



Tawny Owl by Barry Wright

- News & Announcements •
- Summer Migrant Arrival dates – a response •
- Diving Ducks • Moorhen meanderings •
- Bird Sightings – SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER •
- A Long Time Ago •

September and October came and went and for me at least it was a bit of an anti-climax. Above all the absence of Goldcrests seemed ominous, especially as they seem to be vehicles for the arrivals of other eastern gems. Winter thrushes also seemed scarce in my part of East Kent, with a few big arrival days but not the tendency for them to be ever present. There were a few nice birds about, most of which I was unable to see, although I did connect with a nice Desert Wheatear at Joss Bay. What will the winter itself bring? As I mentioned in my last editorial, we are already seeing declines in visits by Bewick's swans and sawbills such as Smew and Goosander, part of a longer term trend associated with warmer winters especially around the Baltic States. Why fly all the way to Kent when conditions are ideal in Latvia and Estonia!

Recent papers on the effects or otherwise of climate change on summer visitors did provoke some discussion and a considered response from Andrew Henderson. In this issue Chris Wheeler has taken the opportunity to respond to some of the points Andrew clarified, but this will be the end of this topic unless some further data driven analysis suggests new evidence.

It is very sad to end with a note on the passing of a good friend and KOS stalwart, Dr. Steve Wood. A man of quiet good humour and perceptive insights, I worked alongside him on the Executive and Conservation & Surveys Committees and also the KOS Breeding Atlas. I shall miss him.

Keep safe!
Good birding

Norman

News and announcements

Dr. Steve Wood

As mentioned in the editorial, Steve Wood passed away recently. A full obituary will appear on the website, but I am grateful to Anthea Skiffington for allowing me to include the eulogy she read at Steve's funeral which captures much of the essence of the man.

Those who knew Steve, know how much nature and wildlife meant to him. When ill health forced his early retirement, it was his love of nature, and birds in particular, that gave him a new direction in life, as he absorbed himself in the ornithology of Kent, and enjoyed many, many days out birding.

For many years, Steve was active on the Executive Committee of the Kent Ornithological Society, serving as Secretary of the Society, and in later years as a skilled moderator of the KOS Facebook page. He was a representative on the Rare Breeding Birds Panel, and he was one of the three authors of the Kent Breeding Bird Atlas, a project to which he devoted many years, collecting and collating information and data, which was the sort of work he enjoyed and at which he excelled. The resultant atlas is a magnificent work, which should form an important part of any Kent birder's reference library.

*Steve, however, always denied that he deserved to be described as an "ornithologist", claiming that he didn't know enough about birds for that honour. But he knew a lot – including the Latin names of pretty much every species in the Collins Bird Guide – for those of you who aren't birders, that's 713 species. Once, I dared to test Steve on his knowledge of Latin names. We started with the common species – Mallard, *Anas platyrhynchos* – Black-headed Gull, *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* – and proceeded through Black-eared Wheatear and Cirl Bunting to Egyptian Vulture and Red-knobbed Coot. Steve got the lot. When I said, "How the heck can you DO that?" he smiled and said "When you're a medical student, and you have to memorise the Latin names for every nerve in the human cheek...." Point taken.*

Birding was an interest and a hobby that Steve shared with Irene, and over the years the Wood family, with sons Tom and Rob, enjoyed many holidays to such places as Scotland, Spain and Cyprus. In later years, Steve and Irene would return to these countries for birding and wildlife holidays, and Bob and I were privileged to join them on many of these

trips. In Cyprus, in particular, Steve could indulge his love of off-road driving, sometimes in the grimmest of conditions. I would mention the many hours I spent whimpering in terror in the back seat of a Nissan Terrano, as Steve merrily attempted to skid us off precipices – but he would say I was catastrophising, so we'll pass over that.

Steve loved the wildlife of each and every country he visited. In Cyprus, he once stopped traffic in order to help a chameleon across the road – chameleons don't hurry, and Steve resorted to gently picking it up and carrying it to the side of the road, where he placed it in a clump of vegetation which was mottled pale grey and dark green, as if to say "Let's see you do that then..." and he watched with fascination and delight as the chameleon rose to the challenge and turned to the exact mottled colours of its new surroundings. And one evening, from the terrace of John Cantelo's beautiful house in Alcala, southern Spain, Steve heard the distant call of a Tawny Owl. He imitated the call, and the owl flew in and perched on a lamppost across the street, calling back to Steve. Steve continued to duet with the owl, and then a second owl flew in, and for a little while the three of them had a little love-thing going on. If you think it's easy to imitate an owl's call so perfectly that you fool two other owls – it isn't.

Scotland held a particular fascination for Steve, and he and Irene visited many times, whether for ospreys in Loch Garten, crested tits and red squirrels in Abernethy, a close encounter with a magnificent Red Deer stag in Poolewe, or white-tailed eagles and otters on the island of Mull. Once, in the Highlands, the four of us spent a very long, cold evening in a hide waiting for pine martens to appear – sadly, they didn't.

He was a sucker for a hungry animal, too, and would willingly feed his packed lunch to any dog, goat or pig that looked at him appealingly. Once, in the absence of anything else to offer them, he fed a happy herd of acorn pigs with a bumper pack of Lays bacon-flavour crisps – he commented that the Serrano ham would probably taste a bit stronger that year.

Steve was into botany too, particularly orchids, and he knew all the best sites. He once took an American botanist friend of ours on a quest to find ten species of wild orchid in one day – she was in heaven. And on a trip to Cyprus, Steve developed a particular fondness for squirting cucumbers, especially once he discovered that a judicious prod with the leg of a tripod would cause the bladders to burst and squirt liquid over anyone in the vicinity.

And it was Steve, who had a wonderful way with words, who coined the perfect collective noun for a nesting group of collared pratincoles – a "pratincolony".

When the Kent Breeding Bird Atlas was published, Steve said to me that he hoped it would be his legacy. Well, Steve, it is, but it's only part of your legacy, because you touched so many people's lives in so many different ways. You leave a gap that will never be filled, and you will always be missed – but your legacy to Kent ornithology will live on, and we will always be the richer for having shared our lives with you.

Anthea Skiffington

The KOS Turtle Dove Survey 2021



This survey finished at the end of July and results are being processed. Details of the survey can be found at <http://kosturtledoves.birdsurvey.org.uk/>

The task of uploading survey results into the summary spreadsheet is continuing, both for Turtle Doves and the other target species that were recorded. At the last update, a total of 81-95 Turtle Doves had been logged from 120 squares. Over 300 squares were allocated so hopefully there's a lot more to be added to the total, although not all squares will have actually been surveyed and not all results have been returned yet. **Please make sure that if you**

took part in the survey, that your results are returned – both positive and negative records! This is important for the statistical calculation of the Kent population estimate.

So far it seems that Kent is well ahead of other counties with Suffolk (41), Lincolnshire (35) and Essex (31) the next best totals. It should be borne in mind that only a small percentage of the 1km squares in each county were sampled for the survey, so the figures above do not represent county populations. These will be calculated from the sampled data.

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 from 2021, not recorded as part of the survey, to BirdTrack or e-Bird if you haven't done so already. 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>

The survey was completed this year and results have been collated and summarised. Data has been sent to the national organiser and will be entered into the KOS recording database. Thanks to all those who volunteered to survey repeat sites and random squares, especially to those who covered large towns or stretches of coast and/or those who helped to organise surveyors at a local level.

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 in 1998-2002 (Seabird 2000), 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 total of over 2,000 pairs of Herring Gull were counted around the coastal towns from Dungeness to Seasalter. Not surprisingly the majority were found in Folkestone (741) and Dover (710). Unfortunately, complete counts were not obtained for the Thanet towns, although some areas were surveyed as part of the random squares survey (below). Surprisingly, only 37 pairs of Lesser Black-backed Gulls were found, suggesting that this species has not exploited the abundance of artificial nest sites in the same way as Herring Gulls.

Inland, a total of 240 pairs of Herring Gulls were found and 31 pairs of Lesser Black-backed Gull, interestingly a much higher proportion of the latter species than around the coast. The most populous town was Faversham with 86 pairs of Herring Gull and 5 pairs of Lesser Black-backed Gull. Coverage of some towns was poor, such as Ashford, whilst a few were not surveyed. Of these, however, only Sittingbourne is known to have breeding Gulls.

Two pairs of Great Black-backed Gulls were also found during the repeat sites survey, one of which bred successfully. These were in Sandwich and Dover.

Random Square Survey

A small proportion of the random squares were surveyed by volunteers, but the rest were covered by a contract surveyor employed by JNCC. Most of these squares did not contain breeding Gulls.

Although the JNCC Seabird Count is now complete, it is hoped to conduct some additional survey work next year to achieve/complete coverage of Sittingbourne and Ashford and perform some sample counts in the Thanet towns. 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.

Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP) - Kent Report for 2020

The report on RBBP species in Kent in 2020 is currently being put together. For details of the work of RBBP and the current list of species covered please see <https://rbbp.org.uk> and previous KOS Newsletters.

This report relies on data being submitted to the KOS via our recording database (currently down), BirdTrack, e-Bird, RSPB/KWT reserves data and other channels, including direct e-mail to the Kent RBBP rep Brian Watmough brianrwat@yahoo.co.uk. It's important to maintain as complete a record as possible of the county's rarer breeding birds. It is understandable, however, that some may wish to send details direct to the RBBP Secretary, Mark Eaton secretary@rbbp.org.uk

Please ensure that any records you may have for the **2020** season are submitted by one of the above means ASAP as the deadline for reporting is November 30th.

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 high 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.

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

KOS – Sightings database

The new sightings database is nearly here. We have been piloting the new system in the last couple of months and have a few remaining issues to sort out. We anticipate it being up and running by Christmas.

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

Summer migrant arrivals – a further comment

I must point out that my article on summer migrants first appeared in the Cley Bird Club Newsletter of July 2020 and was reproduced with the permission of Cley Bird Club in your last Newsletter at the request of the Kent Ornithological Society. However I am glad that the publication of the article has provoked discussion, because that is what it was designed to do.

Having read Andrew Henderson's response though I feel that clarification of some of the points I made is necessary. As the title suggests, I posed a question, and followed it by saying that I did not **recognise** the claims published in the *Ibis* or those made by the RSPB about earlier arrivals of summer migrants. I concluded my article by repeating the same question, suggesting that there was **insufficient evidence** to support those claims – all the time carefully avoiding the hyperbolae of 'certainties' or 'convictions'. I feel I need to emphasise those points.

Andrew is correct in saying that "I was more concerned to draw attention to the apparent similarities of arrival dates now and in the early twentieth century" – that was the whole point of the exercise and why I took a broad brush approach to the analysis. I did it in order to accommodate the shorter term fluctuations and in so doing found that there was a general continuity of first arrival dates, albeit within certain time parameters. An example of this can be seen in Andrew's graph of the Turtle Dove (which didn't feature in my analysis) which clearly shows a continuity of arrival dates within a ten day time frame. I fail to understand why he, for some strange reason, found it disingenuous of me to highlight three of the species which I analysed showing a remarkable consistency in arrival dates between recent times and historic records of over 100 years ago.

Unlike me he has gone into far more detail relating to fluctuating trends over shorter periods of time, even though it is generally agreed that longer term trends are more accurate. Old records have always interested me and in my article I expressed sadness that historical records seemed to be ignored in today's world despite the wealth of information they often contain. Recently David Wilkinson, author of the latest New Naturalists series *Ecology and Natural History*, says "In a rapidly shifting world the in-depth understanding provided by long-term data is invaluable. But we do not have that many long-term studies".

Commenting further, I leave readers to judge for themselves on the relative accuracy of carefully surveyed and recorded observations, all traceable back to their origins, collected and published by amateurs over extensive periods of time (which Andrew seems to denigrate) compared to a collection of *ad hoc* records from unknown sources subjected to manipulation on a computer. His assumption that 'we all know birds have been arriving earlier' and reliance on claims of birder's 'perceptions of earlier arrivals' seems hardly evidence enough to conclude that my article was nonsense. Surely it is facts rather than assumptions and perceptions that we should be looking at?

The Sand Martin seems to be one species that demands further research. The graph shows a sharp change in periods of arrivals around 1990 from a later date to an earlier one of some 20 days. I remembered that this species, together with the Whitethroat, suffered a catastrophic population crash over the 1968/9 winter. Whitethroat numbers eventually recovered but in 1984 the BTO were reporting that the estimated Sand Martin population in Britain was still only 10% of that in the mid-sixties. Could this trauma be somehow responsible for the development of an earlier arrival?

I am comforted by the opening paragraph of Andrew's article where he admits that he had "started to wonder about longer-term trends" and also in his conclusion, as a final observation, he notes that for 75 % of the species in the most recent decade first arrival dates were later than the previous decade, and questions "does this mean that the trend towards earlier arrival has reversed? Only time will tell".

I like to think that means he agrees with me!

Chris Wheeler

-----This topic is now closed-----

Diving Ducks in Kent

This article looks at the diving ducks in the genus *Aythya* in Kent, and for luck I will throw in Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*. Nine species have occurred here, although only two (Pochard and Tufted Duck) can be described as common and two (Canvasback and Lesser Scaup) are extreme rarities in the county.

I won't be discussing hybrids in detail, even though *Aythya* do seem especially prone to creating confusing crosses. Norman McCanch has reminded me about a helpful introduction to the subject, specifically dealing with *Aythya* species from a Kentish perspective, in a newsletter a few years ago – a good place to start:

<https://kentos.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/KOS-News-Jan-2018.pdf>

Hybrids are often poorly recorded in KOS records and without certainty of parentage – but it is a challenge that I invite someone to take up, to review all of the hybrids (not just diving ducks) recorded in Kent.

Red-crested Pochard



Red-crested Pochards by S R Choudhury

Red-crested Pochard, with gaudily coloured drakes, is a popular species in waterfowl collections and has been kept in captivity in Britain since at least the 1930s. It has occurred annually in Kent since the 1970s, though I'm not aware of any reports of the species breeding here (but see below). However, several naturalised populations exist elsewhere in Britain, the largest at Cotswold Water Park, the Lower Windrush valley near Oxford, and the Sutton & Lound gravel pits in Nottinghamshire, each of which regularly hold more than 200.

There is no strong evidence that any of the Kentish records relate to wild birds, though one flying in off the sea at Sandwich Bay during heavy waterfowl passage on 29th October 1974 was interesting. It remains possible that vagrancy to Britain does occur but, since the nearest wild populations in Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands are probably now smaller than those of captive and feral birds in Britain, it is reasonable to assume that birds are not wild unless there are particular grounds for thinking otherwise.

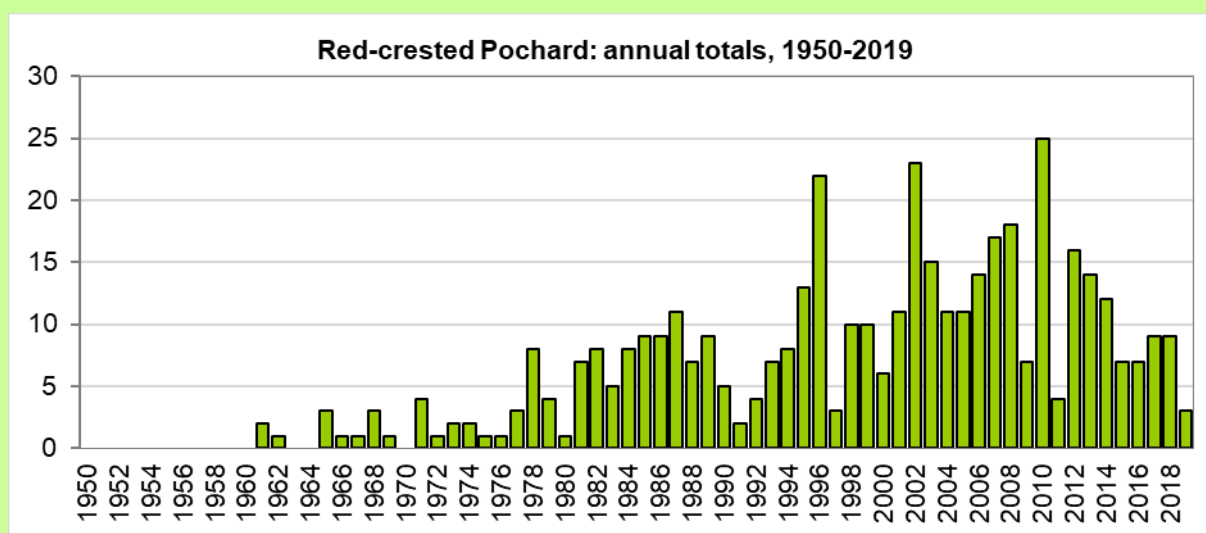
The last Birds of Kent (Taylor, Davenport & Flegg, 1981) included two pre-1952 records. The first related to one shot from a party of 18 on the Thames in 1853. However, that was off Erith and thus outside the present county boundary; it should not have been included. The first Kent record becomes that of T C Gregory on 28th November 1935 at Cottington Court, near Deal. Harrison (*Birds of Kent*, 1953) recounts this in a somewhat confusing manner, saying that Tom Gregory saw "a small flock [which were] in company with some common Pochards, but he saw one old drake before the whole party took to flight". We can't be sure how many Red-crested Pochards there were, or perhaps even if the one male was all that there were.

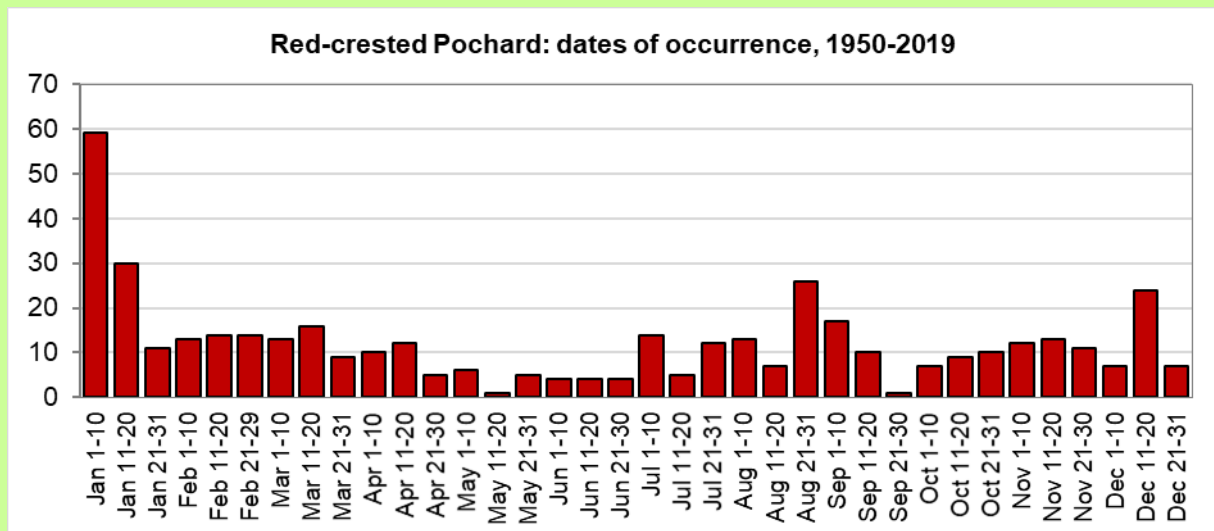
The next were drakes at Lydd in May 1961 and at Lower Hope Point in November 1961, after which the species gradually increased, as the first chart shows. There does seem to have been a decline since 2010, which is also shown in national WeBS data, though I've not seen any speculation about why this might have happened.

I ought to point out that this was a species considered by BBRC during 1958-1962. The two records in 1961 and one in 1962 do not appear to have been submitted to BBRC; in any case, the 1962 individual was regarded as an escape. The data I am presenting here include all Red-crested Pochards, regardless of their origin – and indeed as I've already said most or all are feral to a greater or lesser extent.

The presence of some long-staying and mobile individuals makes it difficult to allocate all birds to arrival dates with certainty, but the resulting pattern shows little seasonal variation (see second chart). Fewer appear during April-June than at other times, and there is a pronounced peak in the first half of January. That may be due in part to increased reporting at that time of year, but it is also the case that several of the larger groups have appeared then.

Most have been single birds, but there have been quite a few groups of two-four, and some larger flocks. The largest groups were eight at Dungeness on 2nd January 2002, up to seven at Stodmarsh in January-February 2003, and seven at Cliffe on 10th January 2010.

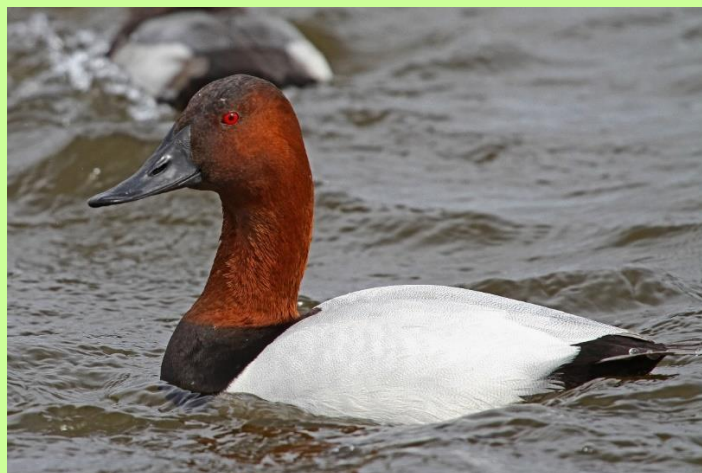




Red-crested Pochards have been recorded at many wetlands, large and small, throughout the county. Of the total of about 440 individuals, 154 (35%) were at or near Dungeness, 43 at Stodmarsh/Westbere, 34 at Cliffe, 23 at Bough Beech and 22 at Sandwich/Pegwell Bays.

I am dealing with Red-crested Pochard hybrids because they contribute the one breeding record, of half a pair of the species, in Kent. A pinioned female at Dungeness produced broods with a drake Mallard in 1966 and 1967. One hybrid male fledged in 1966 and survived throughout 1967, while two young fledged in 1967. Other hybrids include one possibly with Ferruginous Duck in August-October 1989, and one thought to be a hybrid with Tufted Duck in April-May 1997, both of those at Bough Beech. One possibly crossed with Pochard was at Boughton Monchelsea in September 1999, and finally one crossed with either Mallard or Gadwall was at Whetsted GP and Pembury in November 2003.

Canvasback



Canvasback, Ontario (wikicommons)

The first for Kent and for Britain of this American species was one found by Paul Larkin in the North Quarry at Cliffe on 7th December 1996. It was a drake, believed to be a first-winter bird (see notes by P Larkin & D Mercer in *British Birds* 97: 139-143 and *Kent Bird Report* 2001 pp.162-164).

There have been two further occurrences in Kent. The second record was again of a male, at Monk's Wall nature reserve, Sandwich, on 28th May 1999. The third record, also a male, was at Lade Pits during 29th January-14th March 2000 and in the following winter, presumed the same bird, from 18th November 2000 to 8th March 2001, during which time it used both Lade Pits and the Dungeness RSPB reserve.

The Cliffe, Sandwich and Lade birds are treated as different individuals (and different from those recorded in other counties) by BBRC. This is despite there being a pattern of returning birds. About six weeks after the one at Cliffe, a similar bird was found in Norfolk. The Kent Bird Report suggests that it was "probably the same" as that at Cliffe; however, it is treated as different in the BBRC records. The Norfolk bird remained for several weeks and what was thought to be the same bird was seen in Norfolk and Essex over the following four winters. That bird was present in Essex at the same time as the individual was at Lade Pits, so they were definitely different, but no other British records can be ruled out from being the same by simultaneous occurrence.

Only seven individuals are recorded in Britain: the three in Kent, the Norfolk/Essex bird, one in Cornwall in 2000, one in Orkney in 2000 (that was different: it was a female), and one in Greater Manchester in 2002. None has been accepted by BBRC since then, although there have been some claims, and some potential candidates have been identified as hybrids.

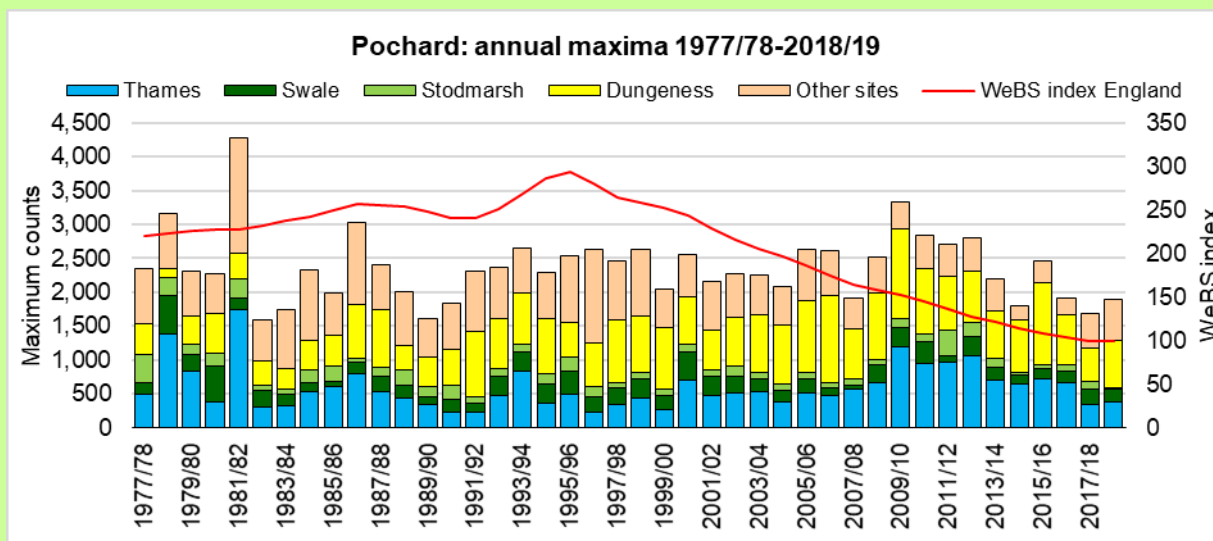
Pochard



Pochard, (wikicommons)

Pochard seems a common enough species, typically present in moderate numbers on gravel pits and reservoirs, and perhaps we forget that – in a wider context – the breeding and wintering populations in Kent are quite significant.

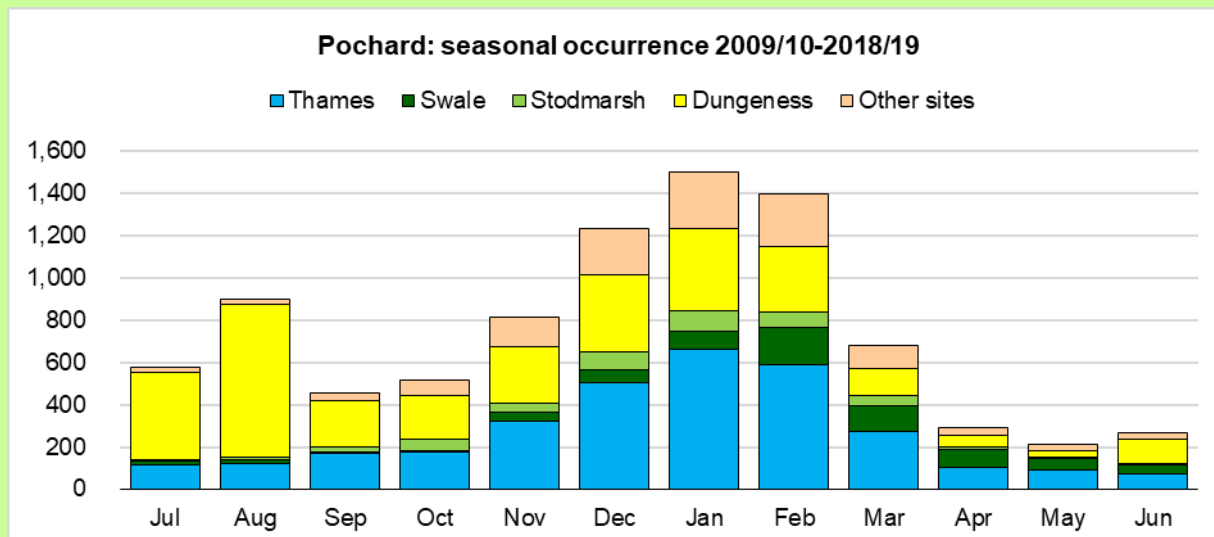
The first chart shows annual maxima at the principal sites used by Pochard over 42 years (the calculations do omit a few sites holding mostly small numbers including those near Tonbridge and Paddock Wood). The chart includes an index line from the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) using data downloaded from <https://app.bto.org/webs-reporting/numbers.jsp>.



Through much of this period, the threshold for national importance (i.e. where an area holds at least 1% of the British population) has been around 400-500, though it has progressively been revised downwards and is now 230. The

Thames and Dungeness areas have been above the threshold throughout; the recent ten year (2009/10-2018/19) mean peak count for the Thames is 768, while for Dungeness it is 843. The next highest totals are those of the Swale (a mean of 202 over the same period) and Stodmarsh/Westbere (129).

In most areas, the peak numbers are found in winter but, at Dungeness, a concentration of moulting birds has tended to build up in early autumn, peaking in July and August. In winter (November-March), the Thames area has the largest share (39%) of the county population, with Dungeness holding about 23%. In autumn (July-October), the position is dramatically different, with the Thames holding 18% and Dungeness holding 67% of the county total. This is illustrated, for the recent ten-year period, in this second chart.



Larger moulting concentrations of Pochards than in Kent occur elsewhere. Abberton Reservoir in Essex held up to 5,000 in the 1960s (though fewer since) but even that is left in the shade by the IJsselmeer in The Netherlands which has held up to 50,000.

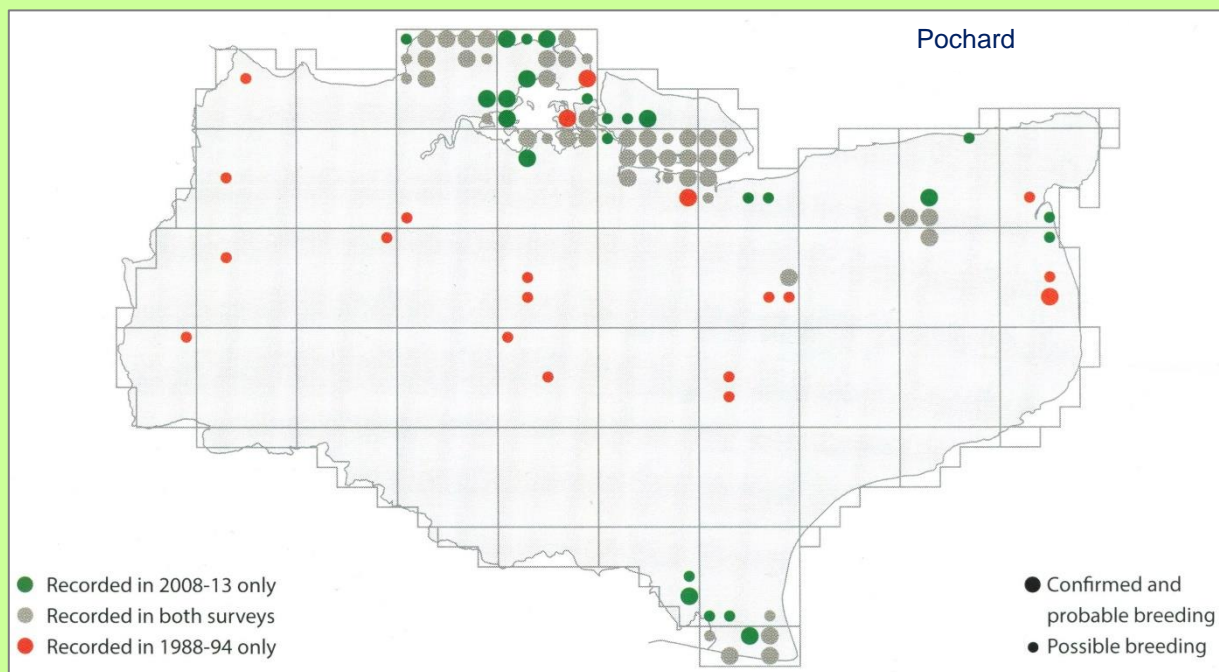
There have been site counts in Kent exceeding 1,000 on seven occasions since 1977. Three have been in winter, each time during spells of particularly cold weather: 1,200 at Littlebrook in February 1979, 1,730 at Cliffe in January 1982 and 1,121 at Cliffe in January 2010 – and we should give an honourable mention to 908 at New Hythe in January 1982. Autumn high counts, all at Dungeness, have been 1,056 in August 2005, 1,280 in August 2006, 1,328 in August 2009 and 1,200 in August 2015.

Nationally, wintering Pochard numbers enjoyed a sustained increase through the 1970s, 1980s and much of the 1990s, but have since then been in a steep decline with current numbers less than half of the peak (BTO WeBS), as shown above in the first Pochard chart. This trend is associated with a widespread decline in breeding numbers in Europe, for which no single factor is known to be responsible, but several have been suggested, including waterbody eutrophication and increased predation, the latter perhaps linked to gull colonies, which formerly leant protection to nesting Pochards, having disappeared (*Wildfowl* 66: 22-40), and poisoning by ingested lead shot (*Ibis* 158: 699-710).

The Kent data do not show the marked rise and fall seen in national (both England and UK as a whole) wintering numbers. Peak annual counts in the first chart are fairly even, given the odd spike during cold winters and a few dips perhaps associated with especially mild winters. However, there does seem to be a more consistent downward trend from 2010 onwards. This is the case for both winter numbers and those at Dungeness in autumn.

Most Pochard wintering in Britain are thought to come from the Baltic countries or east of there, but they do not arrive here until September or later (BTO *Migration Atlas*); some presumably come from the western European mainland. Movements of British-bred birds are poorly known but most probably remain here. The breeding areas of the moulting flocks at Dungeness in July-August is unknown (to me, at least!).

In Kent, breeding birds are concentrated in north Kent, where the broad fleets, borrow dykes and lagoons of the grazing marshes are favoured areas. Smaller numbers breed at Dungeness and Walland Marsh, and in the Stour valley. The *Kent Breeding Bird Atlas 2008-13* (from which the map below is taken) estimated the population at the end of that period to be in the range 150-200 pairs. That contrasts with a British total estimated for 2006-10 to be in the range 330-610 pairs but since revised to 695-720 pairs for 2013-2017 (Avian Populations Estimates Panel). The figures are only estimates but indicate the importance of Kent to the British breeding population, perhaps holding 20-30% or more of the total.



Numbers nesting in Kent are thought to have fallen since 2005 (*Kent Atlas*) and (despite the upward revision of the population estimate) UK breeding numbers are believed to have experienced a moderate breeding decline (*British Birds* 108: 708-746). As a result of that but more especially the severe decline in wintering numbers and its international IUCN status of Vulnerable, Pochard is on the Red list of Birds of Conservation Concern in the UK.

Murray Orchard has mentioned to me the possibility that Pochard breeding success is adversely affected by the presence of large fish such as carp. Fleets and quarries to which carp have been introduced now seem to produce no Pochard broods, while areas without such fish remain productive. Pochard primarily eat water weeds but invertebrates make up a significant proportion of their diet. Competition for food is one possible way that the presence of fish could influence Pochard; another related one would be the reduction in aquatic vegetation using herbicides (sometimes done to create easier fishing conditions), but this is all speculative.

Going back in time, Pochard was not known to breed in Kent until the first decade of the twentieth century, when the first nests were found on the Thames marshes and on Romney Marsh. Numbers gradually built up, with up to 25 pairs in the Stour valley by the 1940s and totals approaching what we have now by the 1960s.

In winter, too, the species used to be far scarcer. It may have been commoner in the early nineteenth century but, through the first half of the twentieth century, it was scarce and of erratic occurrence, found primarily in cold weather and on seas and estuaries, with few inland. An example of these influxes is the presence of 700 on the Thames between Denton and Higham in the bitter February 1947. The next twenty years saw rapid increase in wintering numbers, a trend helped by the proliferation of gravel pits and other water bodies. Especially high individual counts were 950 on the Thames at Cliffe in February 1963 and about 660* at Dungeness on 3rd November 1974. However, totals never reached the heights of those just to the west in the inner Thames at Woolwich, which peaked at 4,000 in 1971/72 (Harrison & Grant, 1976, *The Thames Transformed*), capitalising on the temporary boom in *Tubifex* worm numbers as the river was cleaned up. (*The count of 660 at Dungeness in November 1974 was outstandingly high for the area at the time. It appears in the KBR as 1,000 but the Dungeness Bird Observatory data sheet records 650 on the ARC pit and nine on Lade Pits. The estimate of 1,000 may have been too high and I suggest that it's best to stick with the lower figure.)

Ferruginous Duck



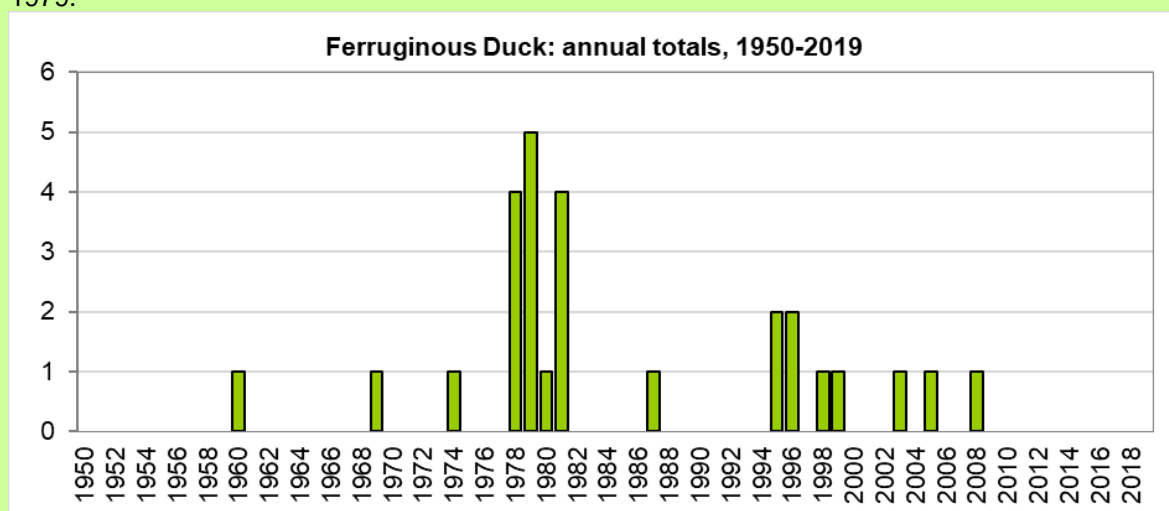
Ferruginous Duck, Martin Mere (wikicommons)

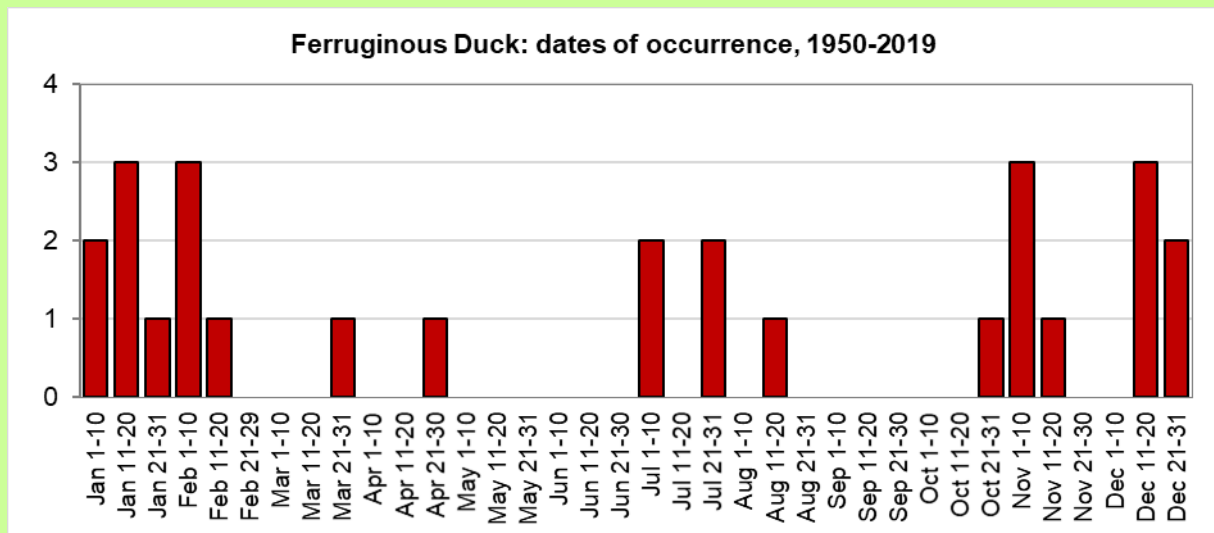
Ferruginous Duck is a migratory species, with a breeding range mainly in eastern Europe and western Asia, wintering in the Mediterranean basin, sub-Saharan Africa and southern Asia. The westernmost populations, at least, are believed to have declined towards the end of the twentieth century (BirdLife International). It has always been rare in Britain, but the true pattern of arrivals here has been obscured by escapes from wildfowl collections and the occurrence of hybrids that appear similar to the species.

In Kent, nine records involving 17 individuals between winter 1849/50 and January 1951 are now considered unreliable. They include some Hastings Rarities and a flock of seven at Stodmarsh on 2nd February 1950, accepted by Harrison (1953) but the description in his book is unconvincing. The first county record is now a first-winter male seen at Dungeness between 8th November and 4th December 1960.

The next two are one at Leybourne on 8th December 1968 and one at Stodmarsh on 18th August 1969. The first was probably a hybrid and so not included in the chart below. For the second, the 1969 Kent Bird Report pointed out that hybrid status had not been ruled out – but it was accepted by BBRC and so is included here. Incidentally, Ferruginous Duck has had an on-off relationship with the BBRC. One record which I have included concerned a drake at New Hythe during 11th December 2005-18th March 2006. It was a BBRC species in 2005, but the record appears not to have been submitted, while in 2006 the record was adjudicated by the KOS and found acceptable – so I've included it for the full period!

So, here are charts of the annual and seasonal patterns of occurrence. The flurry of records in 1978-1981 looks a bit odd now. It could be that some of the records then were of birds moving from one site to another; an example involves males at Chilham and Seaton during 17th January-18th March and at Bough Beech on 27th March-7th April 1981, but we have treated such birds as different unless there was strong evidence for them being the same. Those years did include the two occasions when two have occurred together: two males arrived at Sevenoaks Wildfowl Reserve on 3rd July 1978, one remaining to 7th July and the other to 7th December, and a "pair of adults" was at Murston on 3rd February 1979.





Of the 27 individuals, 19 have been males, five females, two described as immature or first-winter without indicating the sex, and for one no information is given in the KBR or BB. They have turned up at locations widely spread around the county, but Dungeness with five is the leading site, followed by Bough Beech, New Hythe and Stodmarsh with three each.

The paucity of records since the early 1980s, with none since 2008, is in line with the species' decline in Europe, but may have been assisted by more acute observation of individuals that have proved to be hybrids. The seasonal pattern, with 19 (70%) during November-February, perhaps fits with migrant arrivals but why aren't they away to the south at that time of year?

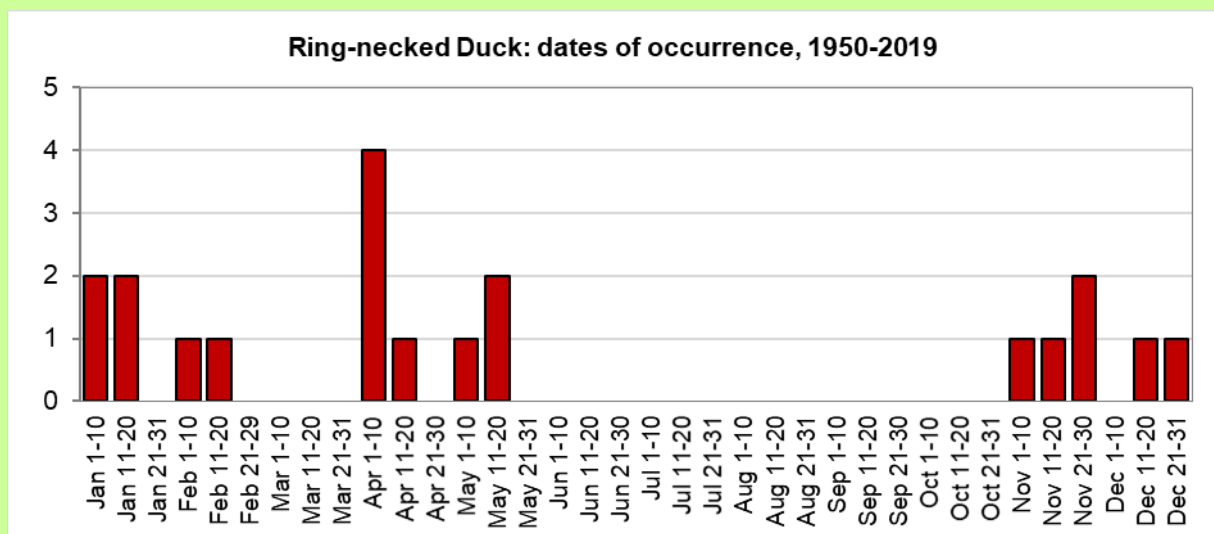
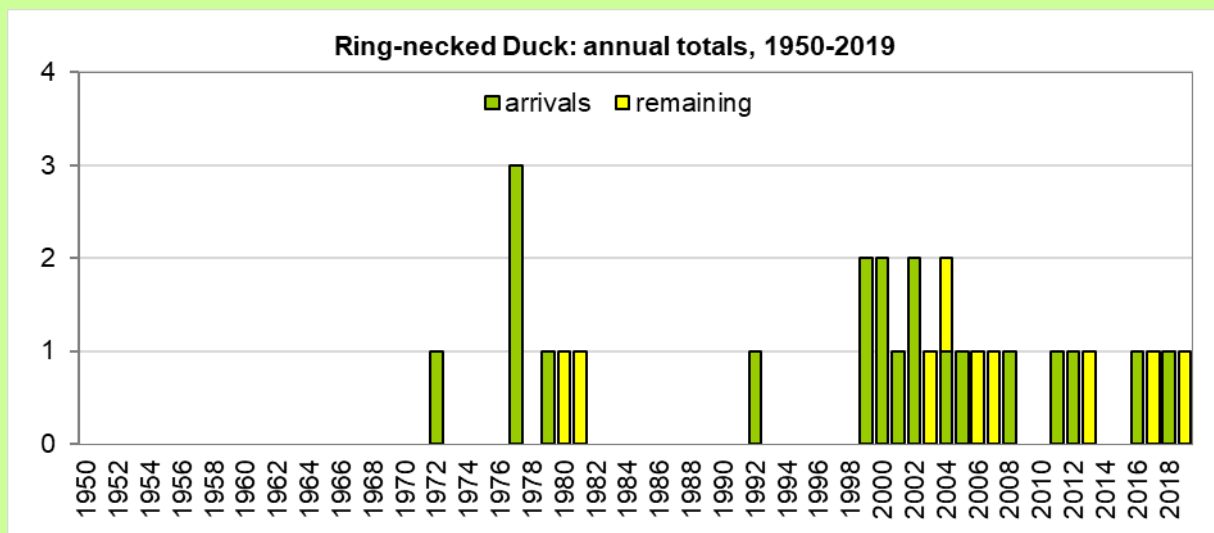
Ring-necked Duck



Ring-necked Duck, Ontario (wikicommons)

The first Ring-necked Duck for Kent was an adult male found by Margaret Lees at Stodmarsh on 9th April 1972. After a gap of five years, there were three in 1977: adult males at Westbere in February and at Sevenoaks in April and November. Those are treated as being different individuals, though there must be a possibility that two or all three were the same, something that seems more possible given the subsequent history of long-staying and mobile birds. The same applies to some later occurrences but at present we consider that 20 individuals have been recorded in Kent.

The charts show annual and seasonal patterns for those 20 birds. In this case, because of the prevalence of birds staying from one year to another, the chart shows (in yellow) individuals remaining from previous years or believed to have returned in a subsequent winter. The seasonal chart shows solely when each bird was first seen.



The most persistent of these Ring-necked Ducks was a drake first seen on Collard's Lake, Stodmarsh, on 13th January 2002. What was assumed to be the same individual was seen there or at Seaton or Westbere through to April 2002, for a couple of days in March 2003, and again in March-April 2004.

Most records have been of single birds but there were a male and female together at Bough Beech reservoir on 2nd-23rd April 2004. The majority have been males, on a couple of occasions specified as first-year but usually adults or (with no mention of age) presumably adults. Three have been females. Ring-necked Ducks have been seen at waterbodies across the county, but the favoured area has been in the south, with seven at Dungeness or nearby at Lade Pits or Scotney Court GP Other areas at which two or more have been recorded are Stodmarsh/Westbere, Bough Beech, Sevenoaks, Cliffe and Grain.

Tufted Duck

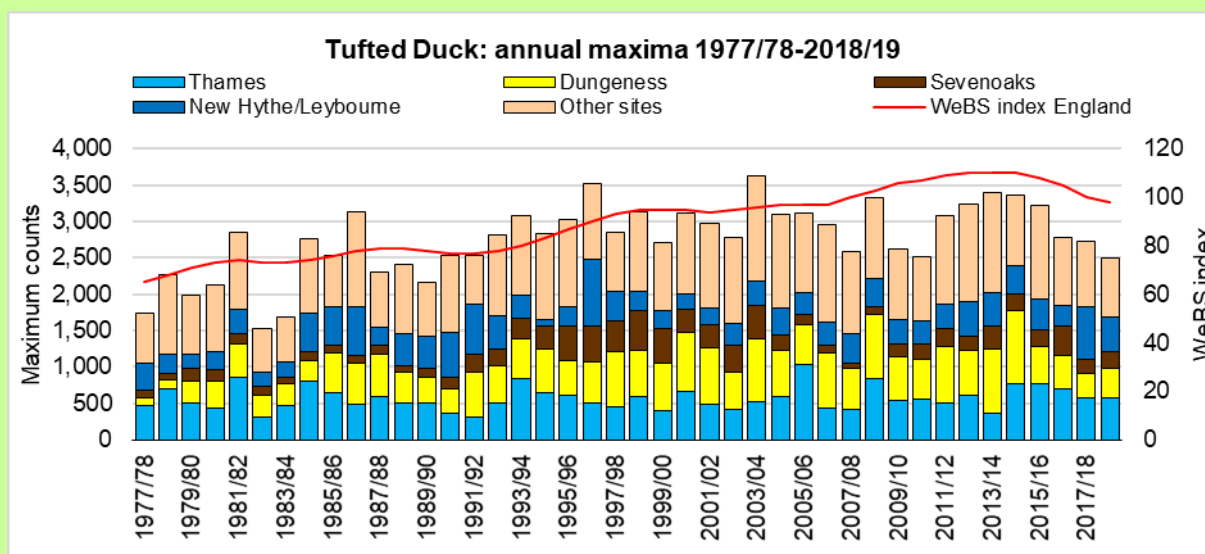


Tufted Duck by Tomasz Kowalski

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Tufted Duck was merely a cold weather visitor, present in more than small numbers only in severe weather and less numerous even than Pochard (Ticehurst, 1909, *A History of the Birds of Kent*). It was seen mainly in the estuaries and marsh fleets of north Kent but occasionally inland. There was an introduced breeding population at Edenbridge but the first record of breeding in the wild was not until 1935, when a pair bred unsuccessfully in the Stour valley (Harrison, 1953, *The Birds of Kent*). Breeding and the presence of wintering flocks became more widespread and regular from the 1940s, a trend facilitated by the excavation of many gravel pits and similar water bodies.

Wintering numbers continued to grow throughout the second half of the twentieth century and beyond, only showing a downturn from about 2015. The pattern in Kent is very similar to the trend for England as a whole, as shown by the WeBS index line in the first chart below.

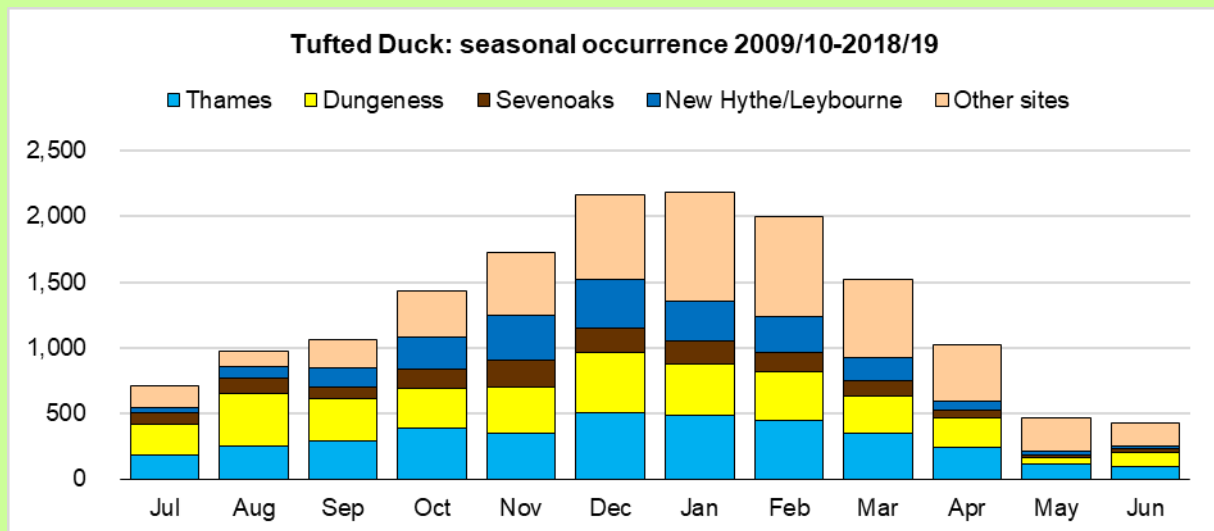
This chart is not comprehensive. Tufted Ducks use water bodies large and small, spread across the county. Those included in the data extraction for this article include the principal sites (and Dungeness and the Thames include peripheral areas) and the chart is considered to indicate the trend accurately, but some places that can support moderate numbers such as the Hayesden area and Whetsted GPs are omitted.



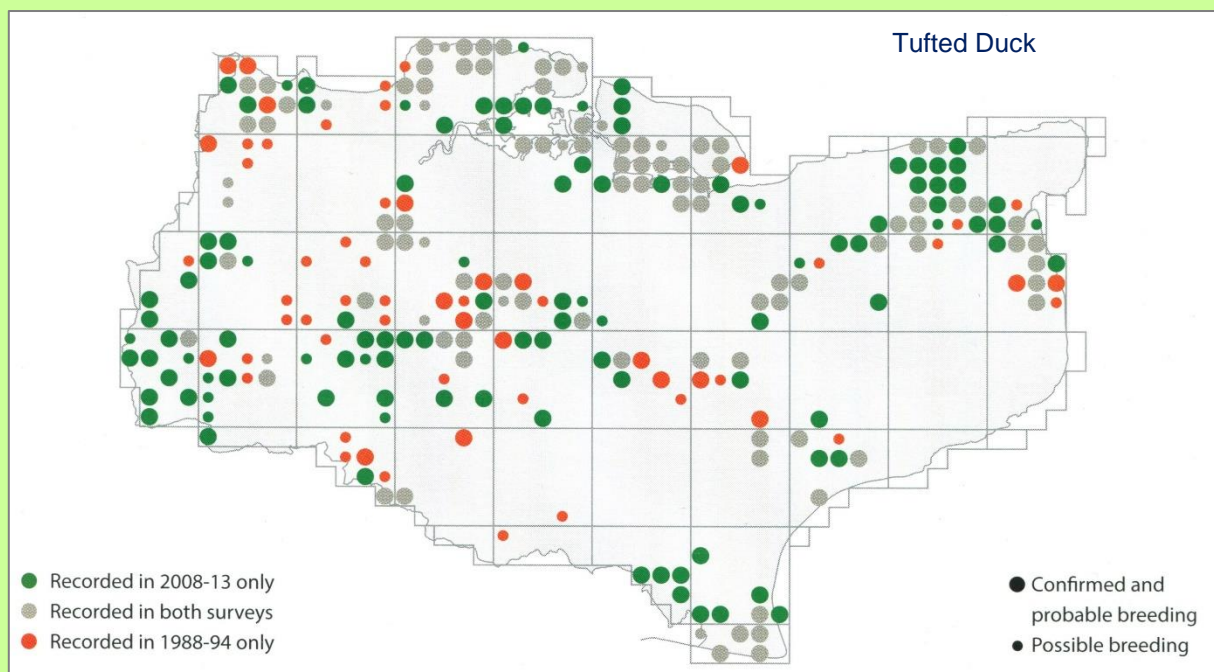
The threshold for national importance for wintering Tufted Duck has gradually been adjusted, in line with the increasing population. Around 1980, it was only 450 and at that point and in the mid 1990s the Thames qualified as nationally important, but mostly no one area of the county reaches the threshold, which is currently 1,300.

Area or site counts exceeding 750 have come largely from the Thames and Dungeness areas. There were totals on the Thames of 865 in January 1982 and 750-800 in January-February 1985, both during cold weather, but mostly the high totals have occurred from the 1990s onwards, as would be expected from an increasing population. The two totals exceeding 1,000 were 1,030 on the Thames in December 2005 (including 991 at Cliffe) and 1,017 in the Dungeness area in December 2014.

The second chart shows, for the recent ten-year period, the seasonal pattern of numbers, peaking in the winter months of December-February. As for Pochard, but far less strongly marked, there is a build-up of moulting birds at Dungeness in late summer: around 37.5% of the total at listed sites is at Dungeness in July-August contrasting with just over 20% during the rest of the year. Wintering birds mainly come from Scandinavia, Finland and Russia but most of our breeding birds also remain here (BTO *Migration Atlas*). It's worth pointing out that the totals shown here don't include all the Tufted Ducks in the county because, as stated above, not every site is included in the analysis. The discrepancy is likely to be greater in summer, when birds are more dispersed (and often hidden in marginal vegetation) than in winter – thus the May-July totals are well short of the number expected from the breeding estimate (see below).



The distribution map from the *Kent Breeding Bird Atlas 2008-13* is shown below. Tufted Ducks nest much more widely than our other breeding diving duck, Pochard. They are found throughout the coastal lowlands, up the main river valleys of the Stour, Medway and Darent, and across the low Weald – anywhere, in fact, where there are bodies of open water large enough to support them. As stated in the Atlas, they use “reservoirs, gravel pits and other flooded quarries, ponds and marshland dykes”.



As shown by the map, there was a considerable expansion into new areas between the previous atlas around 1990 and the recent one, with occurrence in 30% more tetrads. The wide distribution makes it difficult to make a comprehensive count and the current suggestion for the county of 450-550 pairs is no more than an estimate. It is about 2.5-3.0% of the British total, though it should be pointed out that the latter estimate of 16,000-18,000 pairs also is far from precise. The English population is believed to have gone into decline since about 2010, a little earlier than the wintering population. We are not sure whether that applies to Kent, but it may well be the case.

Scaup

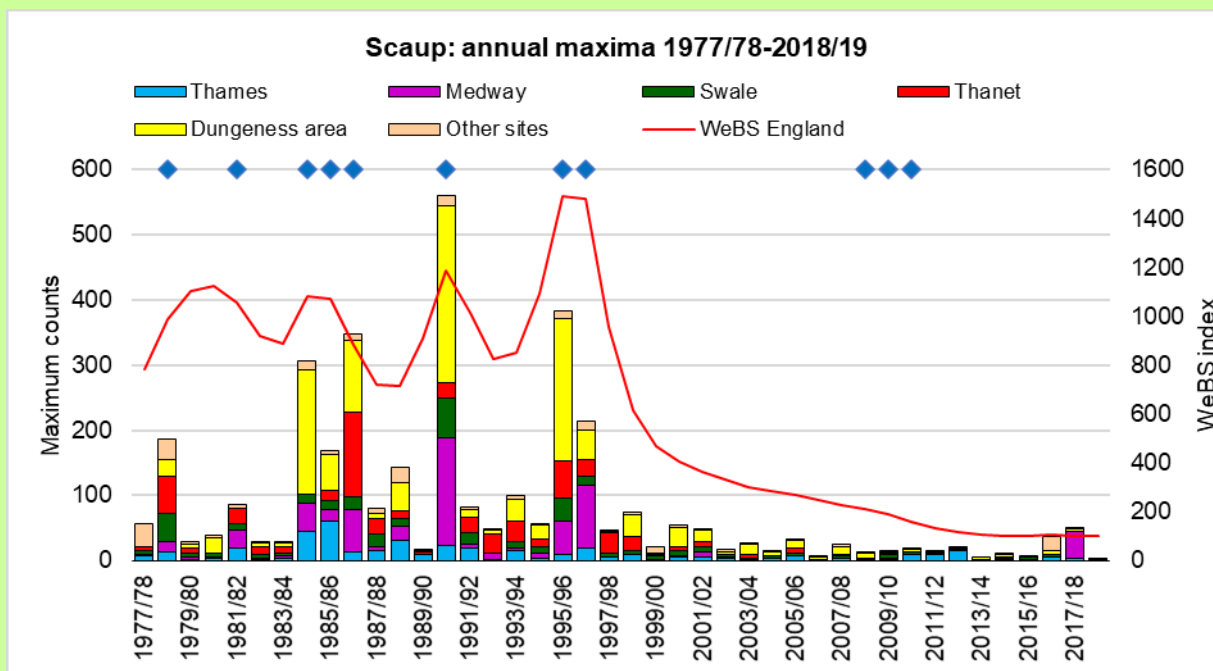


Scaup, (wikicommons)

Until the late 1990s, the status of Scaup in Kent changed little. Both Ticehurst (1909, *A History of the Birds of Kent*) and Harrison (1953, *The Birds of Kent*) described it as an annual winter visitor to coasts and estuaries, present in larger numbers in cold weather, and rare inland. Up to 1950, peak counts included 52 on the Thames, 13 on the Medway, 63 on the Swale and 100 off the Brooks, near Dungeness. There were also exceptional counts of 800-1,000 at Sandwich Bay on 9th-10th March 1940, during very cold weather. This is a surprising record, given that there were relatively few others reported that winter. However, it should be borne in mind that there were access restrictions to the coast at the time, and there are also records of 'very large numbers' offshore west from Dungeness in 1939 and 5,000 in Rye Bay, Sussex, in 1947 (Harrison; SOS, 2014, *Birds of Sussex*).

Three large influxes occurred during 1952-1976. In 1954, the main flock numbered about 300 at Swalecliffe on 2nd February, then 235 nearby at Herne Bay on 14th February, and there were 250 at Cliffe on 14th March. There were also 60 at Egypt Bay on 30th January and up to 50 off Deal, Sandwich Bay and Ramsgate in February. In 1956, there were 550 at Cliffe in February and 400 there in March, but elsewhere the highest count was only 34 on the Medway in March. The largest of the three influxes was in 1962/63, starting with 120 off Dungeness on 26th December. In January, there were 400 at Ramsgate and 700 at Cliffe, the latter decreasing to 400 in February. Elsewhere three flocks of 30-40 were seen, plus 60 at Sandwich Bay, 80 in the Medway and 120 at Lade. A total of 31 was found dead around the coast in that severe winter.

The first chart below shows how things have gone since 1977. Until the late 1990s, the pattern of fluctuating numbers continued, but since then counts have been consistently smaller. The chart shows where the largest numbers have been seen; note that the counts for Thanet and Dungeness include offshore migrants.



The blue diamonds above the chart indicate winters in which the mean temperature in south-east and central southern England during December-February was below 4°C (Met Office data from www.metoffice.gov.uk/research/climate/maps-and-data/uk-and-regional-series). It should be borne in mind that cold weather influxes will be triggered by temperatures in the areas where the birds come from but, typically, when it's cold in Kent, it's colder in the Netherlands, Germany and Poland. The coincidence with years when relatively large numbers of Scaup occurred is obvious, at least for the period up to 2000. The oddities are the lack of influxes of Scaup in the three winters around 2010, and the occurrence of a small influx during 2017-18 when the mean temperature (4.74°C) was slightly above the threshold. The latter is explained by the fact that the influx was in March, during the 'beast from the east', in a month not covered by the mean temperature data. I can't explain why there was no influx around 2010, other than to suggest that it could be linked with the reduced population of the species in Europe as a whole. However, those chilly winters also saw no major influx of some other cold weather birds, such as the scarce grebes (see article in the January 2021 KOS Newsletter).

The decline in Britain has been severe, winter numbers now being less than 20% of what they were in the early 1970s. The trend in England alone is an even steeper decline, as the Wetland Bird Survey index line on the chart demonstrates. As can be seen, that index line closely mirrors the Kent numbers.

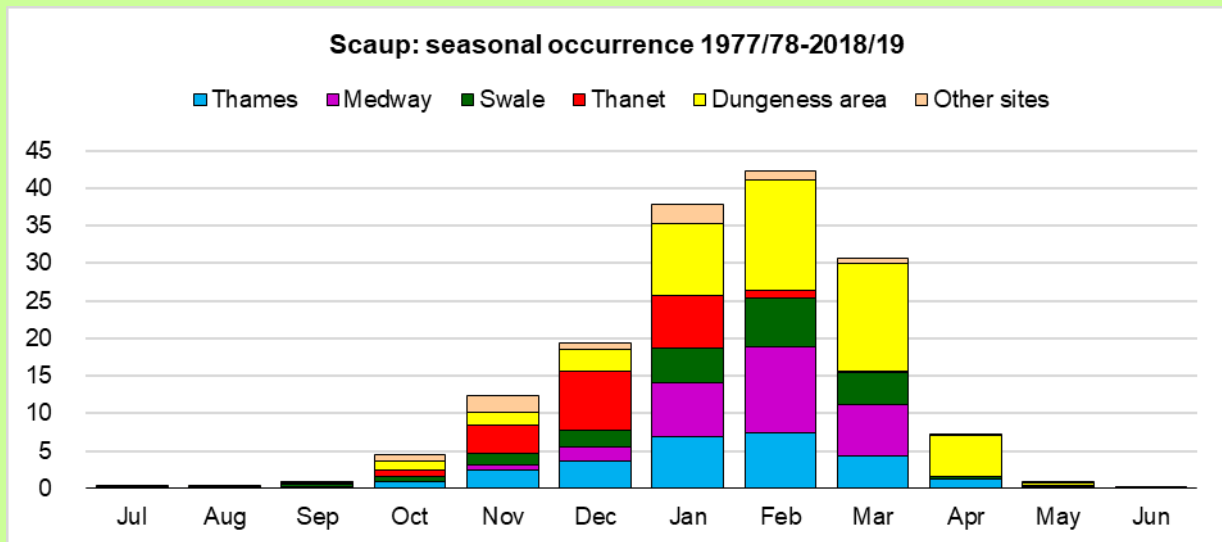
The table below summarises the highest counts made during the period from 1977/78 to 2018/19, giving details of all winters when there was a count of 40 or more.

Scaup: highest counts during 1977/78-2018/19	
1978/79	57 flew E at Margate on 31st December; otherwise peaks of only 26 at Lade and 30 at Murston in March.
1984/85	44 on both Thames and Medway and 190 near Dungeness, in St Mary's Bay or on Lade Pits, where 60 remained into April.
1985/86	In early 1986, resident flocks of up to 28 at Lade and 61 on the Thames, and 55 flew S along the east side of Dungeness on 18th February.
1986/87	A total of 331 E at Foreness during 11th-17th January, including 86 on 12th, 109 on 15th and 71 on 16th; 60 E at Dungeness on 28th January; resident flocks of 64 in the Medway and 110 at Lade in February.
1985/86	In early 1986, resident flocks of up to 28 at Lade and 61 on the Thames, and 55 flew S along the east side of Dungeness on 18th February.
1988/89	A maximum of 43 on Dungeness RSPB reserve on 15th February.
1990/91	Coastal movements during 7th-12th February included 23 at Allhallows, 32 at Shellness and 87 W at Dungeness, all on the 12th; subsequently, resident flocks of up to 166 on the Medway, 48 at Murston, and 270 at Scotney GP with 140 remaining there into April.
1995/96	Coastal movements of 58 E at Foreness on 29th December, 55 E at Reculver on 27th January, 35 E at Foreness on 28th January and 60 NE at St Margaret's on 19th February; in first quarter of 1996, resident flocks of 36 at Murston, 50 on the Medway, and 217 at Scotney GP where 76 remained into April.
1996/97	In January-February, resident flocks of 46 at Scotney GP and 95 on the Medway.
2017/18	Up to 40 at Lower Halstow during 5th-16th March.

Most Scaup occur on the coast, either resting close offshore or on coastal lakes. In the north of the county, the main sites are Cliffe Pools (on the Thames) and Murston Pits (on the Swale) while, on the Medway, the various creeks on the south shore between Nor Marsh and Motney Hill, Lower Halstow and Funton are favoured. In the south of the county near Dungeness, the most frequented sites are the gravel pits at Lade and Scotney Court.

Inland records are not unusual, involving around 130 birds between 1977 and 2019, mainly in ones and twos. Summer parties of moulting drakes at Sevenoaks involved three on 20th July 1972 and six on 8th August 1976. At Bough Beech there were five on 14th April 1973 and groups of three on four occasions between 1978 and 1988. Elsewhere there were eight at Stodmarsh on 12th January 1963, five at Wye on 14th November 1975, four at New Hythe during 7th February-31st March 1985 and three at Seaton on 11th January 1999.

The average pattern of occurrence shows a rise and fall about a February peak (see second chart). Before the species became so scarce, small numbers used to occur regularly in May and September, but Scaup have always been at their scarcest in summer during June-August. Nevertheless, there have been records in low single figures in many years, and in addition an exceptional flock of 32 moulting drakes was seen at Shellness on 29th August 1954. In milder winters, Scaup may be more numerous on passage in November-December or March-April than in mid-winter. In autumn movements, flocks of up to 20-30 occur (or used to occur), and there have been peaks of 51 W at Dungeness on 9th November 1992 and 32 W at Foreness on 22nd November 1993. Spring passage was usually smaller, typically with movements of up to 10-20 but including 45 E at Dungeness on 26th February 1994 and 28 E there on 27th March 2001.



With the exceptions of 20 at Pegwell Bay in November 2016 and the 40 at Lower Halstow in 2018, there hasn't been a count of over 20 since 2000/01. The lowest total of all came in 2018/19, with just four individuals.

Lesser Scaup



Lesser Scaup, Ontario (wikicommons)

The first British record of this North American duck was as recently as 1987, in Staffordshire, but by 2019 over 200 had been recorded. Kent has done remarkably poorly, with only one bird so far. That was a first winter male, found at Scotney Court GP on 17th November 2004 and remaining there until 14th March 2005. The same bird, it is assumed, then appeared at Bough Beech reservoir on 16th March. And, apart from a few hybrids with which I'm not dealing, that's that.

Thanks to Murray Orchard for his comments on breeding Pochard, to David Walker at DBO for clarifying the 1974 Pochard count details, and to Keith Privett and Robin Mace for sorting out a Ring-necked Duck record that seems to have been a mirage.

Andrew Henderson

Moorhen meanderings



Moorhen (wikicommons)

Reviewing bird records while preparing entries for the Kent Bird Report is always interesting – for many reasons. Above all is the fascination of seeing how numbers change through the year and between years, and where birds occur across the county. But there are also snippets of information in the comments section of many records which divert one's attention from the task of writing the entries. It's not possible to mention many of these in the KBR, though occasionally one or two do get slipped in. Having just been completely distracted by some of the comments in the records for Moorhen in 2020, I've given up writing the entry and started listing interesting items. Here's just a few of them. I won't mention observers' names and, in any case, several are anonymous.



Otford Pond (Stockphoto)

At Otford, birds were reported in July (with chicks) and October “on a roundabout which contains a Grade 2 listed reed-fringed pond, where they usually breed”. Of course, I had to go searching for more information about it, and sure enough it's easily found online: it was first listed as long ago as 1975 and photographs show that it has a duck house in the middle. I have not seen anything telling me on whose expenses the cost of this structure appeared.

Two summer records mentioned predation risks. In late May, at Bough Beech, a Mink was seen taking a clutch of Moorhen eggs, but in mid June at Cliffe Pools, a pair was seen to chase away a Stoat. Some records are a little baffling. One record at Sevenoaks in August refers to the bird “singing in the bushes”. This sort of thing makes me suspect someone's entered the record for the wrong species but perhaps it's just different perceptions of what constitutes song. t Bough Beech reservoir in November, three Moorhens were seen, with the comment “walked all the way round”. That's over three miles, quite a long walk for Moorhens, I thought – but then realised that maybe it was the observer who'd done the walking: the problem with keeping comments concise!

The transfer of records from one database to another can give rise to strange effects. A couple of Moorhen records received from eBird have entirely numerical 'comments'. One of them, at Walmer in April, reads "0.0104166666666667". I assumed that wasn't just a very small part of a Moorhen and, putting two and two together, I tried converting it to a time, and sure enough it becomes 00:15 hrs.

Modern recording methods feature, especially the newish technique of analysing sound recordings made at night to discover what's flown over ('nocmig'). Moorhens are detected quite a lot by this method: I can see many such records, some with multiple birds, in 2020 and most of them in April. One submission from Tenterden that month says, "may not seem an interesting record but picked up on night migration at 1.04 a.m.". Well, all records are interesting, in my opinion.

But I will mention one frequent gripe of mine, the practice of submitting records (e.g. through BirdTrack) with no count, just ticking to say 'present'. Some people seem to do this even if it's a significant record of a scarce species. In the case of Moorhen in 2020, 27% of the 5,250 records carry no count information. It really does make your record more valuable to add a count, even if it's just an estimate.

Andrew Henderson

KENT BIRD SIGHTINGS FOR SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER 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 weather through much of **September** was reasonably settled and quiet, though there were outbreaks of rain at times. It was also rather warm, especially around the 7th and 8th. A marked change came about on the 27th, with much more unsettled and notably cooler conditions for the last few days of the month. Mean temperatures were well above normal resulting in the second warmest September on record.

The weather during most of **October** was unsettled and damp though there was a drier spell between the 8th and 17th. Temperatures were above average for much of the time and frosts were few. Overall, there was above average October rainfall with 74.75 mm of rain falling at Bishopstone whilst sunshine was somewhat below average.

PARTRIDGE TO WILDFOWL

A **Black Brant** was recorded at Seasalter between Oct 12th and 19th and a **Pale-bellied Brent Goose** was seen there on Oct 23rd and 24th. A **Dark-bellied Brent Goose** at Seasalter on 24th October had been colour-ringed on the 12th May 2021 on Terschelling, The Netherlands.



Colour-ringed Dark-bellied Brent, by Mark Chidwick

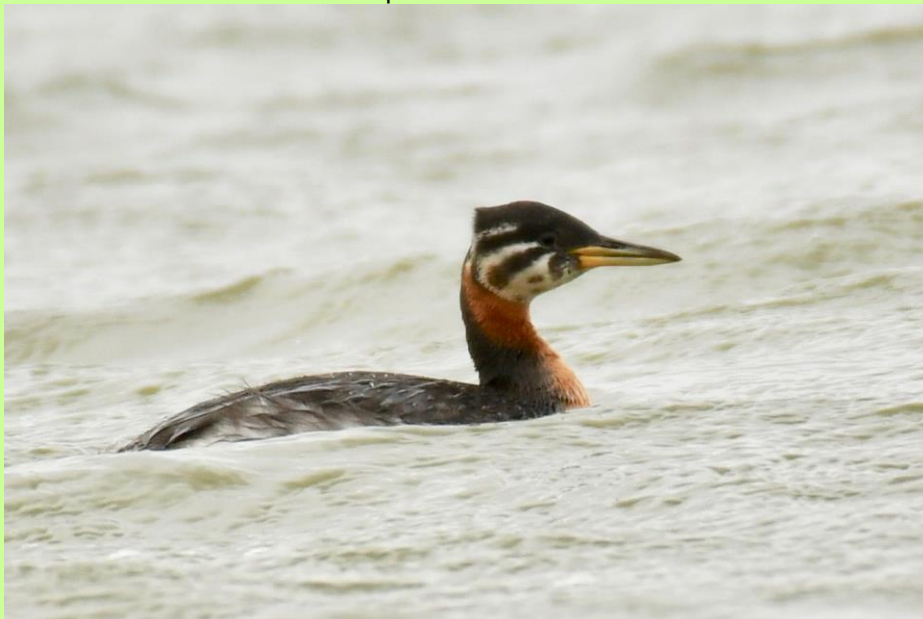
A **Russian White-fronted Goose** was seen at Cliffe on Oct 29th and three **Whooper Swans** were recorded at Reculver, Swalecliffe and Capel Fleet on Oct 16th and at Cliffe on the 23rd. Up to four **Egyptian Geese** were recorded from Bough Beech, DBO, Conningbrook, Stodmarsh, Dunorlan Park and Sandwich Bay and three **Ruddy Shelduck** flew in off the sea at Shellness on Oct 21st.

As many as five **Garganey** were recorded from Stodmarsh, Oare Marshes, Worth Marshes, Higham Marshes and Dungeness RSPB with the last record of one at Dungeness RSPB on Oct 21st.

A female **Scaup** was reported from Oare Marshes on Oct 20th and one flew W at DBO on the 25th. A **Velvet Scoter** flew E past DBO on Oct 8th with five on the 10th and single birds at Reculver on the 12th, Bockhill on the 16th and Mill Point on the 16th and 17th with two at Seasalter on the 24th. On Oct 21st, seven female **Goosanders** were seen at Reculver and Swalecliffe with six at Sandwich Bay and Shellness. After this one or two were seen at Cliffe and Bough Beech.

NIGHTJAR TO WADERS

A **Corncrake** flew over the A30 at Folkestone on Sept 11th.



Red-necked Grebe by Johnathan Boyce Leigh

A juvenile **Red-necked Grebe** was seen at Little Murston NR from Sept 27th-Oct 10th and a bird was also seen at Swalecliffe from Oct 18th-21st whilst single **Slavonian Grebes** were seen at Swalecliffe on Oct 14th and 16th, at Dungeness RSPB on the 14th, Seaton and Tankerton on the 24th and at Sandwich Bay on the 30th. During September and October there were one or two **Black-necked Grebes** at Cliffe Pools and Lade with up to four at Dungeness RSPB.

Single **Dotterel** were recorded from Oare Marshes, Seasalter and Sandwich Bay on Sept 5th and one was also seen at Worth Marshes from Sept 9th-15th. As many as three **Curlew Sandpipers** were seen at Elmley, Oare Marshes, Dungeness RSPB and Cliffe Pools with the last bird reported from Oare Marshes on Oct 3rd. The first **Purple Sandpiper** of the autumn was seen at Reculver on Sept 9th after which up to six birds were seen at Ramsgate Harbour, Sandwich Bay, Hythe, Hampton, Broadstairs, Foreness and Minnis Bay. As many as seven **Little Stints** were recorded from Dungeness RSPB, Elmley, Cliffe Pools, Oare Marshes, Swalecliffe, Reculver, Stodmarsh, Riverside CP, Gravesend and Worth Marshes.



Purple Sandpiper by Bob Gomes

Two **Pectoral Sandpipers** arrived at Worth Marshes on Sept 17th and remained there until the 21st and another was seen at Dungeness RSPB between Oct 6th and 10th whilst a **LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER** was reported from Cliffe Pools on Sept 1st. The first **Jack Snipes** of the autumn was seen at Sandwich Bay on Oct 6th after which up to three were recorded there. A **Grey Phalarope** flew W at Reculver and Swalecliffe on Oct 6th and others were seen at DBO on the 8th, Hythe on the 13th and Grenham Bay on the 21st whilst an **unidentified phalarope** was reported from Oare Marshes on Aug 4th.

One or two **Wood Sandpipers** were recorded from Worth Marshes, Elmley and Bough Beech with the last bird seen at Worth Marshes on the Oct 4th and as many as 17 **Spotted Redshank** were recorded from Murston, Milton Creek, Otterham Creek, Worth Marshes, Lydd Ranges, Riverside CP, Oare Marshes and Cliffe Pools.

GULLS TO SHEARWATERS

A juvenile **Sabine's Gull** was found on Worth Marshes on Sept 22nd and was still there the next morning following a tractor and a plough with Black-headed Gulls. An adult was also seen at Seasalter on Oct 9th with a juvenile at Folkestone on the 13th.



Sabines Gull by Mike Gould

The regular adult **BONAPARTE'S GULL** first seen this year on July 16th remained at Oare Marshes until Sept 26th. As many as 10 **Little Gulls** were recorded from Seasalter, DBO, Mill Point, Sandwich Bay, Deal, Grenham Bay, Tankerton, Swalecliffe and Littlestone. There were also 34 at DBO on Oct 20th.

During September and October as many as three **Caspian Gulls** were identified at DBO, Dartford Marshes, Horsmonden, Higham Marshes and Dungeness RSPB and one or two **Yellow-legged Gulls** were reported from Samphire Hoe, Cliffe Pools, Dengemarsh, Stodmarsh, Dartford Marshes and Bockhill. In addition, 40 adults were reported from Dartford Marshes on Sept 17th.

A **Sandwich Tern** flew over East Malling with Black-headed gulls on Sept 11th whilst a juvenile **White-winged Black Tern** was identified and photographed at Dungeness RSPB on Sept 20th. During September and October up to six **Black Terns** were seen at Dungeness RSPB, Oare Marshes, Reculver, Swalecliffe, Seasalter, Copt Point, North Foreland, Sandwich Bay and Shellness.

Up to 11 **Great Skuas** were seen at DBO with one or two at Sandwich Bay, Minnis Bay, St Margarets-at-Cliffe, Samphire Hoe, Bockhill, Mill Point and Dartford Marshes. During September and October, maximum counts of 93 **Arctic Skuas** on Sept 27th and 94 on Oct 2nd were recorded from DBO. Smaller numbers were also seen at Sandwich Bay, Seasalter, Leysdown-on-Sea, Samphire Hoe, St Margarets-at-Cliffe, Dymchurch Redoubt, Mill Point, Cliffe, Folkestone, Hythe, North Foreland and Swalecliffe. Two **Pomarine Skuas** were seen at Tankerton on Sept 6th with others at Swalecliffe on the 20th and Sandwich Bay on the 27th. In October one flew past DBO on the 2nd and three were reported from Walmer Beach on the 3rd whilst another was reported from Lydd on the 21st. An adult **Long-tailed Skua** was seen at Tankerton on Sept 6th with another reported from Leysdown-on-Sea on the 8th. A juvenile was identified at Kingsdown on Oct 1st and others were seen at DBO and Sandwich Bay on the 2nd and Deal on the 3rd.



Arctic Skuas by Mike Gould

A **Black Guillemot** flew E past Samphire Hoe on Sept 18th whilst another was reported flying E at Grenham Bay on Oct 11th. A juvenile **Puffin** was found in the Swale on Oct 11th and taken into care.

The first **Black-throated Diver** of the autumn was seen at Foreness on Sept 14th after which single birds were seen at Sandwich Bay, Walmer, Tankerton and Grenham Bay whilst single **Great Northern Divers** were recorded from Oct 23rd at Shellness, Swalecliffe and Tankerton.

A **Leach's Petrel** was seen off the fishing boats at Dungeness on Sept 27th and there were five there on Oct 1st when five were also seen at Mill Point. Two were recorded from the fishing boats on the 2nd.

A **Sooty Shearwater** flew W at DBO on Sept 12th with two on the 19th, 20th, 21st and 26th and seven on the 27th. On the 28th, there were four at DBO and one at St Margarets-at-Cliffe and on the 30th two flew past St Margarets-at-Cliffe. On Oct 1st and 2nd there were 19 at DBO with two at Samphire Hoe on the 2nd and with others at DBO on the 6th, 13th, 28th, 29th and 30th and Hythe on the 31st. Two **Manx Shearwaters** flew past DBO on Sept 26th and 27th when two were also seen at Sandwich Bay. One also flew past DBO on the 28th with three on Oct 1st with one on the 5th and other birds flew W at Reculver and Swalecliffe on the 6th and S at Sandwich Bay on the 10th. One was also seen of DBO on Oct 26th and 29th. A **Balearic Shearwater** was seen at DBO on Sept 14th with two there the next day and one on Sept 26th whilst another flew past Dymchurch Redoubt on Sept 17th. There was a good count at DBO on Sept 27th during a south westerly gale when 40 were seen but the Observatory record was beaten the next day when **161** flew past. Also, on the 27th, single birds flew past Walmer and St Margarets-at-Cliffe whilst on the 28th there were six at St Margarets-at-Cliffe and one at Sandwich Bay. With continuing strong winds 20 were counted at DBO on Oct 1st and on the next day there were 18 off the fishing boats at DBO, eight at St Margarets-at-Cliffe and one at Samphire Hoe. Single birds were also seen at DBO on the 3rd, 5th and 29th.

WHITE STORK TO WOODPECKERS

An unringed **White Stork** was seen at Worth Marshes on Sept 11th and 12th before it flew along the south coast past Dungeness RSPB. Also, on Sept 12th, there was a flock of 45 birds seen over Greatstone-on-Sea and then over Dungeness, New Romney and West Hythe before 28 roosted on pylons at Etchinghill. These birds obviously came from the Knepp rewilding scheme. This flock of 45 was also seen at Barham and Faversham the next morning whilst three flew over Greenhill. Two also flew over Bough Beech on Sept 18th and Dymchurch on the 20th. In October one was reported from near Maidstone on the 25th.

One or two **Shags** were seen at Samphire Hoe, Minnis Bay, Folkestone, Foreness, Reculver, DBO, Swalecliffe and St Margarets-at-Cliffe.

The long-staying **Glossy Ibis** was still at Dungeness RSPB and was joined by another bird from the Oct 7th. Others were seen at Cooling Marshes on Sept 16th, Cliffe Pools from Sept 21st-Oct 16th and Stodmarsh from Sept 22nd-Oct 3rd.

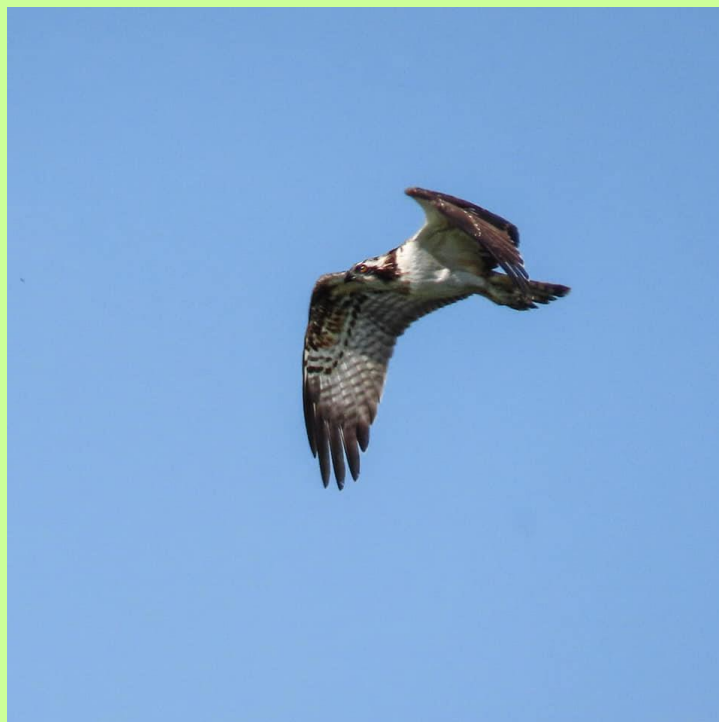


Glossy Ibis by Gaz Foreman

During September and October up to three **Spoonbills** were seen at Cliffe Pools, Dartford, Stodmarsh, Worth Marshes, Sandwich Bay, Broadstairs, Conyer, Oare Marshes and Dungeness RSPB and single **Bitterns** were recorded from Dungeness RSPB and DBO.

Up to 16 **Cattle Egrets** were seen at Dungeness RSPB, Elmley, Stodmarsh, Cooling Marshes, Worth Marshes, Dartford, Sandwich Bay, Murston, Shorne Marshes, Canterbury, Graveney, St Mary's Island, Swalecliffe and Nor Marshes but there were larger counts of 34 at Elmley on the Sept 20th and 28 at Cliffe Pools on the Sept 21st. A **Purple Heron** was seen on Worth Marshes on Sept 7th and 8th. Up to 10 **Great White Egrets** were seen at Dungeness RSPB and Stodmarsh/Grove Ferry with up to three at Swanscombe, Sandwich Bay, North Foreland, Elmley, Pegwell Bay, Bough Beech, Swalecliffe, Capel Fleet, Whitstable, Oare Marshes and Stuart.

One or two **Ospreys** were seen at East Malling, Oare Marshes, Riverside CP, Conyer, Elmley, Leysdown-on-Sea, Harty, Pittswood, Otterham Creek, Copt Point, Murston, Meopham, Langdon Bay, Uplees, Abbotscliffe and Nor Marshes.



Osprey by John Shilling

During September and early October as many as three **Honey Buzzards** were seen at Sandwich Bay, Bapchild, Dungeness RSPB, DBO, Dover, Langdon, Bockhill, Tilmanstone, South Foreland and Weddington. A male **Hen Harrier** was seen at Langdon on Sept 18th after which one or two birds were seen at Cliffe Pools, Reculver Marshes, Shellness, Oare Marshes, Swale NNR, Walland Marsh and Lydd. A juvenile **PALLID HARRIER** was identified and photographed at Abbotscliffe on Oct 23rd. If accepted by BBRC it will be the eighth record for Kent.



Pallid Harrier by Elliot Ranford

One or two **Red Kites** were recorded from Cliffe Pools, Luddenham, Sittingbourne, Sandwich Bay, Godmersham, Tunbridge Wells and Broomfield but there were 20 seen at Bough Beech on Oct 31st. A **Black Kite** was seen at Lydd on Sept 13th.

Single **Long-eared Owls** were seen at Elmley on Sept 4th, Oct 3rd and Oct 19th as well as on Reculver Marshes on Oct 11th. During September and October as many as five **Short-eared Owls** were seen on Sheppey with one or two at Sandwich Bay, Worth Marshes, Foreness, Pegwell Bay, New Hythe, Shuart, Lydd, South Swale and Seasalter.

A **Hoopoe** was reported from Tenterden on Oct 26th. There were still one or two **Wrynecks** at Abbotscliffe until Sept 6th and one or two at DBO until Sept 4th. Others were also seen North Foreland on Sept 2nd and 5th, Langdon Bay on the 3rd, Leysdown-on-Sea on the 4th, Elmley on the 5th, Pegwell Bay from the 6th-11th, Ramsgate on the 6th and Seasalter on the 8th.

FALCONS TO HIRUNDINES

During these two months as many as four **Merlins** were seen at DBO with one or two at Reculver Marshes, Bedlam's Bottom, Shorne Marshes, Abbotscliffe, Horsmonden, Elmley, Dartford Marshes and Sandwich Bay.

As many as 16 **Ravens** were reported from Bockhill, Hythe, DBO, Bough Beech, Furnace Pond, Sandwich Bay, Swalecliffe, Seabrook, Nagden, Reculver Marshes, Worth Marshes, Shuart, Samphire Hoe, Stodmarsh and Bough Beech. A **Hooded Crow** flew in off the sea at Dungeness on Oct 31st.

During October single **Woodlarks** were recorded from Seabrook on the 7th, Abbotscliffe on the 8th and DBO on the 16th whilst a **Shorelark** was seen at Foreness on Oct 13th.

There was a large westerly movement of hirundines on Sept 22nd with the highest counts at Sandwich Bay where there were **34,300 House Martins** and **3,900 Swallows**. A **Red-rumped Swallow** flew NE at Bockhill on Sept 16th.

WARBLERS TO WHEATEARS

A **Wood Warbler** was recorded from Sandwich Bay on Sept 22nd and a **Yellow-browed Warbler** was reported from River on Sept 25th, but the more normal arrival of birds started on Oct 7th when two were seen at Bockhill after which one or two birds were recorded from Bockhill, St Margarets-at-Cliffe, North Foreland and Margate Cemetery.



Radde's Warbler by Brendan Ryan

Single **Radde's Warblers** were seen at Bockhill on Oct 16th and at Sandwich Bay on Oct 16th and 17th. Analysis of the recordings of the call and comparison with sonograms seems to suggest that a strange calling *phylloscopus* warbler at Worth Marshes on Sept 11th was an **IBERIAN CHIFFCHAFF**. If proven this would be the sixth record of this species in Kent.

An **Icterine Warbler** was found at Leysdown-on-Sea on Sept 4th whilst an **Arctic Warbler** was discovered at the Shuart crossing on Oct 9th. This is only the sixth bird of this species to be recorded in Kent. During September single **Grasshopper Warblers** were identified at Sandwich Bay, Shuart, West Hythe, Reculver Marshes, Bockhill and Langdon Hole with the last seen at Bockhill on Sept 14th.



Arctic Warbler by Steve Ashton

A **Barred Warbler** was reported from Foreness on Sept 6th with another seen at Worth Marshes from Sept 7th-10th and a **Dartford Warbler** was seen at Swalecliffe on Oct 14th with two different birds at Reculver Marshes on Oct 16th and 17th

Up to three **Firecrests** were seen at Reculver, Shuart, Canterbury, Weddington, North Foreland, Sandwich Bay, Sandgate and Bockhill.

An adult **Rose-coloured Starling** was seen at Palmarsh from Sept 28th-Oct 28th.

The first two **Ring Ouzels** of the autumn were seen at Langdon Cliffs on Oct 3rd after which up to three birds were seen at Lade, Reculver Marshes, Sandwich Bay, Worth Marshes, Dungeness, Shadoxhurst, Samphire Hoe, Abbotscliffe, Bockhill, Pegwell Bay and Langdon Bay. The first **Fieldfare** of the autumn was seen at Shuart on Oct 8th and the first **Redwing** was recorded at Barming on Oct 1st.

A **Bluethroat** was seen briefly at Bockhill on Oct 10th and a **Red-breasted Flycatcher** was reported from Seasalter on Oct 9th. As many as seven **Pied Flycatchers** were seen at Sandwich Bay, DBO, Dungeness RSPB, Langdon Bay, Abbotscliffe, Margate Cemetery, Dover, North Foreland, Pegwell Bay, St Margarets-at-Cliffe, Kingsdown, Shuart, St Mary's Island, Shellness, Chamber's Wall, Canterbury, Tankerton, South Foreland, Ramsgate, Bockhill, Broadstairs, Leysdown-on-Sea and Aycliffe. Up to 12 **Black Redstarts** were recorded from Samphire Hoe with as many as five at DBO, Dover, Bockhill, Reculver Marshes, Ramsgate Harbour, Sandwich Bay, Broadstairs, Kingsdown, Abbotscliffe and Langdon Cliffs. A **DESERT WHEATEAR** was seen at North Foreland on Oct 9th and was still there on the 13th. This is the 17th record of this species in Kent.



Desert Wheatear by Nick Smith

SPARROWS TO BUNTINGS

A **Richard's Pipit** flew W at Foreness and North Foreland on Oct 10th and a **RED-THROATED PIPIT** was reported flying over Worth Marshes on Sept 18th. A **Water Pipit** was seen at Stodmarsh on Oct 9th and there were 27 on the 20th with up to eight counted there during the rest of the month. Single birds were also seen at Swanscombe on Oct 23rd and Worth Marshes on the 26th.

A **Hawfinch** was seen at Little Farthingloe on Oct 22nd and three **Crossbills** flew W at Bapchild on Sept 6th.

The first **Lapland Bunting** of the autumn was seen at Foreness on Oct 4th after which a single birds was recorded from Weddington. The first **Snow Bunting** of the autumn was discovered at Dumpton on Oct 9th after which up to three birds were recorded from Foreness, Dumpton, Conyer, South Foreland, Langdon Bay, Broadstairs, Sandwich Bay, Reculver and Seasalter.

A **RUSTIC BUNTING** flew over Sandwich Bay on Oct 12th. If accepted by BBRC this is only the eighth record for Kent.

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.

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D. Faulkner, Folkestone and Hythe Birds (per I. Roberts), Foreness Bird Group, C. Gibbard, C. Gillard, 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. Mills, S. Morton, S. Mount, R. Newman, M. Norman, P. North, R. O'Reilly, M. Orchard, J. Organ, J. Partridge, K. Privett, C. Powell, M. Puxley, R. Rackliffe, E. Ranford, 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.

Black Kite	Worth Marshes	March 6th
Red-necked Phalarope (juvenile)	Stodmarsh	August 26th
Caspian Gull (juvenile)	Langdon Cliffs	August 19th
Melodious Warbler	Langdon Cliffs	August 22nd

Christmas Past

A Turkey cock at the Red Fort, Agra



Wild Turkey, by Ustad Mansur. Mughal court 1612

The presence of a Turkey in Northern India 136 years before the species was formally described by Linnaeus, is a bit of a conundrum. However, it is by no means the only extraordinary bird to be found in the Mughal courts. Ustad Mansur, court painter to the Mughal empire, also produced the earliest colour depiction of a Dodo only a few years after this turkey painting. and about fifty years before its likely extinction.

Mansur was remarkable as an artist, given that his depictions of many species of birds, animals and plants are clearly recognisable and quite accurately rendered. A good example is a wonderful painting of the Siberian Crane, illustrated more than 140 years before it was formally described by western science. Turkeys may have been brought to India from the Americas by the Portuguese, but the earliest recorded occurrence of the turkey in England appears to be in 1526, when William Strickland is reputed to have brought six birds back from a voyage to North America and sold them for tuppence each in Bristol Market!

Norman McCanch