



Weed dance, by Terry Laws

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Editorial

We have passed the summer solstice and are sliding inexorably into autumn, arguably my favourite season as a birder. The anticipation of those first signs of southward passage by familiar species is something to be valued. Until recently one of my key markers was the appearance of small groups of Lapwing flying over my garden as little flocks began to appear on stubble at the end of July. In the past the numbers built through into the winter, Lapwings being joined by Golden Plover and occasional trips of Ruff, but not anymore, ever since the most favoured fields were changed from cereals to permanent orchard blocks. In the wider scheme around the parish there are ominous rumblings about a large solar farm proposed for an area of damp lowland grassland favoured by many wildfowl, waders and winter raptors and as a breeding ground for Yellow Wagtails, Corn Buntings and other lowland farmland birds. It does not seem to matter that this is part of an area destined to be under water in only a few decades, profit now for those remote from that natural world seems to be the only mantra governments and most politicians understand. After more than fifty years arguing for a more enlightened and responsible relationship with nature, I fear that the ears in power are deafer than ever, mostly by design and driven by short-term greed.

I am very pleased to welcome **Heather Mathieson** to the Newsletter team. She has undertaken to keep us updated with relevant news and information regarding BTO surveys and requests. As a BTO member for 53 years I have put much of my birding effort into survey work in the past, although my increasing decrepitude has somewhat restricted my input of late, but I still input all my data onto Birdtrack!

Good birding

Norman

News and announcements

Avian Influenza

Over the last few months we have seen evidence that Bird Flu is continuing to decimate colonies of breeding birds across the UK and in areas of Kent. Data collated by the British Trust for Ornithology shows that mortalities of Black-headed Gulls have increased exponentially, estimating that at least 10,000 Black-headed gulls have died in the UK since the end of March. Similarly concerning mortalities for this species have been reported in France, Italy and Germany. It is likely that the significant decline in breeding numbers this year will impact numbers of over-wintering birds seen in Kent this autumn and winter. Other colonial species which have been affected by AI are Common Terns, with colonies impacted across the country. Both Black-headed Gulls and Common Terns are already on the Amber List of Birds of Conservation Concern due to population declines and range contractions. The long-term consequences of Avian Flu on these species are likely to be extremely significant.

Prof. James Pearce Higgins, BTO Director of Science: *We are only able to track the spread of avian influence with the help of birdwatchers who submit their sightings, supporting the efforts of site managers and reserve wardens.*

How you can help

Don't touch dead or sick birds

Keep dogs on leads to prevent them from finding and picking up dead birds

Clean bird feeders and bird baths regularly

Report dead and sick birds

Reporting dead and sick birds

Record dead and sick birds on the [BirdTrack app](#). This allows researchers to follow the disease's geographical spread and rapidly assess potential impacts on populations.

Report to [Defra](#), so that if needed, dead birds can be collected for testing

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/report-dead-wild-birds> 03459 33 55 77 (call charges may apply)

Dawn Balmer, BTO Head of Surveys: Thank you to everyone who has submitted records of dead birds to BirdTrack which allows us to monitor the spread of Avian Influenza, and also to Defra/DAERA, which may collect the birds for testing. We urge birdwatchers to check breeding sites – and report any deaths.

References, links and further reading

Birdtrack: <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/birdtrack>

Defra: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/report-dead-wild-birds> 03459 33 55 77 (call charges may apply)

<https://www.bto.org/community/news/202306-avian-influenza-mortality-rises-threatened-gull-and-tern-colonies>

<https://www.bto.org/community/news/202305-wave-avian-influenza-hitting-black-headed-gulls>

<https://www.bto.org/understanding-birds/avian-influenza>

Recording Breeding Birds

The KOS receives thousands of records either directly from the KOS website or from platforms like BirdTrack or eBird which authors of species accounts in the Kent Bird Report use to develop an accurate estimate of species populations, range and status across Kent.

For breeding records, the information would be of even more value if the recorder could include details about the bird's behaviour. There are nationally agreed codes for both breeding and non-breeding birds (please see below).

Please adhere to the Birdwatchers' Codes. All birds, their nests and eggs are protected by law. It is an offence to intentionally or recklessly disturb them. If you are concerned that reporting a breeding bird may lead to disturbance you can report it directly to the Kent Recorder, Barry Wright

umbrellabirds66@gmail.com.

BIRDWATCHERS' CODE

Watching birds | The Birdwatchers' Code - The RSPB

1. Avoid disturbing birds and their habitats – the birds' interests should always come first.
2. Be an ambassador for birdwatching.
3. Know the law and the rules for visiting the countryside and follow them.
4. Report your sightings to the County Bird Recorder (KOS, Barry Wright) and the BirdTrack website (www.birdtrack.net)
5. Think about the interests of wildlife and local people before passing on news of a rare bird, especially during the breeding season.

EVIDENCE OF BREEDING

The following breeding codes used by BTO BirdTrack are now also incorporated in the KOS sightings database. During the breeding season (usually taken as 1 April to 31 July, but some species breed earlier and later!), please try and add the most appropriate code, if possible, to your record submission, especially for less common species.

Non-breeding

F Flying over.

M Observed but suspected to be still on Migration.

U Observed but suspected to be summering non-breeder.

Possible Breeder

H Species observed in breeding season in suitable nesting Habitat.

S Singing male present (or breeding calls heard) in breeding season in suitable breeding habitat. Probable Breeding

P Pair observed in suitable nesting habitat in breeding season.

T Permanent Territory presumed through registration of territorial behaviour on at least two different days, a week or more apart, at the same place, or many individuals on one day.

D Courtship and Display, judged to be in or near potential breeding habitat.

N Visiting probable Nesting site.

A Agitated behaviour or anxiety calls from adults, suggesting probable presence of nest or young. I Brood patch on adult, examined in the hand, suggesting Incubation.

B Nest Building or excavating nest hole.

Confirmed breeding

DD Distraction-Display or injury feigning.

UN Used Nest or eggshells found in current season.

FL Recently fledged young or downy young. Careful consideration should be given to likely provenance of any fledged juvenile capable of significant geographical movement.

ON Adults entering or leaving nest site in circumstances indicating Occupied Nest.
FF Adult carrying Faecal sac or Food for young.
NE Nest containing Eggs.
NY Nest with Young seen or heard.

BTO Seabird Monitoring Programme (SMP)

As previously reported, the above survey is now organised by the BTO, who have taken on this responsibility from the JNCC (Seabird Monitoring Programme). The SMP is now under the leadership of Sarah Harris, who has left her position as organiser for BBS/WBBS.

The programme retains its partner organisations, JNCC and RSPB. Details of how the programme will be modified going forward are still being worked on but there is scope for wider participation than has been the case in the past.

For further details please see www.bto.org/our-science/projects/seabirdmonitoring-programme

Within Kent it is now possible for volunteers to register and sign up to count sites with breeding Gulls, Terns, Fulmars or Cormorants. These can be coastal or inland sites and all are marked on the Map of Seabird Monitoring Sites which can be accessed via the above link. This shows the current sites registered in Kent and for which data has been submitted in the past or as part of the recent JNCC Seabirds Count. By zooming in to view the master sites, any component ones will be revealed.

Clicking on a site will start the process of requesting to become a counter. Once registered and allocated the site, you can then enter breeding data from visits you make. Hopefully this is something that you would continue to do each year, in much the same way as volunteers do for schemes such as the Heronry Census. You will be making a valuable contribution to our knowledge of the state of UK seabirds! Thanks.

Colour Ringed Redshanks – requests for sightings

The Swale Wader Group Swale Wader Group - Home (swalewaders.co.uk) have started a five-year colour ringing project on Redshank. Redshank numbers are declining nationally and the study aims to provide information on the origins of Redshank wintering in north Kent and the dispersion of our local breeding population. Please report any sightings to Brian Watmough brianrwat@yahoo.co.uk

Surveys

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

KOS Nightingale Survey 2023

Many thanks to all those who participated in this survey and who have sent in their results. All data is important, whether birds were found in squares or not, so please return your forms even if the latter was the case. Data is being processed to establish the extent of coverage achieved and being entered into a summary spreadsheet. We shall be sending out further thanks to participants, and chasing those from whom we haven't yet received results! Once all data is returned, we will be able to start the analysis to produce a Kent population estimate. Many reports during the spring suggested that it has been a good year for Nightingales, despite weather conditions that affected the arrival and numbers of other migrant species.

Please can all participants complete maps and recording forms and return by either of the following options: -
By post to – **Nicole Khan, RSPB Swale Office, John Roberts Business Park, Pean Hill, Whitstable CT5 3BJ**
Or email scanned copies to – nicole.khan@rspb.org.uk
Thank you

BTO Woodcock Survey 2023 – Update



Woodcock (BTO Copyright)

Many thanks to all those who took part in the British Trust for Ornithology's 2023 Woodcock Survey. I was astounded by the positive response to the survey and the exceptional level of commitment from our volunteers. We managed to cover all high priority areas across Kent.

The survey ran from late April to end of June, involving 2-4 dusk survey visits in randomly selected wooded areas across Kent. It was a cold start to the survey season which ended with warm temperatures and – in my case – extremely large mosquitoes keeping me company.

If you still need to submit your records please could you do so as soon as possible so we can start to process the information. Results for the county and the UK will be shared later on in the year. This information will help us to understand the status of the Woodcock as a breeding bird in the UK and give us a greater understanding of its current range and habitat preference, data which will be crucial for the conservation of this Red Listed species in the UK.

Woodcock Survey homepage: <https://www.bto.org/woodcock>

Heather Mathieson, Woodcock Survey Regional Organiser, Kent

Heather.maggie.mathieson@gmail.com

The KOS Conservation & Surveys Sub-Committee – what is it, and what does it do?

by Murray Orchard (Chair)

I'm not sure when this committee was first formed, but I recall a friend and I attending meetings in Walderslade at the house of Rod Smith (then Vice Chairman of the KOS) back in the late 1980's/early 90's – at times just three of us! We spoke about the need to get better bird data to identify important areas and help prevent potentially damaging developments, especially in and around Kent's estuaries and the North Kent Marshes. I remember volunteering for the Eighth Census of the Breeding Birds of the Medway and Swale Islands in 1987, organised by Rod and involving a large team of enthusiastic volunteers, comprising KOS committee members, local birders, and a couple of reserve wardens! Different teams visited different islands. Great fun, some tricky moments involving incoming tides, and a lot of interesting bird data. Sadly, for various reasons, this proved to be the last such Census, which had been carried out by the KOS every five years since 1955, just three years after the Society was founded.

The reason for these surveys, and other ones subsequently organised in the county by the KOS, has been to show the importance of areas such as our estuaries, wetlands, and woodlands for birds, or to investigate the status and population trends of specific species of birds in the county. The results of these surveys provide valuable data to help conserve habitats in Kent or to try and understand how declines within certain species might be halted. Most surveys are now conducted in Kent in support of national ones organised by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO). However, recent KOS led surveys have been conducted for Turtle Doves (2021) and Nightingales this year.

It became increasingly necessary for the KOS to have a group focussing on support for survey work in the county, and to keep informed of conservation threats and issues affecting Kent birds and habitats by liaising with other relevant organisations. And so, the Conservation & Surveys Sub-Committee was set up. Various chairpersons have come and gone and I'm currently in the seat! Membership of the committee has steadily increased to include a range of folk with different knowledge and engagement with birds and bird protection in Kent. These currently comprise representatives from the RSPB, BTO, Kent Wildlife Trust, Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory, Elmley Conservation Trust and people engaged with survey work – both professionally and as keen amateurs. I'm very grateful for the expertise that each of these members bring to our meetings, which are held three times a year.

At our meetings we deal with three main subjects: major development threats (such as Swanscombe, Lodge Hill etc.), conservation issues (such as new reserves, management at existing ones, disturbance and avian influenza) and monitoring (such as KOS and BTO surveys). The aim of the committee is to keep the Society informed of major development and conservation issues and identify where and how bird records collected by the KOS can assist the RSPB and KWT in their conservation casework, or how additional monitoring or surveys might help. The committee also provides a feedback of survey results to the Society and discusses potential species for future county surveys, as well as overseeing support to BTO projects and submission of the annual report on rare breeding birds in Kent to the Secretary of the UK Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP). The key to the success of any committee such as this is networking. I always look forward to our meetings and the chance to tap into the collective knowledge of the other committee members and get updated on what's going on in the county that's affecting Kent birds – and, increasingly, there's a lot of it!

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

Correction

Due to an oversight on my part the Blue-cheeked Bee-eater photo provided by Murray Wright was incorrectly captioned as taken at Church Hougham - it is of the Bockhill bird in July 2009. As far as we know the Church Hougham bird was not photographed. My apologies to Murray for this lapse of concentration.

Norman McCanch – Editor

Articles

PIGEONS AND DOVES

Pigeons and doves are often regarded as uninteresting or even completely ignored. But they are an interesting group with varied behaviours and habitat preferences and, if you look at them closely, they are decidedly attractive, with their black or white bars or neck-rings, subtle pastel shades and iridescent sheens.

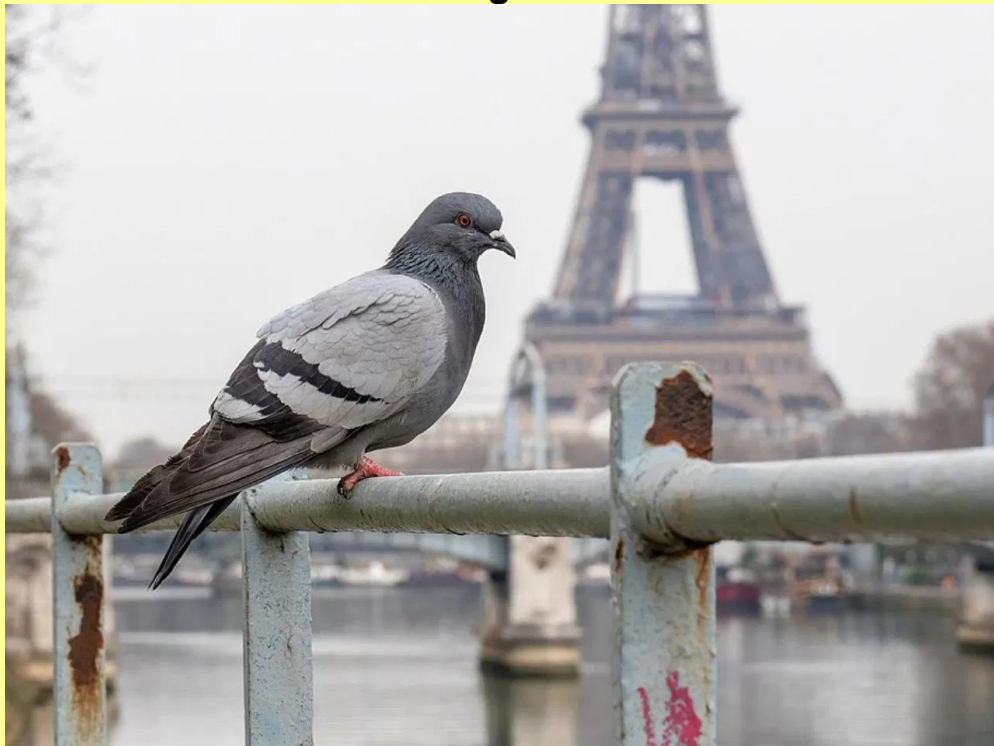
The six species that are on the Kent list and included in this article are Feral Pigeon, Stock Dove, Woodpigeon, Turtle Dove, Oriental Turtle Dove and Collared Dove.

I have not included breeding distribution maps this time. Four of the species are very widespread, Woodpigeon especially so, while Turtle Dove is becoming more scattered year by year. You can always see maps for the last comprehensive survey in the *Kent Breeding Bird Atlas 2008-13*, available through the KOS website (go to the publications page).

As usual, my main sources for this article have been the Kent Bird Reports and, for years from the turn of the century, the KOS database. I've also included quite a bit of BTO data especially from the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS is a partnership jointly funded by the BTO, RSPB and JNCC, with fieldwork conducted by volunteers), kindly provided by the BTO. There are opportunities for more people to take on BBS squares in Kent; it's a fairly straightforward survey involving just two visits in spring to one-kilometre squares. The results are vital for tracking population trends of commoner birds – if you think you could help, please get in touch with Bob Knight, the Kent BTO BBS representative (contact details on the committee page of the KOS website).

Thanks to Robin Mace for making available the database material, to Derek Tutt for more detail on the large Collared Dove counts on Chetney marshes, to Murray Orchard for comments on the Turtle Dove account, and to Simon Mount, Brendan Ryan and Nigel Jarman for local knowledge of cliff-nesting doves at the North and South Forelands.

Feral Pigeon



Feral Pigeon en Paris, by Alex Louris (wikicommons)

No species, not even the Pheasant, has been so thoroughly disregarded in Kent and perhaps throughout England as the Feral Pigeon. As we'll see, the KOS ignored it for the first forty years of the society's existence and even now we get far more records of far scarcer species.

Its ancestor the Rock Dove, still hanging on in almost its pure form in the Outer Hebrides, may well once have inhabited the Dover cliffs but those days are long, long gone. Balston, Shepherd & Bartlett (*Notes on the Birds of Kent*, 1907) recognised that they probably bred near Dover, though they attributed their loss to Peregrines (the two live together elsewhere, productively if not happily). Ticehurst (*History of*

the *Birds of Kent*, 1909) placed the species in square brackets, saying that “it is exceedingly improbable, with a large town in close proximity, that there was ever a pure wild race of Rock-Doves there”. Aside from the point that before human settlement there was no town, this shows the common dismissal as real birds of what he called “mongrel escapes”.

Harrison (*Birds of Kent*, 1953) also placed the Rock Dove in square brackets, although he seemed to accept that they had occurred in the past. He thought their loss was due to their “promiscuity with the tame pigeons which also frequented the high cliffs”. Taylor, Davenport & Flegg (*Birds of Kent*, 1981) did not even mention the species. We are left in the dark as to whether or not Feral Pigeons as we now know them (the wild-breeding descendants of pairings between Rock Doves and domesticated forms of the same species) were present in Kent, on the cliffs as perhaps implied by Harrison, in towns or elsewhere, and certainly know nothing about how numerous they may have been. Nowadays, Feral Pigeons breed widely in Kent; the 2008-2013 Atlas records probable or confirmed breeding in over one third of the county’s tetrads. Most are in human structures, but some also nest in the chalk cliffs of Thanet and either side of Dover.

It’s clear that Feral Pigeons have existed for centuries as domesticated versions of the Rock Dove, for food, ornament and racing, and no doubt birds escaping from captivity have existed in the wild for almost as long. Homes *et al.* (*Birds of the London Area*, 1957) noted that feral domestic pigeons had been a feature of London’s birdlife since at least the fourteenth century. A gradual blurring of the line between Rock and Feral populations has occurred, with gene flow between feral-type birds and ‘wild’ colonies throughout Britain, and there is now minimal introgression (i.e. the least degree of hybridisation with Feral Pigeons) only in the Outer Hebrides (Will Smith, 2023, *British Birds* 116: 70-76). There are no ringing recoveries affecting Kent and perhaps none has been ringed in the county (certainly none in recent years).

After the Kent Bird Report started including an entry for Feral Pigeon, in 1992, the numbers of records submitted grew slowly at first and then rapidly as more people started using BirdTrack and similar. There were just 67 reports in 2000 but 4,500 in 2021. I’m not sure whether the data I have extracted (Figure 1) tell us much about trends over the period; these show the highest count anywhere in the county each year plus (in a paler shade) the sum of the next two highest counts. The chart does appear to show a declining trend. That might be expected, as it’s in line with a lot of species and could be related to such factors as exclusion from nesting sites or reductions in sources of spilt grain on farms and at storage and processing sites.

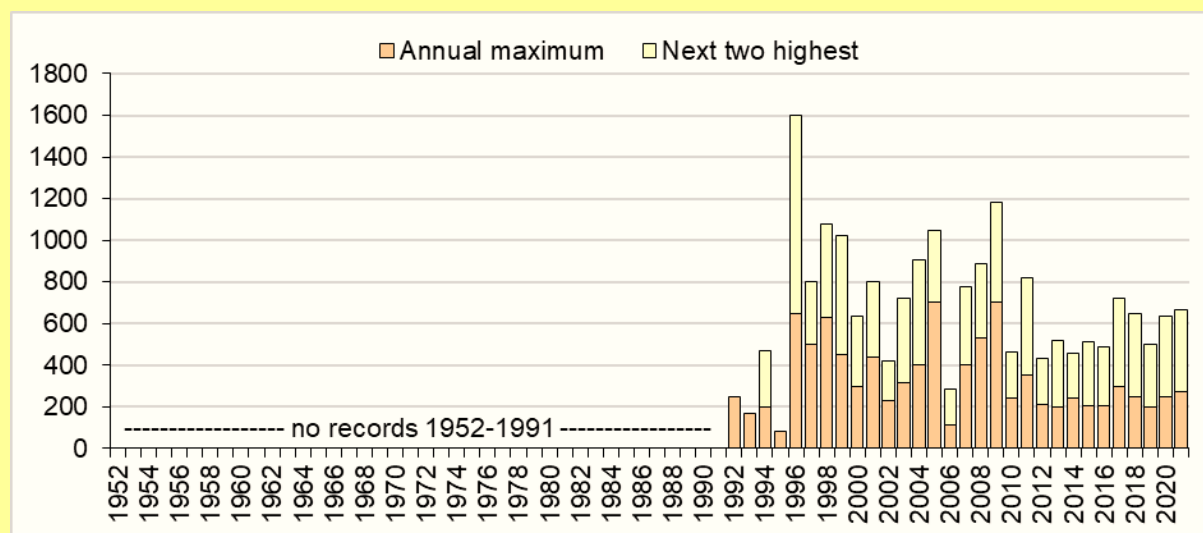


Figure 2. Feral Pigeon: annual maxima

For Kent on its own, there are too few BBS squares to describe the population trend reliably. The BBS does indicate a decline (20%) since 1995 for England as a whole, but no overall change for south-east England (though there was a rise of 30% between 2015 and 2020). This is inconclusive, and it’s also the case that there’s a fair degree of uncertainty about the accuracy of these recorded changes, something not helped by the difficulty of distinguishing between wild-nesting Feral Pigeons, semi-captive dovecote breeders, and passing racing pigeons.

In Table 1, I’ve listed all reported counts of 300 or more Feral Pigeons in Kent. It is worth drawing attention to a couple of points. Most of these large gatherings were in open country, away from the urban areas where most of them breed but where they are less easy to count and, significantly, where birders are

less likely to want to count them. The second point is that most high counts were made in autumn, between mid September and the end of November. (I've omitted a couple of reports of around 2,000 flying fast NW at Hunton in May 2009 and June 2014 on the grounds that surely they were racing pigeons.)

Table 1. Feral Pigeon: counts of 300 or more		
1996	Reculver	650 on 12th October
1996	Hoo peninsula	650 on 16th November
1997	Dover	500 on 24th January
1998	Lower Stoke	630 on 12th December
1999	Hoo	450 on 16th October
1999	Hillborough	400 throughout September
2001	Allhallows-Lower Stoke	440 on 20th October
2003	Allhallows	315 on 8th November
2005	Frindsbury	400 on 9th October
2005	St Mary's Marsh tip	700 on 15th September
2007	Dartford	400 on 29th September
2008	Garlinge	530 on 20th September
2009	Acol	700 on 29th November
2009	Gravesend	360 on 26th January
2011	Church Hougham	350 on 1st November
2017	Stone Marshes	300 on 13th October

Analysis of all reports over a twenty year period also shows numbers higher in autumn and early winter (Figure 2). In this chart, I show the averages for 2002-2021 of the highest count made in ten-day periods through the year. The autumn rise in numbers is doubtless due to the development of feeding flocks made up from adults and young, whereas birds are more dispersed (and less likely to be counted) in spring and summer.

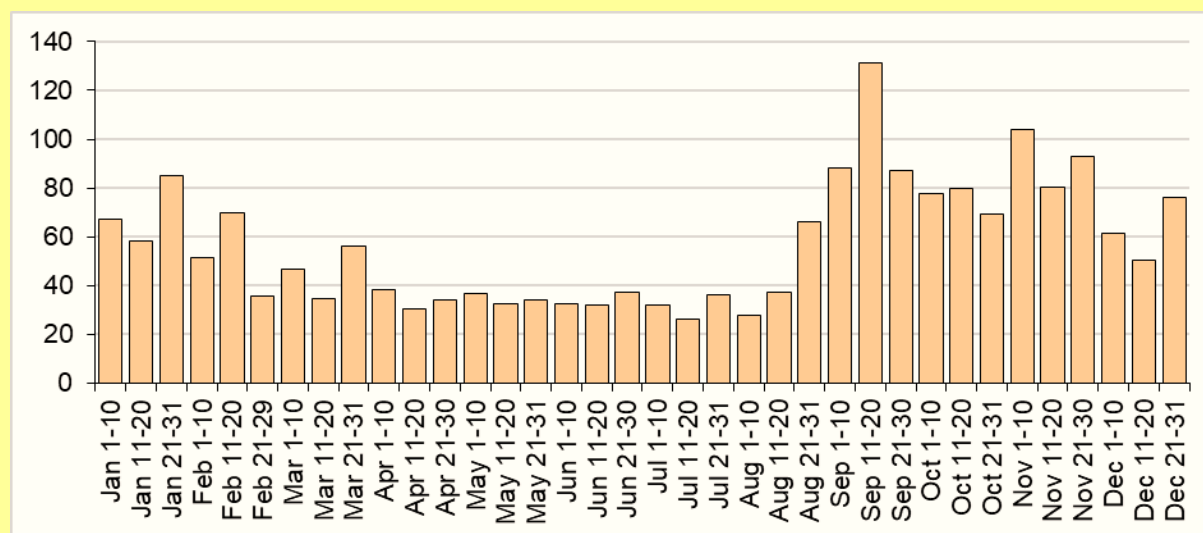


Figure 2. Feral Pigeon: mean ten-day maxima, 2002-2021

Stock Dove



Stock Dove by Terry Laws

All of the standard works on birds in Kent, from the time of Ticehurst (*History of the Birds of Kent*, 1909) describe the Stock Dove as generally distributed but less numerous than the Woodpigeon. That is still the case now, though the species has been through some ups and downs. In contrast to Woodpigeon, Turtle and Collared Doves, Stock Dove nests in holes in trees and buildings and in nest boxes. Ticehurst mentioned that they then also sometimes built open nests, but I think that would be unusual now. Both Ticehurst and Harrison (*Birds of Kent*, 1953) said that they nested in the chalk cliffs of Thanet and Dover. I asked local birders about that: Simon Mount doesn't think they do now on Thanet, but Brendan Ryan and Nigel Jarman, in relation to Kingsdown and Bockhill, have no firm evidence of nesting but the presence of occasional displaying birds makes them suspect it may occur.

Ticehurst and Harrison considered that Stock Dove numbers were increasing. That continued until after the middle of the twentieth century, at which point the introduction of organochlorine insecticides as seed dressings caused huge mortality to many bird species including Stock Doves, and a downturn of populations. With the restriction and eventual banning of those chemicals, numbers increased once more (Figure 3, using data downloaded from the *BTO/JNCC BirdTrends 2021 report*). There was a short-lived decline from the late 1990s to about 2010 but subsequently the population has reached a level higher than in the mid 1990s (Figure 4).

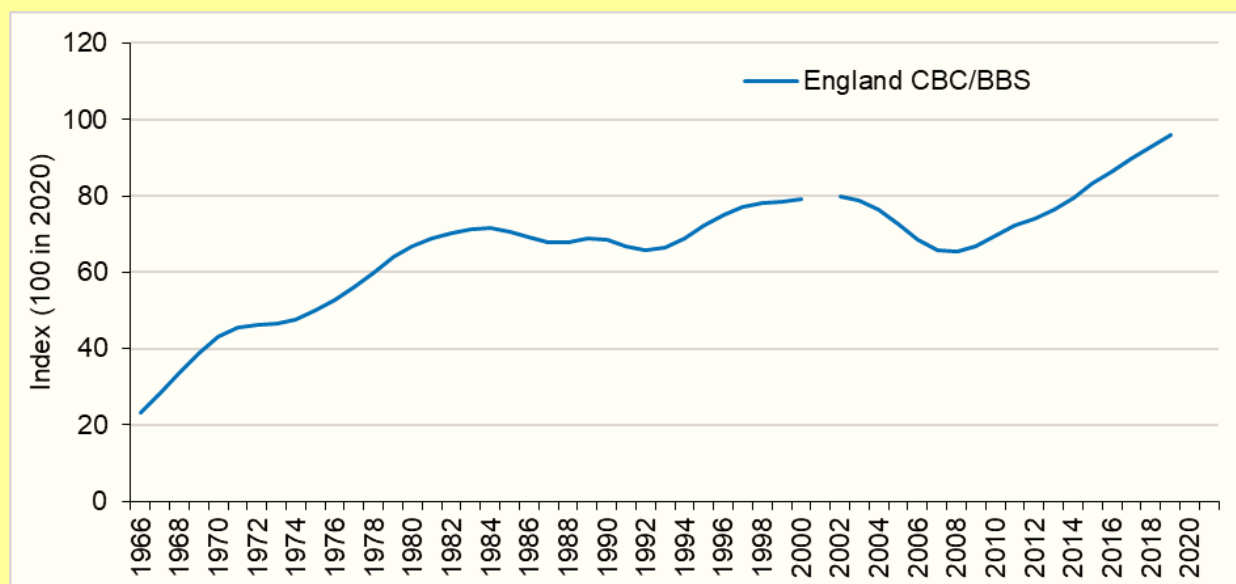


Figure 3. Stock Dove: England CBC/BBS trend, 1966-2021

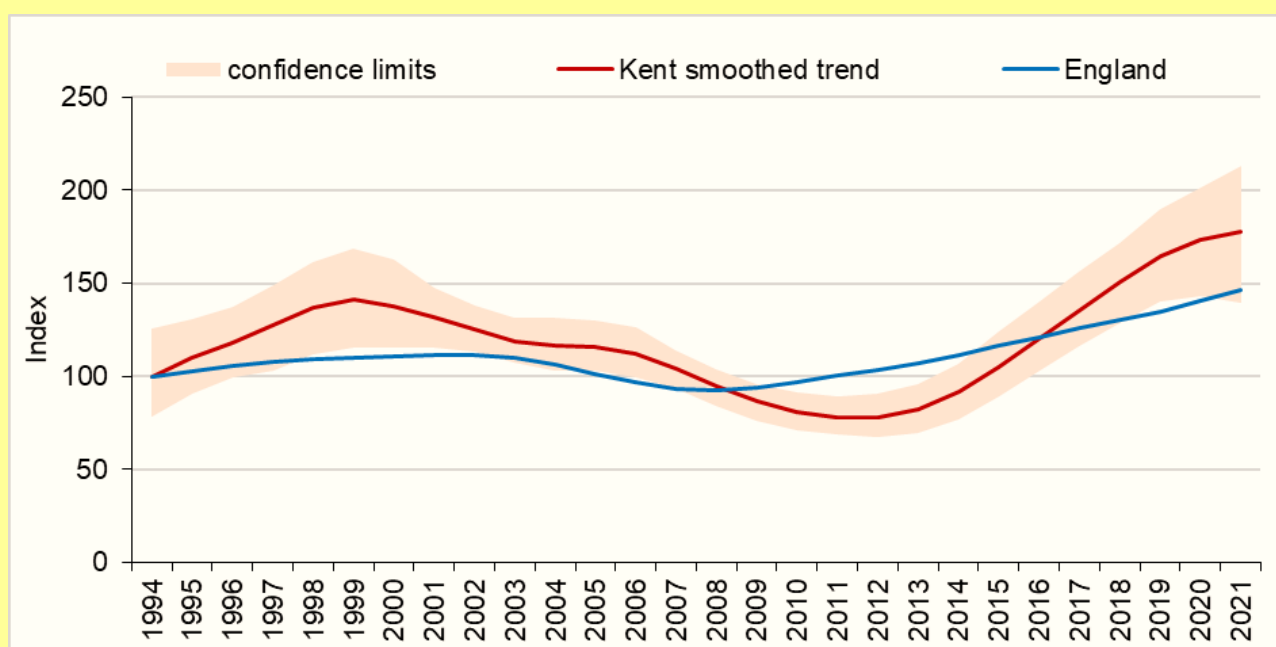


Figure 4. Stock Dove: Kent BBS trend, 1994-2021

In contrast to the increasing trend of breeding populations, there has been a reduction in the size of reported large flocks since the early 2000s. Figure 5 shows the maximum count anywhere in the county each year plus, in a paler shade, the sum of the next two highest counts. Charts such as this one can be influenced by changes in observer behaviour and the way counts are reported. Thus the absence of counts in the 1950s does not mean that there weren't any in the county; rather there were only small numbers which weren't mentioned in the pared-down Kent Bird Reports of the era. I don't know why the pattern shown in Figure 5, contrary to the breeding trend, exists. It's possible that numbers in autumn and winter are genuinely smaller. That could be the case if there was significant winter immigration from declining populations, but – as discussed below – this isn't thought to happen. Could the BBS trend be exaggerating the upward trend? That seems unlikely too. Maybe birds no longer form very large flocks, or observers have changed their behaviour and no longer report them.

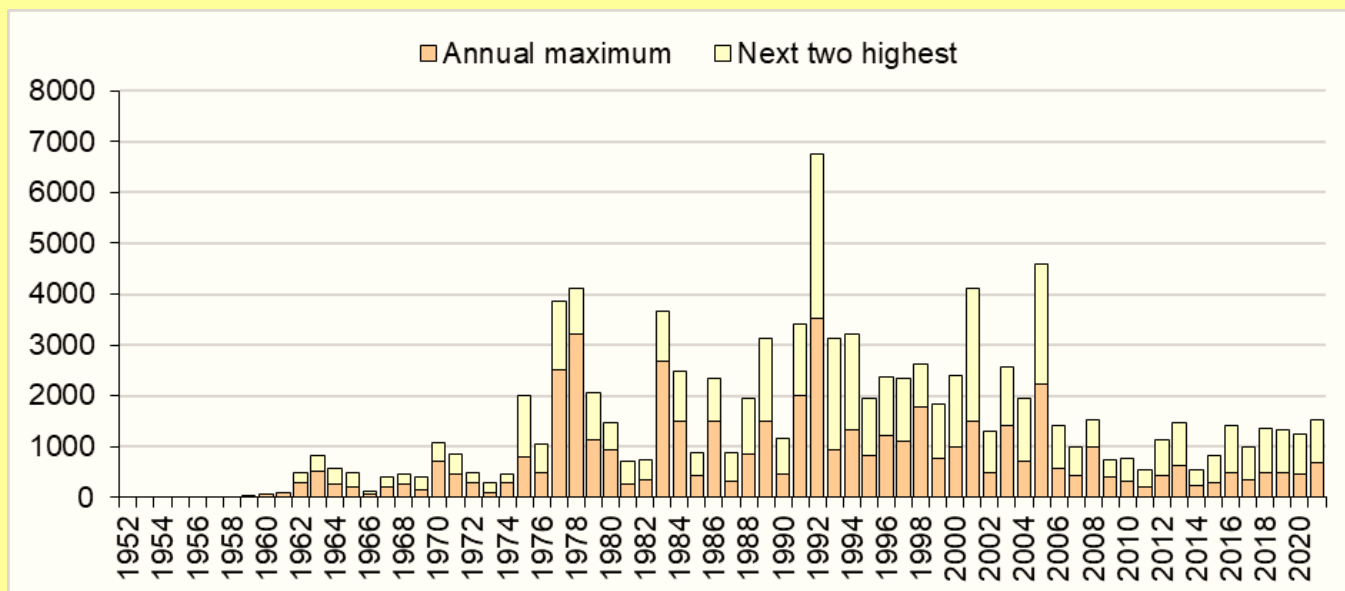


Figure 5. Stock Dove: annual maxima

In Table 2, I have listed all counts of 1,000 or more mentioned in the Kent Bird Reports from 1952 to 2021 (with those of 2,000 or more shown in bold type). They all fall between late October and early February, and while most involve roosting or feeding flocks on the north and east Kent coastal marshes, some – notably those at Dungeness and Abbotscliffe – are of birds apparently on passage.

Table 2. Stock Dove: counts of 1,000 or more		
1977	Chislet Marshes	1,100 on 26th November
1977	Sandwich Bay	2,500 on 27th December
1978	Northward Hill	3,200 roosting in January
1979	Northward Hill	1,140 to roost on 8th January
1983	Elmley	2,670 on 29th December
1984	Cliffe	1,500 on 21st January
1986	Egypt Bay	1,500 on 16th January
1989	Elmley	1,500 on 4th January
1991	Northward Hill	2,000 roosting in November
1992	Northward Hill	1,740 roosting in January
1992	Sandwich Bay	1,507 on 19th November & 3,517 on 1st December
1994	Northward Hill	1,000 to roost on 15th November
1994	Dungeness	1,335 S or SW on 16th November
1996	St Mary Hoo	1,230 on 22nd December
1997	Reculver	1,100 on 12th January
1997	Sandwich Bay	1,100 on 30th October
1998	Northward Hill	1,230 on 22nd January
2000	Swale NNR	1,000 in February
2001	Allhallows area	1,510 in October & 1,215 in November
2001	St Mary's Marsh	1,380 on 31st December
2003	Allhallows	1,410 in December
2005	Abbotscliffe	1,325 W on 23rd October
2005	Dungeness	1,771 SW on 23rd October & 1,488 SW on 4th November
2005	Minnis Bay	2,235 on 15th November
2008	Harty	1,000 on 8th February

While there are a few longer movements, British Stock Doves are largely sedentary, in contrast to those in northern continental Europe which migrate to Iberia for the winter (Wernham *et al.*, 2002, *Migration Atlas*). Of just over 60 ringing recoveries affecting Kent listed in the *BTO Online Ringing Report*, 47 were in Kent, but there have been a few overseas. One ringed as an adult in Belgium was found near Alkham in November, and there have been three movements of Kent nestlings to the French north and west coasts. It seems possible, too, that birds involved in the longer-distance passage on the continent get drifted across

to Kent and elsewhere in the south-east in certain weather conditions. There is no evidence that large numbers of continental migrants spend the winter here; rather they are just passing through on their way further south-west.

Autumn movements are typically in October and November, and usually occur at the same time as Woodpigeon movements. Generally, the flocks move south and west along the east and south Kent coasts, though there are exceptions. Small numbers can be seen arriving off the sea, for example at Foreness and South Foreland, or flying out to sea at Dungeness. The largest counts made on single days are included in Table 2 (in 1994 and 2005). Others that I noted included 225 SE at Dungeness on 25th October 1976, 312 N at Sandwich Bay on 31st October 1976, 400 S at Sandwich Bay on 19th November 1988 and 400 SW at South Foreland on 1st November 1990. In some years, return passage is apparent in March and April, though numbers tend to be small and it's hard to be sure that they are not merely local movements. The largest may be 560 N at Sandwich Bay on 29th April 2006.

The seasonal pattern of occurrence (Figure 6) shows the common pattern of a species that is dispersed in breeding territories in summer and forms flocks in winter. In addition, the pronounced spike of autumn passage is clearly evident.

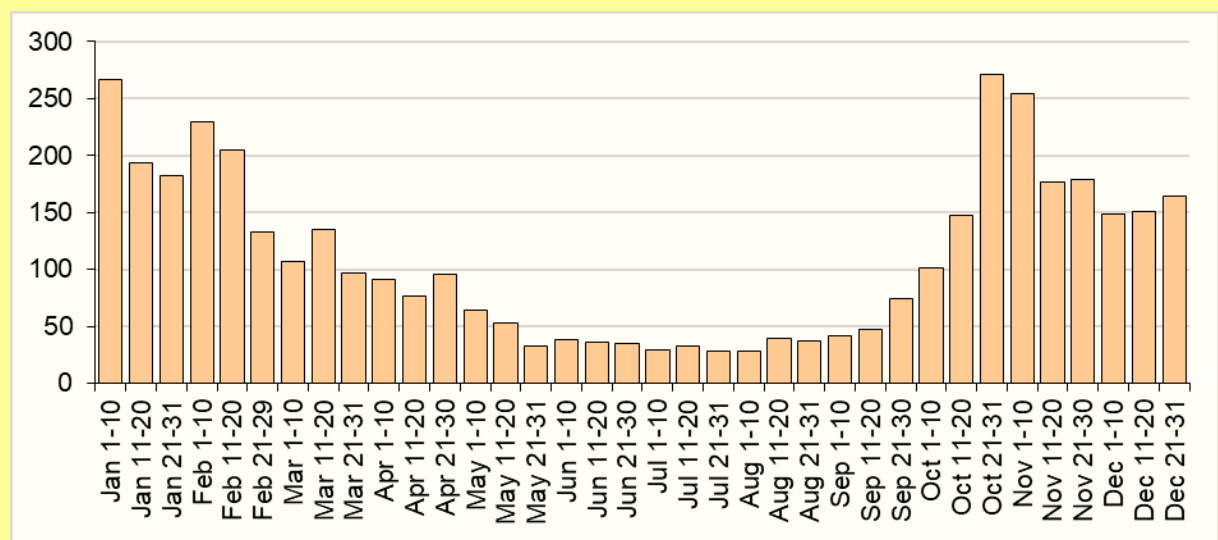


Figure 6. Stock Dove: mean ten-day maxima, 2002-2021

Woodpigeon



Wood Pigeon by Norman McCanch

Woodpigeons is one of the most widely distributed and abundant birds in Kent, something that has been the case for at least one hundred years. Ticehurst (*History of the Birds of Kent*, 1909) reported that they were then increasing steadily, and occupying garden and urban areas, wherever there were trees, as well and woodland. They can undoubtedly be an agricultural problem, notably for their depredations of young crops of peas or oil seed rape, and Ticehurst pointed out that they were “cordially detested by farmers”. Harrison (*Birds of Kent*, 1953) gave some impressive statistics for a Woodpigeon’s cherry consumption (a crop was found to contain 82 cherries, reckoned to amount to 1 lb 2 oz, 510 g).

Woodpigeons nest and roost in woodland and scrub, plus of course parks and gardens, and feed there on tree leaves, seeds and so on, but they are primarily farmland birds. They are well able to exploit the concentrations of resources that agriculture provides. The recent large acreages of oil seed rape (a feature of the farmed landscape mainly since the 1970s) have been especially beneficial to them, with freshly growing seedlings particularly favoured. They can also feed in large numbers on other newly sown seeds and germinating plants, of cereals and peas for example. Large numbers are shot sometimes in such situations. Crops are cleaner and more efficiently harvested than they used to be, but pigeons still find plenty of weed seeds and spilt seeds after harvest.

Figure 7 illustrates the rise in England since the 1960s (source *BTO/JNCC BirdTrends 2021 report*). Confidence limits were wide to begin with, but the trend has been one of steep increase, with the population some 260% higher in 2010 than in the early 1970s. The population trend in Kent is likely to have been similar to that nationally, something that has continued during the period when the better structured BBS has operated (Figure 8). Note, though, that the increase has not been sustained since 2010. In England as a whole, there was a statistically significant 5.7% decline between 2010 and 2020. The data for Kent suggests a larger decline of 9.5%, but that is not statistically significant.

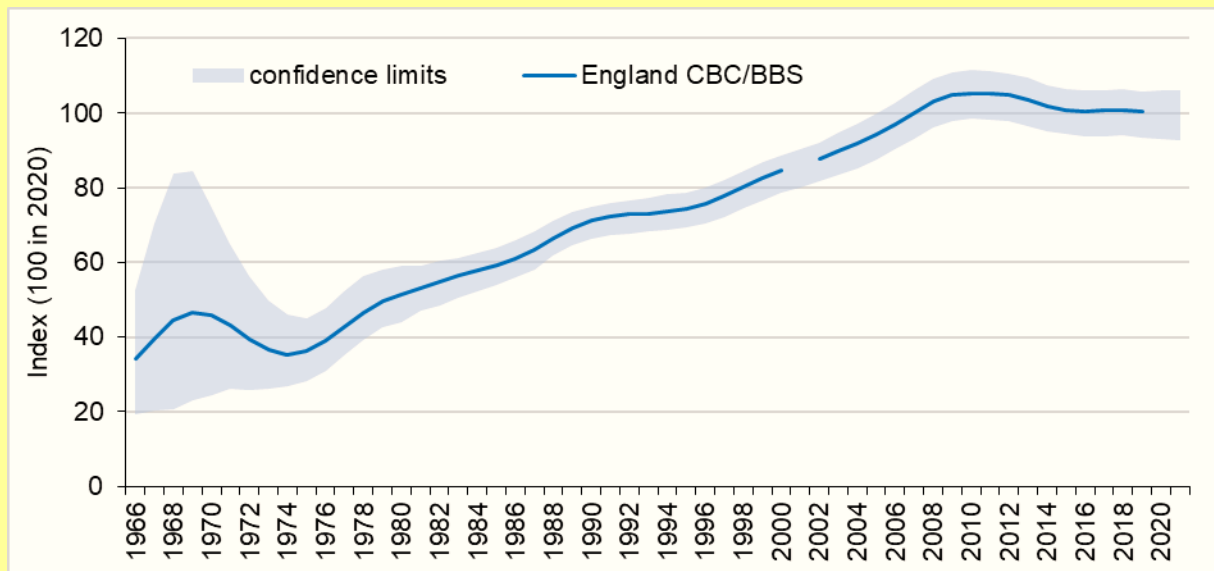


Figure 7. Woodpigeon: England CBC/BBS trend, 1966-2021

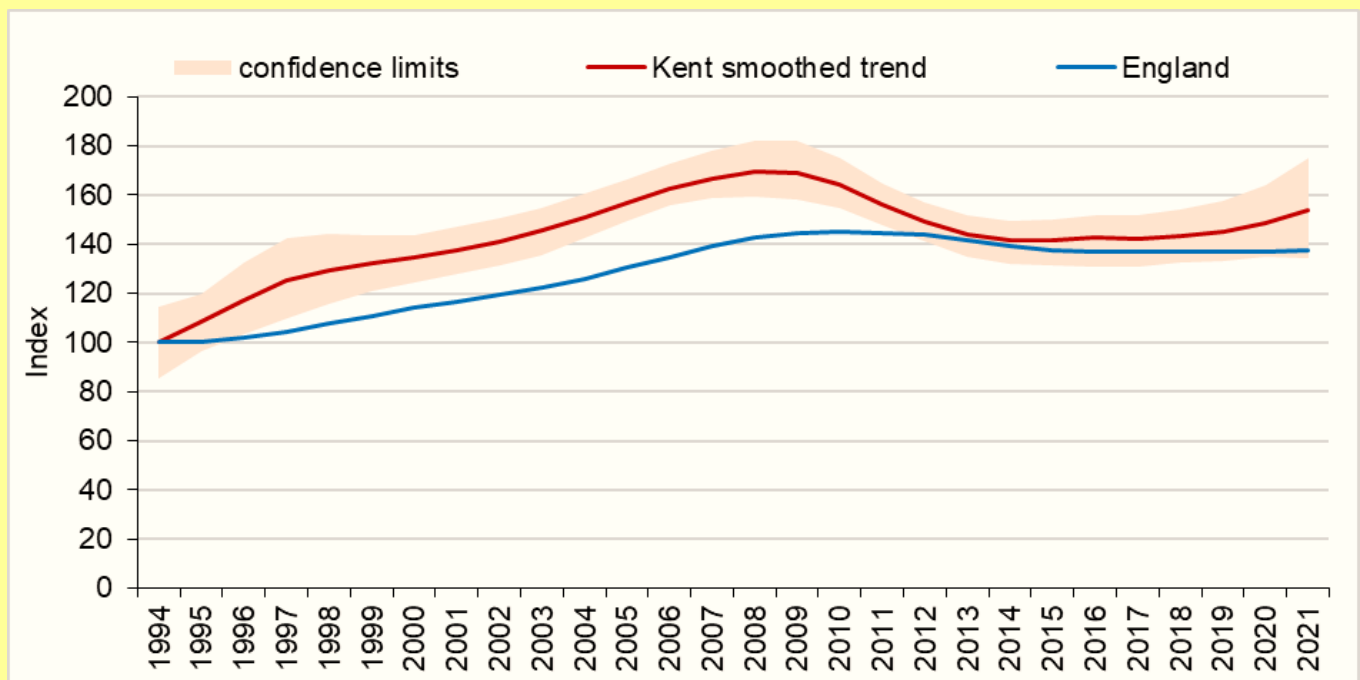


Figure 8. Woodpigeon: Kent BBS trend, 1994-2021

Figure 9 shows the maximum count anywhere in the county each year plus, in a paler shade, the sum of the next two highest counts. It's obvious from the y-axis, as from actually going out birdwatching, that Woodpigeons are much more numerous than the other species covered in this article. Ignoring the earliest years, when the species received minimal attention in KBRs, there is no clear indication of a trend. Instead, there is a background of moderately large peak counts (averaging around 3,800 over the last 30 years) interspersed with much larger totals. Those spikes are mainly years in which there is marked autumn passage through Kent.

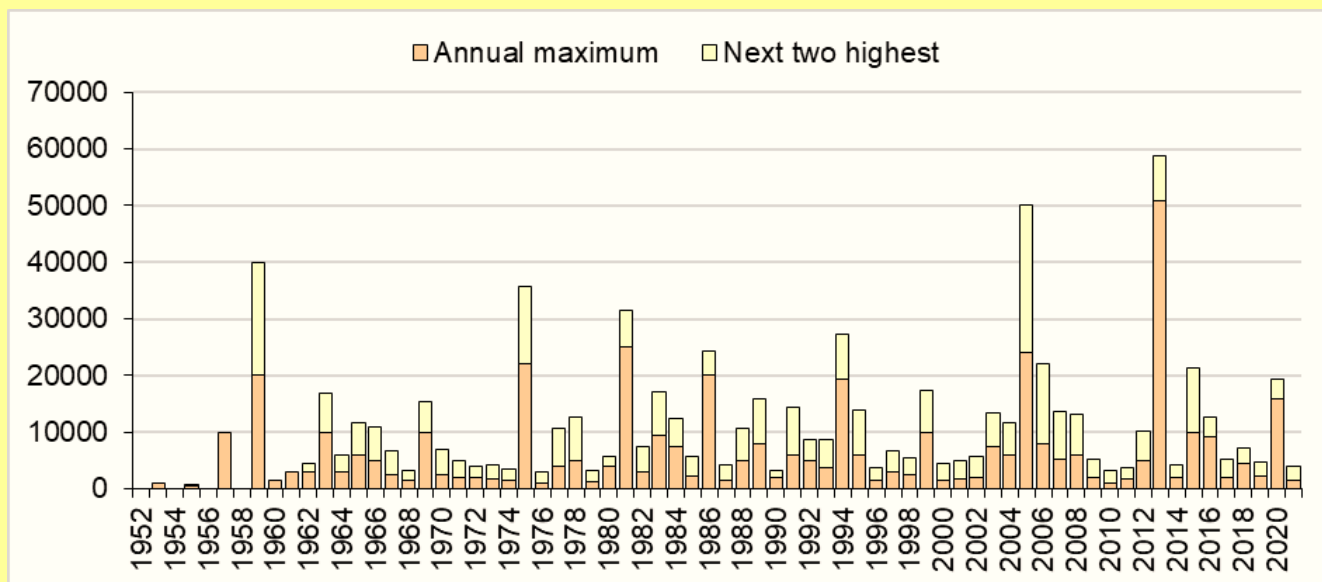


Figure 9. Woodpigeon: annual maxima

In Table 3, I've listed all counts of 10,000 or more reported from 1952 to 2021, with those of 20,000 or more in bold type. As can be seen, most of these occurred during November and most were noted as being movements. The few December counts may include some late passage and also concentrations on local food availability and/or roost movements. The high count of February 1986 at Stodmarsh could be a cold weather movement – it took place during a particularly severe spell of weather.

Table 3. Woodpigeon: counts of 10,000 or more		
1957	St Margaret's Bay	10,000 feeding in stubble on 18th-21st November
1959	Broomfield, Herne Bay	15,000 on 6th November
1959	St Margaret's Bay	20,000 in early November
1959	Thanet	20,000 SE on 20th-21st November
1963	Stockbury	10,000 on 16th-24th December
1969	Pembury	10,000 S on 18th November
1975	Dungeness	22,000 SE on 2nd November & 20,000 SE on 5th November
1981	Shellness	25,000 WNW on 13th December
1986	Stodmarsh	20,000 W on 21st February
1994	Dungeness	19,480 SW on 13th November & 11,400 SW on 7th November
1999	Marden	10,000 S on 2nd November
2005	St Mary Hoo	12,200 in February
2005	Yantlet	14,000 S on 5th November
2005	Headcorn	11,000 S on 5th November
2005	Headcorn	24,000 S on 7th November
2013	Swanscombe	50,800 S on 8th November
2015	Botolph's Bridge	10,000 on 28th November
2020	Pembury	16,000 W on 13th November

The largest count of all, by far, was the total of 50,800 logged flying S over Swanscombe Marshes on 8th November 2013. That was actually slightly smaller than the 52,300 counted moving over Rainham Marshes (Essex) on 6th November (*London Bird Report 2013*) when, perhaps, no-one was watching at Swanscombe. Woodpigeon movements do often persist for several days and of course the totals will be much higher than any one day count. It's also the case, as can be seen from the table, that the movements are by no means confined to the coast, with some of the largest ones well inland.

The majority of Woodpigeons seen in Kent are fairly sedentary. Of about 150 ringing recoveries affecting the county, 116 have been within Kent and most of the rest in neighbouring counties (*BTO Online Ringing Report*). There have been four recoveries in France but the furthest was no more than 300 km.

There has often been debate about the origin of Woodpigeons involved in the large autumn movements (e.g. Wernham *et al.*, 2002, *Migration Atlas*). These have sometimes been assumed to be British birds dispersing in search of food, a view supported by there being few overseas ringing recoveries

and few observations of birds arriving or departing over the sea. But neither are movements of the scale being seen reflected in recoveries of British-ringed birds.

Continental Woodpigeons are far more migratory than ours, with birds from Scandinavia and Finland travelling to France, Spain and Portugal for the winter. As with Stock Doves, it seems that a proportion of these migrants travel via southern Britain, at least in the right weather conditions – but it doesn't happen every year. The passage is usually very condensed, lasting just a few days; the most common period for movements seems to be the first week of November, though it can occur any time from mid October to early December. Numbers seen elsewhere can be far higher than seen in Kent so far. The highest total that I am aware of is 264,600 moving SW in Gwent near the Severn Bridges on 4th November 2022.

One possibility, put forward in the *Migration Atlas*, is that the migrants are in Britain for too short a time for many to be ringed, or ringed birds to be recovered. It's still a bit of a mystery, though, as relatively few are seen arriving or departing. Do they perhaps make crossings at high altitude? That happens crossing the Severn (see Portskewett entry for 02/11/2021 on Trektellen.org).

The seasonal pattern of peak counts in Kent (Figure 10) shows the concentrated period of autumn passage well. Otherwise, this chart illustrates the dispersed nature of birds in spring and summer, with birds forming flocks to feed and roost from October to April.

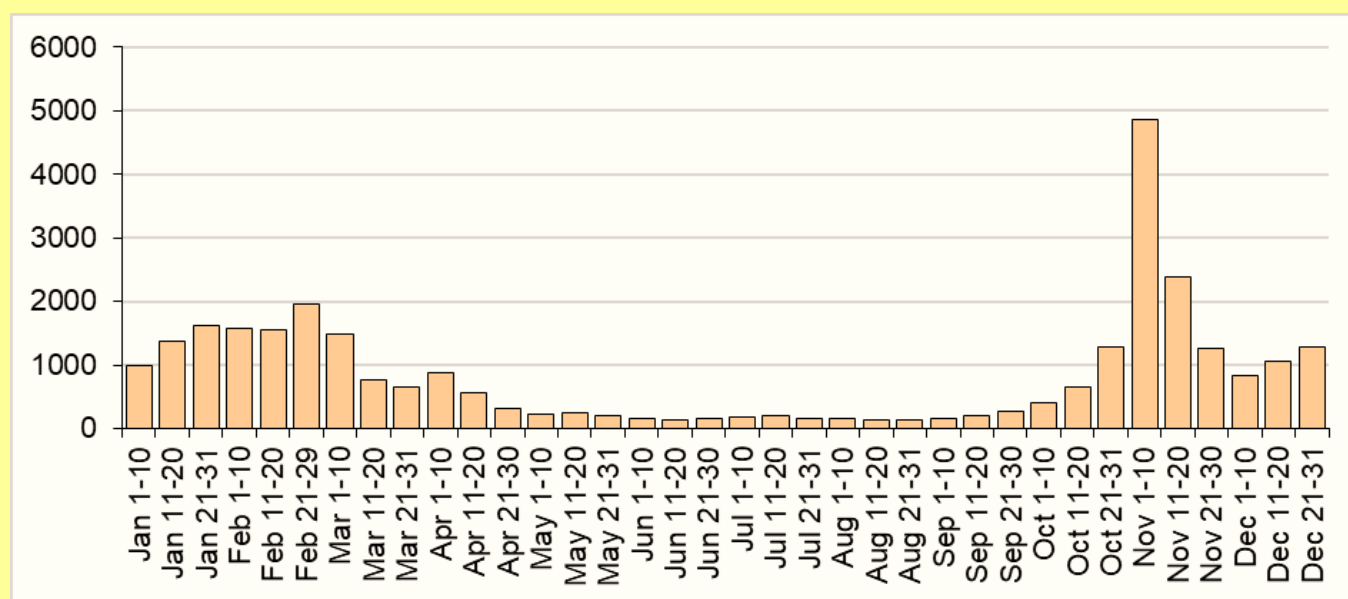


Figure 10. Woodpigeon: mean ten-day maxima, 2002-2021

Some spring passage takes place as well, typically between mid March and mid April, though it's generally smaller than in autumn. Examples of relatively large movements that I've noticed were 4,000 flying out to sea at South Foreland on 27th March 1999, and a widespread westward movement on 2nd April 2006 with the highest count being 6,040 at Bockhill.

Turtle Dove



Turtle Dove by Bruce Rolls

Though similar in structure to our other pigeons and doves, especially Collared Dove, Turtle Dove differs from the others by being a trans-Saharan migrant. A late-arriving summer visitor, many folk associated its purring song with the time when winter is past and the flowers appear on the earth: “the voice of the turtle is heard in the land”. *The Turtle Dove is ... generally distributed throughout the county wherever there [is suitable habitat]. Generally fairly plentiful, it is in some years abundant, while in others it is unaccountably scarce.* Thus spake Ticehurst (*History of the Birds of Kent*, 1909). Yes, those were the days, and the description of its status was repeated by Harrison (*Birds of Kent*, 1953). Now, of course, it is teetering on the brink of disappearance, having experienced a calamitous decline.

We do not have enough Breeding Bird Survey squares to produce a county BBS index through to the present, but the long-term combined CBC/BBS index for the whole of England – including the south-east with its relatively dense Turtle Dove population – illustrates only too well the scale of the decline (Figure 11). Incidentally, I don’t think there is any evidence of large year-to-year fluctuations of breeding numbers as suggested by Ticehurst; perhaps he was reflecting the variable size of passage noted each year.

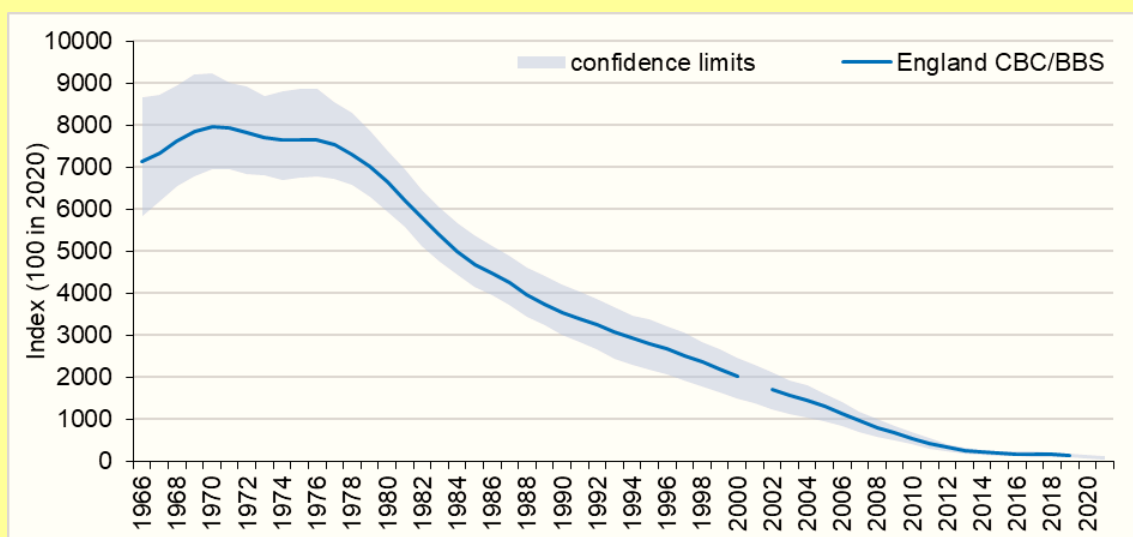


Figure 11. Turtle Dove: England CBC/BBS trend, 1966-2021

To illustrate the trend in Kent, I have – as for other species – extracted from the data sources the three highest reported counts for each year during 1952-2021. These are shown in Figure 12, with the maximum in orange and the sum of the other two in yellow.

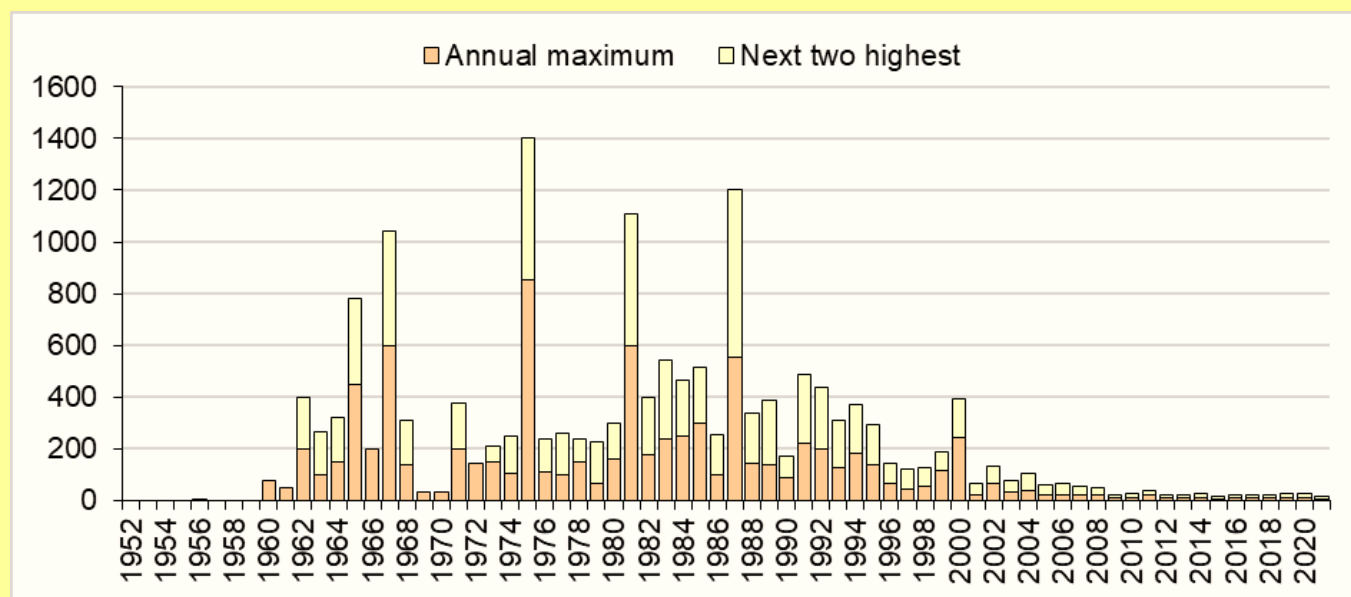


Figure 12. Turtle Dove: annual maxima

The near-absence of information for the 1950s and some other early years is because the Kent Bird Reports at that time tended to mention only unusual records of common species, and not that there were no Turtle Doves. For the rest of the period, annual peaks in Kent appear to have been maintained (including the occasional big counts of migrants) until the early 1990s, when the slide, already evident elsewhere in the country, began.

As for other species, I have extracted details of high counts from Kent Bird Reports and, for recent years, the KOS database. Because of the rapidly changing level of what is a high count for Turtle Dove, I've split this table, with four different thresholds (and as a result, it's bigger than others in this article). Having lived through the whole of the period and being only too well aware of, and largely inured to, the scale of declines in bird numbers, it was a surprise to find myself becoming upset as I typed this table. Just look at the numbers and realise how recently they were at levels that would now be simply unbelievable.

Table 4. Turtle Dove: large counts		
Thresholds for inclusion differ between the four periods shown		
<i>1952-1990: counts of 240 or more</i>		
1965	Hoo-High Halstow	450 on 11th September
1967	Sandwich Bay	600 on 20th-31st May
1975	Allhallows	852 W on 11th May
1975	Foreness	250 W on 11th May
1975	Egypt Bay	300 W on 18th May
1981	Eastchurch	600 on 29th August
1984	Lower Hope Point	250 on 8th June
1985	Elmley	300 on 9th September
1987	Foreness	552 W on 10th May
1987	Minnis Bay	392 W on 10th May
1987	Sandwich Bay	258 N on 10th May
<i>1991-2000: counts of 120 or more</i>		
1991	High Halstow	164 on 1st September
1991	Minnis Bay	222 on 8th September
1992	Sandwich Bay	197 on 15th May
1992	Harty	140 on 29th May
1993	Foreness	125 SW on 16th May
1993	Sheldwich	120 on 7th August
1994	Reculver	182 W on 13th May
1995	Sandwich Bay	136 on 16th May
2000	Sandwich Bay	243 on 2nd September
<i>2001-2010: counts of 24 or more</i>		
2001	Walland Marsh	25 on 19th August
2002	Sandwich Bay	69 on 19th May & 32 on 11th August
2002	Whetsted GP	20 on 3rd August
2002	Allhallows	30 on 8th September
2003	Sandwich Bay	24 on 30th April
2003	St Mary's Marsh	32 on 16th August
2004	Minnis Bay	25 on 29th June & 40 on 31st July
2004	Oare Marshes	40 on 29th August
2005	Sandwich Bay	25 on 4th August
2006	Hunton	24 on 28th July
<i>2011-2021: counts of 12 or more</i>		
2011	Oare Marshes	22 on 21st July
2017	Worth Marshes	12 on 14th-15th July
2018	Oare Marshes	13 on 30th August
2019	Oare Marshes	13 on 25th August
2020	Worth Marshes	13 on 4th May

Quite a few of the large totals are of birds on passage; I've indicated when that is known but a few others may also be passage counts. However, some in spring and most of those in autumn, such as those at Eastchurch in August 1981, Elmley in September 1985, Harty in May 1992, High Halstow and Minnis Bay in September 1991 and Sandwich Bay in September 2000 were feeding flocks in farmland.

Figure 13 shows the seasonal pattern of occurrence for the recent twenty year period. Had it been for an earlier period, the basic pattern would probably have been similar, though perhaps with more pronounced spring and autumn passage peaks, and of course the numbers on the y-axis would have been a lot bigger.

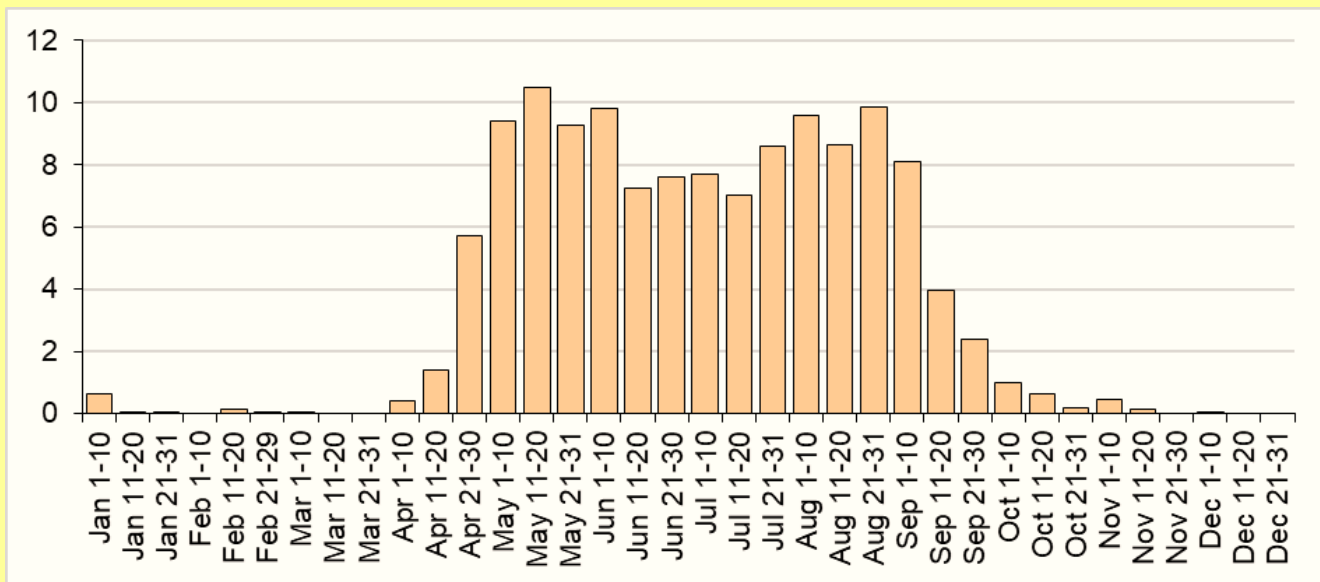
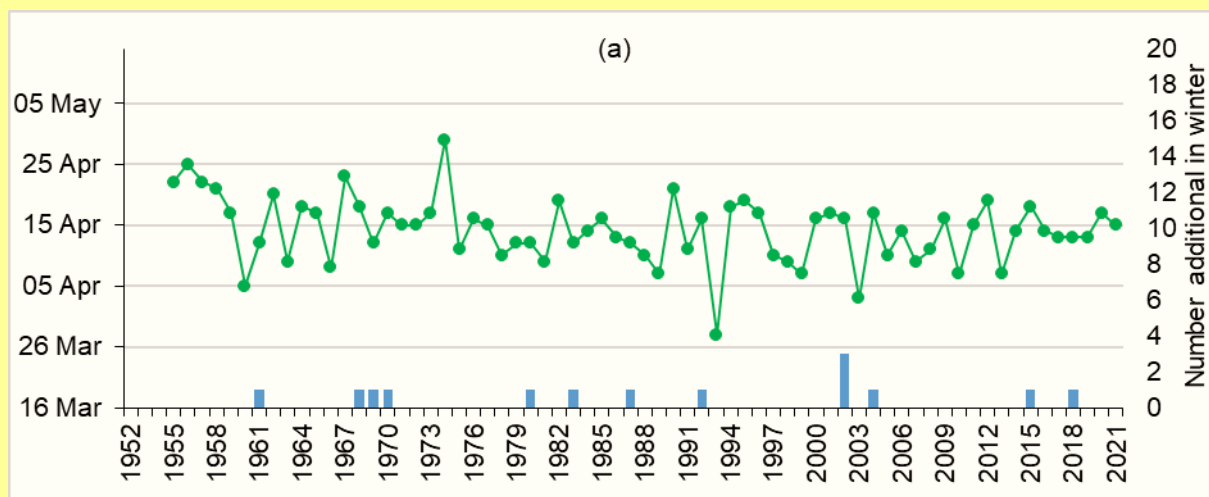


Figure 13. Turtle Dove: mean ten-day maxima, 2002-2021

The average first and last dates over the whole period 1952-2021 are 14th April and 16th October (Figures 14a & b). There was a slight tendency towards earlier arrival but that stopped or reversed in the most recent ten year period. The picture for last dates is more confused, with a great deal of year-to-year variation (each of these charts shows a 60-day span).

Figure 14a also shows when Turtle Doves have occurred in winter (including any record during 20th November-20th March). All were singles apart from two near Allhallows on 16th February 2002. Records are shown for the following calendar year (thus a bird seen in winter 1960/61 is shown at the 1961 point in the chart). For what is one of the later arriving spring migrants, there are quite a few of these winter records (could any of them have been Oriental Turtle Doves...?). Most were seen on single dates but the following were present for longer periods: one at Broadstairs from Christmas 1967 to the end of January 1968, one at Lydd during 13th January-3rd February 1969, one on Walland Marsh during 31st December 1982-9th January 1983, and one at Wilmington from 25th December 2014 to 21st February 2015.



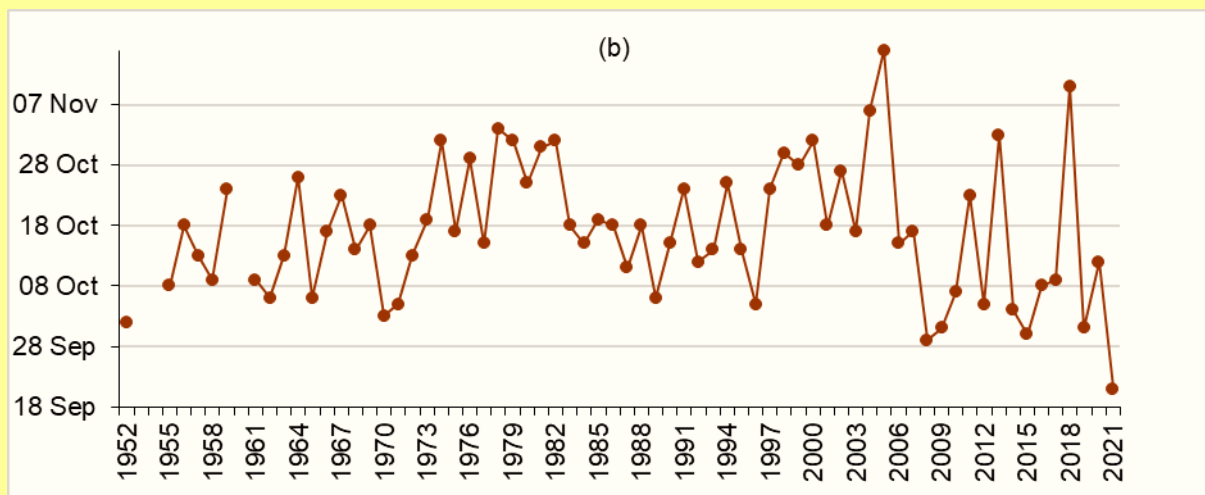


Figure 14. Turtle Dove (a) first and (b) last dates
Fig. 14a also shows numbers recorded in winter (see text)

Turtle Doves breeding in western Europe travel to winter in sub-Saharan Africa via Iberia and Morocco, while those from central and eastern Europe cross the central Mediterranean or fly around its eastern end. There are 18 ringing recoveries affecting Kent, just two within the county, one in Essex and the remainder overseas. There are six recoveries in each of France and Spain, one in Portugal and one in Africa (ringed at Sandwich Bay in April 2004 and shot in Mauritania in March 2005).

There is plenty of debate about the causes of the Turtle Dove decline, which has been severe throughout Europe especially in the west and also thought to be occurring further east in the species' range, in western and central Asia (BirdLife International fact sheet, 2023). I am not going to discuss possible drivers of decline in detail here. They may include food shortage in breeding areas, disease, hunting pressures on migration, and habitat change in migration stopover and wintering areas. Turtle Doves nest in scrub, hedgerows, coppice woodland and young plantations and feed mainly on weed seeds with some grain. We know that habitat loss and the deterioration of its quality together with reductions in food availability have adversely affected other farmland birds, but none quite so severely as Turtle Dove. It may be the combination of factors that has led to such a steep decline in numbers. For further information on Turtle Dove research and conservation efforts, the website www.operationturtledove.org is a good place to start.

As KOS members should be aware, Kent is at the centre of Turtle Dove conservation efforts within Britain. The Kent Bird Report for 2016 contains articles by Nicole Khan on the Operation Turtle Dove project launched by the RSPB and others in 2012 and continuing today, and by Anthony Curwen on his experiences as a farmer involved in the project at Quex Park. There is also a 2021 paper on Turtle Doves, trial plots and *Trichomonas* (Jenny Dunn, *British Birds* 114 pp 196-209). The 2021 national Turtle Dove survey, in which KOS was a partner, estimated that only 2,100 pairs remained in England – and about one third of those were in Kent (there will be more on the survey in the forthcoming 2021 Kent Bird Report). It is important that observers in Kent keep recording Turtle Doves as fully as possible to track the continuing trend, but at the same time, remember that they need space to breed and feed successfully. As they have become scarcer, they have become a target for listing and photography; those activities should avoid disturbance to what can be a sensitive species.

Oriental Turtle Dove



Oriental Turtle Dove by Andrew Moon

The story of Kent's first and only Oriental Turtle Dove is well told by Barry Wright in an article in the 2016 London Bird Report. It was noticed by local residents on 18th February 2016 but a succession of circumstances conspired against it being seen by birders until 30th April. It remained until 12th May, though it generally was seen only early and late, and vanished during the middle of the day.

There was no finder's note in the Kent Bird Report but the London Bird Report article (Wright 2018) is available online at

http://www.lnhs.org.uk/images/publications/LBR2016/Paper3_OTD_full-paper.PDF.

Collared Dove



Collared Dove by Norman McCanch

After the distressing story of the Turtle Dove, it's good to turn to the Collared Dove and something more positive ... or is it? Its spread across Europe, colonisation of Britain and explosion of numbers are well-known but did you realise that it is now declining?

It is my custom to begin these accounts with summaries of what Ticehurst and Harrison had to say about the species. I won't bother here, as – of course – neither of them mentioned it. It was left to Taylor, Davenport & Flegg (*Birds of Kent*, 1981) to chronicle the first record at Broomfield, near Herne Bay, on 16th May 1957, a breeding pair with young at Staple by the end of that June, and the subsequent rapid expansion. By 1964, there was an estimated 1,500 pairs on Thanet alone and flocks of several hundred were being found in the late 1960s.

Before long, observers were becoming blasé; in the 1980 Kent Bird Report, it says “now very poorly recorded”. But larger gatherings were reported, and breeding bird surveys and atlases fortunately enable us to track the species' fortune. The geographical spread is documented by the three Kent breeding bird atlases: in 1967-73 Collared Doves were present in 496 tetrads (2x2 km squares), rising to 890 tetrads in 1988-94 and 951 out of the total of 1,001 in 2008-13. The long-term combined CBC/BBS population trend for the whole of England is shown in Figure 15, and the BBS trend for Kent for the period since 1995 in Figure 16.

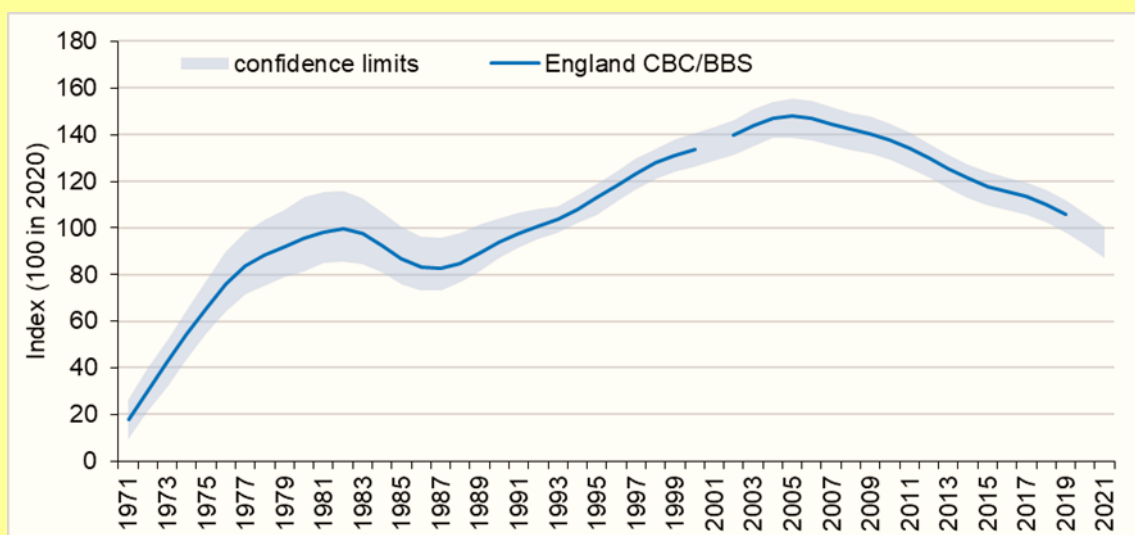


Figure 15. Collared Dove: England CBC/BBS trend, 1971-2021

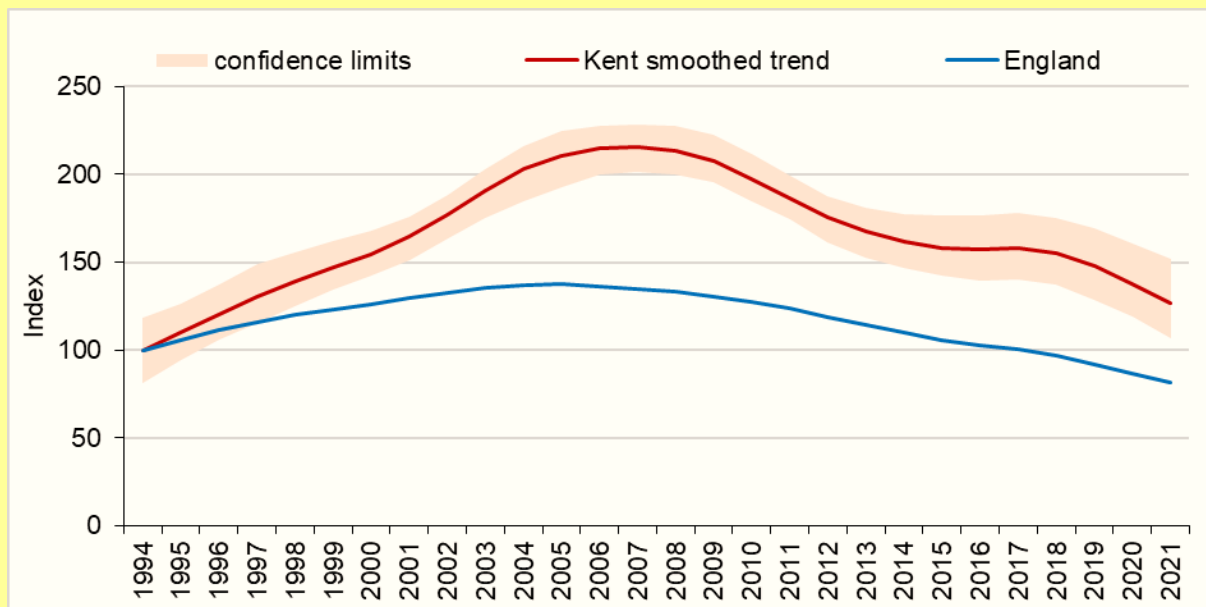


Figure 16. Collared Dove: Kent BBS trend, 1994-2021

The steepness of the initial rise of Collared Dove numbers is impressive and, after a short-lived dip in the 1980s (for unknown reasons) the increase continued at a gentler pace until 2005, when decline set in. This has been linked to the parasitic disease trichomonosis (BTO BirdFacts), although there have also been suggestions that Grey Squirrels may have had an effect on numbers. Kent numbers may have peaked a year or two later than in England as a whole, but the size of the decline since then has been similar: 31.9% in England and 30.4% in Kent. It's the same as the Turtle Dove decrease nationally at the start of their decline between 1969 and 1984 – and in this case we can't blame foreigners and their guns.

Collared Doves have never really broken away from an association with humans. Built-up areas (especially towns and villages) remain the breeding areas for almost all Collared Doves, and they feed predominantly in such areas. From the early days, favoured feeding areas have been grain storage and milling sites, poultry farms and the like. Garden bird feeding stations also are popular with them. Sometimes, flocks may be found in open countryside but usually only where there is abundant spilt grain. Has that human association – something also seen to a lesser extent in Greenfinches – put Collared Doves at greater risk of disease than many species?

Figure 17 illustrates the trend of non-breeding Collared Dove counts in Kent, showing the maximum count each year plus (in a paler shade) the sum of the next two highest counts. Most of the peaks occurred between September and February.

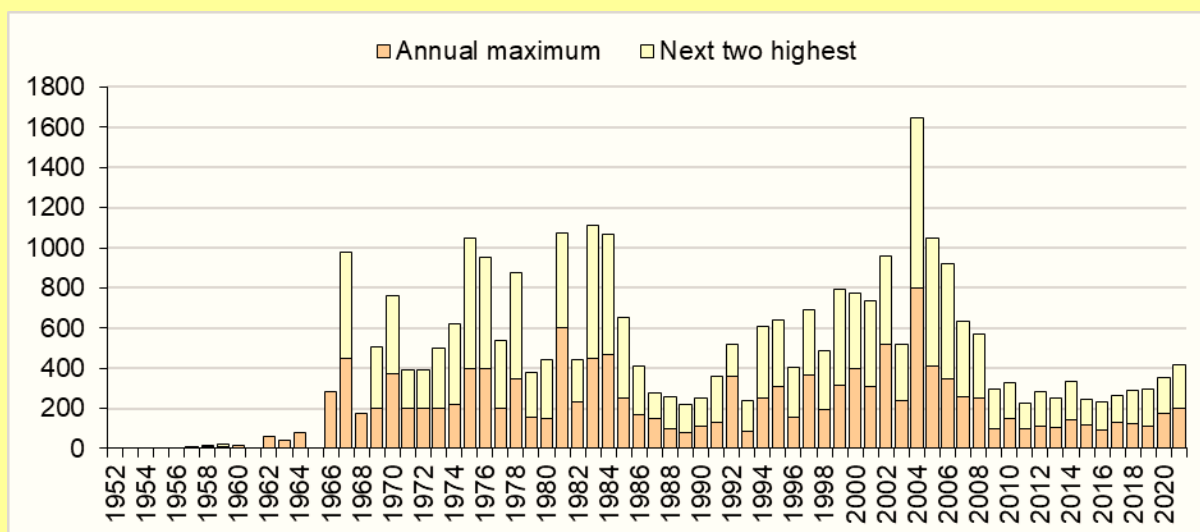


Figure 17. Collared Dove: annual maxima

After the initial explosion in numbers, annual peaks don't seem to have changed that much for a long time. There was a small dip in the late 1980s, perhaps related to the dip shown in the national breeding bird index, although that was slightly earlier. But the most recent fifteen years have seen smaller counts being

recorded: the average sum of the three highest counts during 1992-2006 was 733, while during 2007-2021 it was 335.

Many Collared Dove flocks are no doubt not counted and perhaps not even seen by birders. But for the record, Table 5 lists the highest counts reported to KOS over the whole period 1957-2021. The largest of all, 800 at Chetney, was a huge flock feeding where there had been a spill of food stored to feed wildfowl (thanks to Derek Tutt for that detail).

Table 5. Collared Dove: counts of 400 or more, 1957-2021		
1967	Dymchurch	400-500 in January
1975	Minster, Sheppey	400 in January-February
1976	St Mary Hoo	400 on 7th February
1981	Walland Marsh	600 on 31st December
1983	Wainscott	450 on 23rd August
1984	Walderslade	469 to roost 15th January
2000	Funton	400 in January
2002	Minnis Bay	520 on 26th November
2004	Chetney Marshes	800 on 28th October
2004	Minnis Bay	450 on 6th November & 400 on 5th December
2005	St Mary Hoo	410 in September

The seasonal pattern (Figure 18) shows the dispersed nature of the population during the breeding season, followed by the build-up of flocks in autumn, gradually declining through the winter. There is no spike at any point to suggest migration. The low value for late November is assumed to be a matter of chance.

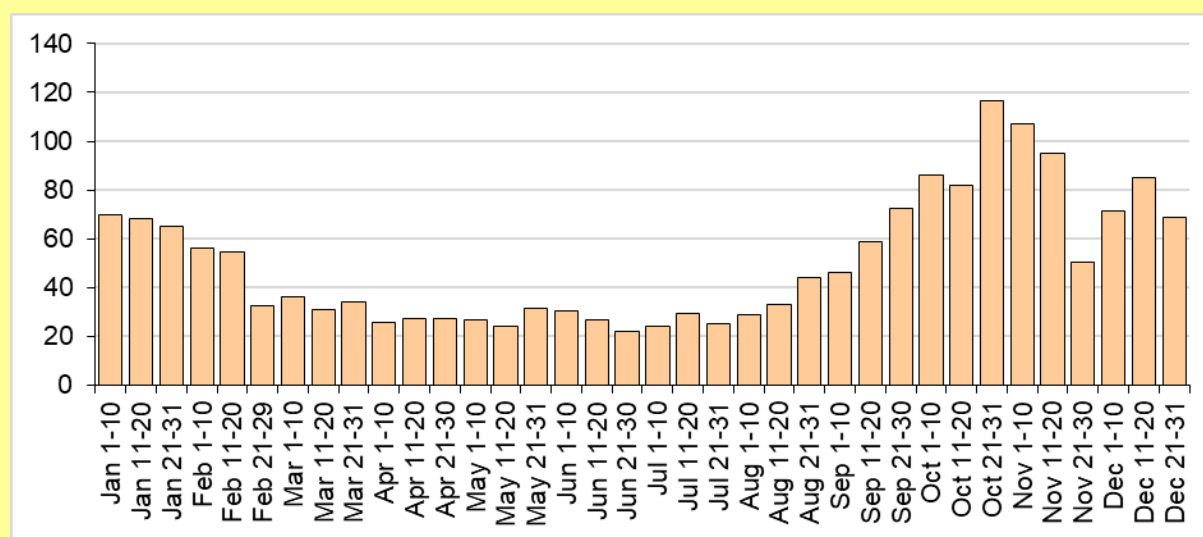


Figure 18. Collared Dove: mean ten-day maxima, 2002-2021

Ringing recoveries (*BTO online ringing report*) suggest that the expansionist urge that drove the species across Europe diminished quite soon after Collared Doves arrived in Britain. The longest distance recoveries of Kent-ringed birds, to Ireland and Scotland, occurred during 1966-1971 – though there was one that moved the ‘wrong’ way from Orkney to Kent between 1979 and 1981. There are ten continental recoveries, four to northern France, five from Belgium and one from the Netherlands – but all of those were during 1961-1977 with none more recently.

Andrew Henderson

If you build it... Living with Swifts



Swift by Dan Richards

I've always been into my wildlife, birds in particular. In 2018 I happened to stumble across <https://www.bristolswifts.co.uk/swift-colony/>. I knew a few Swift nested naturally in the next avenue from me which was a good starting point before I then took ideas to build my boxes from the blog above and initially made two that would fit between my roof joists under my eaves. These went up in August of 2018, at the end of that season more or less and in preparation for the following year I added another 4 boxes all in my same aspect.

What started out as a simple project putting up a few boxes however very quickly turned into an all-out passion when in 2019 I began playing their calls to attract juvenile birds looking for new nest sites. I'd only originally planned on boxes on one aspect as the rear was South facing and the front had telephone wires running adjacent, however it was clear the Swifts didn't discriminate and I was having birds checking out all three aspects and by the end of 2019 I was lucky enough to have my first pair of non-breeding Swift coincidentally in the very first box I made. I then added another 8 boxes - some on the front with entrance holes underneath to make easier access under the wires and the remainder on the back of the house. I experimented with my designs to utilise the space to maximise nests.

2020 saw the previous year's pair return. They went on to hatch the first ever Swift chick on my house, followed quickly by the second. I also had another two pairs that took boxes in late June, that I originally thought would be non-breeders. However, I'd soon learnt to recognise the jingling chirp of chicks in the nest and both pairs had a late brood. The last chick was seen on the 21st September.



Swift nest by Dan Richards

I added more boxes taking my total to 22 and also began adding cameras while they were away to help keep better records when they returned. In 2021 all three pairs returned and fledged 2 chicks each. I no longer needed to play their calls as the resident birds echoed the screams of prospecting birds. I then added another 2 boxes.

Last year was a special year as I was getting new birds in boxes previously not occupied. I finished with 8 successful breeding pairs, 1 failed breeding pair and another 3 pairs that were frequently seen roosting overnight. A total of 15 chicks fledged with one of my old pairs also having their first clutch of 3 eggs.

This breeding season has been an odd one due to May's long spell of northerlies but currently I have 11 pairs, 2 that have failed to lay, 1 had laid but failed to successfully incubate and 8 pairs with a total of 16 chicks between them. I also have one new pair frequently visiting a vacant box. This year has also been interesting as after a bit of networking with like-minded people we are in the throes of setting up an action group for Swifts in the Deal and Walmer area, where we hope to raise awareness locally and hopefully make a difference to the declining Swift population.



Swifts at home by Dan Richards

No matter how many times I've seen them screaming past my head - sometimes just inches away - it never gets tiring and every year when they return it's like I'm seeing them for the first time again. They are enigmatic and amazing birds to live with.

Dan Richards

THE MOST PERFECT THING

Local birders are working with Shellness residents and conservation NGOs to protect nesting Ringed Plover, Oystercatcher and Little Tern at Shellness on the Isle of Sheppey.

The Kent Breeding Bird Atlas (2008-2013) estimated there were between 120-160 pairs of Ringed Plover nesting in the county. Recent Kent Bird Reports suggest numbers have declined further and in 2015 Ringed Plover was Red listed as a species of conservation concern. We knew Ringed Plover and Oystercatcher were nesting at Shellness but there were many questions we could not answer. How many pairs are nesting? How many young are they raising? Are they being predated as eggs or chicks? And if so by what? Is disturbance by people significant?

I was aware of initiatives in East Anglia to reduce disturbance of nesting shorebirds and at the beginning of the year, I emailed Hayley Taylor of Birdwise and asked if we could work with them safeguarding nesting shorebirds. I copied my email to Murray Orchard, Chair of KOS Conservation and Surveys committee, and he in turn forwarded it to Leigh Lock of the RSPB who is leading the Life on the Edge project <https://www.projectlote.life> looking at coastal SPAs. These networks paid dividend when Leigh emailed that there might be funding for small scale community projects.

Hayley set up a meeting with residents of Shellness hamlet, Andrew and Lucia. We walked the site, and over a cup of coffee in Andrew's chalet talked about plans to protect the shorebirds. We decided a key question was to find out what was happening to the nesting birds? Were they predated and if so by whom? We agreed to ask for funding for camera traps.



Ringed Plover nest by Brian Watmough

In May, Lucia found the first Ringed Plover nest and suggested that we used What3Words to share the location. This was an inspired proposal and by sharing the What3Words precise location we were all able to monitor the nests. We developed an informal programme of visiting the site once a week. We were all

very conscious of the need to minimise disturbance and adopted a simple protocol, walk steadily below the tide line on a falling tide. Sitting birds characteristically silently sink away towards the tideline. In contrast, a bird with young is noisy with both adults trying to distract us away from the youngsters. Birds on a territory without eggs or young stay quietly on site. If we had the time, we would watch from a distance to see if the adults returned to their nest or young. By surveying on a falling tide any roosting waders would retreat to the intertidal zone.

Lucia placed ropes around nests close to the hamlet. Andrew sent videos of hovercraft landing on the beach and overflying drones. Hayley was able to speak to the hovercraft pilots and they agreed to keep away from the beach. Lucia and Hayley designed and erected signs. We had been promised camera traps, but they never came. I challenged my grandchildren to spot the eggs in pictures of Ringed Plover nests. Nesting Little Terns meant parts of the shell beach were out of bounds.



Nest protection by Brian Watmough

With careful observation and Google search we have learnt much. Apparently Ringed Plovers are like Wrens in that the male will make several scrapes and the female will choose. Female Ringed Plovers will relay if a clutch is predated. A study in Sweden found Ringed Plover may lay as many as four replacement clutches a year, meaning a female would produce eggs 3.7 times her body mass in a year. Surprisingly the Oystercatchers at Shellness seemed to be two weeks later than those on freshwater marshes at Elmley NR. Research in Iceland has shown the opposite with coastal birds laying earlier than inland birds. So, what is going on at Shellness?

As the nesting season comes to an end, what have we found out? Firstly, there are up to 10 Ringed Plovers and 5 Oystercatchers attempting to nest and some young have been raised. Secondly, measuring breeding success is challenging, we hope to do better next year. If the promised camera traps eventually turn up we will be better able to answer the question: are the nests being predated on and by whom? Thirdly, the informal partnership between KOS, Shellness, Birdwise, Elmley NR and Life on the Edge can work. Fourthly, and not necessarily finally, getting an insight into the lives of these birds is rewarding. The four speckled eggs of the Ringed Plover, nestling in a hollow which counts as a nest, reminded me of the quotation which inspired the title of Tim Birkhead's book on eggs: "I think that, if required on pain of

death to name instantly the most perfect thing in the universe, I should risk my fate on a bird's egg"
(Thomas Wentworth Higgins, 1862).

Brian Watmough

KENT BIRD SIGHTINGS FOR MAY-JUNE 2023 - Chris Hindle

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*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 in this newsletter.*

WEATHER

May began fine, but soon became more unsettled after which it settled down again for the remainder of the month and was often rather warm and sunny by day. Rainfall was well below average with only 8.75mm of rain falling at Bishopstone.

June began fine and settled with temperatures around average, but from the 9th it became warm and humid and rather less settled with scattered thunderstorms. It remained very warm or hot for most of the rest of the month making it the warmest June since records began in 1884. Rainfall was below average with 20.0 mm recorded at Bishopstone.

PARTRIDGE TO WILDFOWL

A **Quail** was heard at Seasalter on May 8th whilst others flew over Chainhurst calling on the night of the 13th and were heard at Worth Marshes on May 15th and Tonbridge on May 29th. As many as four birds were also heard calling at Sandwich Bay between May 31st and June 12th.

A **Dark-bellied Brent Goose** was seen at Pegwell Bay on June 17th and an unseasonable **White-fronted Goose** was seen at Seaton from June 5th-10th.

As many as 101 **Egyptian Geese** were seen at Bough Beech with up to nine recorded from Grove Ferry/Stodmarsh, Seaton, Sandwich Bay, Sevenoaks WR, Mote Park, Dunorlan Park, Dungeness RSPB, Lade, Cliffe Pools, Eastwell Park, Penshurst Place and Whetsted GPs and up to 12 **Mandarins** were reported from Bough Beech, Godmersham, Hampton, Worth Marshes, Chiddingstone, Tonbridge, East Peckham and Folks' Wood.

During May and June up to seven **Garganey** were recorded from Oare Marshes, Worth Marshes, Grove Ferry/Stodmarsh, Elmley, Cliffe Pools and Dungeness RSPB.

Two **Velvet Scoters** flew past Mill Point on May 3rd and 14 flew past DBO on the 4th with one on the 5th with two flying N at North Foreland on the 12th. A **Long-tailed Duck** was also seen at DBO on June 5th.

NIGHTJAR TO WADERS

A migrant **Nightjar** was discovered at Sandwich Bay on June 17th.

A male **Black-winged Stilt** was seen at Worth Marshes on May 6th and four birds were seen at Dungeness RSPB on May 17th and then at Worth Marshes between May 18th and the 21st.

There were nine **Curlew Sandpipers** at Cliffe Pools on May 19th whilst one was seen from Stodmarsh on June 7th.

A **Temminck's Stint** was identified at Worth Marshes on May 4th and there were three there from the May 18th-20th with one on the 24th and two on June 4th. A **Little Stint** was seen at Cliffe Pools on May 11th with others at Worth Marshes from the May 24th-27th, at Egypt Bay on May 29th and at Dungeness RSPB from June 4th until the 26th.

Two **Pectoral Sandpipers** were found at Cliffe Pools on the evening of May 11th but soon flew off N.

During May and the first week of June as many as four **Wood Sandpipers** were recorded from Worth Marshes, Cliffe Pools, Elmley and Sandwich Bay, whilst a **Spotted Redshank** was seen at Worth Marshes on May 1st.

GULLS TO SHEARWATERS

One or two **Caspian Gulls** were recorded at Bough Beech, Dartford Marshes and Oare Marshes and single **Yellow-legged Gulls** were seen at Reculver, North Foreland and the River Darent.

A **CASPIAN TERN** was seen at Pegwell Bay on May 19th and there was one at Dungeness RSPB on June 27th and 28th whilst a **White-winged Black Tern** flew E at DBO on May 22nd.



Caspian Tern by Neil Burt

During May and June, as many as 11 **Black Terns** were seen at DBO, Dungeness RSPB, Bough Beech and Cliffe Pools.

Single **Great Skuas** flew past DBO on May 5th and 6th and past Sandwich Bay on May 15th.

54 **Pomarine Skuas** flew E past DBO with one at Sandgate on May 4th and three at DBO on the 5th with one on the 6th. One also flew N at North Foreland on May 18th.

During May up to 23 **Arctic Skuas** flew past DBO with one or two also seen at North Foreland and in June one or two birds were seen at DBO on the 2nd, 11th and 20th.

A **Puffin** flew S at North Foreland on May 6th.

Two **Black-throated Divers** flew E at DBO on May 3rd with singles on the 4th, 5th and 28th and single birds at Tankerton and North Foreland on the 12th. There was also a **Great Northern Diver** seen off Mill Point on May 27th and very late birds recorded flying E at DBO on June 1st and off North Foreland on the 12th.

Three **Manx Shearwaters** flew past DBO and one flew S at North Foreland on May 5th and there were 19 off DBO on May 10th with single birds there on the May 23rd and 29th and June 1st. Three also flew N past North Foreland on May 28th with five at DBO on June 10th and one on the 13th and another at North Foreland on the 27th.

WHITE STORK TO WOODPECKERS

Single **White Storks** were seen at Bough Beech on May 10th and 19th and June 10th and at Edenbridge on May 31st. Two birds were seen at Elham Valley, Wickhambreaux, Stodmarsh and Dungeness RSPB on June 3rd and there was one at Dover on the 15th and at Sandwich Bay and Worth from the 16th-23rd.

In May single **Shags** were recorded from Sandgate, Foreness and North Foreland.

One or two **Glossy Ibises** remained at Dungeness RSPB until the end of May and single birds were seen at Stodmarsh on May 16th, at Worth Marshes on the May 17th and at Seasalter on June 3rd.

During May and June up to three **Spoonbills** were seen at Dungeness RSPB, Reculver, Stodmarsh, Worth Marshes, Oare Marshes, Cliffe Pools and Foreness.



Spoonbills by Martyn Wilson

During these two months **Bitterns** were heard or seen at Grove Ferry/Stodmarsh, Elmley, Worth Marshes and Dungeness RSPB.

A **Night-heron** was reported flying across a road at Leybourne on May 14th.

Three **Cattle Egrets** were seen at Seasalter on May 10th with seven at Elmley on the 18th and one at Oare Marshes on the 21st. During June there was one at Stodmarsh on the 10th.

Single **Great White Egrets** were seen at Worth Marshes on May 11th and 25th with two there on the 20th and single birds at Oare Marshes on the 21st and Stodmarsh on the 30th. In June birds were reported from Penshurst Place on the 1st, Walmer Beach on the 3rd, Worth Marshes between the 5th, 10th and 25th and flying S at North Foreland on the 24th with one seen at Lade on the 30th.

A **Purple Heron** was seen at Elmley between May 10th and 13th and there was one at Stodmarsh from May 15th-20th and single birds at Dungeness RSPB on the 18th, Stoke Marshes on the 23rd and Northward Hill on May 29th.

Single **Ospreys** were seen at South Foreland on May 16th, at Bough Beech on the 15th, 16th and 25th, at Sandwich Bay on the 28th, at King's Hill on June 1st, Kingston on June 3rd and at Palmarsh on the 4th.



Honey Buzzard by Jamie Partridge

A **Honey Buzzard** flew N at Dungeness RSPB on May 7th after which one or two birds were recorded from Sandwich Bay, Kingsdown, South Foreland, Whitstable, DBO, Ashford, Edenbridge, Canterbury, Kingston, Broadstairs, Folkestone and New Romney.

Single ring-tailed **Hen Harriers** were reported from Grove Ferry/Stodmarsh on May 1st and 17th.

During May and June reports of **Red Kites** were widespread with peak counts of 44 flying past Sandwich Bay on the May 16th, 25 at Barham on the May 25th and 27 at Sandwich Bay on June 27th.

A **Black Kite** was seen at Stodmarsh on May 24th with others flying SW at North Foreland on June 16th, at Bockhill on the 24th, at Hillborough on June 27th and at Lower Rainham on the 29th whilst single **White-tailed Eagles** flew SE at Port Lympne on May 7th and S at North Foreland on June 22nd.

During May and June one or two **Long-eared Owls** were reported from two sites in **North** and one in **East** and in May single **Short-eared Owls** were seen at Reculver, Oare Marshes and Pegwell Bay

A **Hoopoe** was seen at DBO on May 6th.



Bee Eater by Jamie Partridge

After early morning rain on May 5th there was an arrival of **Bee-eaters** with 10 each at Ramsgate and Langdon Cliffs, three at High Halden, two at Betteshanger CP and one at Sandwich Bay. One was also seen at Stodmarsh on the 17th whilst on May 22nd there were four at Langdon Cliffs and one at DBO. Two were also reported from Margate with one at Worth Marshes on May 24th and on the 28th there were two at South Foreland and one at North Foreland.

In June there were three at Sandwich Bay on the 2nd and 3rd with one on the 16th and flying one over Margate Cemetery on the 6th and single birds reported from Dover on the 22nd and Seaton on the 25th.

FALCONS TO HIRUNDINES

A **LESSER KESTREL** was reported from North Foreland on May 16th and a female **Red-footed Falcon** was seen and photographed at Stodmarsh between May 4th and 16th with a first summer male at Dungeness RSPB from June 20th-22nd.

An immature **Merlin** was seen at Shuart on June 2nd.

A male **Red-backed Shrike** was seen at Grove Ferry between May 28th and 31st and at Stodmarsh on June 19th.



Red-backed Shrike by Peter Webster

Single **Golden Orioles** were seen at Reculver Marshes on May 5th and 7th with two at Foreness on the 6th and one on the 8th and singles at Nethergong on May 11th and 29th.

A **Hooded Crow** was seen at North Foreland and Reculver Marshes on May 11th and one was seen and photographed at Graveney on June 3rd.



Hooded Crow by Gaz Foreman

A **Red-rumped Swallow** was reported from South Foreland on May 24th whilst one was seen at Worth Marshes on May 29th.

WARBLERS TO WHEATEARS

A **Wood Warbler** was heard singing at Sandwich Bay on May 15th and a **Marsh Warbler** was reported singing at Tankerton on May 22nd.

A **GREAT REED WARBLER** was heard singing and seen at Stodmarsh on May 31st and June 1st and a **Grasshopper Warbler** was seen and heard at Chamber's Wall on May 1st with others heard at Langdon Hole on June 3rd and Seasalter on June 19th.

A **SUBALPINE WARBLER** was seen at North Foreland on May 21st. Unfortunately, it could not be assigned to a particular species.

As many as five **Firecrests** were recorded at Covert Wood, Dunorlan Park, Hothfield Common, Park Gate Down, Shorne Woods, DBO and Enbrook Park.

A **SHORT-TOED TREECREEPER** was found at Dungeness on May 5th. This is the third bird to be recorded in Kent this spring.

An adult **Rose-coloured Starling** was seen in a private garden in West Kent on May 30th.



Rose-coloured Starling , West Kent

At the beginning of May single **Ring Ouzels** were seen at Shuart, Eynsford and Reculver with the last bird recorded at Shuart on May 10th.

During May one or two **Black Redstarts** were seen at DBO, Dover Harbour, Abbotscliffe and Bockhill.

SPARROWS TO BUNTINGS

A **Blue-headed Wagtail** was seen at Foreness on May 6th and a calling **RED-THROATED PIPIT** flew N over Bockhill on May 7th.

Two **Hawfinches** flew past South Foreland on May 28th.

During May and June up to 21 **Crossbills** were seen at North Foreland, South Foreland, Kingsdown Lees, Bockhill, Langdon Cliffs, Sandwich Bay, Foreness, Walmer Beach, Brooksend, Covert Woods and Weddington Forstal.

A **Serin** was seen at Bockhill on May 5th with others at North Foreland the next day and at Kingsdown Lees on the May 13th and at Langdon Hole on June 3rd.

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, B. Benn, Bockhill Birders, R. Bonsor, Bough Beech (per A. Ford), E. Brown, D. Bunney, P. & P. Burness, N. Burt, G. Burton, F. Cackett, J. Cantelo, J. Carnell, P. Carr, R. Carr, M. Casemore, J. Chantler, P. Chantler, M. Chidwick, R. Collins, G. Coultrip, K. Cutting, DBO (per D. Walker), B. East, A. Farrar, D. Faulkner, Folkestone and Hythe Birds (per I. Roberts), G. Foreman, N. Frampton, C. Gibbard, M. Gould, R. Heading, J. Headley, A. Hindle, C. Hindle, M. Hindle, G. Hollamby, M. Hollingworth, P. Holt, M. Kennett, S. Kennett, J. King, G. Lee, O. Leyshon, A. Lipczynski, K. Lord, R. Mace, A. Malone, T. Mantle, J. Massey, N. McCanch, S. McMinn, S. Message, S. Mills, S. Mount, R. Newham, 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 P. Holt and P. Smith), SBBO (per A. Lipczynski and S. Walton), I. Serle, Sevenoaks WR, I. Shepherd, B. Short, D. Smith, P. Smith, R. Smith, W. Stoneham, M. Sutherland, Swale NNR (per R. Smith, D. Faulkner, I. Davidson), A. Swandale, P. Trodd, C. Turley, J. Turner-Moss, D. Tutt, M. Watts, C. White, M. Wilson, T. Wilson, J. Woolgar, B. Woolhouse, D. Wrathall, B. Wright, M. Wright and J. Young.

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 and they are then entered 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 2023 KOS Rarities have recently been accepted by the KOS Rarities Panel based on published photos or from descriptions submitted.

Black Brant	Swalecliffe/Whitstable	Feb 2nd & 20th
Black Brant	North Foreland & Foreness	Feb 27th-Mar 6th
Black Brant	Lower Halstow	March 6th
Black Brant	Kingsdown	March 12th
Black Brant	Dover Harbour	March 13th
Green-winged Teal (male)	Gravesend Promenade	March 30th
Ring-necked Duck (female)	Stodmarsh.	Jan 6th-Apr 14th
Alpine Swift	Stodmarsh.	March 19th
Alpine Swift	Worth Marshes	March 19th
2 Alpine Swifts	Reculver Marshes	March 20th
up to 3 Alpine Swifts	North Foreland and Foreness	March 21st-26th
Alpine Swift	New Hythe GPs	March 22nd-26th
Alpine Swift	South Foreland	March 25th
Alpine Swift	Darenth Lakes	March 25th
2 Alpine Swifts	Dungeness	April 1st
Alpine Swift	Dungeness RSPB	April 3rd
Alpine Swift	North Foreland	April 7th
Alpine Swift	Upper Hale Farm	April 7th

Black-winged Stilt (female)	Dungeness RSPB	April 22nd-25th
2 Black-winged Stilts	Dungeness RSPB	April 30th
4 Black-winged Stilts	Dungeness RSPB	May 17th
Stone-curlew	Cliffe Pools	Mar 22nd
Night-heron (adult)	Dungeness RSPB	April 25th-27th
Night-heron (adult)	Worth Marshes	April 25th
2 Night-herons (adult)	Worth Marshes	April 30th
Purple Heron (adult)	Elmley	May 10th-13th
Purple Heron	Stodmarsh/Grove Ferry	May 15th-20th
Black Kite	Stodmarsh	May 24th
Red-footed Falcon (female)	Stodmarsh.	May 4th-16th
Hooded Crow	Dungeness	April 1st-20th
Hooded Crow	North Foreland	April 11th
Hooded Crow	Foreness/North Foreland	April 26th-27th
Hooded Crow	Dungeness	April 29th
Hooded Crow (flying W)	Coldharbour, Reculver	May 11th (0820)
Penduline Tit (male)	Dungeness RSPB	April 2nd & 3rd
Penduline Tit	Oare Marshes	April 22nd-30th
Red-rumped Swallow (flying S)	North Foreland	April 10th
Richard's Pipit	Sandwich Bay	Feb 8th-Apr 17th
Little Bunting (ringed as Reed Bunting 30/12/20)	Bockingfield Farm, Marden	March 11th

Fifty Years Ago

Honey Buzzard



Honey Buzzard by Archibald Thorburn (PDI)

A 'ringed bird of prey' that flew into wires at Leysdown on July 20th proved to be of this species. This bird was captured but recovered and was released on the next day. It had been ringed as a nestling on 6th Aug. 1967 at Friedberg, Schleswig-Holstein in Germany. (LCB, CS). This represents the twelfth record of this species for Kent since 1952.

KBR1973

MEET THE MEMBER – Kieron Palmer



Tell us about the role you play in the KOS and describe what it involves.

I serve on the KOS Executive Committee and the Engagement Committee. I was first invited to the Exec as some “fresh blood” and for my IT knowledge (I work in a technical role for Microsoft). I am using this opportunity along with the other Engagement Committee members to try and make the KOS more modern. I mean modern in both a technical sense where we have automated some time consuming processes and made the newsletter more accessible by hosting it on the website, but also modern in terms of looking to make the KOS appeal to a broader demographic.

What first drew you into the world of birds?

I was into birds as a young person and remember bird watching with my grandfather, my aunt and my neighbour, I remember that I had a poster on my wall of the raptors of Great Britain alongside my favourite bands. This was of course pre internet and I had no idea that birdwatching was a thing and without knowing anyone involved I drifted away in my later teens and twenties.

In my 30s I moved to a more rural location and encountered Yellowhammers while running and Lesser Redpolls on my feeders, this pulled me back in to birding and I lived there long enough to see the Yellowhammers disappear due to loss of breeding habitat.

How are you involved with birds in Kent?

In addition to my KOS duties I am part of the Thames Estuary Ringing Group, Swale Wader Group and I ring with a few other people around Kent. This takes up a lot of my time but I try to ensure that I leave time for birding, I am not much of a twitcher but I take pleasure in the annual cycle and like to see birds as they arrive / pass through the county each year, I am particularly interested in when they start singing.

What has been your biggest birding blunder?

The one that I cringe about the most was actually not that big a blunder but it was the setting. I was in Gibraltar last October, it was my 5th or 6th visit to stay at the observatory and in addition to ringing each day the observatory ask us to record any raptor passage. On this particular day I was there with a team of 5 other ringers, two visitors and a staff member from Gibraltar Ornithology and Natural History Society. I saw a large raptor far across the bay, it looked too large to be the usual Booted Eagles and it was grey! I watched it for 30 seconds or so and noticed the gleaming white undertail coverts viewed from the side, it turned sideways on and I called Goshawk. Everyone else got on to the bird, it was put onto the local WhatsApp group and we watched it for quite a while. Once it had gone and we looked at the photos it was

clearly a female Sparrowhawk! The locals tried to make me feel better by telling me that they get big Sparrowhawks on passage but it was embarrassing, I still sometimes wonder if we could have photographed the wrong bird.

What's your top tip for people who are interested in learning more about birds or getting more involved?

I have two tips:

- 1) Go outside, you don't have to go somewhere special. Learn what's in your area, local park etc.
- 2) Learn the songs. If you find it hard then start in December with Robin, Mistle Thrush and then add new songs as they start. By knowing the songs you will find birds in unexpected places. I remember a Willow Warbler singing at Embankment Station and a Black Redstart at Bank junction (in London).

What is the bit of kit that you take with you when out and about birding?

Just my bins. I used to have a notebook but now I use my phone to record what I see.

How do you feel we can improve the future for birds in Kent and birdlife on a larger scale?

If we can get people interested at a young age then even if they do not grow up to spend their life involved in birding then they may at least understand why they should put the dog on a lead or not cut the hedge down.

Tell us about a species, place or project that interests you.

I am interested in Nightingales and find it fascinating how they return to the same bush each year. I have been part of a BTO project monitoring Nightingales for 11 years now.

Too many projects interest me and I don't have time to get involved with them all but I love what Marden Wildlife are doing with farmland birds and Turtle Doves. I would love to do something to help the Swifts too, their decline is desperately sad.