



Leucistic Stonechat, by Mark Chidwick

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Autumn has arrived! September sees the onset of probably the most exciting period of the year if, like me, you are enthralled by the spectacles of migration. Waking up on a cool, slightly damp morning and hearing the peeps, chips, tacks and rattles coming from scrubby bushes fills me with anticipation. It is also a good time to check fence lines for chats, shrikes and raptors. Any suitable wetland (if you can find one these days) is likely to hold a transient wader from northern breeding grounds, heading south on the perilous journey to winter south of the Sahara. Already this month Wood Sandpiper, Red-backed Shrike, Wryneck and Barred warbler have graced the county and with any luck more and others will follow.

Against all this hope and potential is the growing realisation that we are losing key conservation sites and potential habitat on an almost daily basis, sacrificed to short-term profit and an ideology which does not value the natural world which sustains us all.

Good birding

Norman

News and announcements

AVIAN INFLUENZA – an update

Tragically, this year has again seen major outbreaks of Avian Flu, with breeding seabirds particularly affected once more. Shocking reports, from widespread localities around the UK, showed harrowing scenes of significant mortality at breeding colonies. Data collated by the British Trust for Ornithology showed that mortalities of Black-headed Gulls increased exponentially from March, estimating that at least 10% of this species' UK breeding population may have been lost. At least 20,000 Black-headed Gulls, including adults and young birds, died at one Lancashire site alone. Other colonial species which have been affected include Common Terns, with colonies impacted across the country, as well as Guillemots, Razorbills and Kittiwakes in Wales and parts of the eastern coasts of Scotland and England. Further south, the huge colony of Sandwich Terns at Scolt Head in Norfolk, along with those of other terns and gulls there, was very badly hit with over 90% of young dying. Along the south coast, major colonies of both Black-headed and Mediterranean Gulls, as well as Common Terns, suffered massive mortality around the Solent. All these species are already on the Red and Amber Lists 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.

Fortunately, in Kent and East Sussex, the breeding colonies of Gulls and Terns appear to have escaped the worst of Avian Flu this year. Both Mediterranean Gulls and Common Terns had good breeding seasons and Black-headed Gulls, although suffering some losses, appear to have done quite well and managed to fledge a reasonable number of young.

Prof. James Pearce Higgins, BTO Director of Science: *We are only able to track the spread of avian influenza 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

- Record in the [BirdTrack app](https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/birdtrack) <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/birdtrack> . This allows researchers to follow the disease's geographical spread and rapidly assess potential impacts on populations.
- Report to [Defra](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/report-dead-wild-birds), 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.*
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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>

2023 BREEDING RECORDS

Please submit any notable breeding records recorded during the year, to the KOS or BirdTrack, especially those of RBBP species such as Garganey, Shoveler, Pochard, Turtle Dove, Little Ringed Plover, Marsh Harrier, Long-eared Owl, L/S Woodpecker, Peregrine, Hobby, Bearded Tit, Black Redstart and Hawfinch.

RBBP records can be submitted directly, in confidence, to either Brian Watmough brianwat@yahoo.co.uk or Murray Orchard murray.orchard@live.co.uk

Thank You.

KOS NIGHTINGALE SURVEY 2023

Results are still being collected from volunteers, whilst those returned are being summarised for eventual analysis. All data is important, whether birds were found in squares or not, so please return your forms even if the latter was the case. We shall be sending out personal reminders/requests to 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.

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 emailing scanned copies to – nicole.khan@rspb.org.uk

BTO WOODCOCK SURVEY 2023

In 2015, the Woodcock was added to the UK Birds of Conservation Concern Red List because of a long-term decline in breeding numbers and range. The National Woodcock Survey 2023 will provide an update to national population estimates and assessment of range change compared to the previous surveys of 2003 and 2013, and is instrumental in helping to understand the ongoing changes in distribution detected in the Breeding Atlases.

We're currently working on the results of the BTO Woodcock Survey which took place earlier in the year, and will be giving an overview of the status of the Woodcock in Kent later in the year. If you still need to submit your records please do so as soon as possible.

<https://www.bto.org/woodcock>

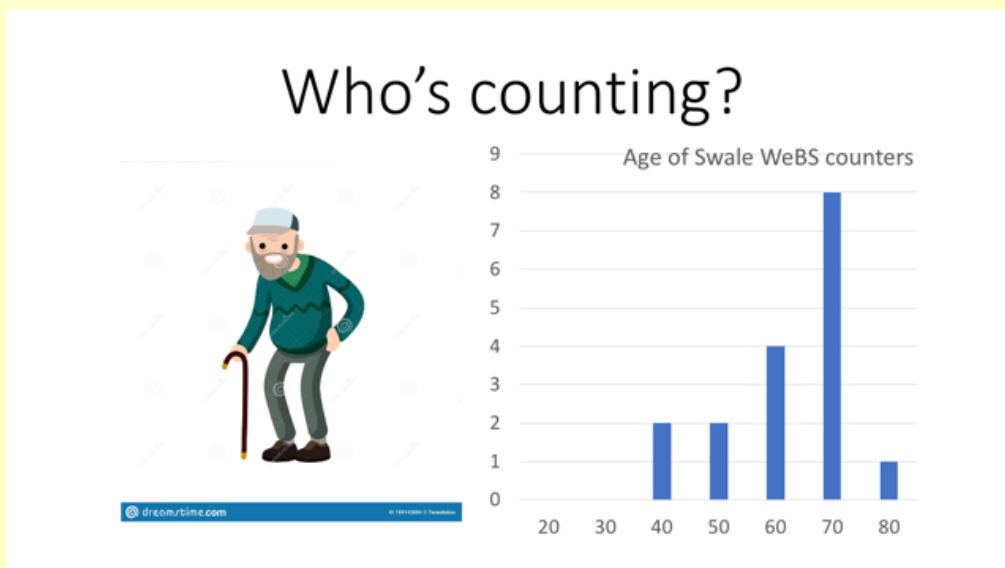
The Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) needs you



Every month 50 or more birders commit to counting waterbirds on wetlands in Kent as part of the Wetland Bird Survey. They may be counting major sites like Stodmarsh, Cliffe and Shellness but also small ponds, marshes and gravel pits throughout the county. These counts, which started in 1972, enabled the conservation agencies to justify the conservation designations which are essential to safeguard our birds. James Pearce-Higgins, Director of Science at BTO, writes *"we are sometimes accused of simply monitoring species decline, focussing only on documenting the scale of biodiversity loss across the country. But these schemes also help us identify solutions and track their effectiveness"*.

As I write this in September the temperature is 31°C. The summer has seen climate chaos throughout Europe with forest fires, drought, exceptional sea water temperatures, forecast sea level rise and loss of ice in the arctic where many of our waders breed. The world is changing for our waterbirds and we do not know how they will adapt. Already in Kent WeBS counts have shown how species like White-fronted Goose are short stopping, numbers in Kent have declined as milder winter temperatures mean many birds stay in Europe rather than crossing the North Sea. We can expect many other shorebirds to change their migration. WeBS counts can help not only track these changes but evaluate interventions. How do the new reserves help the birds? What will be the impact of proposed managed retreat?

Counting birds is important. It is unfortunate that so few birders are prepared to commit the time. We regularly appeal for new counters in newsletters but the response is usually disappointing. The counters are getting older and we need new recruits to continue this monitoring.



I love doing my WeBS count. It is patch-birding at its best, regular visits give a better understanding of the seasonal trends, annual variation and behaviour. For tidal sites it is necessary to understand how different species use the site. At Shellness it is easier to count the Curlew on the intertidal before they fly to roost in saltmarsh, but for other species it is best to wait until high tide and they have settled and then to check with Bob Gomes on the other side of The Swale that we are not counting the same birds as they move between Castle Coote and Shellness. Then when the counts are completed the local organiser sends out a summary of the month's count and you can see how your count fits into the bigger picture. At the end of the year BTO WeBS team send an annual report and you can see how your site compares with the national picture. The Swale is 15th and The Medway 22nd most important wetland in UK based on peak numbers of waterbirds.

Each year we have a WeBS counter get-together at Elmley. This year it will be on Sunday Nov 26th at 10.00 and will feature some presentations about counting/results around Kent's estuaries and wetlands. It is an opportunity for counters to meet and chat and a great way to find out more about WeBS, whether you'd like to participate and how to do so. Please note that this meeting is on a "first come first served" attendance with a limit of 50 people. If you would like to attend, please contact Brian Watmough (brianrwat@yahoo.co.uk)

If you are interested in taking part in this important survey contact your local organiser and they will invite you to join them.

WeBS organisers in Kent;
 Thames: Murray Orchard murray.orchard@live.co.uk
 Medway: Bob Knight rjknight53@gmail.com
 The Swale: Brian Watmough brianrwat1@gmail.com
 East Kent: Heather Mathieson HeatherMathieson@outlook.com

BTO WINTER GULL SURVEY 2024-25

The Winter Gull Survey collects information about our wintering gull populations, through the coordinated effort of volunteer surveyors across the UK.

In winter, gulls flock together to roost communally on lakes, reservoirs and estuaries, in groups that can reach the thousands.

The Winter Gull Survey (WinGS) will run over the winters of 2023/24 and 2024/25 to collect updated information on the numbers and distributions of these wintering gulls in the UK, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.

WinGS volunteers visit gull roost sites, counting five key species: Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull and Great Black-backed Gull. These gulls are all of conservation concern, and their breeding populations are either Amber- or Red-listed in the UK.

Gathering more detailed information about wintering populations, and which roost sites they rely on, will help us protect them and develop more effective conservation strategies.

Key roost sites

If you sign up to visit a key roost site, you will count gulls from a fixed point as the birds arrive to roost at dusk. You may do this alone or with a team of other volunteers, especially on larger sites. If your site is part of a larger team site it is important that you liaise with the team leader and carry out the count on the agreed date.

Roost counts at key sites will involve recording a large number of birds, some of which will continue to arrive during and after dusk. We do not expect observers to be able to identify all birds to species, and you will be able to record some gulls as 'large gull species' or 'small gull species' or even just as 'gull species'. However, it is important that as many gulls as possible are identified to the species level.

Sample squares

If you are visiting a sample square, either at the coast or inland, you will need to follow the same guidance, although sample sites are standalone sites and will not normally involve working with a team.

- Full instructions for data collection will be published closer to the time of the surveys. In the meantime, you can contact wings@bto.org with any questions or queries.
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Sign-up and survey dates

You will be able to browse and sign up for WinGS survey sites (both at key roost sites and sample squares) from around late September or early October from the BTO website [Winter Gull Survey | BTO - British Trust for Ornithology](#).

- Oct 2023: Sign-ups for the 2023/24 winter counts begin.
- Jan 2024: Survey visit(s) for the 2023/24 winter counts.
- Apr 2024: Sign-ups for the 2024 autumn counts begin (dates TBC).
- Sept 2024: sign-ups for the 2024/25 winter counts.
- Jan 2025: Survey visit(s) for the 2024/25 winter counts.
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When sign-up opens, you will need to log in to the WinGS portal to request sites.

- You will need a MyBTO account to log in to the WinGS portal. If you don't already have one, you can [create a MyBTO account now](#).

OARE MARSHES – an update from Kent Wildlife Trust

by Steve Weeks, Area Manager for KWT



We were pleased with how the new wet features, created in partnership with the RSPB and funded by the Green Recovery Challenge Fund, performed in the Pheasant Farm fields. In the past, these fields dried out early in the spring but this year there was still standing water and muddy margins available to birds during the hot weather at the end of June.

The past couple of months have seen plenty of bird interest on the East Flood, with Black-tailed Godwit numbers building from mid-July and a range of less common visitors, including Curlew Sandpipers, Little and Temminck's Stints, Spoonbills and Great White Egrets. My personal highlight was two Bitterns walking around the margin of the island in front of the East Hide in May. A good place to see the smaller waders is currently along the eastern sea wall near the sea sluice where there are extensive shallows and exposed mud on the East Flood.

Autumn work will start soon in the western half of the reserve, where staff and volunteers will continue work that the cattle started in knocking back the reed, with the aim of restoring larger areas of grazing marsh. Sections of dense reed will be retained along the western boundary and the net result will be that there will still be more reed on the reserve than there was ten years ago but with larger, more open areas of seasonally wet marsh.

We will be submitting a planning application in the next couple of months to replace the West Hide. Unfortunately, this doesn't mean that work it will begin immediately, as we still need to find the funding. One of the things many funders require is that you have all the necessary permissions in place, before they will consider the project, so this is a necessary stepping-stone in the process of getting a new hide.

The Environment Agency will be carrying out vegetation management on the sea wall between the Watchhouse and the Sea Wall Hide this autumn to ensure they can maintain it effectively.

People may have noticed water coming in from the sea sluice. This is due to the leaky tide flap and in the past, it was far more pronounced before the EA repaired it (and the oyster fishermen stopped wedging it open to grow oysters in the ditches!). It is beneficial to have a certain amount

of sea water entering the flood, as it has always been brackish. In recent years, due to the silting up the ditch section that leads to the sea sluice, the flood has had a drop in salinity as less sea water has been reaching it. We suspect this is one of the main reasons why there has been a rapid spread of common reed around the edge of flood over the last 5 years. Reed prefers fresh water, so as the salinity drops, it can spread.

We dredged the blocked section of ditch last September and I'm hoping that with more saltwater entering the flood, we will see a natural decline in the extent and vigour of the reed. The reed encroachment is one of the reasons why people aren't seeing as much exposed, muddy margins. In some places the reed has expanded by 10-15m and now occupies the normal draw down zone, particularly along the southern edge of the scrape".



The Elmley Curlew Recovery Project



The aim of this exciting project is to allow curlew from vulnerable areas to fledge on sites where they will have a stronger chance of survival, with the long-term aim of increasing the overall population and ensure a breeding population survives in lowland England.

The project

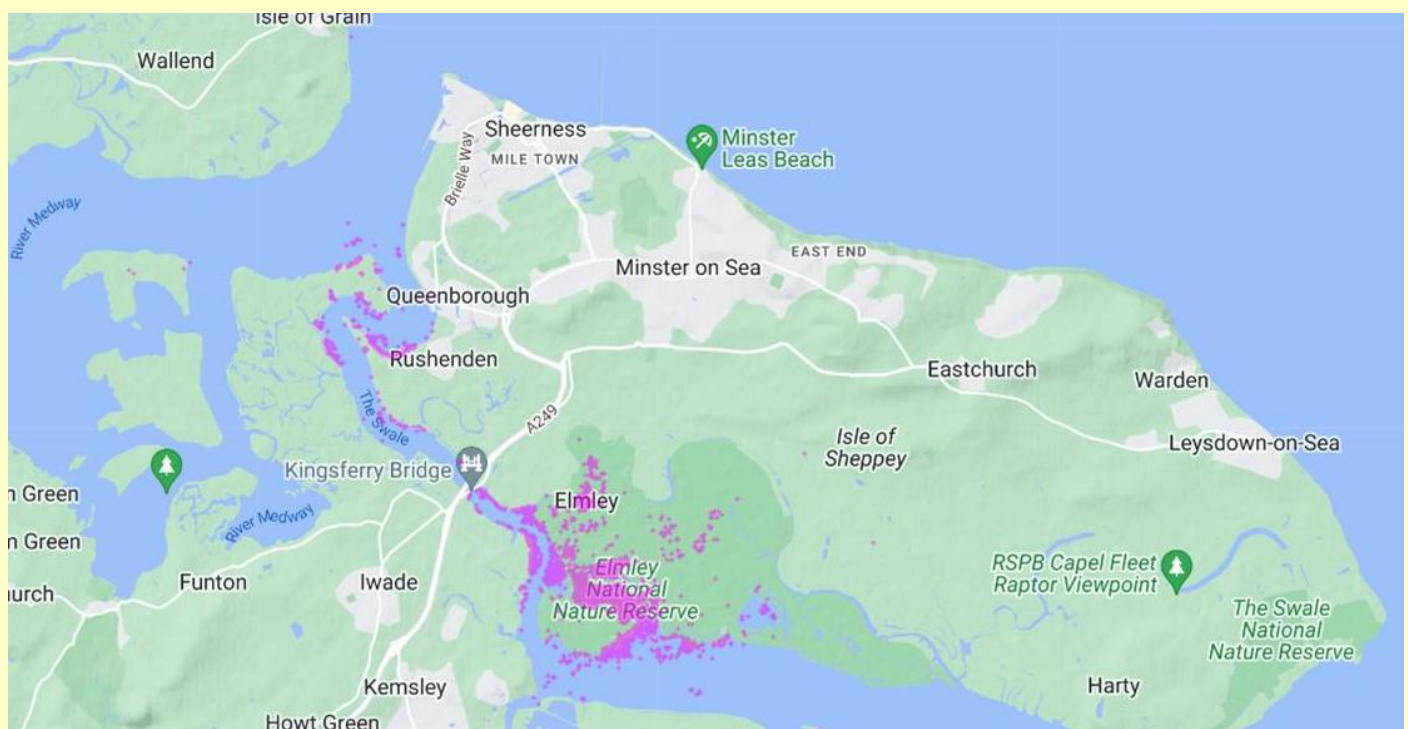
Eggs were collected from upland sites in North Yorkshire by a dedicated team of ornithologists and gamekeepers, and transported to Elmley, where 39 of 40 eggs hatched – 3 en route! The hatching process was amazing to witness with chicks initially ‘pipping’, piercing their egg shell and then after a well-deserved rest, pecking their way out of the egg over the next day or two. The chicks were carefully monitored throughout their rearing process. At 5-6 days old they were moved from an indoor rearing unit into outdoor aviaries, allowing them to develop well with space and more interesting feeding and exploring opportunities - their innate curiosity is wonderful to watch. Curlew chicks are exceptionally observant and very greedy eating almost anything in their path. The chicks grew rapidly, over the next 40-50 days, through a very hot and dry June to soaked July.

Another milestone was catching each chick for ringing - a small metal ring issued by the BTO and used to study movement and life span. A few days before their release each curlew was checked for flight feathers and condition as well as fitting of the yellow flags for easier tracking our released birds. Several of the fittest birds were also selected to carry a very lightweight and specially made GPS harness which provides regular locations so we can track their distribution over time.

Help us track these birds

Our next steps are to collate our learnings with the other teams rearing curlew this autumn and improve anything we can for next year. We will also be keenly watching where and how our birds go. The GPS data is invaluable in tracking the projects progress and we hope the Curlew reared at Elmley continue to thrive with the GPS tags attached for the next few years.

We would be very grateful for any sighting of Elmley reared curlew. You will recognise them with their yellow leg flags and several with small GPS backpacks.



Please send sighting to the info@elmleynaturereserve.co.uk or the Swale Wader Group www.swalewaders.co.uk

Gareth Fulton, Elmley Reserve Manager

Surveys

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

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: membership@kentos.org.uk

Articles

Rare and Scarce Buntings

Fourteen species of bunting are on the Kent list. Three of them (Corn Bunting, Yellowhammer and Reed Bunting) breed here at present and are reasonably numerous, though the first two have shown serious declines. Snow and Lapland Buntings are annual passage migrants and winter visitors, though currently in small numbers. The others, covered by this article, are rarities. I'm able to include records up to 2022 but not all data for that last year are yet fully collated or assessed in the case of rarities, so it's possible that some of this may be provisional.

The species, in order, are Pine, Rock, Ortolan, Cirl, Little, Yellow-browed, Rustic, Yellow-breasted and Black-headed Buntings. And to demonstrate inclusivity, Red-headed and Cinnamon-breasted Buntings are here too.

One point worth making about rare buntings – but it applies to other rarities too – is that, while most records are along the coast where birders concentrate, they are occasionally encountered inland. Examples of this among the buntings can be found below, for Ortolan and Cirl Buntings, and Little and Rustic Buntings. As inconspicuous birds, they are less likely than, say, a Hoopoe to be reported by a non-birder, and the chances that one will show itself to a birder are vanishingly slim. But they *are* sometimes found; just how many are missed?

Many thanks to Maria Mak, Brian Watmough and Chris Hindle for help with the recent, inland, Little Bunting record.

Pine Bunting



Pine Bunting by Matthew Short

The breeding range of Pine Buntings extends over a huge area east of the Urals in Russia and they have expanded their range westwards at the same time that Yellowhammers (mainly a European species) has expanded eastwards into Asia. While the males look very different, the two species are fairly closely related and occupy similar habitats, and there is a wide zone of western Siberia in which hybridisation occurs. Individuals with intermediate plumage are frequent in the overlap zone, and some features of Pine Bunting can be found in Yellowhammers breeding westwards at least as far as central Europe (Panov *et al.*, 2003, *Dutch Birding* 25: 17-31).

Over sixty birds have been accepted as Pine Buntings in Britain, and a further six or seven as Pine Bunting x Yellowhammer hybrids. The hybrids show a wide range of combinations of the two species' plumages; the least manifestation of some Yellowhammer genes in a Pine Bunting is thought to be yellow fringes to the primaries. Three records have been in Kent. The first was found by James Massey at Murston on 24th January 2017 (*Kent Bird Report* 2017 pp 183-185). The bird remained there until 1st March and was seen by many people during that time. Observations and photographs detected no yellow in the primaries or elsewhere. It was accepted as a first-winter male Pine Bunting and was even heard singing.



Pine Bunting hybrid by Matt Hindle

A year later, Chris Hindle found another male, at Reculver on 17th February 2018. This one was seen again on the 18th but not thereafter. Another eighteen months passed, and would you believe it? Matt Hindle trapped and ringed another male at Reculver on 4th November 2019. The British Birds Rarities Committee judged that these Reculver records were hybrid Pine Bunting x Yellowhammer because they showed yellow primary edgings. One point of confusion is that BBRC published both birds as adult males and presumed them to be the same individual, while the local view was that the second one was a bird of the year and so must have been different. There's an article about them by Chris Hindle in the *Kent Bird Report* 2019 pp 238-242.

While two of the three may have had some Yellowhammer influence in their make-up, they nevertheless are assumed to have been long-distance vagrants, since birds with those features are likely to have originated in the overlap zone in western Siberia. To summarise, the three records are:

Pine Bunting	Murston	24th January to 1st March 2017
Pine Bunting x Yellowhammer	Reculver	17th-18th February 2018
Pine Bunting x Yellowhammer	Reculver	4th November 2019

Rock Bunting



Rock Bunting, Armenia by Barry Wright

The Rock Bunting is a common enough bird in mountainous areas throughout southern Europe, the Middle East and into Asia. Except at the eastern end of its range, it's not a migrant and it remains an extremely rare bird here. The five British records include two at the beginning of the twentieth century, two in the 1960s and one in 2011.

The one Kent record was around 14th February 1905. The bird was captured alive at Perry Woods, near Selling, from a flock of Yellowhammers and other buntings. Ticehurst (*History of the Birds of Kent*, 1905) includes it under its old name of Meadow Bunting, now applied to a similar species in eastern Asia.

Rock Bunting	Perry Woods	on or about 14th February 1905
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Ortolan Bunting



Ortolan Bunting Sandwich Bay, by Steffan Walton

Ortolan Buntings breed very widely throughout mainland Europe and western Asia, in farmland, open woodland and scrub, and winter in Africa south of the Sahara. While they remain numerous, populations are believed to be declining. Traditionally, the species was the target of hunters, especially in south-west France where autumn migrants are concentrated, to provide the 'delicacy', Ortolans. Whole birds were marinated in brandy and eaten in a curious ritualistic manner. This practice persisted in France long after it was banned elsewhere and is believed to continue illegally. The toll on decreasing populations from hunting pressure will not be helpful, but it seems likely that the main driver of decline is habitat change and agricultural intensification.

The species has never been a common migrant in Britain. Even with the numbers of birders now searching, there have seldom been more than 100 records in a year; historically, with fewer observers, they were far less often reported. In Kent, the first acceptable record was of one caught by the bird-catchers of Dover cliffs on 14th September 1874 (Ticehurst, *History of the Birds of Kent*, 1909). There were a couple of records from the first half of the nineteenth century that have insufficient detail to be acceptable, and also one at Cobham on 10th April 1866 that is generally discounted; Ticehurst himself appears to have been less than keen on that one – it would have been a very early date in the year.

The next occurrences were one shot on Dover cliffs on 3rd September 1922 (in the Guy Mannering collection, see *historicalrarebirds.info*) and a male seen at Fairfield on Romney Marsh on 10th May 1946 (Harrison, *Birds of Kent*, 1953). Subsequently, with more observers, more were seen (see Figure 1). The numbers seen were highest in the middle of this 70 year period; during 1974-2003, an average of 2.4 were recorded per year, while before that the average was 0.77 and more recently just 0.47 per year. (I'll come to sound records shortly.)

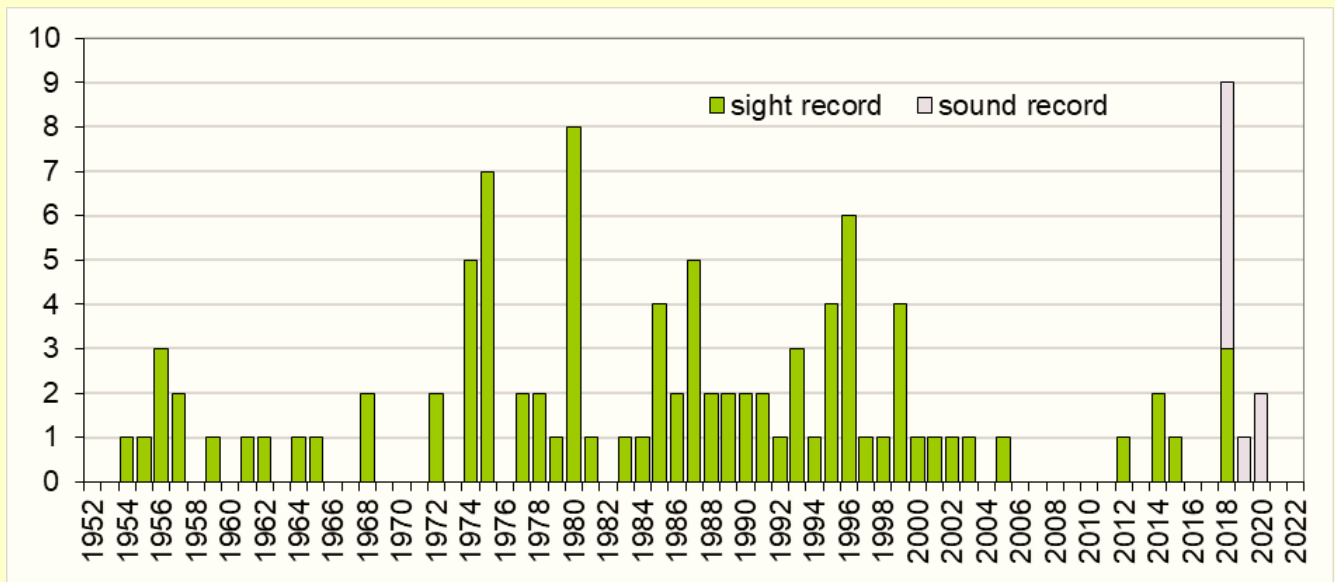


Figure 1. Ortolan Bunting: annual totals

The years with the most sight records were 1975 and 1980. In 1975, there were three at Dungeness in spring, between 16th and 19th May, and four at Sandwich Bay in autumn, between 26th and 28th September. In 1980, there were four at Dungeness on 5th May, two more there on 8th May, and then two at Sandwich Bay on 24th September.

The growth of 'nocmig' is likely to alter our appreciation of how often some species pass through Kent without being seen. Recording and subsequent analysis of nocturnal migrant calls is revealing that some seldom-seen species are almost of regular occurrence.

A prime example of this is the Ortolan Bunting (see <https://soundapproach.co.uk/species/ortolan-bunting/>). Sound-recording at Stonar and Sandwich Bay detected nine birds during the autumns of 2018-2020, including six birds passing over Stonar at well-spaced intervals between 2345 hrs on 28th August and 0257 hrs on 27th August 2018. These sound records are shown using a paler shade in Figure 1. Once they are taken into account, the annual average for 2004-2021 is doubled, from 0.47 to 0.94 per year (but note that it's still well below the previous thirty-year average).

My interpretation of all this is that the recording of relatively small numbers in the 1950s and 1960s was due to the smaller numbers of observers active at the time. With more observers, more were found from the mid 1970s onwards, especially once areas like Thanet and St Margaret's Bay were being covered more intensively. But then the wider population decline started to affect the numbers being found, explaining the reduction in sight records from 2000 onwards. But evidently, migrants do still pass over Kent. Just how many might have been detected had nocmig recording been possibly fifty years ago, I wonder.

Most records have been of single birds. The total of six detected on the night of 27th/28th August 2018 is the largest 'day-count' for Kent. As already mentioned, there have been two records of four together, at Sandwich Bay on 28th August 1975 and at Dungeness on 5th May 1980, and one of three together, at Dungeness on 2nd September 1956, and there have been nine records of twos. There hasn't been a sight record of more than one in the same place since May 1986 when there were two males at Dungeness gravel pits. However, single birds, which I have assumed to be different, were seen in the South Foreland valley and at Bockhill, either side of St Margaret's Bay, on 12th September 1999.

Figure 2 shows the occurrence through the year by ten-day periods. It is solely a passage migrant, with more in autumn than in spring. The earliest in the year have been two on 22nd April: a first summer male at Dungeness in 1984 and an adult male by the South Foreland lighthouse in 1996. The latest in spring was a male at North Foreland on 26th May 2005. There is a slightly wider span of autumn records. The earliest were a juvenile at North Foreland on 15th August 2001 and one sound-recorded over Stonar at 0035 hrs on 16th August 2020. The latest were one at Herne on 9th November 1974 and a first-year bird at Foreness on 10th November 1987.

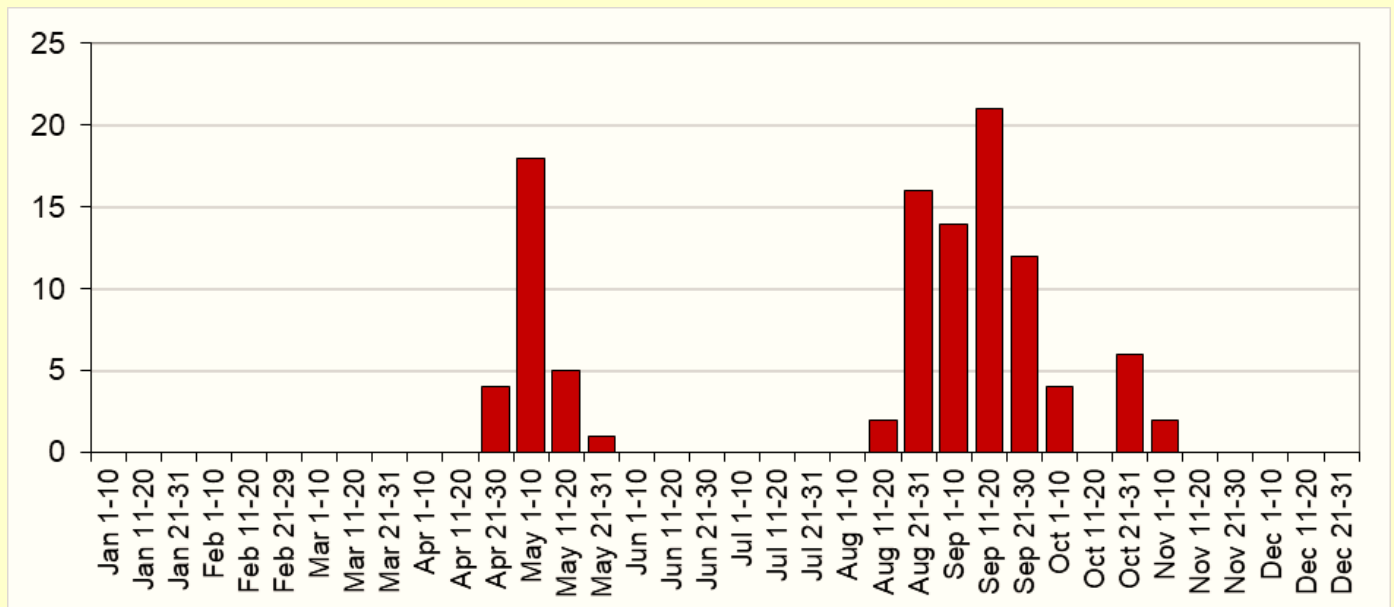


Figure 2. Ortolan Bunting: seasonal pattern of occurrence, 1952-2022

The Kent Bird Report for 1957 included a record of three in reeds at Leybourne on 1st December. That record was omitted from the *Birds of Kent* (1981). I've not been able to check the original documentation but given the late date, location and habitat, the omission seems reasonable.

Most have been found around the coasts of south and east Kent, as shown in the table below. If the nocmig records are omitted, the Sandwich-Pegwell share falls to 10.1% (and the others rise a bit). The two found away from those coasts were individuals at 'Lower Hope Pools' (presumably the small ponds by Lower Hope Point) in October 1959 and inland at Boughton Monchelsea in August 1991. The Minnis-Reculver total does include one a short way inland at Herne in November 1974 and the Thanet total one at Monkton chalk pit in September 1994.

	Number	%
Dungeness	48	44.4
Folkestone-Deal	17	15.7
Sandwich-Pegwell Bays	19	17.6
Thanet	12	11.1
Minnis Bay-Reculver	10	9.3
Elsewhere	2	1.9

Cirl Bunting



Cirl Bunting , Devon by Tim Gutsell

The historical status of the Cirl Bunting in Kent is a little uncertain. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Balston, Shepherd & Bartlett (*Notes on the Birds of Kent*, 1907) thought it “far from a permanent resident, and only occasionally found breeding”. That assessment differed from Ticehurst’s (*History of the Birds of Kent*, 1909), who said it was extremely local but probably “more numerous than most people imagine”. He thought they were most numerous on the Downs near Folkestone and Dover. Remarkably, from a modern viewpoint, nesting took place as far into London as Lewisham. Harrison (*Birds of Kent*, 1953) suggested that “mid, north and north-west Kent” formed the stronghold. The differences may be related to individual perspectives of the various authors, but the consensus was that the species was scarce and local, seldom forming groups of more than a few family parties, and largely sedentary.

Harrison, in 1953, did not suggest that any decline was happening. Yet within fifteen years, Cirl Buntings were all but gone. The first few Kent Bird Reports contain just a handful of reports each year. These do include nesting near Maidstone in 1952 and 1953, and the 1956 report says “no reports for the year which points to this species being very much overlooked”. The distribution of records was widely spread, though perhaps concentrated in the north of the county. It seems to me that a decline had already happened and was continuing, but that observers – few in number and not regularly watching the sort of places in which the species occurred – were unaware of it.

Figure 3 shows the annual totals from 1952 onwards. In the earliest years, these are approximate, as some reports are vague about exactly how many were present.

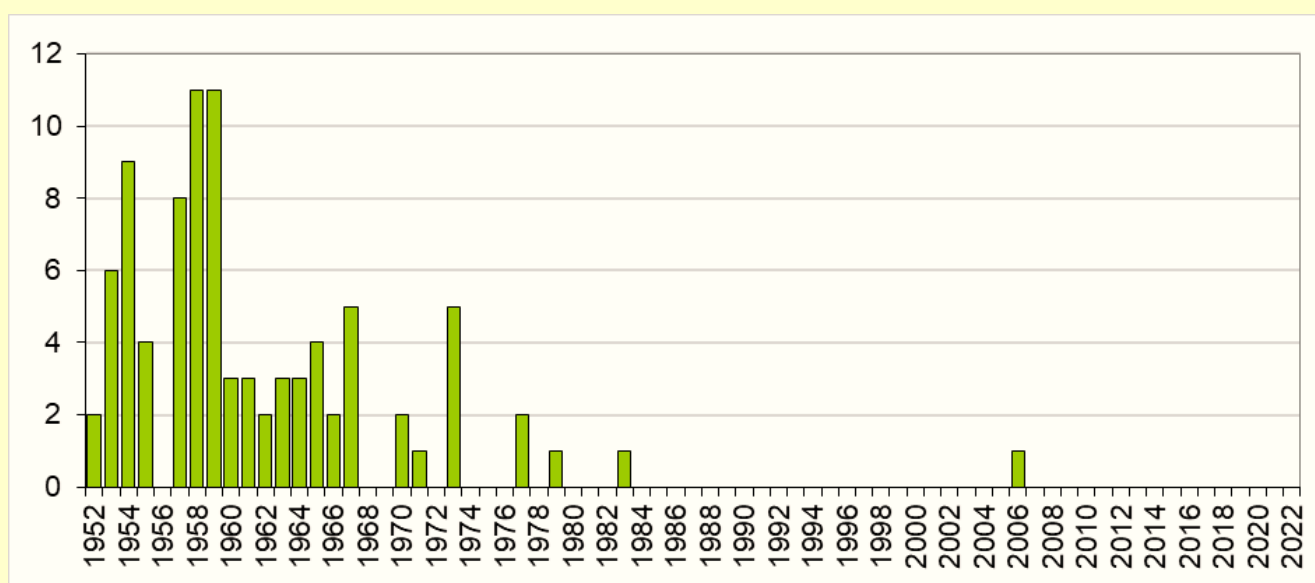


Figure 3. Cirl Bunting: annual totals

The last breeding record in Kent was at Bluebell Hill in 1958 (Taylor *et al.*, *Birds of Kent*, 1981). From the late 1960s, records were all on single dates and most were in autumn or winter. There was a noteworthy group of five feeding with other buntings at Headcorn on 23rd December 1973, but otherwise all were single birds. An adult male at Conyer on 18th February 1979 and a male at Conningbrook on 2nd January 1983 seemed to be the last – but over twenty years later a singing male was at Dungeness on 5th May 2006. That bird could well have been from continental stock which would suggest that recolonisation from there is not impossible. Western European populations declined in the twentieth century but have more recently experienced some increases (BirdLife International).

We don’t know why the decline in Britain took place. Agricultural change including the ploughing of pastures in the war may have contributed, but the severe winters of 1940 and 1947 won’t have helped. Cirl Bunting is essentially a southern European species and it’s not surprising that the area in Britain to have retained them when others were lost was the mild coastal fringes of south Devon. It could be that the species has come and gone from Britain over the centuries. It was, in fact, not mentioned in literature before the end of the eighteenth century (Sitters, *British Birds* 75: 105-108).

The seasonal pattern of post-1952 records seems fairly random (Figure 4). The high total for early January is an artefact, because of several birds described as ‘present in winter’ in the 1950s being given a notional date of 1st January.

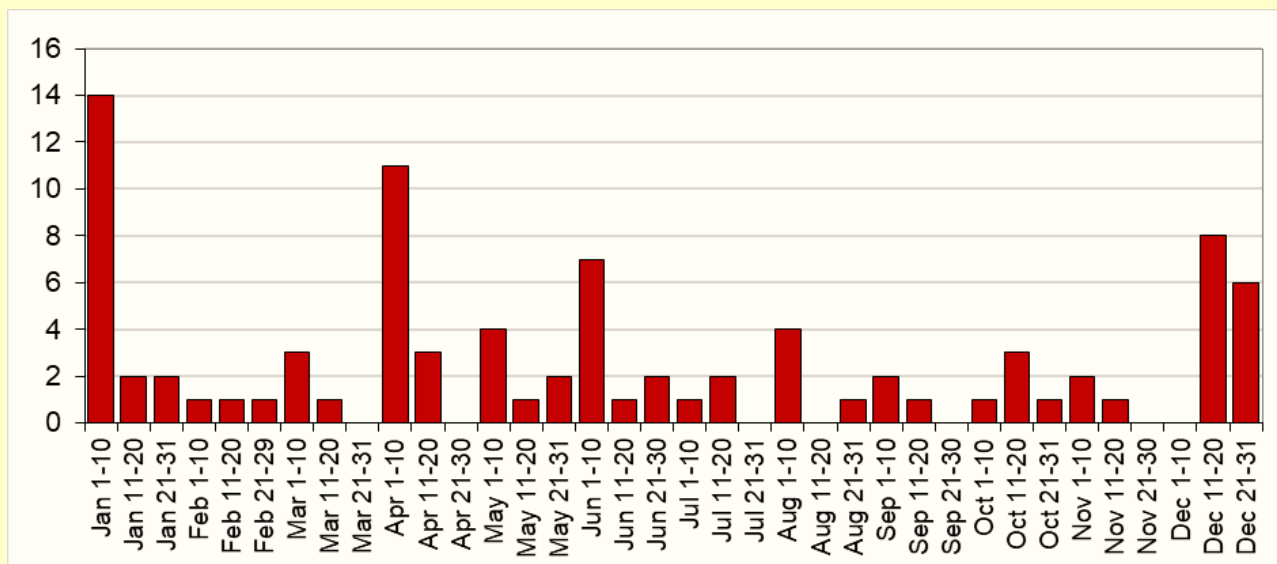


Figure 4. Gull Bunting: seasonal pattern of occurrence, 1952-2022

Little Bunting



Little Bunting by Barry Wright

Little Buntings breed in north-east Europe and into Siberia, and winter in south Asia. It is a scarce migrant along the British east coast, but usually most frequent in the north, notably in Shetland. It remains a rarity in Kent, with only thirteen records.

The first was an adult male trapped by the bird-catchers of the Dover cliffs on 16th November 1907 (*British Birds* 1: 291). The next was one seen by H G Alexander at Dungeness on 14th October 1914. This was accepted by Harrison (*Birds of Kent*, 1953) but omitted without explanation by Taylor *et al.* (*Birds of Kent*, 1981). I have not been able to check the original report, in the *Hastings and East Sussex Naturalist*, but some years ago I did ask Don Taylor why it was left out. He could not remember, and I wonder if it was not merely an oversight. I am continuing to include the record until someone shows why it is unreliable.

The remaining eleven individuals occurred mainly in the years from 1956 to 2013, with one later one in 2020 (see below); all thirteen are listed below. There have been a couple in the north Kent marshes and one inland; most have been along the east and south Kent coasts.

Dover	16th November 1907	Adult male, caught on Dover cliffs
Dungeness	24th October 1914	Male, seen
Cliffe	28th October 1956	Immature, seen
Dungeness	29th April 1990	Adult, trapped and ringed
Sandwich Bay	9th October 1991	Immature, trapped and ringed
St Margaret's Bay	29th September 1993	One seen, South Foreland valley
Bockhill	23rd April 1998	One seen, and briefly sang
Bockhill	14th October 2001	One seen
Littlestone	16th November 2003	One seen
Dungeness	23rd April 2008	Singing male seen, then flew NW
Sandwich Bay	30th April-5th May 2012	One, trapped and ringed on first date
Oare Marshes	28th November 2013	One seen
Marden	30th December 2020	One trapped and ringed; retrapped at the same site on 11th March 2023

I wouldn't usually bother with a chart showing the seasonal pattern of occurrence for a species this rare, but have done here, to emphasise the remarkable coincidence of the spring records: all four of the first sightings in the eight days from 23rd to 30th April.

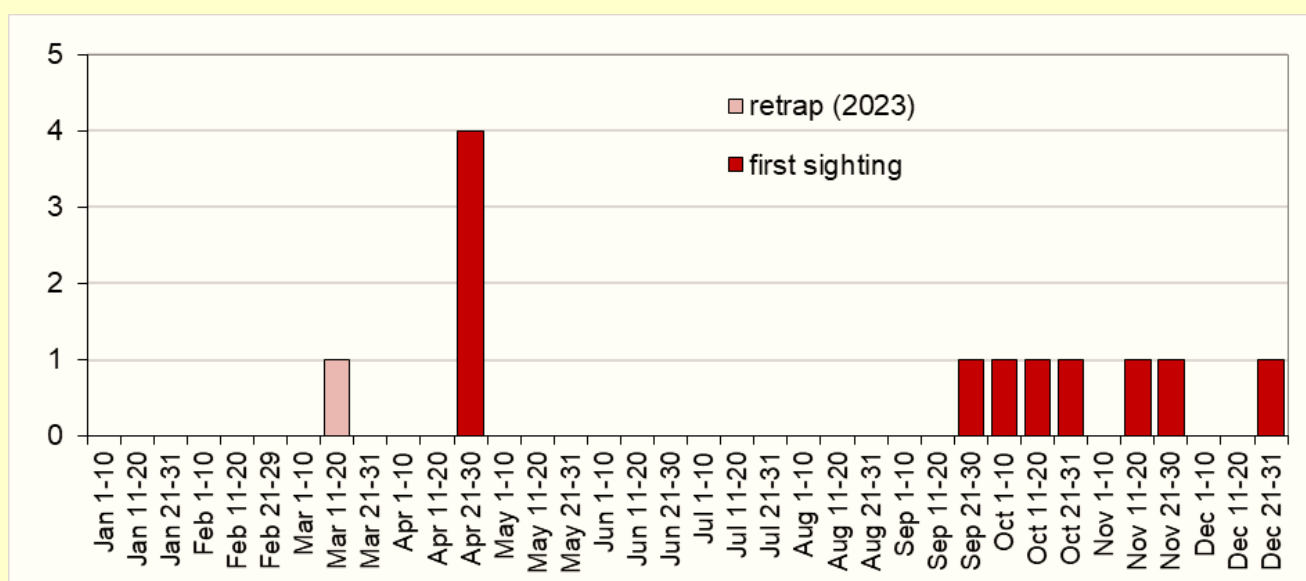


Figure 5. Little Bunting: seasonal pattern of occurrence, 1907-2022

The most recent record is the most remarkable one; I'll only give brief details here as a full report should be published elsewhere in due course. One was trapped and ringed near Marden in December 2020 and retrapped there in March 2023. Where had it been in the meantime...?

Yellow-browed Bunting



Yellow-browed Bunting Sandwich Bay by Steve Reynaert

The Yellow-browed Bunting is the most recent addition to the Kent list among the buntings:

Sandwich Bay	10th October 2022	First-year male, trapped and ringed
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Descriptions of the bird being caught, and photographs, can easily be found online, for example on the Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory and Bird Guides websites.

Rustic Bunting



Rustic Bunting, Seasalter by Marc Heath

The first Rustic Bunting in Kent was seen by Mr and Mrs Hori at Shellness on 9th April 1962. John Hori was a stalwart of Kent birding in the 1950s, 1960s and beyond. He was for a time one of the KOS area recorders and, perhaps most importantly, undertook studies of the breeding biology of Shelducks on Sheppey in the early 1960s, with repeat investigations in the 1980s.

Rustic Buntings breed in northern forests from Scandinavia east to the Bering Strait, and winter mainly in China, Korea and Japan. With that eastward movement for the winter, it has always been a rarity in Britain (though it did briefly come off the list of species considered by BBRC during 2006-2014). The population in the European part of its range is thought to have declined by more than 50% since 1980 (BirdLife International) and it's suspected that trend also applies further east. Logging of forests may be one cause, but agricultural intensification and large-scale trapping on wintering grounds are thought also to be important factors.

Since the first, there have been six more records, though only one was in the last thirty years. One was at Dungeness, and remarkably one far inland, found at Wierton Hill Farm by Don Taylor and Bob Bland, but most have occurred at locations across northern Kent, from Northward Hill to Thanet.

Shellness, Sheppey	9th April 1962	One seen
Northward Hill	2nd June 1983	Adult male seen
Dungeness	19th-20th October 1983	Immature male, trapped on the 19th
Muswell Manor, Sheppey	5th-6th October 1984	One seen
Port Regis, Kingsgate	25th-28th October 1990	First-winter bird seen
Boughton Monchelsea	19th-28th March 1993	First-winter bird, Wierton Hill Farm
Seasalter	21st November 2010	One seen on golf course

In common with those in other parts of Britain, the Kent records are divided roughly evenly between autumn and spring. The numbers found here, in common with elsewhere in the south and east, are far smaller than, say, the Northern Isles or the Isles of Scilly – though perhaps more occur but aren't found.

Yellow-breasted Bunting



Yellow-breasted Bunting, Mongolia by Barry Wright

This is another species that breeds in northern forests and migrates south-east through China to south-east Asia. It has always been a rarity in Britain, and there has been a strong northerly bias to their distribution here, with the majority found in Shetland. In contrast to Rustic Bunting, almost all British records have been in autumn.

The only example to have been found in Kent was one seen by Dave Gilbert at Margate on 3rd October 1984. It was during a spell marked by eastern arrivals, including a Rustic Bunting at Shellness two days later and a Booted Warbler found at Foreness one day after that.

Margate	3rd October 1984	One seen
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It is currently unlikely that another one will be found in Kent. The species has suffered a catastrophic decline, thought to have been caused by the intensive trapping of huge flocks that occur (or used to occur) in farmland and reedbeds in China and elsewhere while on passage or in wintering grounds. The problem has been exacerbated by habitat deterioration in both breeding and wintering areas. BirdLife International now classifies Yellow-breasted Bunting as Critically Endangered. In the late twentieth century, there were usually several records in Britain each year; that has ceased to be the case and only four have been recorded from 2010 onwards.

Black-headed Bunting



Black-headed Bunting, Sheppey by Mike McDonnell

Black-headed Buntings breed in scrubby low-intensity farmland in south-east Europe and south-west Asia, moving east to winter in India. The European populations experienced substantial declines in the late twentieth century, attributed to agricultural change.

Somewhat surprisingly, given that distribution, south-east England has rather few records (and the areas with most are Shetland, the Isles of Scilly, Pembrokeshire and Highland Scotland). Kent's first was eventually found, by David Davenport and others, near New Downs Farm at Sandwich Bay on 1st June 1972. It was a male, as have been all county records, and most in Britain; females and first-year birds are not so eye-catching and perhaps get overlooked, plus there is the difficulty in distinguishing them from Red-headed Buntings of similar age/sex.

Sandwich Bay	1st June 1972	Adult male seen
Reculver	19th August 1973	Male seen
Lydd	14th May 1983	Male seen
Dungeness	27th June 1987	Adult male seen
Dungeness	30th May 1993	Male seen
Capel Fleet	30th June-6th July 1997	Singing male present

The 1983 record is allocated to Lydd in the Kent Bird Report but to Dungeness by British Birds Rarities Committee. I have not made great efforts to discover which is correct, but my guess would be that it's the KBR. A further minor discrepancy is that the 1987 record is said by the KBR to have been present on 26th-27th June but BBRC (whose details by convention take priority) have only the 27th.

Red-headed Bunting



Red-headed Bunting, Uzbekistan by Barry Wright

By one of those coincidences, as I started to prepare this article, the British Birds Rarities Committee publicised its review of post-1990 British records of Red-headed Bunting. For many years, the general assumption has been that all examples of this central Asian species were escaped from captivity. However, the number imported to Britain declined markedly after India restricted wild bird exports in 1982, and there have always been suspicions that some are genuine vagrants.

I have managed to find nineteen records, all of single birds, for Kent, and most if not all of them are likely to have been escapes. It's possible there are more but I am still unable to access the KOS record cards, on which details were stored until computerisation took over in the 1990s. The first was a male that was trapped near Dover some time in 1900 (Ticehurst, *History of the Birds of Kent*, 1909). I suppose it's just possible that was a vagrant – presumably cage-bird imports were fewer then than later in the century. But there are unhelpful aspects to the record: though apparently trapped in 1900 it was not until 1905 that the specimen (which so far as I know isn't still in existence) reached Dr A G Butler who reported it to Ticehurst.

Dr Arthur Butler, who lived from 1844 to 1925, worked on birds and other groups at the British Museum. He must have been a competent ornithologist and published widely, including bird notes in *The Zoologist*. He was also an aviculturalist, which might be thought to raise a question over his acquisition of a Red-headed Bunting specimen; however, those were different times, of course, and keeping birds and shooting birds were activities pursued by many people that today would be classed as birders.

The majority of the Kent records of Red-headed Bunting fall during the period 1953-1978, as shown in Figure 6. Of the nineteen birds, fourteen were males, one (at Dungeness in May 1975) was a female, and the other four are not specified in Kent Bird Reports.

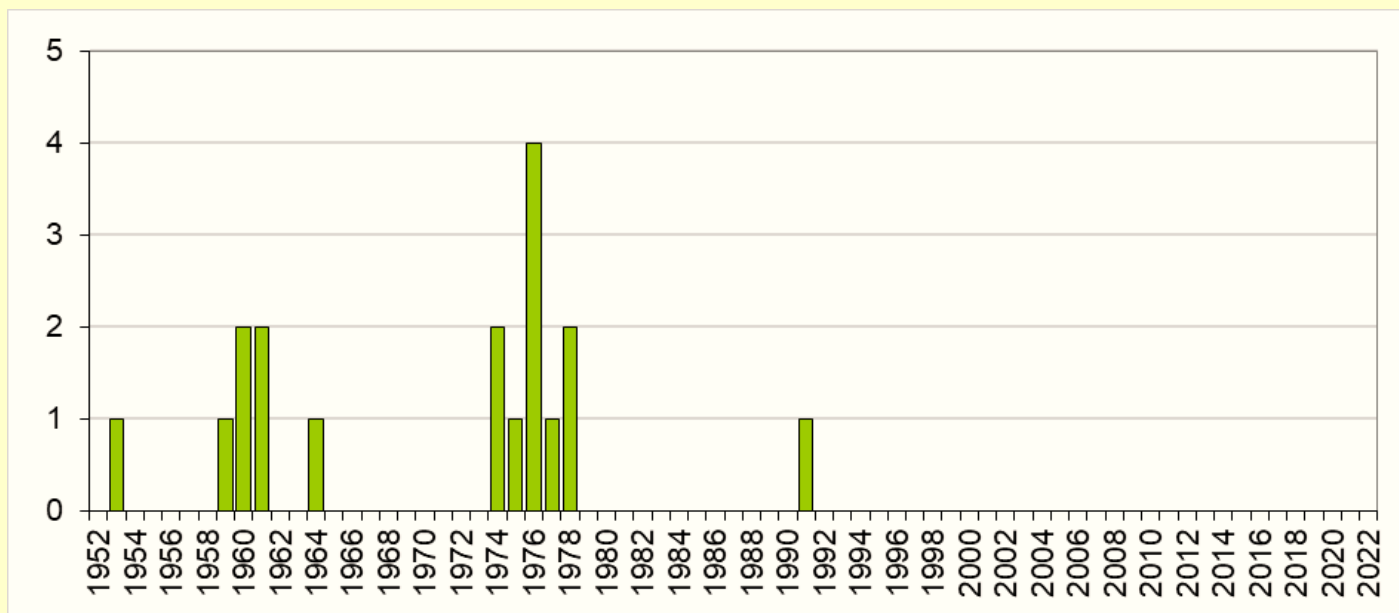


Figure 6. Red-headed Bunting: annual totals, 1952-2022

Eight of these buntings were seen at Dungeness, another eight scattered around the coast between Sheerness and Dover (including three in the Bishopstone/Reculver area), and three were elsewhere (at Gillingham, Ashford and Tonbridge).

The seasonal pattern (Figure 7) is similar to that of a real scarce passage migrant, with occurrence restricted to spring (March to early June) and autumn (mid August to mid September). It's close to Broad-billed Sandpiper or Subalpine Warbler, for example. That may seem odd for birds escaping captivity but, while I have not analysed this in great detail, I suspect that it is common to other escapees.

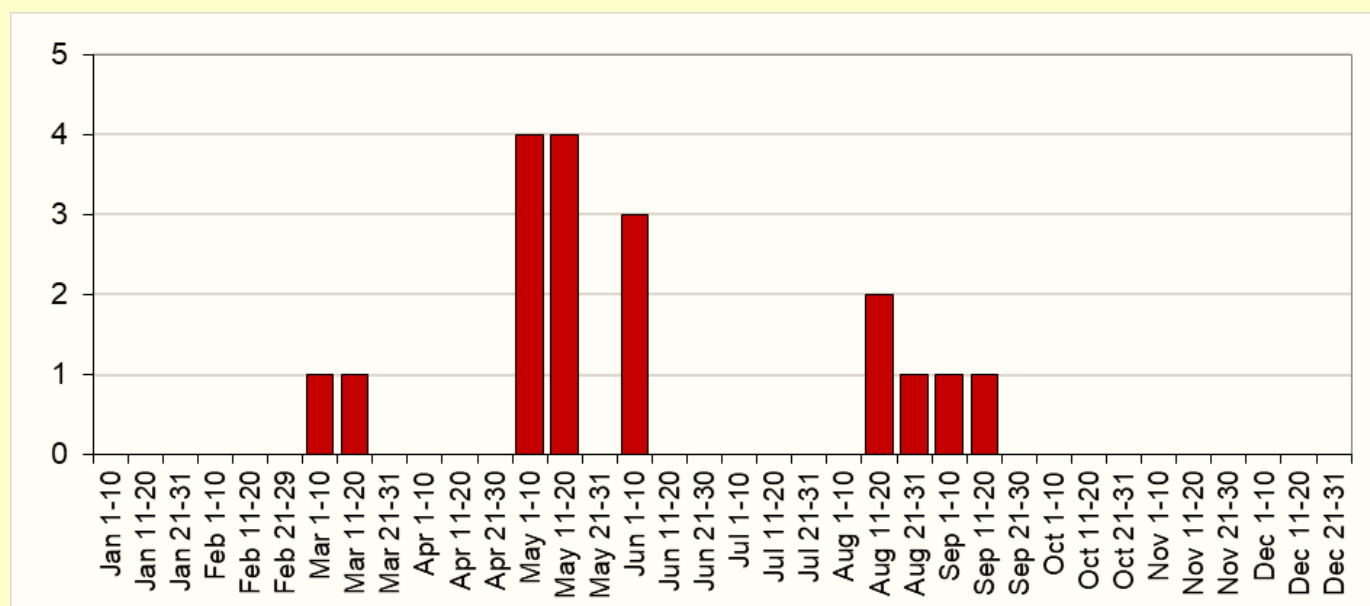


Figure 7. Red-headed Bunting: seasonal pattern of occurrence, 1952-2022

I have very quickly looked at Budgerigar records from 1977 to 2021, using Kent Bird Reports as my source. Not all mentions are given precise dates and I was able to use only 57 out of about 75 reports in the analysis. The result (Figure 8) shows occurrence, if not restricted to passage periods, at least biased towards them. About 72% of records fall in April-May and July-September combined.

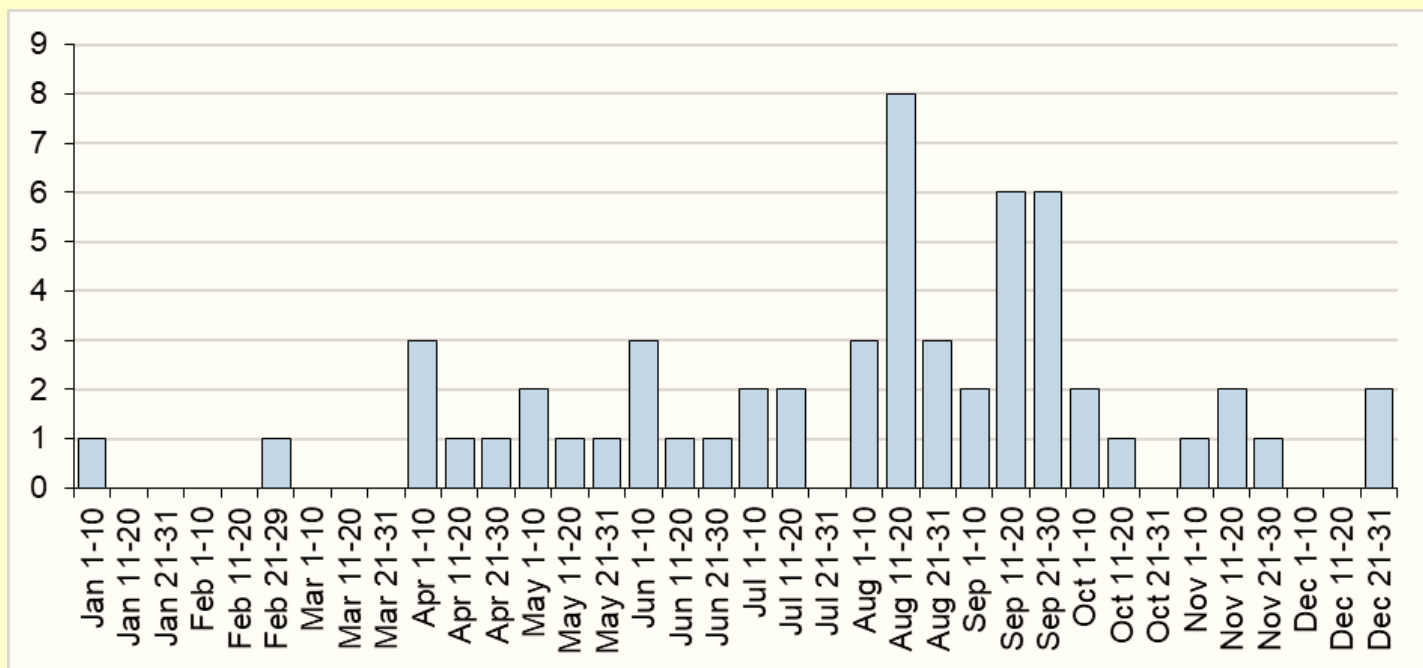


Figure 8. Budgerigar: seasonal pattern of occurrence, 1977-2021

If you think that Red-headed Buntings are genuine vagrants, then maybe Budgerigars are too, and worth a notch on your telescope. But if they are really escaped cagebirds, why do the seasonal patterns mimic those of wild birds? One possibility is that cagebirds retain some migratory instinct and may be more likely to appear at coastal watchpoints in spring and autumn. Another is that there are more birders out looking for something different at those times. Isolating bird population trends, whether seasonal or annual, from variations derived from changing observer numbers and patterns of coverage is not easy and perhaps often impossible.

Cinnamon-breasted Bunting

I have traced only one other Kent record of buntings believed to refer to escaped individuals. On 2nd October 1963, two birds were seen at Sandwich Bay and one of them trapped and ringed. They were named as Chestnut Rock Buntings in the 1963 Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory Report, though later (in ringing totals lists) that was changed to African Rock Bunting. I've never looked for a description of the birds nor seen a scientific name given to them, but assume they were what is now known as Cinnamon-breasted Buntings *Emberiza tahapisi*, a species of sub-Saharan Africa. I may be wrong.

Andrew Henderson

EDITORIAL COMMENT

'Well, I think he was wrong!'

When I read Andrew's account of the "Cinnamon-breasted Bunting" I realised that, since that record, new research has resulted in the taxon being split into two species. The bulk of the range occupied by what was the nominate race *Emberiza tahapisi tahapisi* is south of the equator and extends into East Africa. However, the race found north of the equator was *Emberiza tahapisi goslingi*, found from Senegambia to the Sudan. There are several plumage and adaptive differences which justify the split, and as neither taxon appears to be migratory it is apparent that the bird recorded in Kent was an escape from captivity.

In the 1960's and 70's Senegal was the source of most African cage birds, with over 338,000 exported to the USA alone in 1970-71 (Inskipp 1974). This strongly suggests that in modern terms *Emberiza tahapisi* was not the taxon concerned. I mentioned this to Andrew, so he contacted Steffan Walton at SBBO who was able to find the original type-written description in the observatory files.

Reading the description and checking relevant sources (Borrow & Demey; Byers, Curson & Olsson) does seem to confirm the view that the bird in question was *Emberiza goslingi* **Gosling's Bunting** and not *Emberiza tahapisi* **Cinnamon-breasted Bunting**.



Gosling's Bunting , Emberiza goslingi, (Wiki commons)

Key features for identification are as follows (details in italics are verbatim from the description).

Dark grey (or black) head streaked white, with indistinct crown stripe. Lores, moustachial stripe and ear coverts black, ear coverts with central white streaks. Supercilium whitish before and behind the eye. (This supports the view that it was an adult male as females and young birds of both taxa are markedly paler on these areas).

*Above and below the moustachial streak and under the chin whitish-grey and 'hoary' in appearance. Throat grey, continuing round sides of neck to below nape forming a pale collar. Upper breast grey of throat. (Clearly the dark grey black crown, ear coverts and facial markings indicate an adult bird, hence the contrasting pale grey throat and upper breast rules out *tahapisi* as in that taxon these areas are as dark as the head in adult males).*



Cinnamon-breasted Bunting Emberiza tahapisi by Warwick Tarboton

I rather doubt there is any kind of photograph existing of this bird, but it occurred to me that as Dennis Harle was one of the finders, he probably made some sketches/paintings. Steffan informed me that there is a good haul of Dennis Harle's artwork at the Observatory and eventually his efforts turned up a Dennis sketch which, despite its limits, clearly shows the bright rufous edges to all the remiges, supporting the record as Gosling's Bunting.



Notebook sketch by Dennis Harle. (SBBO archive)

This whole episode highlights the value of a good description of a rare or unknown species kept on file and is a testament to the expertise and diligence of these two observers. My thanks to Steffan Walton for his assistance in finding the original description and the sketch.

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Inskipp T (1974) All heaven in a rage. RSPB

Byers C, Curson J & Olsson U (1995) Buntings & Sparrows. Pica Press

Borrow N & Demey R (2001) Birds of Western Africa. Pica Press

Norman McCanch

OBITUARY - Peter James Oliver OBE FCA

Peter Oliver had many friends and associates in the worlds of conservation and ornithology but because of his modesty and private nature his name might not be familiar to many. To those who did know him however he was a great friend and someone you could always turn to for sound advice. He loved the North Kent Marshes became a very knowledgeable ornithologist, was a meticulous record keeper and shared a deep concern for conservation.

He was born on 22nd July 1939 at Forest Hill, London and was educated at St Dunstan's College Catford and on leaving school he took up employment to train as a Chartered Accountant. Sadly his father died when he was only 17. After qualifying in 1963 he pursued a successful accountancy career in London acquiring exceptional financial and administrative skills which he was able to use to great effect in the cause of conservation. It was his financial and administrative skills that were used to great effect in the rescue of 'British Birds' in 2000, where, according to Richard Chandler, Peter effectively saved it from closure. At that time 'British Birds' had been published continuously every month for 93 years and thanks to Peter's efforts its future was secured, and this will remain a lasting legacy. Earlier he had been invited to join the Board of 'West Palearctic Birds 1993 Ltd' at a time when difficulties arose in financing that publication. At the successful completion of the ninth volume of 'Birds of the Western Palearctic' he is acknowledged

to have “kept firm control of the finances besides providing a balanced and knowledgeable input to the Board’s discussions”.

Peter was a keen birdwatcher and it was his mother who introduced him to the joy of watching and identifying birds in his garden. Later he explored Dulwich Park and Sydenham Woods. But I think it was the book ‘The Birds of the North Kent Marshes’ by Gillham and Homes published in 1950 that might well have been the spur that caused him to expand his horizons there as they were easily accessible by rail. He tells how once during the winter, on an early trip with a school friend, they got lost on the marshes as it rapidly got dark and arrived back home extremely late. After this early adventure, Peter came to love the North Kent Marshes and this developed into a lifelong interest in its wildlife, carefully recording his observations and noting the changes that were taking place over the years. Peter’s sister Jean rightly described the North Kent Marshes as Peter’s birdwatching home.

It was there where I first met him, we were both in our late teens studying for our respective professions whilst in employment and a day out birdwatching was a precious commodity. We very soon became great friends, sometimes meeting for lunch in one of the Dickensian eating houses still to be found in those days in the City of London. We also attended the evening meetings of the London Natural History Society and in course of time the meetings of the British Ornithologists Union, British Ornithologists Club and the little known ‘37 Club’.

In those early days we regularly visited the marshes bordering the Hoo peninsula which were accessible by a local steam railway running from Gravesend. This was at a time when very few people had cars and the marshes had become a magnet for birdwatchers from the London area using ‘The Birds of the North Kent Marshes’ as their vade-mecum. Gravesend Station was a regular meeting place of like-minded souls waiting for the local train on a Saturday morning, which led to many friendships that lasted a lifetime. We had great times exploring the marshes, often in the winter when it always seemed to be misty and damp, crawling over the wet grass with our brass and glass telescopes trying to get close enough to the flock of White-fronted Geese to find the odd Bean Goose. We were very lucky to have greater freedom in those days, being able to wander over the marshes more or less where we pleased, getting to know the local farmers and shepherds as well as the local pub with its hot pasties and bar billiards. Peter was great fun to be with and had a sense of humour always ready for a good laugh. There was great excitement one day in 1958 when we found three Avocet chicks feeding in a tidal creek with their parents. Thinking we had ‘discovered’ the first breeding Avocet in Kent since the nineteenth century we soon discovered the nest had been a well-kept secret, guarded by the RSPB who had organised a 24 hour watch until the eggs hatched. We did however find the first nest of Black-tailed Godwit on the marshes in 1968, which unfortunately failed, possibly due to the fact it contained seven eggs.

Obtaining a license to ring birds enabled Peter to become involved in ringing gulls and terns in the spring, Linnets and Goldfinches in the late summer and thrushes in the winter. Catching wading birds at night at a tidal roost on the Isle of Sheppey in Kent was a rewarding but exhausting occupation, particularly after a week at work in London. Seeing the luminous plankton on the incoming tide, the Northern Lights and a receiving a night visitation by the police with a dog team after some-one had reported illegal immigrants coming ashore, made some nights memorable. Apart from recoveries from West Africa etc. much was learnt about the autumn movements of waders in and around the Medway estuary. Latterly he took an interest in the breeding harriers on the North Kent Marshes, particularly on the Isle of Sheppey, where he monitored the position of the Marsh Harrier nests so that the young could be ringed and wing-tagged. He also co-ordinated the counts at the winter roost sites of both Marsh and Hen Harriers in North Kent and published various papers in the Kent Bird Reports in connection with these activities, he also wrote the raptor section in the Kent Bird Reports from 1996 -2016

In 1991 Peter wrote and self-published ‘Bird Watching on the North Kent Marshes’, a book which chronicled the change in status over the years since Gillham and Homes published their account in 1950. He was never obsessed with chasing rarities but as wildfowl were one of his favourite group of birds it was fitting that one day in 1967, when we were out on the marshes, he picked out a drake American Black Duck. However in his book it hardly gets a mention, being listed as ‘accidental’ without a date, stating that the “accidental occurrence of a species is of little relevance to the ornithology of an area”. He then, somewhat mischievously admitted, “but for virtually all birdwatchers - - there is an undoubted spice and excitement in seeing a rarity, especially in an area watched regularly and even more if you find it yourself”. Some years later this eventually became the first record for Great Britain and Northern Ireland and is now permanently etched in the annals of British ornithology with his name attached to it, and it still remains the only record for Kent.

Interest in migration led Peter to become involved with Phil Redman, Tony Gibbs and John Naylor in the establishment of a Bird Observatory at cap Gris-Nez, opposite Dover, to link in with the Bird Observatories in the UK. The use of a wartime blockhouse on top of the cliffs and using the French ringing scheme were arranged, with visitors from Britain providing cover during the autumn. Night migrants were attracted by the revolving beam lighthouse and visible migration by day could be impressive particularly in October, with sea-watching being rewarding as well. Peter was there one weekend in October 1963 when a Pallas’s Warbler was found which was officially accepted as a first record for France. Since the demise of the cap Gris-Nez Bird Observatory, L’association “Station Ornithologique du cap Gris-Nez” has been established and become a popular seawatching locality for birdwatchers from northern France, Belgium and Holland. It is with some satisfaction that ‘Le seawatch’ and ‘seawatcheurs’ have been added to the French vocabulary because of the attraction at cap Gris-Nez. Peter also loved visiting sea bird breeding colonies and was particularly fond of Skokholm which he first visited in his younger days, handling a Manx Shearwater for the

first time. In later tears I joined him several times and one day after ringing some shearwaters the previous night, he discovered that one of the birds we had been handling was ringed on a night when he was there some 20 years previously. We were also both there in the hot summer of 1976 and were able to fulfil one of his ambitions, which was to land on Grasholm and walk up to the nesting Gannets. We last visited Skokholm together with our wives to mark his retirement from professional life.

As travel overseas became easier after the wartime restrictions and with growing affordability, exploring the wider world inevitably became tempting, bearing in mind that annual holidays in those days were limited to two weeks, or three if you were lucky. The first adventure a small group of us made involved hiring a Bedford van in 1961 and setting out on a camping trip to the Camargue and Pyrenees and this was the precursor of many more expeditions to Europe and various parts of the world before we each got married and settled down. These included areas of Europe, Morocco, Kenya, Canada, Trinidad and Tobago and India. Odd memories that come to mind include; camping on Fetlar in 1965 when the male Snowy Owl was there, meeting three figures coming out of the mist which materialised into George Waterston, Peter Conder and Bobby Tulloch; being lucky to gain free access on the Coto Donana in our Land rover; finding a pair of Demoiselle Cranes in the Atlas mountains of Morocco; camping by Varanger Fjord in north Norway; watching the migration of raptors over the Bosphorus in September 1972, clocking-up 3,000 Lesser Spotted Eagles in one day; camping in the wild miles away from anywhere in Kenya experiencing the African dawn chorus; finding Siberian White Cranes in India and meeting Dr Salim Ali. Later after his marriage to Mary in 1981 Peter travelled to Chile, Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands, the Seychelles and an expedition to the Arctic where another of his ambitions to sit among Little Auks at a breeding colony was fulfilled. Collectively we saw some wonderful things and had many experiences which would be impossible to replicate today.

Peter was a member of both the London natural History Society and the Kent Ornithological Society becoming a member of the London Natural History Society's Bird Research committee and Chairman of their Records Committee. Having been a methodical record keeper over the years as well as travelling widely he was acutely aware of all the changes to the environment that had occurred during his lifetime, and it concerned him greatly, in particular the effect this was having to the everyday birds in the areas with which he was familiar. He commented often to me, as he did quite recently, that we were so lucky to have been able to do and see the things that we did when we did. He was determined to highlight the needs of conservation and raise its profile and I imagine he hoped that by publishing his information and raising awareness it might have some effect on policy makers. Not being a policy maker himself he was able to use his financial and administrative skills to great effect in the cause of conservation by voluntarily offering his time and energy in supporting charities whose business it was to influence policy makers. He was a Council Member of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds from 1983 and Treasurer from 1986 – 1991. He became Trustee and Treasurer of the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust from 1996 – 1999 when the WWT were not only embarking on a major upgrade of the Slimbridge Headquarters but also on the formation of the London Wetlands Centre. The charity had to take great care not to overextend its financial reach and the three years that Peter remained as Treasurer came at a pivotal time in this regard, and it was no small thanks to Peter's support and influence that both the Slimbridge Millennium Conservation Centre and the London Wetland Centre were both duly opened to great acclaim in 2000. He was a Trustee of the Woodland Trust from 1996 – 2005 becoming Chair of the Board in 1998 when the Trust were delivering their millennium project 'Woods on your Doorstep' and acquiring new sites in England Scotland and Northern Ireland. He was a Trustee of the British Ornithologists Union and elected Treasurer from 2007 – 2011 where he served on the Management Committee of the publication of the journal 'Ibis'. It was for service to wildlife conservation that he was awarded his OBE in 2005

Away from birdwatching, he loved music, going to Prom concerts, booking seats as soon as the programme was published, and visiting art exhibitions both of which he and Mary enjoyed doing together. Latterly he took up change-ringing at his local church.

Modesty was one of the many attributes that Peter possessed, he was never boastful about what he had done or seen or found but was always careful that, if it had relevance, it was recorded somehow. He possessed high ethical standards and I suspect that, like me, he was apolitical. He was conscious of the needs of others and with his detailed knowledge of economics could be critical of a Government's handling of the economy and the effect it had on the man in the street. The last time we had a chat, a few months ago he expressed great concern that many people in this country have now found it necessary to rely on food banks to survive and wondered what could be done about it. He was very kind and considerate to all he met, and an encouragement to others, always ready to share his knowledge of wildlife.

Since being diagnosed with Myeloma Peter remained active and positive until he finally succumbed to its various effects just before Easter this year. He is survived by his wife Mary, his sister Jean and brother-in-law Peter. Of the many tributes that have been received since the announcement of his death are, a congenial and engaging personality, a true gentleman, fair, considerate, intelligent and astute, and one final very apt comment - another good one gone. He will be missed and his family, friends and all who had the privilege of coming into contact with him, can say thank-you – you really were a 'good egg'.

Chris Wheeler

KENT BIRD SIGHTINGS FOR JULY-AUGUST 2023 - 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 in this newsletter.*

WEATHER

July was an unsettled month, often cool, dull, windy and with a lot of rain. The jet stream generally shifted much further south than in June with the weather often taking on an autumnal character. Throughout the month a succession of frontal systems made regular west-to-east progress across the UK. There was a brief very warm spell from the 7th-9th when temperatures touched 30°C. There was 51.75mm of rain at Bishopstone during the month.

August was a rather mixed and unsettled month, continuing the theme of July. Low pressure systems mostly dominated the weather with any brief spells of high pressure that brought settled weather confined to the south-east. There was only one period of really hot weather from the 10th-12th when the temperature reached the mid to high 20s. Any periods of dry weather were fairly brief with 47.75mm of rain falling at Bishopstone.

PARTRIDGE TO WILDFOWL

A **Quail** was recorded calling on the night of July 19th at Sandwich Bay and one was heard at South Foreland on July 24th and 25th. Single birds were also heard at Littlestone-on-Sea between July 31st and Aug 4th and at Lydd on Aug 6th.

During these two months as many as 195 **Egyptian Geese** were seen at Bough Beech on Aug 27th with lesser numbers seen at Cliffe Pools, Eastwell Park, Higham Bight, DBO, Conningbrook, Sandwich Bay, Cliffe Pools, Hayesden GPs and Dunorlan Park.

Two **Ruddy Shelduck** flew N at Sandwich Bay on Aug 2nd, there were up to nine **Mandarins** seen at Bough Beech, Penshurst Place, Brokes Mill Farm and Nethergong during July and August and a **Red-crested Pochard** was seen at Stodmarsh on July 1st.

During July and August up to seven **Garganey** were recorded at Grove Ferry/Stodmarsh, Worth Marshes, Sandwich Bay, Sevenoaks WR, North Foreland and Dungeness RSPB.

NIGHTJAR TO WADERS

A **Black-necked Grebe** was identified at Lade on Aug 4th and summer plumaged birds were seen on the sea off Reculver Towers on Aug 17th and at Lade on the 28th.



Stone Curlew by Terry Laws

A **Stone-curlew** was seen at Worth Marshes on Aug 10th with another at Cliffe Pools between Aug 22nd and 31st.

Two of the **BLACK-WINGED STILTS** that arrived at Worth Marshes in May remained to breed successfully and raised four young. Birds were last seen in the area on Aug 3rd. Originally three pairs bred and nested but two pairs deserted at a late stage for no apparent reason.



Black-winged Stilt family by Russ Blackman

An immature **KENTISH PLOVER** was found at Pegwell Bay on July 26th with two juveniles there on Aug 4th whilst a **Dotterel** flew in off the sea at Foreness on Aug 24th.

From July 16th, as many as three **Curlew Sandpipers** were seen at Oare Marshes, Elmley, Cliffe Pools, Leysdown-on-Sea and Pegwell Bay. A **Temminck's Stint** was identified at Dungeness RSPB on July 25th whilst the first **Purple Sandpiper** of the autumn was seen at Foreness on Aug 22nd.



Little Stint by Mark Chidwick

After a **Little Stint** was seen at Dungeness RSPB on July 12th and 13th up to three birds were seen at Cliffe Pools, Elmley, Sandwich Bay, Worth Marshes, Reculver, Oare Marshes and Pegwell Bay.



Pectoral Sandpiper by Peter Maton

A **Pectoral Sandpiper** was identified at Oare Marshes on Aug 2nd and remained there until the 4th.

A **phalarope sp.** flew offshore at Sandwich Bay on Aug 7th and an adult **MARSH SANDPIPER** spent the day at Dungeness RSPB on July 8th.



Marsh Sandpiper by Russ Blackman

As many as eight **Wood Sandpipers** were seen at Dungeness RSPB, DBO, Reculver Marshes, Worth Marshes, Sandwich Bay, Bockhill, Elmley, Northward Hill, Oare Marshes, Swalecliffe, Cliffe Pools, Capel Fleet, Foreness, Higham Marshes and Grove Ferry/Stodmarsh.

During these two months one or two **Spotted Redshanks** were recorded from Dungeness RSPB, Elmley, Oare Marshes, Sandwich Bay, Reculver, Stodmarsh, Stuart and Cliffe Pools.

GULLS TO SHEARWATERS

An adult **Sabine's Gull** was reported flying S at North Foreland on Aug 3rd.

The regularly returning **BONAPARTE'S GULL** arrived at Oare Marshes for its eleventh year on July 6th and remained there until the end of August.

During July and August single **Little Gulls** were seen at DBO, Minnis Bay, North Foreland, Foreness, Pegwell Bay, Sandwich Bay and Romney Marsh.

Up to 14 **Yellow-legged Gulls** were recorded at Higham Bight, DBO, Foreness, Deal, Walmer Beach, Copt Point, Samphire Hoe, Bockhill, Reculver, Sandwich Bay, Lower Hope Point, Cliffe Pools, Shellness and Pegwell Bay with single **Caspian Gulls** seen at Dungeness, Pegwell Bay, South Foreland and Walmer.

CASPIAN TERNS were seen at North Foreland on July 8th, at Deal on the July 25th and flying W at Herne Bay and then on to Seasalter on Aug 6th.

A **Roseate Tern** was roosting at Pegwell Bay on July 14th with two there on the July 22nd and 25th, one on the 28th and 31st and Aug 1st and three on the July 30th. Single birds were also seen at Plumpudding on July 31st, DBO on Aug 2nd and Pegwell Bay on Aug 24th and 26th.

A moulting, adult **White-winged Black Tern** seen at Riverside CP on the evening of Aug 24th eventually flew upriver and a juvenile flew up the River Stour at Pegwell Bay on the 26th.

As many as 45 **Black Terns** were seen at DBO, Dungeness RSPB, Minnis Bay, Oare Marshes, Pegwell Bay, Sandwich Bay, Swalecliffe, Tankerton, Reculver, Conningbrook, Eastwell Lake, Conyer, South Foreland, Oare Marshes, Bockhill, Cliffe Pools, Foreness, North Foreland, Shellness and Bough Beech. On the thundery afternoon of Aug 24th, 63 were seen at Oare Marshes, 50 at Riverside CP, 30 at Sandwich Bay, 28 at Pegwell Bay and six at Tankerton.

Great Skuas were seen at North Foreland on Aug 6th and 31st, a **Pomarine Skua** was reported flying N at the same site on Aug 3rd whilst up to three **Arctic Skuas** were recorded during these two months at DBO, Swalecliffe, Minnis Bay, Shellness, Sandwich Bay, Foreness, North Foreland and St Margarets-at-Cliffe.

A first summer **Long-tailed Skua** flew N at Walmer Beach on July 16th whilst two were reported flying S at North Foreland on Aug 17th.

A **Storm Petrel** was reported flying S at North Foreland on July 22nd and single **Cory's Shearwaters** flew E at Foreness on Aug 3rd and S at North Foreland on Aug 29th.

A **Sooty Shearwater** was reported flying S at North Foreland on July 11th and single birds were also reported from there on July 9th and 23rd and Aug 1st and 2nd, 30th with two on Aug 27th.

A **Manx Shearwater** flew past Walmer Beach on July 23rd with two at DBO on the July 23rd and Aug 2nd and one on July 24th. One also flew past Foreness and North Foreland on Aug 3rd with one at North Foreland on the 25th.

A **Balearic Shearwater** flew W at DBO on July 1st with two seen there on Aug 2nd and 21st, three on the 14th and 25th and 20 on the 20th whilst one also flew N at Walmer on Aug 3rd. On Aug 29th, 21 flew W at DBO and the next day there were single birds at DBO and North Foreland and on the last day of the month two flew E at Swalecliffe.

WHITE STORK TO WOODPECKERS

A **White Stork** flew over Canterbury on July 23rd and was seen at Shalmsford Street between the 24th and 26th. On Aug 15th a large flock of birds was seen over the south coast with 32 counted at Langdon Cliffs and 19 at Folkestone.



Black Stork by Terry Laws

A juvenile **BLACK STORK** was discovered at Pegwell Bay on the evening of Aug 11th before it flew up the River Stour. It was then seen at a number of locations as it thermalled over east Kent on the 12th whilst on the 13th it was back at Sandwich Bay in the morning before it was seen later flying high over Tankerton. It was then seen at Capel Fleet from Aug 14th-19th.

Single **Shags** were seen at Kingsdown on July 23rd and at Samphire Hoe on the 24th and in August at DBO and Bockhill.

A **Glossy Ibis** was seen at Dungeness RSPB during July with two there from the 28th and throughout August. One was also seen at Lade on July 23rd.

During July and August up to 13 **Spoonbills** were seen at Grove Ferry/Stodmarsh, Pegwell Bay, Capel Fleet, Worth Marshes, Cliffe Pools, Elmley, Oare Marshes, North Foreland, Kingsgate and Sandwich Bay.

Single **Bitterns** were recorded from Grove Ferry/Stodmarsh, Dungeness RSPB, Lade and Elmley.

In July one or two **Cattle Egret** were seen at Dungeness RSPB and there were four at Northward Hill on the 9th and seven at Nethergong on the 13th. In August as many as 10 birds were seen at Dungeness RSPB, Conningbrook GPs and Worth Marshes.

Up to three **Great White Egrets** were seen at Capel Fleet, Bough Beech, Dungeness RSPB, Worth Marshes, Reculver and Grove Ferry/Stodmarsh.

An **Osprey** flew SW at Samphire Hoe on July 10th whilst one flew along the cliffs at Dover on Aug 8th after this, birds were recorded from Stodmarsh, Oare Marshes, St Margarets-at-Cliffe, Langdon Cliffs, Deadman's Island, Pean Hill and Nethergong.

During these two months single **Honey Buzzards** were recorded from the following coastal sites; Pegwell Bay, St Margarets-at-Cliffe, Samphire Hoe, South Foreland, Yantlet Creek, Hythe, Walmer, Langdon Hole, Dover and Kingsdown.

A juvenile **Hen Harrier** was seen at South Foreland on Aug 10th with ring-tails at Dungeness RSPB on Aug 19th and Langdon Bay on the 22nd.

Up to seven **Red Kites** were reported from Gravesend, Bough Beech, North Foreland, Bockhill, Pegwell Bay, East Malling, Swalecliffe, Reculver and Canterbury.

Single **Black Kites** flew S at Conyer on July 4th and over Bough Beech on Aug 29th.

OWLS TO HIRUNDINES

Single **Long-eared Owls** were seen in **North** and **East** whilst a **Short-eared Owl** flew in off the sea at Bockhill on July 22nd and in August birds were recorded from Walmer, Foreness and Plumpudding.

A **Hoopoe** was seen at Warden Point early on the morning of Aug 28th and single **Bee-eaters** flew SW at Pegwell Bay on Aug 13th and were seen at West Hougham on the 14th and at Bockhill on the 21st.

A **Wryneck** was seen at North Foreland on Aug 17th and there was another at Dungeness between Aug 25th and the 29th.

Single **Merlins** flew N across the Swale at Oare Marshes and over DBO on Aug 27th and a juvenile **Red-backed Shrike** was ringed at Sandwich Bay on Aug 18th.

WARBLERS TO WHEATEARS

Single **Wood Warblers** were seen at Sandwich Bay on July 28th and Aug 1st, at Margate on Aug 1st, Kingsdown Lees and Foreness on Aug 9th, Marden on the 21st, South Foreland and North Foreland on the 22nd and Langdon Hole on the 27th.

An **Icterine Warbler** was ringed at Sandwich Bay on Aug 19th and one was seen at Bockhill on the 23rd.

The first **Grasshopper Warbler** of the autumn was seen at Bockhill on July 23rd after which one or two birds were recorded from Langdon Cliffs, Chislet Marshes, DBO, Sandwich Bay, Little Farthingloe, Shuart, Foreness, Oare Marshes, Herne Bay, Abbotcliffe and Bockhill.

During August one or two **Firecrests** were seen at Bough Beech, Reculver and Dunorlan Park.



Pied Flycatcher by Andy Tsylor

The first **Pied Flycatchers** of the autumn were seen at DBO and Foreness on Aug 4th after which up to four birds were seen at DBO, Leysdown-on-Sea, Oare Marshes, Reculver Marshes, Nethergong, Birchington, Sandwich Bay, Langdon Cliffs, Shuart, Bockhill, North Foreland, Foreness, Cliftonville and Swalecliffe.

Up to five **Black Redstarts** were seen at Samphire Hoe, Bockhill, Abbotscliffe, DBO, Ramsgate, Lydd, North Foreland, Walmer, Hythe, Folkestone, Margate, South Foreland and Sandwich Bay.

SPARROWS TO BUNTINGS

As many as five **Crossbills** were recorded from DBO, Hemsted Forest, Weddington, Lyminge, Sandwich Bay and East Peckham.

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, P. Beraet, Bockhill Birders, R. Bonsor, Bough Beech (per A. Ford), E. Brown, D. Bunney, 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, D. Ellingworth, A. Farrar, D. Faulkener, Folkestone and Hythe Birds (per I. Roberts), 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, J. Massey, P. Maton, 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. Searle, 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 2022 and 2023 KOS Rarities have recently been accepted by the KOS Rarities Panel based on published photos or from descriptions submitted.

2022

2 Black-winged Stilts	Shorne and Higham	April 15th-19th
Black Kite	DBO	May 9th
Red-rumped Swallow	Sevenoaks WR	May 10th
Red-breasted Flycatcher	DBO	October 6th
Red-rumped Swallow	Pegwell Bay	November 18th

2023

Red-footed Falcon (first summer male)	Dungeness RSPB	June 20th-22nd
Hooded Crow	Graveney	June 3rd
Rose-coloured Starling (adult)	site in West Kent	May 20th
2 Pectoral Sandpipers (the flew N)	Cliffe Pools	May 11th
Red-rumped Swallow	South Foreland	March 19th

Fifty Years Ago

Baird's Sandpiper



Baird's Sandpiper by Archibald Thorburn (PDI)

Baird's Sandpiper: A single bird was seen at Bough Beech on Sept. 22nd and 23rd (BBI, CSI) and constituted the second Kent record.

KBR1973

Meet the Member – Nicole Khan



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

I've been a member of the KOS Conservation and Survey committee since 2018, where I have assisted with helping to organise surveys such as the KOS Turtle Dove survey in 2021 and the KOS Nightingale survey this year. I sit on the committee in both a work capacity as well as an interested individual passionate about conservation.

2. What first drew you into the world of birds?

I grew up in urban East London and remember seeing a Blue Tit fly over the garden as a child. At this time the only birds I ever really saw were House Sparrows and I thought all British birds were dull and boring (sadly most of the House Sparrows are gone from my parent's area and I certainly don't think they are a dull bird anymore). Seeing something as brightly coloured as a Blue Tit captivated me. I remember convincing my parents to buy me a children's book on birds and flicking through the pages and being able to identify the Blue Tit. It got me hooked, and I wanted to see as many different species as I could.

3. How are you involved with birds in Kent?

I work for the RSPB as the Turtle Dove Advisor for Kent, working with farmers and landowners to deliver habitat for this species and other farmland birds. I carry out woodland bird surveys in RSPB Blean Woods and try to make the time to help with specific KOS species surveys. I consider myself a birder and RSPB Blean Woods and the farmland around Blean is my local patch. Some of my local birding highlights include Goshawk, Long-eared Owl, Honey Buzzard, Osprey and one of the Isle of Wight White-tailed Eagles.

4. What has been your biggest birding blunder?

Before moving to Kent I was the Warden at RSPB Rainham Marshes and developed a bit of a reputation for missing rare birds that turned up on the reserve. It got to the stage when the local birders would ask for my holiday dates in advance so they could make sure they turned up on the reserve those days as something good would likely be about! I was on a bus in Italy when one of the local birders sent me a text asking where I was as there was a Baillon's Crake on the reserve! After my 9 day holiday I managed to see the bird on the last day before it disappeared – my unlucky strike was finally broken.

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

Try and find yourself your own birdwatching patch and try to meet the birders in your local area – building that network is great for knowledge sharing. This could be somewhere on your doorstep or perhaps a nature reserve. You could even look to join the KOS field trips or contact your local RSPB group who will also have a programme of walks and events.

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

The things I like to have with me are my trusty Zeiss binoculars and more recently my new bridge camera. I also have a small notebook that I carry with me for keeping a list of birds seen. I usually adorn a hat (baseball in the summer and a fluffy bobble hat in the winter).

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

The key is connecting habitats and working at a landscape scale. This is the strategy for our Turtle Dove work in Kent as part of the Operation Turtle Dove project, working with farmers, landowners and partners to deliver habitat in important landscape areas across Kent.

Making more people aware is essential to influence change and something I see the rewards of with my work with Turtle Doves. I have worked with many landowners over the years – some I would say have not been aware of the importance of their land for Turtle Doves, but by developing relationships, sharing knowledge and inspiring others, you can influence positive conservation interventions.

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

One of the projects that really inspires me is Jane Goodall's Roots & Shoots program. It's a global youth-led program which is evolving in over 60 different countries, the aim of Roots & Shoots is to help young people to feel empowered within their communities, creating a holistic network for young people to share ideas that have a positive effect on the environment. Also I think the work of Black2Nature, founded by Mya-Rose Craig is equally as inspiring. This work concentrates on better access to nature for young people from ethnic minority communities. The project runs nature camps and activities as well as campaigning to make the nature conservation sector more ethnically diverse.



Turtle Dove