page even less than I understand guides on gull identification.

In 1916 another multiple record occurred: groups of three and six entered a house in Hythe, in separate rooms occupied by Miss Barclay and Mr Hake. In this case, despite the details seeming a bit fishy, the view was taken that we can bank on the record (P Chantler, 2005, *British Birds* 98: 259-260). This record is counted as nine birds and remains the only count of more than two in Kent.

The two charts below show the number of Alpine Swifts recorded in Kent each year from 1950 onwards and their seasonal pattern over the period. Mostly single birds have been seen but there were two together on three occasions: at North Foreland on 24th-28th March 1992 (one later being found dead), at Foreness on 23rd April 1992, and at Reculver on 23rd-25th April 1993.





I am aware of eight reports during 1995-2006 (and there may well be others) which don't appear in the 'official' record, and which will be forgotten in time. These are sightings for which no supporting documentation was provided to BBRC (up to 2005) or KOS. They may well have been Alpine Swifts but without some evidence, who knows? They could have been Sand Martins like those in 1915. It's a shame to lose good records, though, as it detracts from our understanding of species' true status.

The earliest in the year was one at Foreness on 8th-9th March 2003. The latest in the modern era was one at Tankerton on 14th October 1987, but there was one that was seen then shot at Broadstairs on 21st October 1902.

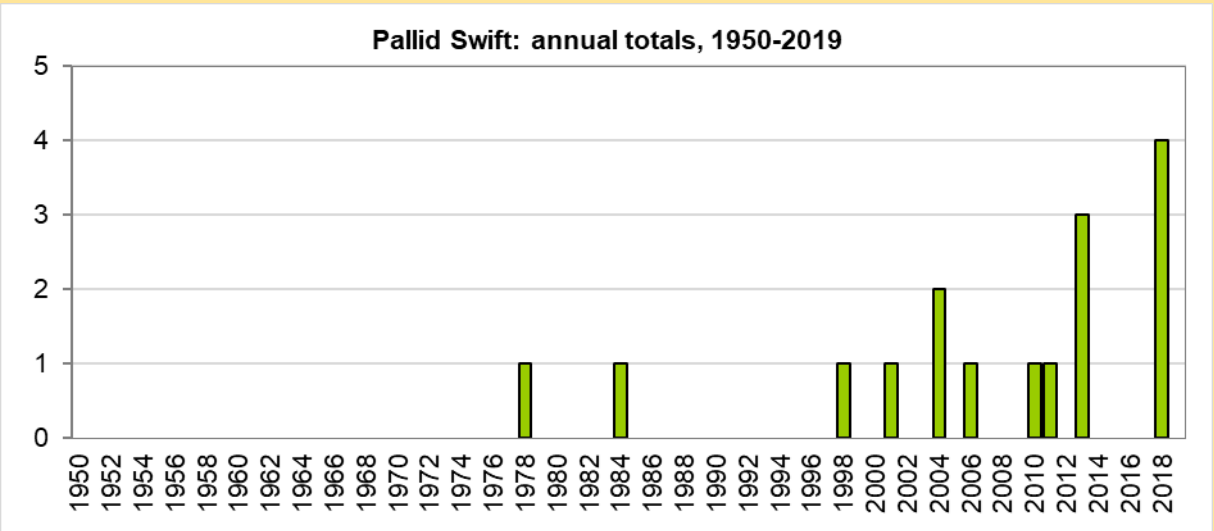
As suggested by the examples already quoted, most Alpine Swifts have been seen around the coast. Of the 61 individuals seen from 1950 onwards, 20 were between Kingsdown and Folkestone and 17 on Thanet, with nine at Dungeness or on Romney Marsh, seven between Pegwell and Deal, and four between Whitstable and Reculver. Birds seen inland were one at Hayesden on 25th-26th July 1981, one at Larkfield on 27th March 2010 and one at Biddenden on 26th May 2010, and the one accepted record in north Kent was a bird at Cliffe on 7th October 1961.

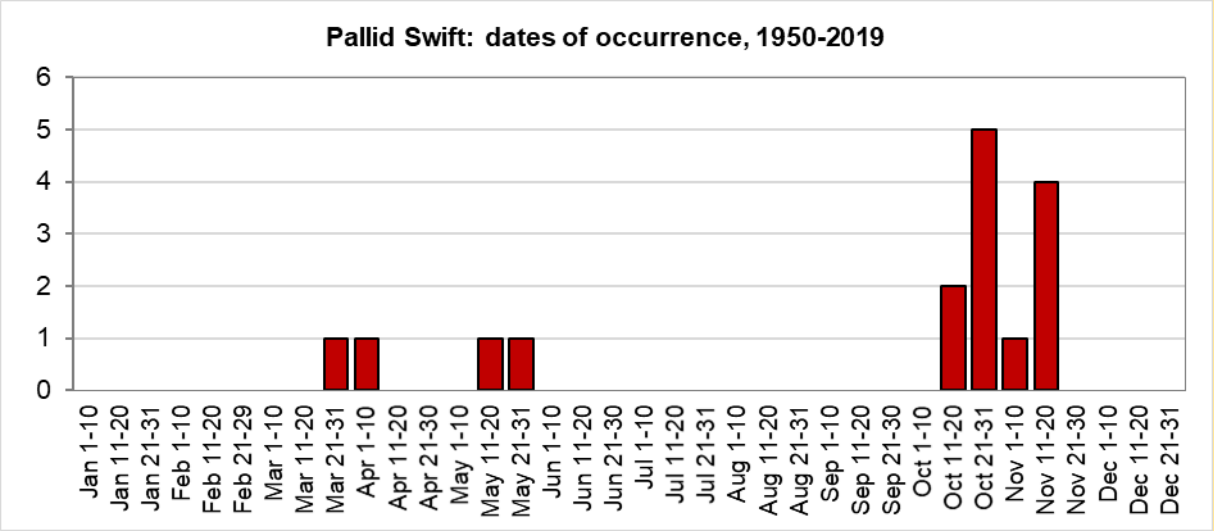
Pallid Swift

Pallid Swift by Martyn Wilson

The first Pallid Swift for Britain was seen at Stodmarsh on 13th May 1978 (see W G Harvey, 1981, *British Birds* 74: 170-178). It remained until at least 21st May (some claims to the 24th were never substantiated). The species has now become quite frequent nationally (for a rarity); its earlier absence may well have been a result of identification difficulties. Indeed, one had been collected in Ireland in 1913, and there had been others suspected of being Pallid in Britain prior to 1978.

There have now been 13 accepted records in Kent involving 16 individuals. Four single birds have been seen in spring, the earliest being one at Dungeness RSPB Reserve on 29th-30th March 2010. Twelve birds have been seen in autumn, the earliest on 15th October 2004 and the latest on 14th-16th November 1984. All except the Stodmarsh bird have been at coastal locations, including three at Dungeness and six at Foreness. The Foreness records include up to three together during 21st-28th October 2013 and two on 13th November 2018.





Crag Martin

Crag Martin by Mike Gould

Most of the summaries in this article cover the period up to 2019, as records for 2020 are not yet fully collated. But I think we can make an exception for this: the only Crag Martin to be recorded in Kent was the first-winter bird seen at Kingsdown from 21st November to 4th December 2020, the bird also being seen at Samphire Hoe during 28th November-2nd December.

This species remains a genuine rarity in Britain (so far), with only thirteen individuals before the Kent one. The first was in Cornwall in 1988. Interestingly, one was seen on Orkney on 18th November 2020 but, so far as I know, it's not thought that it was the same as in Kent.

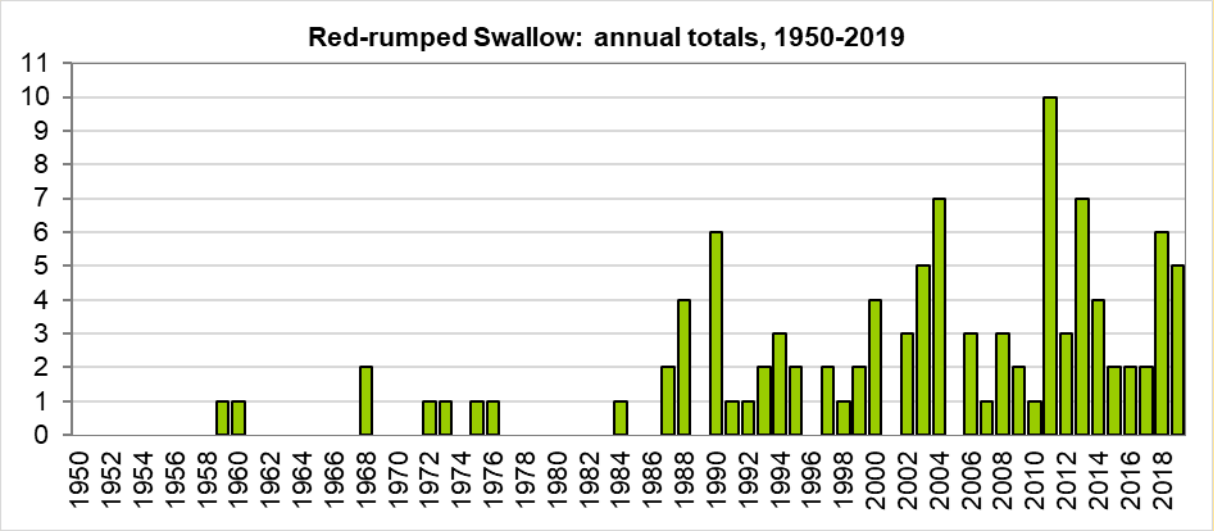
Red-rumped Swallow

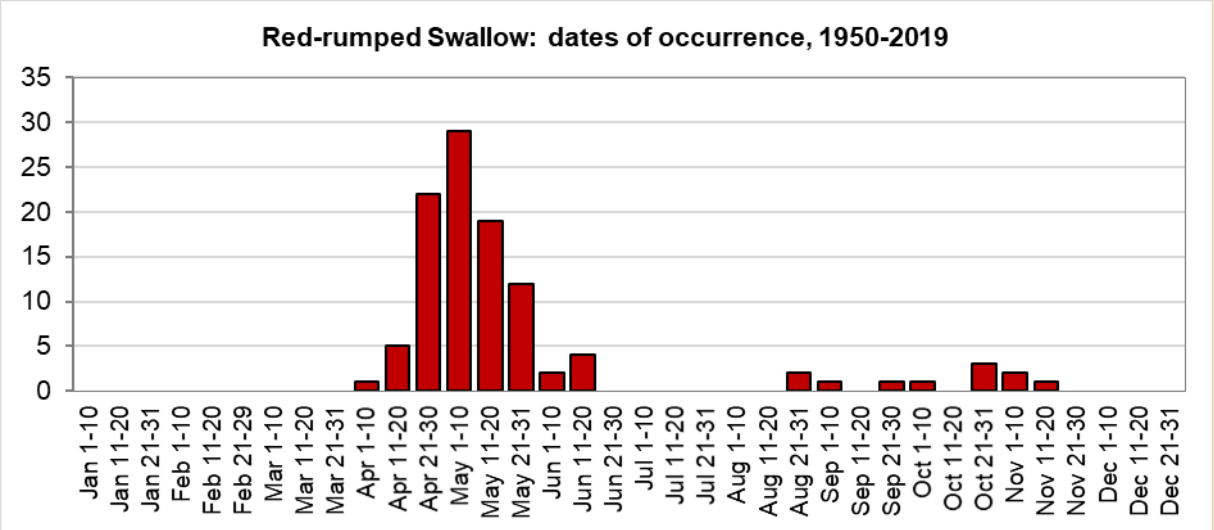
Red-rumped Swallow by Marc Heath

Excluding a Hastings Rarity in 1909 (in any case outside the modern county), the first for Kent was one at Murston Pits on 28th August 1959 (see J J M Flegg, 1960, *British Birds* 53: 222-223). For the next 25 years, the species remained a rarity but from the late 1980s it became more frequent. There have been only three blank years since 1990, as shown on the first chart below. Sightings of single birds are usual but two have been seen together on nine occasions, all in April-May.

Far more are seen in spring than in autumn: of the 105 individuals recorded up to 2019, 94 occurred during April-June. The earliest was one seen at both Monk's Wall NR, Sandwich, and Westbere on 5th-6th April 1999, and the latest in spring have been two individuals on 17th June, in 2004 and 2013, and one at Stodmarsh on 14th-18th June 1991. Of the 11 individuals in autumn, the earliest were individuals on 28th August, at Murston in 1959 (the first Kent record) and Bough Beech reservoir in 1972. The latest was one at Whiteness, Thanet, on 17th November 1990.

As for Alpine Swift, I'm aware of quite a few undocumented records. There are various reasons why this happens: being unaware of the procedure, oversight/just not getting round to it, observers thinking themselves superior to the adjudication system, observers antipathetic to those doing the adjudication. It's never too late to submit material and, to ensure as accurate a record as possible, I'd encourage anyone who thinks a record is missing from these accounts to send details.





Of the 105 birds, most have been around the coast including 30 at Dungeness or nearby, 25 along the chalk cliffs and 11 between Pegwell and Deal. A total of 18 have been found around Thanet or along the north coast and estuaries. In addition, 21 were seen at inland locations, including 13 in Westbere/Stodmarsh section of the Stour valley.

Andrew Henderson

KENT BIRD SIGHTINGS FOR JULY AND AUGUST 2021 - Chris Hindle

*Species printed in **red** require descriptions or good quality photographs to be accepted by the British Birds Rarities Committee (species in capital letters) or the KOS Rarities Committee (species in lower case). The results of these committees' deliberations are regularly published on the KOS website.*

WEATHER

The first twelve days of **July** were mostly unsettled with frequent showers, but it was much warmer by mid-month with temperatures exceeding 30°C in some places. The final week was much more unsettled with temperatures back to near normal and "Storm Evert" moving west on the 30th and bringing 40 mph gusts at Langdon Bay. 87.9 mm of rain fell at Bethersden in 24 hours on the 26th.

The first half of **August** was unsettled with some rain, but the second half was drier except from the 20th to 22nd when thunderstorms drifted up from the Continent. On the 22nd, 33 mm of rain fell in two hours at Bishopstone between 0500 and 0700. Sunshine was below average for the month with only about 60% of normal recorded.

PARTRIDGE TO WILDFOWL

A **Quail** was heard at Bockhill on July 3rd and 4th.

A very early returning flock of 22 **Dark-bellied Brent Geese** flew E at DBO on July 27th whilst a **White-fronted Goose** was found at Scotney GPs on Aug 2nd.

As many as 25 **Egyptian Geese** were reported from Bough Beech with single figure counts at Cliffe Pools, Dunorlan Park and Dungeness RSPB. A total of 174 was counted at Bough Beech on Aug 21st with 165 on the 30th. Up to 13 **Mandarin Ducks** were recorded at Bough Beech and Eastwell Park.

During July and August up to seven **Garganey** were reported from Worth Marshes, Oare Marshes, Dungeness RSPB, DBO, Cliffe Pools, Reculver Marshes, Tankerton and Grove Ferry/Stodmarsh.

A **Velvet Scoter** was reported from Grain on Aug 26th.

NIGHTJAR TO WADERS

A **Nightjar** was found at North Foreland on Aug 31st but was unwell and had to be taken into care.

During August up to four **Black-necked Grebe** were seen at Dungeness RSPB with one or two at Cliffe Pools and Seasalter.

Single **Stone-curlews** were seen at Kingsdown on Aug 17th and St Margarets-at-Cliffe on the 24th.

The first **Curlew Sandpiper** of the autumn was recorded at Oare Marshes on July 30th after which one or two birds were seen at Oare Marshes, Elmley, Reculver, Dungeness RSPB and Cliffe Pools.

A **Little Stint** was seen at Oare Marshes on July 30th and subsequently as many as four birds were recorded from Sandwich Bay, Dungeness RSPB, Worth Marshes, Elmley, Gravesend, Cliffe Pools, Lade Bay and Shellness

A **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** was found at Elmley on Aug 23rd and a juvenile **Red-necked Phalarope** was seen at Stodmarsh on Aug 26th.

Red-necked Phalarope by Gaz Foreman

After single **Wood Sandpipers** were seen at Minster Marshes, Thanet and Worth Marshes on July 23rd as many as nine birds were seen at Foreness, Stodmarsh/Grove Ferry, Minster Marshes, Reculver, Worth Marshes, Sandwich Bay, Bough Beech, Pegwell Bay, Elmley, Cliffe Pools and Capel Fleet.

During July and August up to eight **Spotted Redshank** were seen at Sandwich Bay, Otterham Creek, Cliffe Pools, Faversham Creek, Capel Fleet and Oare Marshes.

GULLS TO SHEARWATERS

An adult **Sabine's Gull** was seen at Shellness on Aug 26th and at various other places in the Swale and as far as Swalecliffe. On the 31st, an adult flew W at Reculver and another was recorded from Gravesend.

The adult **BONAPARTE'S GULL** that has been seen at Oare Marshes for the last nine years arrived on cue on July 16th and remained there until Aug 30th.

A **Little Gull** was seen at Lade on July 21st after which others were seen at Reculver, Collard's Lake, DBO, Samphire Hoe and Tankerton.

Juvenile **Caspian Gulls** were seen at Langdon Cliffs on Aug 19th and at Pegwell Bay on the 28th whilst after the first juvenile **Yellow-legged Gull** of the year was seen at DBO on July 4th as many as four birds were recorded from DBO, Pegwell Bay, Langdon Cliffs, Walmer, Bough Beech, Cliffe Pools and Foreness.

Gull-billed Tern by Chris Powell

An adult **GULL-BILLED TERN** was seen very briefly at Chartham on July 22nd but luckily it was photographed before it moved on and a **CASPIAN TERN** was seen at Dungeness on Aug 2nd and then flew NW.

An adult **Roseate Tern** was identified at Pegwell Bay on July 31st and a juvenile **White-winged Black Tern** was identified at Bough Beech on Aug 23rd.

White-winged Black Tern by Chris White

The first **Black Tern** of the autumn was seen at Tankerton on July 28th after which up to 12 were recorded from Dungeness, Shellness, Swanscombe, Swalecliffe, Oare Marshes, Walmer Beach, Lade, Tankerton, Cliftonville, Bough Beech, Seasalter, Sevenoaks WR and Foreness.

As many as three **Great Skuas** were seen at DBO, Reculver, Grenham Bay, Whitstable, Tankerton, Shellness, Walmer Beach, Sandwich Bay and Swalecliffe.The first **Pomarine Skuas** of the autumn were seen at Reculver and Shellness on Aug 30th.

The first **Arctic Skua** of the autumn flew past Tankerton and Swalecliffe on July 16th after which up to 15 were recorded from DBO, Foreness, Seasalter, Seabrook, Reculver, Swalecliffe, Whitstable and Sandwich Bay. There were, however, higher counts of 27 birds at Swalecliffe on Aug 23rd, 45 in the Swale at Shellness on Aug 26th with 32 there on the 30th.

Single juvenile **Long-tailed Skuas** were seen at Oare Marshes and Grain on Aug 26th. There was an unprecedented movement of birds reported from Shellness on Aug 30th when a total of **51** birds was reported flying into the Swale during the day and moving off as the weather cleared during the afternoon. Single birds were also seen at Cliftonville and Seasalter. One was also reported from Shellness on the 31st. A **Sooty Shearwater** was seen at DBO on Aug 7th and 8th and gave very close views and others flew S at Walmer Beach on Aug 28th and were seen at DBO on the 29th.

Sooty Shearwater by Steve Ashton

With a south-westerly gale blowing on July 6th, 12 **Manx Shearwaters** flew past DBO.

22 **Balearic Shearwaters** flew past DBO on July 30th during "Storm Evert."

Balearic Shearwater numbers at Dungeness during August

August 1st	3
August 2nd	-
August 3rd	4
August 4th	3
August 5th	-
August 6th	3
August 7th	3
August 8th	-
August 9th	8
August 10th	1
August 11th	1
August 12th	-
August 13th	-
August 14th	-
August 15th	-
August 16th	-
August 17th	1
August 18th	1
August 19th	-
August 20th	-
August 21st	1
August 22nd	1

In addition, three birds flew past Samphire Hoe on Aug 11th.

WHITE STORK TO WOODPECKERS

A **BLACK STORK** was found at Worth Marshes on the evening July 9th but was not seen the next day, however it reappeared at Minster Marshes, Thanet on the 13th, flew over Folkestone and Dover on the 15th, Stonar and Ash Levels on the 16th and Folkestone, Langdon and Ash Levels on the 17th.

Black Stork by Shaun Ferguson

An immature **Shag** was seen at Reculver on July 12th whilst one flew past Sandwich Bay on Aug 25th and there were two at Samphire Hoe on the 30th.

The long staying **Glossy Ibis** was still at Dungeness RSPB on July 9th and from Aug 6th-29th whilst single birds were seen at Bough Beech from July 9th-16th and at Oare Marshes and Faversham Creek from Aug 13th-25th. One was also seen at Cliffe Pools on Aug 26th and 29th.

Glossy Ibis by Norman McCanch

Up to four **Spoonbills** were seen at Worth Marshes, Cliffe Pools, Higham Marsh, Tankerton, Birchington, Oare Marshes and Elmley whilst during July and August single **Bitterns** were recorded from Stodmarsh/Grove Ferry, Worth Marshes, Stonar and Oare Marshes.

A **Night-heron** was reported from New Hythe GPs on Aug 2nd., while another was heard flying over Ash late in the evening on 4th August.

As many as four **Cattle Egrets** were seen at Northward Hill, Dungeness RSPB, Conyer, Swalecliffe, Halstow Marshes, Cliffe Pools, Elmley and Higham Marshes. In addition, 15 birds including eight juveniles, were seen at Halstow Marshes on Aug 8th and 22nd and 10 were recorded from Elmley on the 29th.

Adult and Juvenile Cattle Egrets by Linda Lyon

A juvenile **Purple Heron** was seen at Conningbrook on Aug 22nd.

Up to ten **Great White Egrets** were recorded from Dungeness RSPB with one or two at Stodmarsh/Grove Ferry, Oare Marshes, Swalecliffe, Worth Marshes and Sandwich Bay.

During August single **Ospreys** were recorded from DBO, Walmer, Hythe, Oare Marshes, Samphire Hoe, Dungeness, Marden, Lower Halstow, Grain and Stodmarsh/Grove Ferry.

During July and August single **Honey Buzzards** were recorded from DBO, Dungeness RSPB, Oare Marshes, Sandwich Bay, Little Farthingloe, Willop Outfall, Pegwell Bay, Staple, Canterbury, South Foreland, Samphire Hoe and Ramsgate.

A **ring-tailed harrier** was reported from Godmersham on Aug 5th and a **Hen Harrier** was reported from Eastchurch on Aug 22nd.

During July one or two **Red Kites** were recorded from Sandwich Bay, Bough Beech, Conyer, Kennington, Canterbury, Stodmarsh, Hillborough, Sevenoaks and Elmley and a **Black Kite** was reported flying E at Conyer on Aug 26th.

A **Short-eared Owl** was seen at Conyer on July 9th, with others at Dungeness RSPB on Aug 27th and at Sandwich Bay on Aug 29th.

Nine **Bee-eaters** flew S over Sandwich Bay on July 1st whilst a **Hoopoe** spent the day at Oare Marshes on Aug 4th.

Hoopoe by Terry Laws

There was an arrival of **Wrynecks** in the last week of August with three different birds seen at Sandwich Bay between Aug 25th and 27th and two at Langdon Cliffs from the 26th-30th, two at Abbotscliffe from the 28th-31st, one at Galloways on the 28th and another at St Margarets-at-Cliffe on the 29th. Single birds were also recorded from DBO, North Foreland and Cliftonville on the 31st.

FALCONS TO HIRUNDINES

Single **Merlins** were seen in the Dungeness area on July 17th and Aug 4th and 28th, Elmley on Aug 23rd, Weddington on the 26th and Tankerton on the 29th.

A **Golden Oriole** was singing at Northward Hill on July 16th.

Up to five **Ravens** were recorded from Bough Beech, Oare Marshes, Grove Ferry, Shuart, Rochester, Sellindge, Minster Marshes, Reculver, Horsmonden, Cliffe Pools, Bockhill, Cooling Marshes and Stodmarsh.

The **Sand Martin** colony on the cliffs between Reculver and Bishopstone had 182 nest holes in use on July 1st.

WARBLERS TO WHEATEARS

Single **Wood Warblers** were recorded at Sandwich Bay on July 28th and Aug 11th, 15th and 20th with others at Northdown Park on Aug 5th and Furnace Pond on Aug 17th.

A **Melodious Warbler** spent the day at Langdon Cliffs on Aug 22nd.

Melodious Warbler by Phil Smith

During July and August one or two **Grasshopper Warblers** were recorded at Bockhill, Swanscombe Marshes, Shuart, Pegwell Bay, Foreness Point, Hope Point, Nethergong and Reculver Marshes.

A first winter **Barred Warbler** was reported from Abbotscliffe on Aug 10th.

During July one or two **Firecrests** were reported from Orlestone Forest and Godmersham.

An unseasonable **Redwing** was ringed at Sandwich Bay on July 23rd.

The first **Pied Flycatchers** of the autumn were recorded from Cliftonville, Warden Ponit, Bockhill and Walmer on Aug 21st after which up to five birds were seen at Reculver, North Foreland, Walmer, Lydd, Langdon Cliffs, Fan Bay, Leysdown-on-Sea, Ramsgate, Stodmarsh, Chamber's Wall, Worth Marshes, Ramsgate, Walpole Bay, Abbotscliffe, Warden Point, Kingsgate and Dungeness.

During July and August up to three **Black Restarts** were seen at DBO, Langdon Cliffs, Abbotscliffe and Samphire Hoe.

SPARROWS TO BUNTINGS

In July, one or two **Crossbills** were seen at Langdon Hole and DBO whilst five flew W at Reculver Marshes on Aug 14th.

A **Serin** flew E over the Point at DBO on July 15th.

***DBO** = Dungeness Bird Observatory **BBRC** = British Birds Rarities Committee*
***RSPB** = Royal Society for the Protection of Birds **BOU** = British Ornithological Union*
***"The Patch"** = the warm water outflow from Dungeness Nuclear Power Station*
***NNR**=National Nature Reserve **NR**=Nature Reserve **LNR**=Local Nature Reserve*
***FC** = Field Centre **WR** = Wildlife Reserve **GP** = Gravel Pits **CP** = Country Park*

CONTRIBUTORS

This summary owes much to the contributors to the various sites in “Latest Sightings” on the KOS Website at www.kentos.org.uk, KOSForum, Twitter and the RBA Hotline.

Records have been contributed by A. Appleton, P. Beraet, Bockhill Birders, Bough Beech (per A. Ford), E. Brown, N. Burt, G. Burton, F. Cackett, J. Cantelo, P. Carr, R. Carr, M. Casemore, J. Chantler, P. Chantler, M. Chidwick, G. Coultrip, K. Cutting, DBO (per D. Walker), A. Dunstan, B. East, P. Edmonson, D. Faulkener, Folkestone and Hythe Birds (per I. Roberts), Foreness Bird Group, C. Gibbard, M. Gould, R. Heading, A. Hindle, C. Hindle, M. Hindle, M. Hollingworth, S. Huggins, M. Kennett, J. King, O. Leyshon, A. Lipczynski, K. Lord, R. Mace, J. Massey, B. Matlock, N. McCanch, S. Message, S. Morton, S. Mount, M. Norman, P. North, R. O'Reilly, M. Orchard, J. Partridge, K. Privett, C. Powell, M. Puxley, R. Rackliffe, B. Ring, M. Roser, K. Ross, B. Ryan, Samphire Hoe (per L. Collins, P. Holt, D. Smith, and P. Smith), SBBO (per A. Lipczynski and S. Walton), Sevenoaks WR (per S. Clerici), I. Shepherd, D. Smith, P. Smith, W. Stoneham, M. Sutherland, Swale NNR (per R. Smith, D. Faulkner, I. Davidson), A. Swandale, C. Tedder, P. Trodd, D. Tutt, N. Upton, J. van der Dol, M. Watts, C. White, M. Wilson, T. Wilson, J. Woolgar, B. Woolhouse, B. Wright and M.Wright.

Please send records for this review to Chris Hindle at christopherhindle@hotmail.com

Records sent to me may not all be used for this report as I try to extract the more interesting sightings, however all records are equally important and I forward them to the appropriate Area Recorders who enter them all onto the KOS database.

Please also send to me any descriptions or photos of rare birds so that they may be assessed by the relevant committee.

The following 2021 KOS Rarities have been accepted by the KOS Rarities Panel based on published photos or from descriptions submitted.

Purple Heron	Stodmarsh/Grove Ferry	May 20th & 31st
Rough-legged Buzzard	Stonar	April 19th
Stone-curlew (sound recording)	Stonar	March 30th
Stone-curlew (sound recording)	Sandwich Bay	April 19th
Red-footed Falcon (male)	Collard's Lake	May 24th
Red-footed Falcon (female)	Worth Marshes	June 6th-26th
Siberian Chiffchaff	Worth Marshes	March 18th-29th
Siberian Chiffchaff	Worth Marshes	April 8th-21st
5 Rose-coloured Starlings	South Foreland	June 2nd
Rose-coloured Starling	Worth Marshes	June 6th

Fifty Years Ago

Cirl Bunting

Cirl Bunting by H Gronvold (PDI)

One at Longfield on Aug. 8th (AWC) was the only record.

KBR 1971