



House Sparrows by Wayne Stock

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KOS Contacts – Committee Members details are available on the society website

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Back in the old days we had proper winters, crisp cold mornings bright with the glitter of frost or howling blizzards which left the countryside heaped with snow. Of course it could be tough on the birds, but birders often found rewards in the flocks of finches, thrushes and tits at garden feeders, or gangs of wildfowl, geese, swans and waders on our wetlands. We could even hope for a few more exotic visitors, a Great Grey Shrike or trilling tribe of Waxwings.

This winter is perhaps a portent of things to come, mild and unbelievably wet, grey and generally a bit miserable. My garden feeders have been largely deserted except for my local sparrows and the regular tits, of which Long-tailed tits are a constant delight. My local lowland lakes and marshes have been depressingly full of water although we have had some impressive sea passage and as I write numbers of wild geese are beginning to make their presence known.

Of course, we have had Waxwings, fast becoming the bird of the moment in place of Short-eared Owls and Kingfishers to many people. Sadly, we are very short of those old winter favourites, especially Snow Buntings and Shore Larks, although Pegwell has hosted a pair of Twite, the first for several years, but far short of the zingy, twanging flocks that graced the saltmarsh in winters past.

Mid-January is well short of the end of winter so who knows what the next couple of months will bring!

Good birding

Norman

News and announcements

Avian Influenza

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.*

References, links and further reading:

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

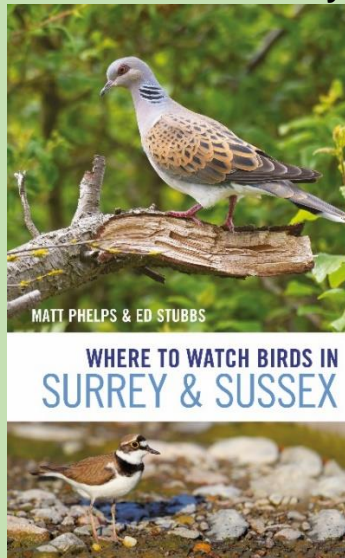
Defra: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/report-dead-wild-birds>

<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>

Where to Watch Birds in Surrey & Sussex



This book is due to be published very soon and a full review will appear in the next newsletter. In the meantime members can obtain it at a discount using code: KENT30 on the website at (www.bloomsbury.com) entering the code at the checkout . A book including Kent is due to be published later in the summer.

Annual General Meeting

This year's AGM will be again held via zoom at 7.30pm on Wednesday 10th April 2024.
More detail will be included in the next newsletter

Committee vacancy: - Honorary Secretary

After 15 years on the KOS Executive Committee, Brendan Ryan is retiring from the committee at the AGM in April. This creates a vacancy for the position of Honorary Secretary.

The role involves arranging and minuting executive committee and general meetings and maintaining the non-ornithological records of the Society. As Honorary Secretary you will be involved in the discussions and decisions of the committee which is responsible for steering and developing the Society.

If you are interested in joining the committee in this rewarding role and would like more information please contact Brendan Ryan brendan.ryan@yahoo.co.uk or Andre Farrar andre.farrar57@gmail.com

Obituary Notice –We are saddened to learn that **David Johnson** an ex-treasurer of the KOS, author of Wild Orchids of Kent, passionate birder, and lover of the natural world passed away recently. Our condolences to his family.

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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:

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

Articles

SPARROWS

After the marathon on ducks in the last newsletter, I thought something shorter would be suitable for this one. I chose the sparrows and, thinking there wouldn't be that much to say about House and Tree, decided to add Dunnock a.k.a. Hedge Sparrow as an honorary sparrow, and Alpine Accentor while I was at it. Of course, it's ended up much longer than expected partly because, when you start looking at a species' records, there is always something of interest.

Quite a few people have helped with data provision and queries. Robin Mace as usual provided me with all the computerised records, all 147,000 of them. Chris Hindle, Chris Powell and Keith Privett have tried to uncover the truth about an odd Tree Sparrow record. Phil Redman and John Hollyer described their meetings with George Took. Data from the BTO Common Birds Census and the BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey were downloaded from the BTO website (see Massiminoet *al.*, 2023, *Bird Trends 2021*, *BTO Research Report 732*).

Tree Sparrow



Tree Sparrow by Mark Chidwick

Tree Sparrow is often lumped with other seedeaters as one of those species that has declined precipitously as a result of agricultural intensification. The *Kent Breeding Bird Atlas 2008-2013* is not alone at suggesting that is a likely reason. But it may not be that simple; it has been a scarce species in the past as well. Ticehurst (*History of the Birds of Kent*, 1909) described it as “a somewhat rare bird ... extremely local in distribution”. That could almost be a summary of its present status, except that the greatest concentration then was in the northwest, in what is now Bromley borough.

Harrison (*Birds of Kent*, 1953) recorded that the species had “increased enormously since 1909”, all around the lower lying land of north and east Kent but also in the south and further inland. He reported, thanks to the observations of Norman Ticehurst himself, the colonisation of Romney Marsh in the 1920s and 1930s, which area is now the core of the Kent distribution. The increase continued to reach maximum abundance in the 1960s and 1970s, after which a huge and rapid decline began.

Large population fluctuations have been experienced nationally but there do seem to have been regional variations. In Britain as a whole (see for example Brown & Grice, *Birds in England*, 2005), there is thought to have been an increase which reached a peak in the early twentieth century (and thus contrary to the situation in Kent), followed by decline between 1930 and 1950 after which the large increase started.

When the Common Birds Census (CBC) began in the 1960s, Tree Sparrow numbers were at a high point and, it seems, the only way was down. Figure 1 shows the longer term trend from CBC and BBS, and Figure 2 one based on the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) alone. Note the different x-axis scales. The overall change in England between 1967 and 2020 was a decrease of 96%. The gaps in the charts for 2001 and 2020 in these and later similar charts are the result of poor coverage in Foot & Mouth and Covid years.

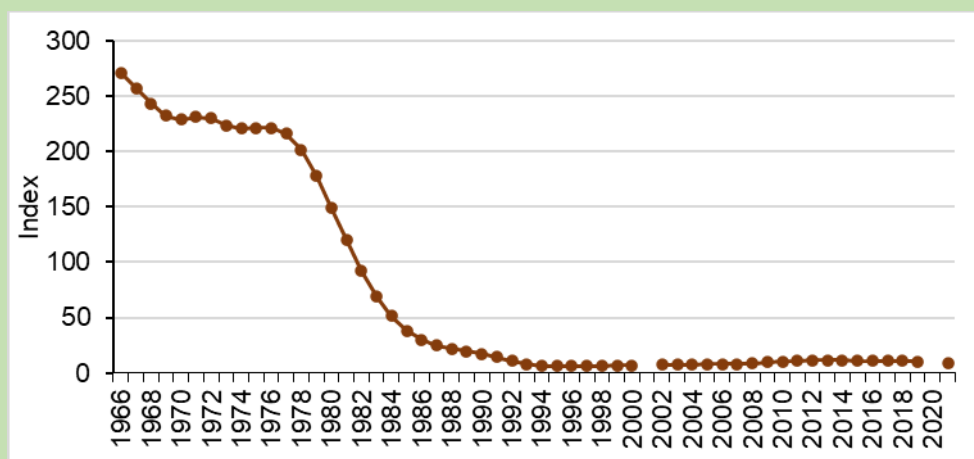


Figure 1. Tree Sparrow: CBC/BBS population trend for England, 1966-2021

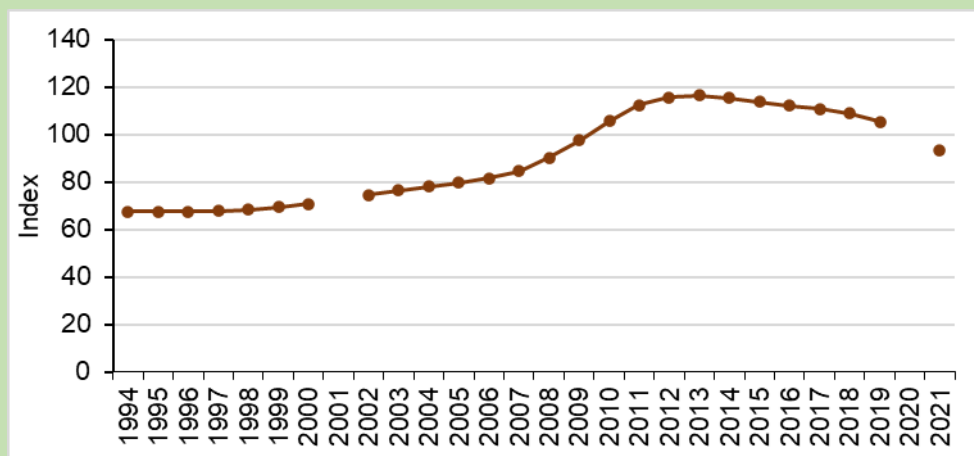


Figure 2. Tree Sparrow: BBS population trend for England, 1994-2021

From a Kentish perspective, it's hard to equate Figure 2, which shows a substantial rise between 1994 and 2012, with the difficulty of finding the species in the county. But while they have remained at a very low level in Kent for over twenty years, there are parts of England where the species is doing quite well.

Figure 3 shows the annual maxima in each recording area in Kent for years from 1957 onwards. Prior to 1957, the KBRs make only general statements about status. The chart is complete for the computerised period from 2000 onwards, for which I've used the KOS database, but earlier years may be incomplete as material was extracted from Kent Bird Reports which tend to mention only the largest counts. Don't worry too much about the detail, it's the basic pattern that is important, and that wouldn't change even if I had all records.

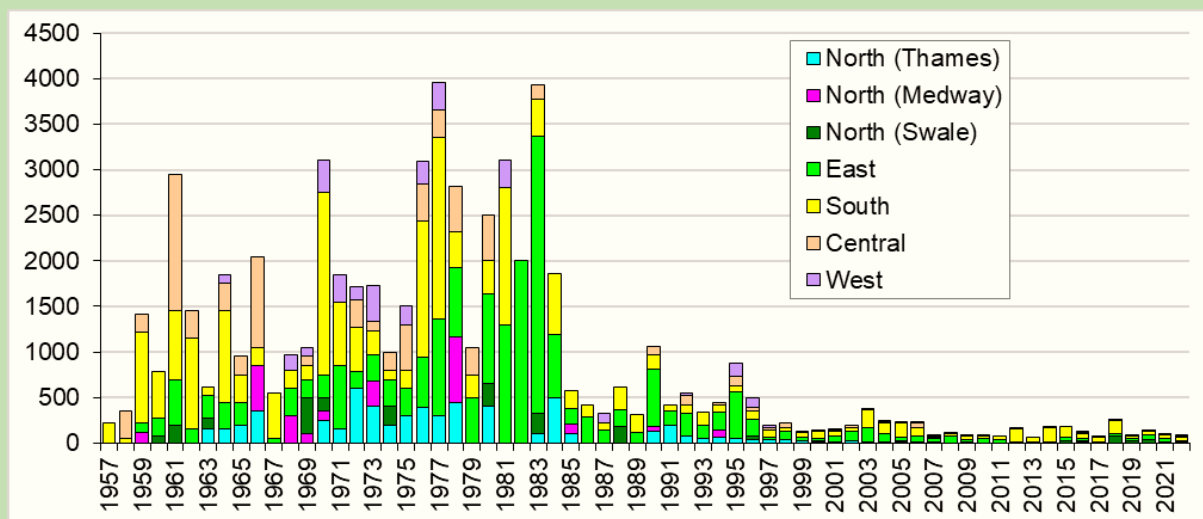


Figure 3. Tree Sparrow: annual area maxima in Kent, 1957-2021

There is a suggestion in Figure 3 that numbers were increasing during 1957-1980. That may be true, but the trend will have been influenced by the increasing numbers of observers and especially the coverage of such locations as South Foreland where large-scale visible passage could be seen. It is, though, clear that after 1984 there was an abrupt and major decline in numbers of passage birds being seen. Counts did remain high by current standards for about ten years, but they were a fraction of what had gone before. The average peak passage count during 1975-1984 was 1,317 whereas during 1985-1994 it was 235. During 2013-2022 it was 29.

In Table 1, I have listed all counts above certain thresholds. Because of the declining numbers being seen, the thresholds have been reduced for successive periods, as indicated. I have separated passage counts from others. Most large passage counts have been in October with a few in September and November. However, I have included one unusual record of birds flying E at Reculver in late December 1977 about which I not been able to find any more detail (I see there were also 1,000 at Dungeness on 13th December that year). Note that I have set thresholds so as to have roughly the same number of records (passage & others) in each period, and that has meant that passage thresholds have reduced more rapidly than the others.

Table 1. Large Tree Sparrow counts, 1952-2022		
Passage counts are separated from others (see text) and the thresholds for inclusion reduce as the population size has declined.		
Year	1952-1984, Passage >1000	1952-1984, Others>500
1961		1500 Wormshill Dec 10th;
1966		1000 Stockbury March;
1970	2000 Dungeness Oct 20th;	
1971		700 Elmstone September-October;
1972		600 Swanscombe February;
1976	1500 Dungeness Oct 10th;	
1977	2000 Dungeness Nov 13th; 1060 Reculver Dec 21st;	
1978		720 Chetney Marshes January;
1981	1300 South Foreland Oct 10th; 1500 Dungeness Oct 11th;	
1982	2000 Cliffsend, Pegwell Oct 10th;	
1983	3045 South Foreland Oct 17th;	
1984		519 Sandwich Bay Feb 8th;
	1985-1996, Passage >200	1985-1996, Others >175
1985		200 Lydd Jan 12th;
1986	293 Foreness Oct 7th; 229 South Foreland Oct 23rd;	
1988	250 Dungeness Oct 18th;	180 Harty-Shellness Feb 21st;
1990	635 South Foreland Oct 29th& 310 Oct 31st;	

1991		200 Cliffe Jan 27th;
1992	230 Foreness Oct 14th& 240 Oct 24th;	200 Sandwich Bay February;
1994		200 Sandwich Bay February;
1995		500 Ash Levels Feb 15th& 450 Oct 17th;
	1997-2022, Passage >80	1997-2022, Others>125
2003		150 Worth Marshes Mar 14th; 200 Walland Marsh Feb 2nd;
2004	87 Bockhill Oct 26th;	
2005	120 Dungeness Oct 23rd;	150 Lydd Oct 23rd;
2008	81 Sandwich Bay Oct 14th;	
2012		150 Dengemarsh Feb 25th;
2014		160 Walland Marsh Aug 19th;
2018		150 Walland Marsh Aug 17th;

Until 1990, most of the annual peak counts fell during autumn, and typically were of visible migration at places such as Dungeness, South Foreland and Foreness. That has changed and, while annual peaks still often occur in autumn, they can occur any time between August and March, and are generally of concentrations of birds at good feeding areas close to breeding locations. Figure 4 shows the annual pattern of reported counts in recent years. The largest concentrations are of post-breeding flocks and some passage birds in September-November, with moderately high numbers reported through the winter, but then smaller counts in spring and summer when birds are more dispersed. Incidentally, the chart is a bit jagged because quite a lot of high counts in the past are recorded, without specific dates, as monthly peaks, which I allocated to the 15th of the month.

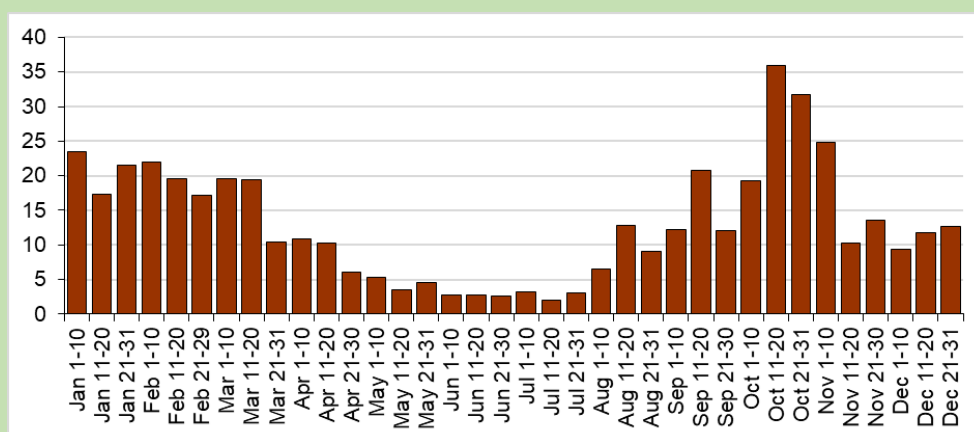


Figure 4. Tree Sparrow: seasonal pattern of counts, 2000-2022

There is little sign of any spring passage in Figure 4, but that of course covers the period when even autumn movements were smaller and less frequent. In earlier years, some spring movement was seen, notably during 1976-1978. The largest counts were 129 W at Allhallows on 27th March 1976, 403 W there and 100 in off the sea at Foreness on 13th April 1977, 150 at Dungeness on 18th May 1978 and 170 at Dungeness on 1st June 1978. It's interesting that the Dungeness peaks are so much later in the year than the others, but what that means is anyone's guess.

British Tree Sparrows are fairly sedentary though there is clearly some dispersive movement in autumn (BTO, *Migration Atlas*, 2002). Some birds in mainland European populations do move northeast to southwest through the near-continent for the winter (see <https://migrationatlas.org>) and those perhaps contribute (or contributed) to the passage seen at times in east and south Kent. There are a few ringing recoveries to or from outside Kent, but the furthest in Britain are no more distant than Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Buckinghamshire. The five overseas recoveries include two from just across the channel at Cap Gris Nez, and single Kent-ringed birds to France, Belgium and the Netherlands, the last being the most distant of all, at 209 km. One more local recovery I noticed, of a bird ringed at Beachy Head on 13th October 1976 and caught again at Dungeness on 15th October 1977 hints at regular movement through south coast promontories.

It seems fairly certain that some of the visible movements are true migration, but it's difficult to distinguish that from dispersive or wandering movements of local birds. Tree Sparrow populations throughout Europe are believed to have undergone moderate decline between 1980 and 2013 (*BirdLife International factsheet*), and thus the decline in passage counts in Kent could be associated with reduced numbers migrating, but equally it might simply be that the decline in England has meant that fewer are available to contribute to dispersive movements here. We simply don't know.

And why have they declined? We don't know that either. Attributing it to agricultural changes, with fewer weed seeds and spilt grain to maintain the birds over the winter – something thought responsible for the declines of many seedeaters – is easy to do but (while it could well be a contributory factor) there isn't hard evidence to support it. And the previous history of steep increase (when other seedeaters were not) is puzzling. In summer, Tree Sparrows do like to feed themselves and their young on insects gathered in reeds and other wetland vegetation, so drying conditions or reduced insect numbers could be involved, but they are not alone in that. They are very adaptable in nest site selection, using holes in trees and buildings, including occupied ones, and they even built open nests in hedges when numbers were high, so it's unlikely that that is a limiting factor.

In the *Kent Breeding Bird Atlas 2008-2013*, the map (reproduced in Figure 5) illustrates the scale of the range reduction between the previous atlas in 1998-94 and 2008-13 and, remember, the decline was already underway by 1990. The number of tetrads with probable or confirmed breeding had fallen from 548 in 1967-73 to 293 in 1988-94 and 37 in 2008-13.

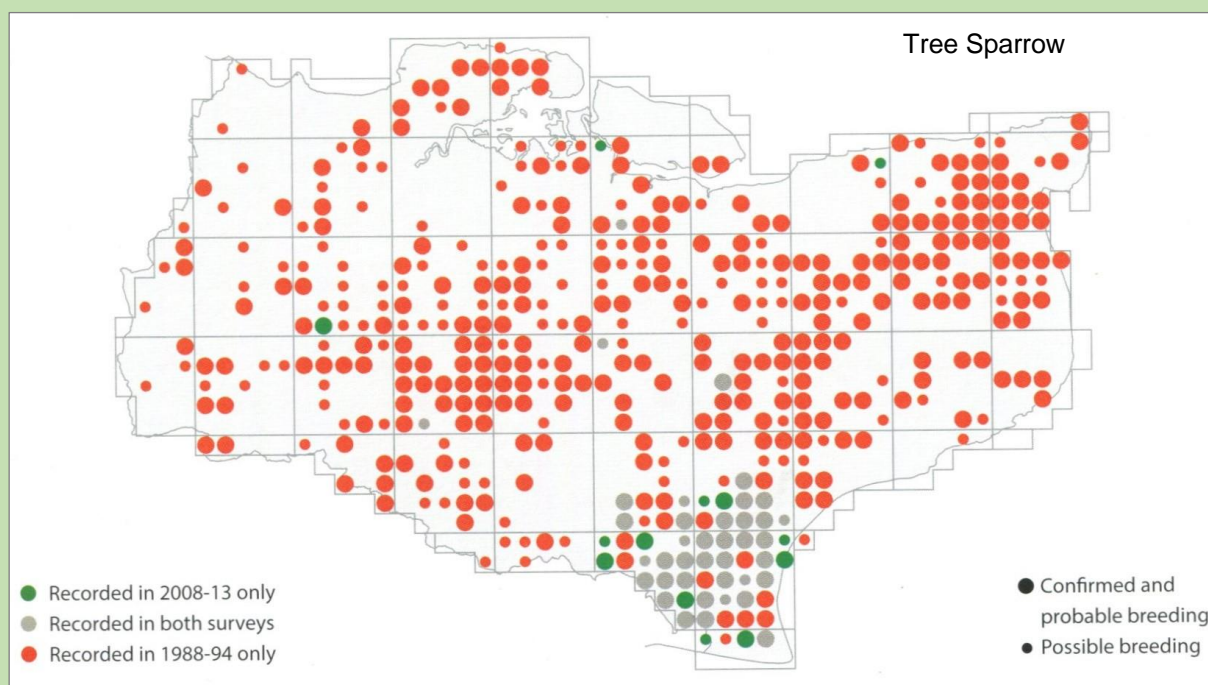


Figure 5. Tree Sparrow: breeding distribution

Few records of breeding evidence are submitted annually now, and I am not sure how things have changed between the last atlas and the present, but there's no evidence to suggest things have improved. The population size was estimated to be in the range 200-500 pairs in 2008-13; the odd pair here or there can be easy to miss but reports submitted to KOS in the past few years suggest the total is now no more than 100 pairs.

House Sparrow



Male House Sparrow by Terry Laws

Ticehurst (*History of the Birds of Kent*, 1909): “the House-Sparrow is abundant throughout the county, both in town and country...”. Harrison (*Birds of Kent*, 1953): “this bird is generally distributed throughout the county [and] very abundant around all our farmsteads, where its activities are viewed with great disfavour”. Poor little sparrows, they withstood the intense persecution of those days only to be caught by the more insidious effects of human activity in our time.

The House Sparrow's distribution in Kent is still near continuous at the level of the tetrad (2x2 km square). The number of tetrads with probable or confirmed breeding had fallen from 981 (out of the total of 1,001) in 1988-94 only to 921 in 2008-13 – but both of those figures were above the 914 during 1967-73, a low value probably explained by the tendency of observers then to ignore a species that was almost universal and abundant. It is important to remember, though, that distribution can remain widespread despite population size falling. Only when colonies are lost entirely from a tetrad does range reduction start to be apparent.

Across England as a whole, House Sparrow numbers were falling from at least 1976 (the year in which an index was first possible in the Common Birds Census) and quite possibly for a few years before then (Figure 6). The trend bottomed out around 2000 but the population has remained at that low level since then. The decrease between 1977 and 2020 is estimated to have been 69%, less than that for Tree Sparrow over a slightly longer period (96% during 1967-2022) but nevertheless a very big change.

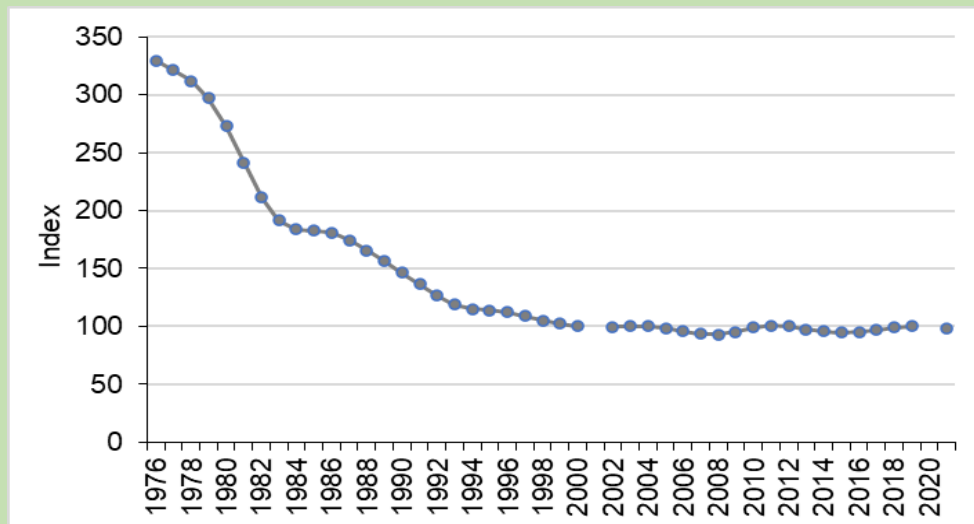


Figure 6. House Sparrow: CBC/BBS population trend for England, 1966-2021

For the Breeding Bird Survey era from 1994, an index is possible for Kent alone (Figure 7). Confidence limits are rather wide, but it appears that the decline here continued for another ten years to 2010 before levelling out.

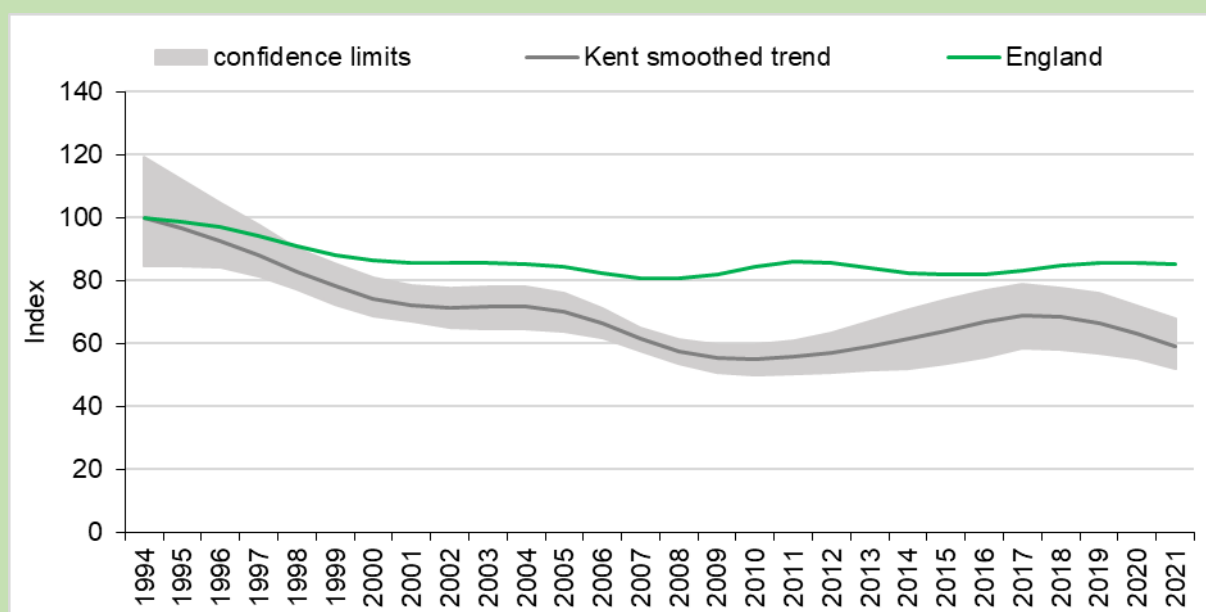


Figure 7. House Sparrow: BBS trends for Kent and England, 1994-2001

The trend of peak counts in Kent (Figure 8) follows a similar pattern to that of CBC/BBS. Prior to 1970, few counts of House Sparrow were made or reported, and this is why this chart starts in 1970, even later than that for Tree Sparrow. I have included the highest count each year (shown in dark grey) plus, when available, the second highest and third highest, shown in greys of decreasing intensities.

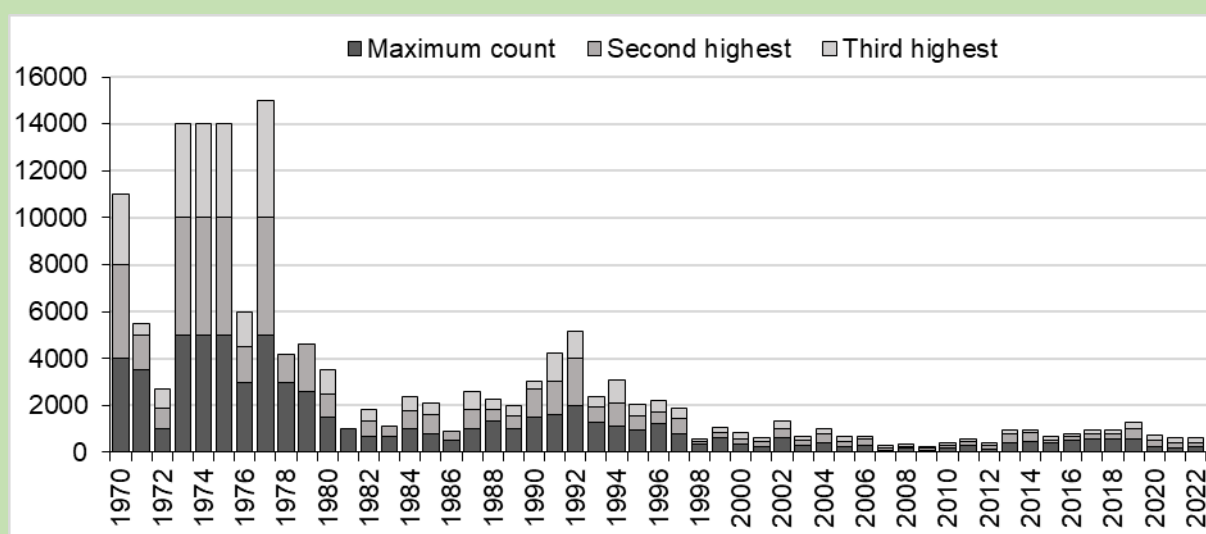


Figure 8. House Sparrow: annual peak counts in Kent, 1970-2022

To give a bit more substance to the tale of declining numbers, Table 2 lists the highest counts made over the years. As for Tree Sparrow, I have divided the whole period into three and applied reducing thresholds for inclusion in the table. As usual, there are few notable counts in the early years of the KOS, not because numbers were small but because the reports seldom mention flock sizes.

Table 2. Large House Sparrow counts, 1952-2022	
The thresholds for inclusion reduce as the population size has declined.	
Year	1952-1979, counts>2000
1961	3500 Wormshill Dec 10th;
1970	4000 Swanscombe Oct 17th; 4000 Dartford Autumn; several thousand Gravesend Dec 31st;

1971	3500 Broadstairs Autumn;
1973	5000 Dartford August & October; 4000 Dartford other months; 3000 Sandwich Bay Nov 12th& Dec 29th;
1974	5000 Dartford December; 5000 Littlebrook December; 4000 Sandwich Bay November; plus slightly smaller numbers at the same sites in other months;
1975	5000 Littlebrook January-February; 4000 Dartford January-February; 3000 Dartford Autumn;
1976	3000 Dartford July 18th;
1977	5000 Stone Marshes January-February; 5000 Dartford and Littlebrook August-September; 3000 Sole Street January;
1978	3000 Dartford Marshes December;
1979	2600 Worth Marshes Oct 28th;
	1980-1999, counts >1000
1980	1500 Dartford Marshes July;
1988	1350 Minnis Bay Aug 28th;
1990	1520 South Foreland Nov 1st;
1991	1600 Sandwich Bay Oct 16th;
1992	2000 Minnis Bay September; 2000 South Foreland late October;
1993	1300 Sandwich Bay Oct 4th;
1994	1100 South Foreland Sept 15th;
1996	1200 Reculver Oct 12th;
	2000-2022, counts>400
2002	600 Sheerness Dec 17th; 405 Sandwich Bay Sept 10th;
2004	421 Sandwich Bay Jan 2nd;
2013	425 Swalecliffe Sept 6th;
2014	454 Swalecliffe July 27th;
2016	544 Swalecliffe Sept 14th;
2017	589 Swalecliffe Aug 26th;
2018	589 Swalecliffe Aug 22nd;
2019	586 Swalecliffe Aug 26th;

As often the case with the more over-looked species, the recorded high counts are biased through the efforts of one or two observers who have counted the roosts in particular areas over a number of years. This was the case for House Sparrow in the Dartford area in the 1970s, and at Swalecliffe more recently (where the coincidence of counts from one year to another is remarkable). But that does not detract too much from what is a clear trend: the big concentrations of the 1970s are no more.

Many of the largest counts in Figure 8 and Table 2 were roosts in thick scrub but a few were of feeding flocks. Examples of that are the flocks of around 3,500 feeding on stubble at Broadstairs in autumn 1971, 3,000 feeding with finches on fallow arable fields on Worth Marshes at the end of 1973, and 1,000 feeding on unharvested cereal crop at Langley in October 1980.

For many years, from 1970 to 1993, there was a presumption against ringing House Sparrows; they were thought too sedentary and uninteresting to bother with. That may, with hindsight, have been a mistake since things could have been learnt of their demography that might have helped to identify reasons for their decline. Still, there are about 2,700 ringing recoveries affecting Kent and around 98% of them were within the county; this is indeed a sedentary species. The few more distant ones have been no further than to Hampshire and Norfolk and, at 331 km, from North Yorkshire. There have been two overseas recoveries, a meagre total but amounting to two-thirds of all such recoveries in Britain (the other one was from Dorset). They were one from Dungeness to near Ypres in Belgium, and the furthest of them all, a male ringed at Dungeness in April 1964 and trapped alive 444 km away in Morbihan, northwestern France, in June 1965.

Historically, cross-channel movements were large. Ticehurst, writing of the late nineteenth century, said that, from late September to mid November, "large numbers arrive ... on the coasts of Kent, the direction of flight being from due east to west". They occasionally attained "immense proportions" and, for example, in 1882 "large and continuous flights were witnessed at the Goodwin lightships on ten different days". Strangely, Harrison could find accounts of merely very small movements in the early twentieth century. If the passage did cease abruptly, why? There seem to be no other suggestions of population decline around that time.

In more recent times, observations at coastal locations in Kent have continued to include House Sparrow movements but they have declined sharply since 1990. The annual maximum day-counts in the 1980s were mostly over 500 and included 800 W at Foreness on 6th August 1985, 816 W at Minnis Bay on 12th October 1988 and 1,520 SW at South Foreland on 1st November 1990. Note that these peaks cover a wide span of autumn dates. Most

instances of movement have referred to coasting birds; in fact my notes, admittedly of just the larger counts taken from Kent Bird Reports, include no records of birds coming in off the sea.

Figure 9 shows the seasonal pattern of counts in recent years. This is broadly similar to that for Tree Sparrow, with largest numbers reflecting the build-up of post-breeding flocks and smallest when birds are more dispersed for breeding in spring and summer. The autumn peak is, though, roughly two months earlier – quite a difference. Could it be that the House Sparrow peak is largely or wholly made up from locally-bred birds while that for Tree Sparrow includes a substantial proportion of continental migrants?

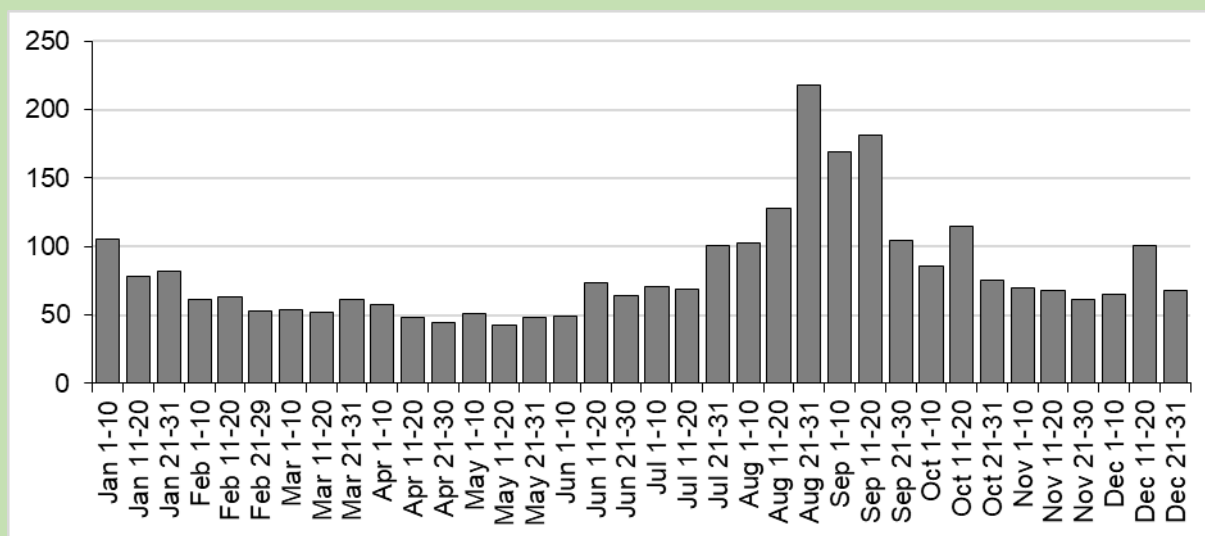


Figure 4. House Sparrow: seasonal pattern of counts, 2000-2022

As for Tree Sparrow, I allocated some monthly maxima to the 15th of the month, which has given rise to some of the spikes in Figure 8. But the largest spike of all, in late August, is the result of Geoff Burton counting the Swalecliffe roost at that time each year!

Earlier authors recorded very little spring movement, or didn't even mention it, but it has occasionally been noted. The largest by far that I have traced was of 705 W at Foreness on 29th March 1983.

To our sensibilities, the accounts of attitudes to the House Sparrow in Kent in the past seem outrageous. Harrison described it as an "arrogant and pugnacious bird" and thought "there can be little doubt that this is in the main a harmful species". Ticehurst did mention that they "do a certain amount of good by the destruction of harmful insects" though Harrison thought that this was "a negligible accomplishment". They were relentlessly persecuted and often, certainly in the early nineteenth century, rewards were paid for the destruction of eggs and young. Yet populations levels remained high.

Here, in Figure 10, is an illustration from Ticehurst's *History of the Birds of Kent*. These earthenware bottles were placed in rows under the eaves of farmhouses and other buildings, with the neck of the bottle outward to provide access for sparrows. The 'bottom', flat against the wall, was half open to allow a hand to reach in, in order to remove eggs and young. Ticehurst says they were used until 1860. You can now buy similar items, designed for successful nesting, but I wonder how many, if any, of the old ones have survived.

The high level of persecution in the nineteenth and into the twentieth century seems to have made little difference to House Sparrow abundance. The steep decline in numbers began at some point during the 1950s to 1970s. In rural areas, there is strong evidence that lower survival rates attributable to reduced amounts of seed (from both weeds and spilt crops) have been to blame. Other factors may be important in built-up areas, including shortage of invertebrate food for chicks, poor air quality, loss of nest sites, disease and predation. In my experience, the House Sparrow has gone from being a species present everywhere, in town and country, to one associated closely with human development, not seen much in open countryside anymore and, even in towns and villages, of patchy occurrence: in some places there are still dense concentrations while in apparently similar places none can be found.

One final notable observation of House Sparrows in Kent relates to a gynandromorphic bird, present in Ash, near Canterbury, during June-October 1986. This is an extremely rare condition in which both male and female characters are shown by one individual. In this case, the sparrow appeared to be female on its right side but male on

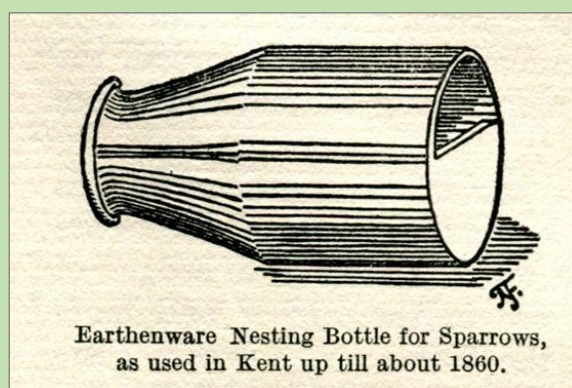


Figure 10. Sparrow nesting bottle from Ticehurst (1909)

its left side. A note with sketch appears in *British Birds* (1992) vol.85 pp.675-676; the author and artist is none other than Norman McCanch, editor of this newsletter.



Gynandromorphic House Sparrow, left side top, right side below by Norman McCanch

Alpine Accentor



Alpine Accentor (Morocco) by Peter Maton

There have been four records in Kent of Alpine Accentor, but that is really quite a lot as there have been only 41 in Britain up to 2022. Its closest breeding locations are not far away in France and Germany but it's largely an altitudinal migrant, moving from its mountainous breeding habitat to lower levels in winter, rather than a directional migrant.

The first in Kent was one seen on 1st May 1932 by Major George Took at Leathercote Point, St Margaret's-at-Cliffe (this is by the Dover Patrol Memorial within what birders now generally refer to as Bockhill). Major Took was one of the first of those who have contributed so many valuable records from this part of Kent. He was active for many years, as he still appears in the contributors' list of the Kent Bird Report for 1963 and is thanked for information on Red-backed Shrikes in the report for 1968. A couple of KOS founder members, when asked, recalled little about him other than his interest in Peregrine nests, but they had met him only briefly. Can anyone add anything?

A note from George Took on that first Alpine Accentor appears in *British Birds* vol.26 p.275. It pleases me for the honest comment about the bird's call: "It uttered a few notes, but I could not correctly give details of them in view of my general inability to describe accurately any of the less obvious bird notes".

Table 3 lists all four records. I won't draw attention to the closeness in May of the dates of occurrence (or maybe I have just done so).

Table 3. Alpine Accentor records in Kent			
St Margaret's-at-Cliffe	1st May 1932	1	Leathercote Point
Ramsgate	7th May 1975	1	Ramsgate cemetery
Dungeness	8th May 1976	1	Observatory recording area
St Margaret's-at-Cliffe	6th May 2000	1	Flew in off sea to Bockhill; later flew to near the South Foreland lighthouse, then back NE but lost to sight.

It is worth pointing out that the bird in May 2000 landed close to the war memorial at ... Leathercote Point. If you want to see one in Kent, I recommend standing there for the first week of May each year.

Dunnock



Dunnock by Brendan Ryan

Is the Dunnock the Coot of the passerine world: highly under-rated? It has often seemed so although research by Nick Davies revealed some curious personal habits. These are now widely known and indeed you can read a whole book about them (Davies, *Dunnock Behaviour and Social Evolution*, 1992) so there is no need to go into them here.

Ticehurst (*History of the Birds of Kent*, 1909) and Harrison (*Birds of Kent*, 1953) found little to say about the species. It was “very common and widely distributed”. It was thought to be the most frequent host of Cuckoo young (or, as Harrison would have it “much victimised”). Ticehurst knew of no evidence for it being anything but sedentary but Harrison, while confirming that no direct immigration was recorded, found that some Dunnocks present in Kent at passage times and in winter had the morphology of continental birds. Taylor *et al.* (*Birds of Kent*, 1981) found more evidence of immigration, and I’ll come back to that shortly.

At this time, when name-changing for birds is all the rage, it may be worth remembering that it seems never to have stopped for this species. Most people fifty years ago (and some still) called this bird the Hedge-Sparrow, often with that hyphen, and Harrison headlined his account with Hedge-Accentor. That is perhaps the best name for a hedgerow bird belonging to a largely mountain-dwelling genus, but it’s never caught on. The genus is *Prunella*, derived originally from a diminutive of brown (Latin *brunus* which became *prunus*), and linked to prunes and plums. *Prunella* is also an old name for a disease causing brown coating on the tongue and the scientific name of the plant Self-heal *Prunella vulgaris* that was thought to cure it. I was going to suggest that we started to call the bird Little Plum but have discovered that this has doubtfully acceptable connotations from its use in *The Beano*. Anyway, I hope all that has lifted the scales from your eyes.

Unlike the real sparrows, Dunnocks do not form compact flocks or breed colonially, and they are generally seen in ones and twos (and regrettably sometimes threes) shuffling about under shrubbery. If it was wholly sedentary, one would expect to find the seasonal pattern of counts to be more or less level, but that is not the case (Figure 11). There is a marked peak of reported numbers in autumn, centred on late September and October, indicative of autumn passage. There is also a slight rise in March when spring passage might be expected (though that could be partly or wholly because the species is more noticeable then when they are singing most strongly) and a dip in July (when they are moulting).

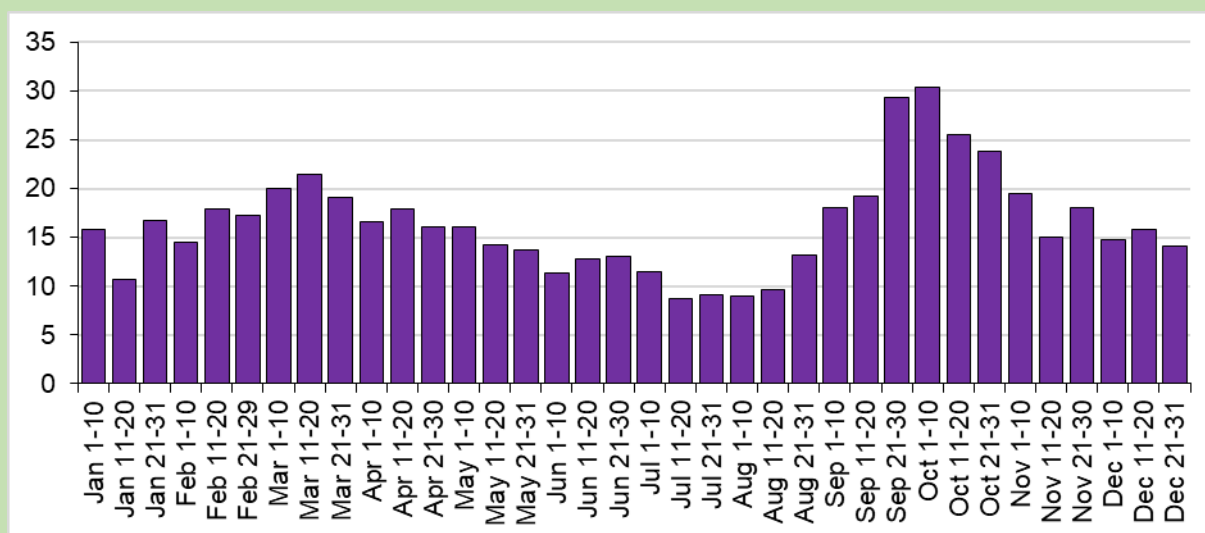


Figure 11. Dunnock: seasonal pattern of counts, 2000-2022

Ringling has confirmed that continental Dunnocks do reach Kent. The majority of ringing recoveries are local (only 25 out of over 800 in the county involve travel outside Kent or London). None of the Kent recoveries is further north than Suffolk, indicative of the sedentary nature of British Dunnocks. However, Dunnocks breeding in continental Europe are migratory, with birds in Scandinavia and Finland heading largely for Iberia. The raised numbers at passage periods, especially in autumn, can, it seems, be attributed to birds on that migration route that have crossed the sea to reach Kent. There are seven foreign ringing recoveries, three to/from Norway and single birds to Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and France. Significantly, six of those birds were trapped in Kent during 28th September-3rd November when the autumn peaks occur here, and one in early March on return passage.

Also of interest on the ringing front: the oldest recorded Dunnock in the BTO scheme was one ringed at Sandwich Bay in 2001 and retrapped there at intervals until 2012, setting the record of 10 years 7 months and 23 days. It was clearly addicted to being caught, as it was retrapped at least once in every year except 2008.

Turning to Dunnock's breeding status, it remains a widespread and numerous species throughout the county. In the *Kent Breeding Bird Atlas 2008-13*, it is near ubiquitous at the tetrad level, recorded as present in 977 of the 1,001 squares (and presence for this species almost certainly means nesting). In 1988-94, it had been recorded in 969 tetrads, so little change, and the low total of 862 tetrads in 1967-73 is attributed in the *Birds of Kent* (1981) to poor coverage in some areas.

As for House Sparrow, though, that unchanged distribution has masked a substantial population decline. It hasn't been as large as for the two sparrows but hardly small either, at 41% between 1967 and 2020 in England (*BTO Bird Facts*). Figure 12 shows the trend line, with the steepest decline occurring from the mid 1970s to the mid 1980s.

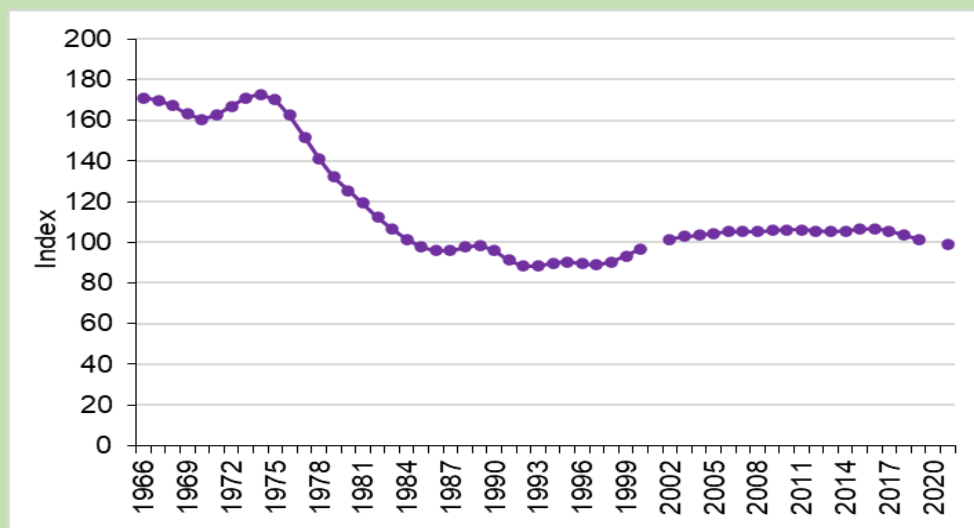


Figure 12. Dunnock: CBC/BBS population trend for England, 1966-2021

Since 1990, the population trend has been fairly level, though including a slight rise around 2000. The picture for Kent is similar; the BBS trend from 1994 onwards was included in the 2021 Kent Bird Report, so I am not repeating it here, but it shows gentle fluctuations with no overall change.

I have been through Kent Bird Reports and recent computerised data to extract high and other notable counts. In the early years and occasionally up to 1970, few significant counts were reported (and in four years there wasn't even an entry for Dunnock in the KBR), so in presenting data (Figure 13) I have excluded everything before 1970. In contrast to Tree and House Sparrow, the chart shows just the single highest count reported in the county each year.

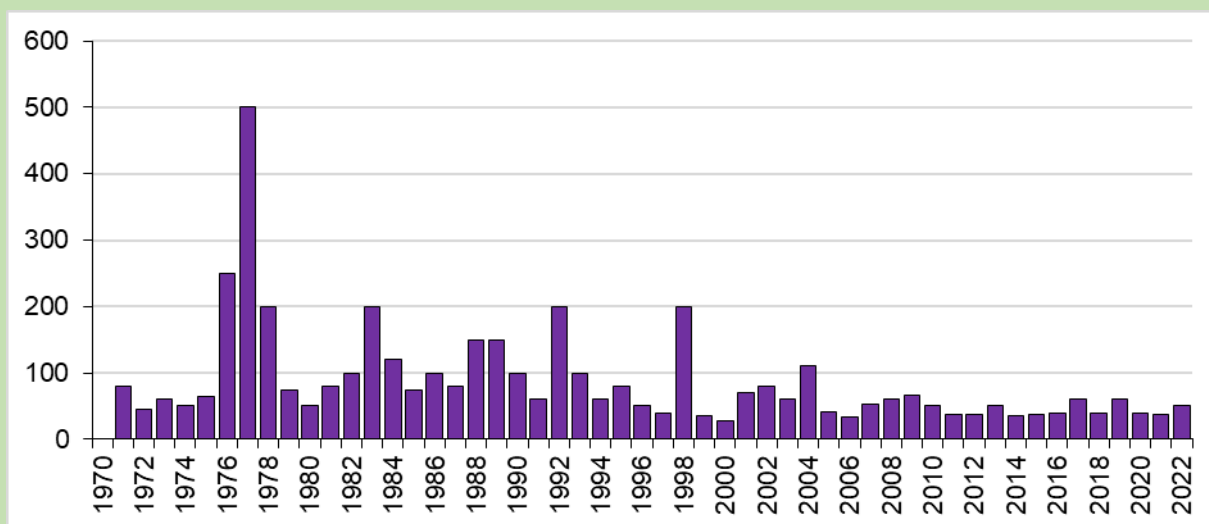


Figure 13. Dunnock: annual peak counts in Kent, 1970-2022

Yet again, we have a pattern of decreasing numbers over the years. It's not so dramatic as for the two sparrows but it is there. The average peak counts for successive 13 year periods from 1971 onwards were 135 (1971-1983), 102 (1984-1996), 67 (1997-2009), 47 (2011-2022).

Most of the peak counts have been in autumn (occasionally there's been one in late summer or winter) and almost always these have been in coastal locations. Every few years, a particularly high count occurs (or at least they used to do). This is a typical pattern for a migrant. The odd thing about it all is that the occurrence of these autumn migrants was not evident in earlier years, as mentioned above. It was only in the *Birds of Kent* (1981) that the existence of passage was first noted. There it says, "from 1957 onwards there are regular reports of passage or

influxes in late September, October and November". This culminated in the largest of all recorded influxes in 1976 and 1977 after which the decline apparently set in. Table 4 lists the highest counts of Dunnocks, with the period split into three.

Table4. Large Dunnock counts, 1952-2022	
The thresholds for inclusion differ between periods.	
	1952-1975, counts of 60 or more
1957	60 West Hythe Sept 25th; 60 Lower Hope Point Oct 12th;
1964	60 Dungeness Oct 17th;
1966	60 Dungeness Sept 30th;
1968	60 Sandwich Bay Oct 18th;
1971	80 Dungeness Mar 20th; 60 Dungeness Sept 23rd;
1973	60 Dungeness Oct 20th;
1975	65 Dungeness Sept 20th;
	1976-1998, counts of 120 or more
1976	250 Dungeness Oct 25th;
1977	500 Dungeness Oct 27th, 250 there Oct 8th, 200 Oct 28th& several counts >175;
1978	200 Dungeness Oct 14th;
1983	200 South Foreland Oct 17th, 150 there Oct 1st& 25th;
1984	120 South Foreland Oct 1st;
1988	150 South Foreland Oct 18th;
1989	Up to 150 Foreness in autumn;
1992	200 South Foreland Sept 26th;
1998	200 Foreness Oct 7th;
	1999-2022, counts of 60 or more
2001	70 South Foreland Sept 25th;
2002	80 South Foreland Oct 7th;
2003	Up to 60 South Foreland September;
2004	111 Sandwich/Pegwell Bays Oct 30th; 100 Pegwell Bay Sept 29th;
2008	60 Chislet Marshes Sept 28th;
2009	66 Bockhill Sept 26th;
2017	60 Royal Military Canal, Hythe Oct 15th;
2019	60 Sandwich Bay Oct 7th;

Normally, I would suggest that the absence of high numbers in earlier years was a result of observers not counting birds and merely giving subjective descriptions such as 'unusually high numbers'. However, the events of 1976 and 1977, one would have thought, would have occurred at intervals and surely, even with relatively few observers, sometimes they would have been noticed. It's worth mentioning here that Ticehurst (1909) reported that Dunnocks had never been encountered on the Kentish Knock lightship. Perhaps the almost complete absence of indication of autumn passage really does mean that some change in migratory behaviour took place. It seems unlikely, though, and I suspect we'll never be sure.

The pattern of decline from the 1970s onwards is clear and, of course, is similar to those of so many other passerines. We are not certain why the decline between the mid 1970s and mid 1980s took place, but the belief, supported by some evidence, is that it is connected with poor over-winter survival due to inadequate food supply (*BTO Bird Facts*). The decline took place at the same time as that of so many farmland seedeaters, and that is probably significant. Dunnocks are insectivorous for much of the year but do take plenty of seeds in winter (and of course changing farmland conditions mean that invertebrate abundance as well as that of seeds has declined). In woodland, Dunnocks may have been adversely affected by reduced quality of the low shrub layer, caused by factors including reductions of coppicing and increased deer browsing.

The declines have affected both breeding birds and migrants (some, perhaps most, assumed to be continental birds). Dunnocks have a very large range across Europe and into north Africa and west Asia; we don't know much about population trends throughout the range but in western Europe moderate decline seems general.

Returning to observations of Dunnocks on passage, there are quite a few records of birds seen moving, both along the coast and arriving off the sea. The largest ones that I have noted (Table 5, including all those of more than

10) occurred during 1978-1997, though it should be noted that I've only included records if movement was explicitly said to be taking place. Some other high autumn counts could have included movement.

Table5. Largest Dunnock visible passage events	
1978	32 in off the sea in 1.5 hrs at South Foreland on Oct 15th.
1981	37 NE at Cliffsend, Pegwell on Oct 6th and 72 W there on Oct 15th.
1982	78 S off the sea at Foreness on Sept 26th, 58 S there on Oct 16th& other counts <39; 41 W at Cliffsend on Oct 5th; 39 in off the sea in 1 hr South Foreland on Oct 10th.
1983	33 moving at Foreness on Oct 3rd; 53 coasting at South Foreland on Oct 17th.
1990	40 coasting at South Foreland on Sept 23rd.
1992	74 coasting at South Foreland on Sept 26th.
1997	20 moving SW at South Foreland on Mar 16th.

The majority of counts in Table 4 and 5 have been made during autumn but a couple were in March, and there have been some other examples of spring concentrations below the thresholds set for those tables, such as 45 at Dungeness on 18th March 1996. Those presumably relate to return passage in spring.

Andrew Henderson

Big Black Birds(and one with some grey).



Introduction

In recent years we have seen a growing interest in birding, there are more people out in the field than ever. Many carry cameras. sometimes in preference to binoculars and it is clear that many novice birdwatchers lack developed identification skills. This often leads to photographs posted on social media which are incorrectly identified or, in many cases attached to a request for identification.

Amongst the regular problem birds is the **Raven**; not infrequently this will be an optimistically mis-identified 'other corvid'. This stems from problems of size perception which is itself complicated by the fact that juvenile Ravens are frequently noticeably smaller than adults. Also, the main big, black corvids, Rook, Raven and Carrion Crow are themselves quite variable in size, though barely enough to accurately assign gender as there is considerable overlap. So where do we start inseparating these birds?

VOICE

Typical calls are often helpful once learned; the main problem is that all these species are vocally diverse producing a remarkable range of odd sounds and calls. I lived alongside a wild raven pair for four years where the male would greet me in the morning with a strange "poo-poo-poo" flight call not unlike a Hoopoe! I have never heard another Raven make a similar call.

The good news is that each species has at least one distinctive, regular flight-call. For the **Raven** this is an unmistakeable deep "PRUKK-PRUKK" which carries a long way! **Carrion and Hooded Crows** have a rather abrupt and harsh "KRAAH", while **Rooks** have a more drawn out call, often with a short uplift at the end KAAAWWU".

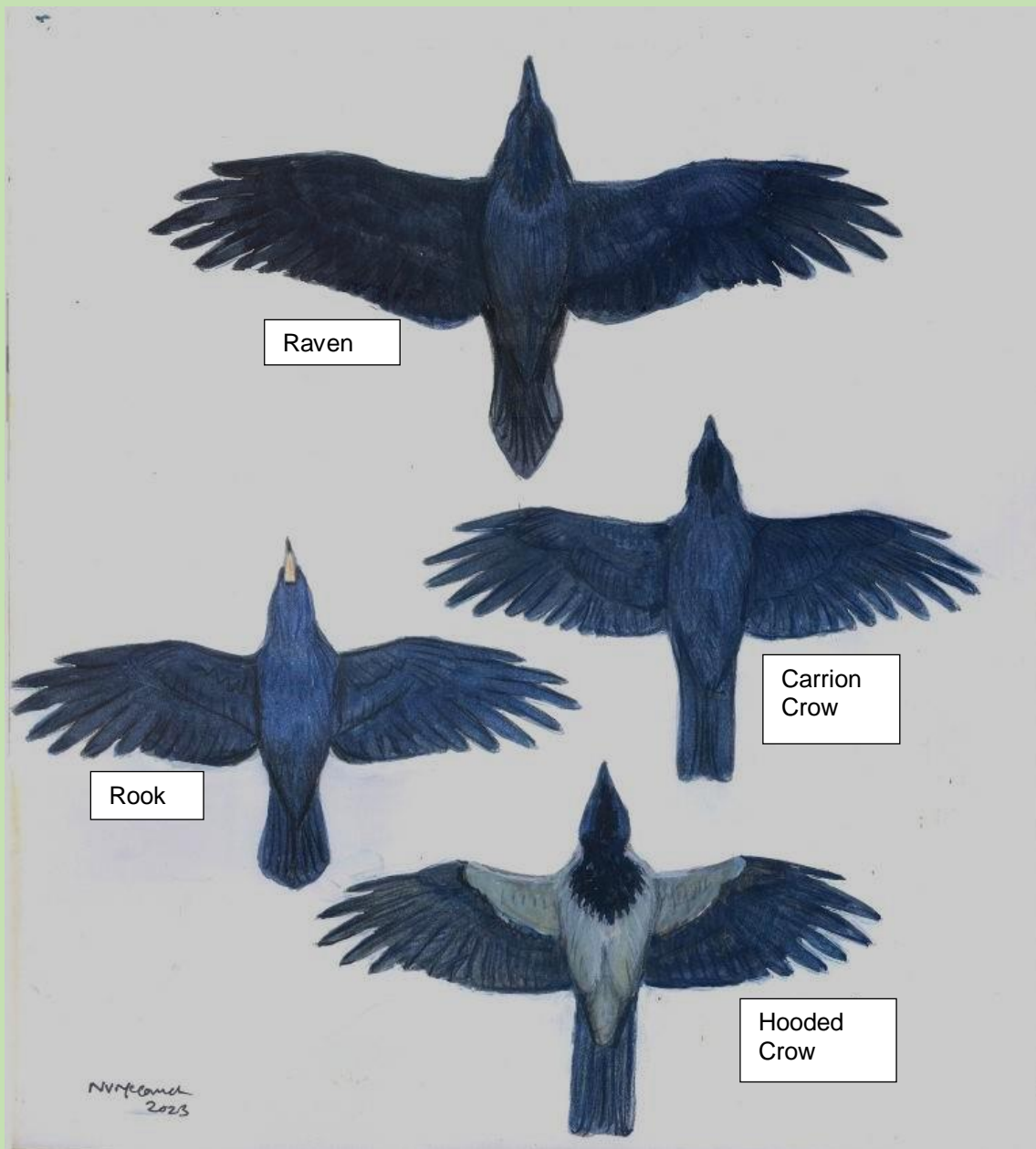
The best way to get to know these and other corvid calls is by using the Xeno-Canto website (<https://xeno-canto.org>) where a library of recordings is available online. Typical calls of these three species are below.



XC770891 - Rook - XC794347 - Northern XC814968 - Carrion
Corvus frugilegus.mp3 Raven - Corvus corax.Crow - Corvus corone

FLIGHT SHAPE

Experience helps, but some key features are tail shape, wing shape and proportions. **Ravens** are generally very big with long broad wings which often show a bulge in the trailing edge of the secondaries near the body. The tail is typically diamond-shaped, but can be fanned when expanded and then appears more rounded. **Carrion and Hooded Crows** are smaller, slimmer, with narrower wings and a noticeably square-ended tail. **Rooks** are the slimmest and most elegant of the trio. With narrow wings notably 'pinched in' where they join the body. The rook tail is markedly rounded, while the pale bill and throat on an adult is a real clincher (as is the grey body on a **Hooded Crow!!**),.



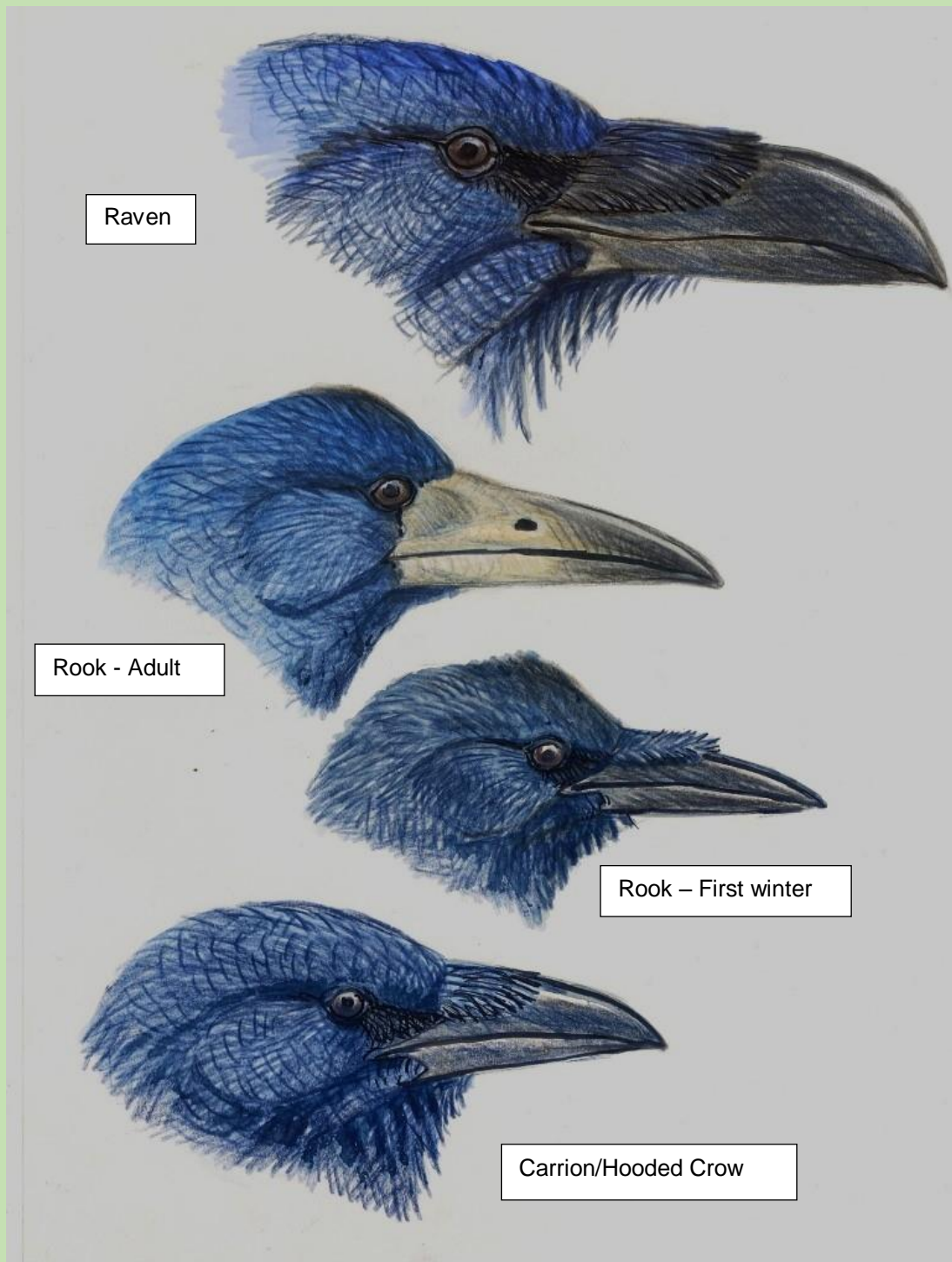
Corvid flight shapes by Norman McCanch

BILL SHAPE

Bill shape can be very helpful. The top edge of the bill is known as the culmen. In **Ravens** this is markedly curved, while the bill itself is very robust. The Raven also has a prominent patch of bristles over its nasal area and usually a thick beard of hackles on the throat.

Carrion and Hooded Crows also show nasal bristles and throat hackles but to a much lesser extent than Ravens. More especially, the culmen on both crow species is straighter and less curved.

The bill of the adult **Rook** is obviously pale based with no nasal bristles and a variable area of bare skin. The bill shape is markedly different, longer, down-curved and tapering to a finer point than the other species. However, there is a minor pitfall; **juvenile and first winter Rooks** do not have a bare face patch and they do tend to have a patch of scruffy nasal bristles; Bill shape is a good indicator however, as the bill of the young Rook is about the same proportion as a Crow, but is much straighter-edged on both upper and lower mandibles, in addition all ages of Rook show a steep peak at the forehead, whereas crows are distinctly flat-headed.



I hope these brief notes are helpful to anyone struggling with Big Black Birds!!

Norman McCanch

KENT BIRD SIGHTINGS FOR NOVEMBER and DECEMBER 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

The first half of **November** was unsettled and stormy at times with the ongoing influence of Atlantic low pressure systems with strong winds and heavy rain. Storm Ciaran on the 1st and 2nd produced wind gusts of 78 mph at Langdon Bay and was followed by Storm Debi on the 13th. These storms contributed to mounting rainfall in what was a thoroughly wet autumn. There was an incursion of colder air at times with a frost as far south as Kent with 0.8°C at East Malling. The second half of November saw rather quieter weather with a continued mild Atlantic influence until the last week when a more northerly airflow introduced colder air. There was a total of 85.25 mm of rain at Bishopstone during the month.

The cold snap in late November extended into the first week of **December** but the cold weather was swept away on the 9th and 10th by storms Elin and Fergus which brought very wet, windy and disruptive weather, but much milder Atlantic air including some exceptionally mild nights. Thereafter the weather continued very mild for most of the month. The UK recorded its highest daily minimum temperature on record on Christmas day with 12°C at East Malling. The month ended with a spell of very unsettled, turbulent weather when Storm Gerrit brought further strong winds from the 27th to 29th. The monthly rainfall total at Bishopstone was 57.35mm.

PARTRIDGE TO WILDFOWL

A **Black Brant** was recorded intermittently at Grenham Bay from Nov 18th to Dec 30th and was seen at Swalecliffe on Dec 1st whilst a **Pale-bellied Brent Goose** was seen at Reculver on Dec 1st.



Black Brant by Mark Chidwick

Five **Bean Geesesp** were seen at Sandwich Bay on Nov 2nd whilst two **Tundra Bean Geese** were seen at Pegwell Bay and North Foreland on Dec 1st and Worth Marshes on the 2nd and 13 **Pink-footed Geese** flew over Bockhill on Nov 11th with three at Elmley on the 25th and four there on the 28th with three at Sandwich Bay on Dec 2nd.

After 30 **Russian White-fronted Geese** flew over Tankerton on Nov 2nd as many as 130 birds were seen at Swale NNR with smaller counts from Northward Hill, Elmley, Oare Marshes, Harty Marshes, Dungeness RSPB, Swale NNR, South Foreland, Eastchurch, Langdon Hole, Swalecliffe, Lydd, Scotney, Sevenoaks WR, Conningbrook, Worth Marshes, Cliftonville, Stodmarsh/Grove Ferry and Sandwich Bay.



Lesser-White fronted Goose by Peter Maton

An adult **LESSER-WHITE FRONTED GOOSE** was found with Greylag Geese at Oare Marshes on Dec 15th and was still there on the 18th and 28th and was also seen at Harty Marshes on the 23rd.

The first **Bewick's Swan** was seen at Cliffe Pools on Nov 12th after which up to 49 were seen at Walland Marsh and Dungeness RSPB with counts of up to nine at Cliffe Pools, Foreness, Cliftonville, Sandwich Bay, Worth Marshes, Capel Fleet, Reculver Marshes, Oare Marshes, Swale NNR, Broadstairs, Snargate, Northward Hill, Appledore and North Foreland.

The two **Whooper Swans** first seen in October were still in the Dungeness area on Nov 9th with four there from Nov 26th into December. Two birds also flew N at Sandwich Bay on Nov 15th and there were two at Elmley on Dec 9th.

As many as 50 **Egyptian Geese** were seen at Walland Marshes, Sevenoaks WR, Penshurst Place, Seaton, Reculver, Sandwich Bay, Swalecliffe, Sellindge, Mote Park, Gravesend, Hythe, DBO, Folkestone and Cooling Marshes.



Ruddy Shelduck by David Hale

The Haysden female **Ruddy Shelduck** was still present on Nov 5th and was seen at Sevenoaks WR on Dec 9th and Bough Beech on the Dec 11th whilst up to 33 **Mandarins** were seen at Bough Beech.

Three **Scaup** were seen at North Foreland on Nov 2nd with five reported from there on the 17th. A female was seen between Pegwell Bay on Dec 17th and the 28th.



Velvet Scoter by Mark Chidwick

As many as four **Velvet Scoter** were seen at DBO, Grenham Bay, Herne Bay, St Margarets-at-Cliffe, Foreness, Cliftonville, Dover, Sandwich Bay and North Foreland and one or two **Long-tailed Ducks** were seen at DBO, Swalecliffe, Tankerton, Grenham Bay, Foreness, Pegwell Bay and Sandwich Bay.

Up to 14 **Goosanders** were recorded from Bough Beech, Swalecliffe, Sandwich Bay, Grenham Bay, Pegwell Bay, Reculver, Minnis Bay, Bockhill, Haysden, Westenhanger, Dunorlan Park, DBO, Dungeness RSPB, Foreness, West Hythe and Hythe.

NIGHTJAR TO WADERS

Three **Common Cranes** flew over Newingreen on Nov 5th.

A **Red-necked Grebe** flew S at North Foreland on Nov 12th and another was reported from Cliffe Pools on Dec 29th and during these two months single **Black-necked Grebes** were seen at Scotney GPs, Dungeness RSPB, Cliffe Pools and Riverside CP.

A **Slavonian Grebe** was recorded at Dungeness RSPB from Nov 13th-Dec 8th and Oare Marshes on the Nov 21st and 22nd whilst one flew E at Tankerton on Nov 24th and others were seen at Riverside CP on the Nov 29th with two there on Dec 15th and at Sandwich Bay on Dec 3rd.



Slavonian Grebe by Steve Cullum

Two **Curlew Sandpipers** were seen at Oare Marshes on Nov 1st with another at Worth Marshes on the 6th and a **Little Stint** was seen at Cliffe Pools on Nov 1st.

As many as 23 **Purple Sandpipers** were seen at Ramsgate Harbour, Dover Harbour, DBO, North Foreland, Reculver, Pegwell Bay, Swale NNR and Swalecliffe.

The **Grey Phalarope** first seen at Cliffe Pools on Oct 17th was still there on Nov 1st and another was seen at DBO on Nov 2nd whilst two were seen at Kingsdown with one at Sandwich Bay on the 3rd, one flew W at DBO on the 21st and one flew W at Minnis Bay and Reculver on the 24th.

The **SOLITARY SANDPIPER** first seen on Oct 15th was still to be seen at Stodmarsh on Nov 3rd. If accepted by BBRC this will be a new species for Kent.

One or two **Jack Snipe** were seen at Sandwich Bay, Dungeness RSPB, Grove Ferry, Minster Marshes, Donkey Street, East Peckham, Pegwell Bay, Willop Basin and Samphire Hoe.

Single **Spotted Redshank** were recorded from Elmley, Sandwich Bay, Cliffe Pools, Oare Marshes, Otterham Creek and Scotney.



Sabine's Gull by Ian Stewart

The juvenile **Sabine's Gull** first seen at DBO on Oct 29th was still present on Nov 7th with an adult there on the 4th and 5th and another adult on the 11th and with two there on the 12th and a juvenile on the 20th. In addition, single birds were seen at Dover Harbour on the 2nd and 4th, at North Foreland on the 3rd and 10th, Walmer Beach on the 4th, Graveney on the 5th, Seabrook on the 13th and Samphire Hoe on the 14th. One was also reported from Hythe on **Dec 29th**.

As many as 95 **Little Gulls** were recorded from DBO with smaller counts at Dungeness RSPB, Sandwich Bay, Cliftonville, Worth Marshes, Dover Harbour, Walmer Beach, Hythe, Reculver, Minnis Bay, Seabrook, Swalecliffe, Ramsgate Harbour, Battery Point, Sandgate, Willop Basin, Botolph's Bridge, Samphire Hoe, Walpole Bay and North Foreland.

A second winter **Russian Common Gull** was identified at Shakespeare Beach on Dec 24th and a second winter **Iceland Gull** flew S at Walmer Beach on Nov 5th.

During November and December up to seven **Caspian Gulls** were recorded at Dover Harbour, Deal, Sandwich Bay, Worth Marshes, Langdon Cliffs, St Margarets-at-Cliffe, South Foreland, Pegwell Bay, Greenhithe, Oare Marshes, Nickoll's Quarry, Foreness, Cliftonville, Mill Point, Dartford Marshes, **Marden** and DBO and one or two **Yellow-legged Gulls** were seen at DBO, Reculver, Swalecliffe, Pegwell Bay, Sandwich Bay, Worth Marshes, Shellness, Bockhill, North Foreland, Nethergong and Langdon Bay.

During November as many as five **Great Skuas** were seen at DBO, Shellness, Bockhill, Minnis Bay, Oare Marshes, Samphire Hoe and Swalecliffe. In December up to three birds were recorded from Foreness, North Foreland and DBO.

In November a **Pomarine Skua** flew S at North Foreland on 1st with others at Swalecliffe/Tankerton on the 3rd, 4th, 9th and 21st, Walmer Beach and DBO on the 4th, Grenham Bay on the 18th and Shellness on the 21st.

During November up to eight **Arctic Skuas** were seen at DBO, North Foreland, Sandwich Bay, Samphire Hoe, Reculver, Seabrook and Hythe with two reported from North Foreland on Dec 27th and **Long-tailed Skuas** were seen at DBO on Nov 4th and 12th.



Black-throated Diver by Keith Cutting

As many as three **Black-throated Divers** were recorded from DBO, Dungeness RSPB, Sandwich Bay, Swalecliffe, Tankerton, Seasalter, Shellness, Grenham Bay, Reculver, Walmer, Foreness and North Foreland.

It was a good late autumn and early winter for **Great Northern Divers** with as many as seven seen at Reculver, DBO, Dungeness RSPB, Dover Harbour, Folkestone Harbour, North Foreland, Foreness, Seabrook, Grenham Bay, Pegwell Bay, Minnis Bay, Shellness, Bockhill, Swalecliffe, Conyer, East Peckham, Westbere, Oare Marshes and Tankerton.

A **Little Auk** flew N at North Foreland on Nov 22nd and another was reported from Shellness on Nov 27th whilst a **Black Guillemot** was discovered at Foreness on Nov 12th and was seen there the next day and a **Puffin** was reported flying S at North Foreland on Dec 7th with two flying S there on Dec 30th.

With westerly winds of over 70mph in the Channel associated with Storm Ciarán on November 2nd unprecedented numbers of **Leach's Petrels** and **Storm Petrels** were counted between Thanet and Dungeness.

Petrel numbers during Storm Ciarán on November 2nd and also on the 3rd and 4th

	Leach's Petrel			Storm Petrel		
	2 nd Nov	3 rd Nov	4 th Nov	2 nd Nov	3 rd Nov	4 th Nov
Dungeness BO	203	57	7	84	44	3
Lade Bay	105	-	-	9	-	-
Kingsdown	9	-	-	1	-	-
Sandwich Bay	8	1	-	4	-	-
North Foreland	7	3	-	2	1	1
Deal	4	1	1	-	-	-
Hythe	3	-	-	8	-	-
Mill Point	-	-	-	3	1	-
Dover Harbour	2	-	-	-	1 dead	-
Seabrook	2	-	-	1	-	-
Oldstairs Bay	2	-	-	1	-	-
Walmer	1	7	1	-	6	-
St Margarets	-	6	-	-	-	-

In addition to the table above a single **Storm Petrel** was seen at Seabrook on Nov 13th and single **Leach's Petrels** were seen at DBO on Nov 6th and 8th.



Storm Petrel found dead at Dover by Snowy Johnson

On Nov 1st and 2nd eight **Sooty Shearwaters** were seen off DBO with one at North Foreland on the 1st, one at Cliftonville on the 2nd and nine at DBO on the 4th and seven on the 8th and single birds at St Margarets-at-Cliffe and North Foreland on the 18th. On Nov 21st a single bird was recorded from Swalecliffe, Reculver and Shellness and on the 28th one flew S at North Foreland. One flew W at DBO on Dec 27th.

A **Great Shearwater** flew S at St Margarets on Nov 18th and single **Manx Shearwaters** flew past DBO on Nov 1st and 2nd.

WHITE STORK TO WOODPECKERS

15 **White Storks** were seen at Bough Beech on Nov 11th.

Up to four **Shags** were seen at North Foreland, Samphire Hoe, Bockhill, Hythe, Chatham Docks, Ramsgate Harbour, Folkestone, Sandwich Bay and Dover Harbour.



Shag by Mike Gould

The three **Glossy Ibises** were still at Dungeness RSPB during November and December and were sometime joined by one or two other birds. Single birds were also seen at Oare Marshes intermittently from Nov 7th-28th, Ham Marshes on the 9th and South Foreland on the 19th. In December one was seen at Oare Marshes on the 6th and 10th. During November and December up to nine **Spoonbills** were seen at Oare Marshes, Faversham Creek, Harty Marshes, Conyer, Elmley and Pegwell Bay.



Spoonbills by Stuart Brown

During these two months single **Bitterns** were seen at Dungeness RSPB, Elmley, Northward Hill and Oare Marshes.

As many as 45 **Cattle Egrets** were counted on the Dungeness peninsula with up to 16 at Seaton, Elmley, Worth Marshes, Lympne, Preston, Oare Marshes, Sandwich Bay, Grain Marshes, Cliftonville, Collard's Lake and Stodmarsh.

Up to three **Great White Egrets** were seen at Sandwich Bay, East Peckham, Conningbrook GPs, Swale NNR, Oare Marshes, Whetsted GPs, Seaton, Elmley, Bough Beech, Dungeness RSPB, Seabrook, Sandwich Bay, Swalecliffe and Worth Marshes.

The **Osprey** first seen at Hothfield in October was still there on Nov 3rd.

During these two months up to three **Hen Harriers** were seen at Dungeness RSPB, Reculver, Pegwell Bay, Staple, Seaton, Conyer, Grove Ferry/Stodmarsh, Oare Marshes, Shellness, Walland Marsh, Elmley, Cliffe Pools, Capel Fleet, Church Hougham, Bishopstone, Fairfield, Minster Marshes, Langdon Cliffs, Harty Marshes, Swale NNR, Dungeness RSPB, Lydd, Wittersham, Elmley NNR, Wingham and Sandwich Bay.

Up to 23 **Red Kites** were recorded from Knockholt with as many as eight at Downe, Barfreestone, North Foreland, Bridge, Donkey Street, Bough Beech, Godmersham, Sandwich Bay and Penshurst Place.

OWLS TO HIRUNDINES

One or two **Long-eared Owls** were seen at Elmley, DBO and Hoo.

As many as 30+ **Short-eared Owls** were seen at Elmley in November with a peak of 18+ there during December. At other sites up to six were counted at Cliffe Pools, Reculver Marshes, Samphire Hoe, Swalecliffe, Folkestone, Mill Point, Langdon Cliffs, Lydd, Cliftonville, Shellness and Hoo.

During these two months single **Merlins** were seen at DBO, Sandwich Bay, Reculver, Oare Marshes and Hoo.

A **Hooded Crow** was seen at Swalecliffe on Nov 3rd.



Hooded Crow by Andy Taylor

Following a large-scale influx of **Waxwings** into Scotland and northern England the first birds to be recorded in Kent were singles at Chamber's Wall and Cliftonville on Nov 15th. After this as many as 52 birds were seen at Broadstairs, Lower Upnor, Weddington, Folkestone, Staplehurst, Betteshanger Park, Graveney, Cheriton, Whitfield, Faversham Creek, Appledore, King's Hill, Whitfield, New Hythe, Herne Bay, Horsmonden, St Mary's Island, South Foreland, West Malling, Tunbridge Wells, Westgate, Marden, Stonelees, Tonbridge and Pegwell Bay.

A **Penduline Tit** was seen briefly at Elmley on Nov 16th and another was heard at Oare Marshes on Dec 30th.

A **Woodlark** was seen at DBO on Nov 7th with another bird at Langdon Cliffs on Nov 21st and two **Shorelarks** were recorded at Elmley from Nov 25th-28th.

A very late **Sand Martin** was seen at Dover Harbour on Nov 16th.

WARBLERS TO WHEATEARS

A **Yellow-browed Warbler** was seen at Sandwich Bay on Nov 15th and a **Pallas's Warbler** was found there on Nov 24th with another at Elmley from Dec 3rd-9th.

A **Dusky Warbler** was found at Dungeness RSPB on Nov 23rd and a **Siberian Chiffchaff** was trapped and ringed at Sandwich Bay on Dec 26th.

During November one or two **Dartford Warblers** were recorded from DBO, North Foreland, Sandwich Bay, Creteway Down and Chamber's Wall.

Up to six **Firecrests** were seen at Bockhill, DBO, Folkestone Warren, Sandgate, Northdown Park, Sandwich Bay, Minnis Bay, Dunorlan Park, Denge Wood, Mote Park, Church Woods, Stodmarsh, Seasalter and Enbrook Park.



Firecrest by Steve Reynaert

Late **Ring Ouzels** were seen at North Foreland, Samphire Hoe, Abbotscliffe, South Foreland and Bockhill with the last one seen at Langdon Hole on Dec 2nd.

During November and December up to three **Black Redstarts** were seen at DBO, Tonbridge, Dover Harbour, Samphire Hoe, Lympne, Folkestone, Pegwell Bay, Canterbury and Foreness.

SPARROWS TO BUNTINGS

During these two months as many as 10 **Water Pipits** were seen at Stodmarsh/Grove Ferry with smaller numbers at Worth Marshes, Minster Marshes, Sandwich Bay, Elmley Marshes, Swale NNR, Fordwich, Shellness, Capel Fleet, Dungeness RSPB, Oare Marshes, Westbere and North Foreland.

A juvenile **Common Rosefinch** was trapped and ringed at Sandwich Bay on Nov 12th whilst two **Twite** were seen and photographed at Pegwell Bay on Nov 26th and remained there into 2024.



Twite by Barry Wright

A **Mealy/Common Redpoll** was reported from Harty Marshes on Nov 22nd and as many as 10 **Crossbills** were seen at Denge Wood, Mill Point and Sandwich Bay.

Single **Serins** were seen at Sandwich Bay on Nov 3rd and 7th.

One or two **Lapland Buntings** were seen at Abbotscliffe, Swale NNR and New Romney.

Up to seven **Snow Buntings** were seen at Plumpudding, Minnis Bay, Reculver, Swalecliffe, Elmley, Cliftonville, North Foreland, Hampton, Swale LNR, Langdon Bay, Pegwell Bay, Samphire Hoe, South Foreland, Kingsdown and Sandwich Bay.

DBO = Dungeness Bird Observatory **BBRC** = British Birds Rarities Committee

RSPB = Royal Society for the Protection of Birds **BOU** = British Ornithological Union

"The Patch" = the warm water outflow from Dungeness Nuclear Power Station

NNR=National Nature Reserve **NR**=Nature Reserve **LNR**=Local Nature Reserve

FC = Field Centre **WR** = Wildlife Reserve **GP** = Gravel Pits **CP** = Country Park

CONTRIBUTORS

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

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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.

Fifty Years Ago

Black-bellied Dipper



Black-bellied Dipper by JG Keulemans (PDI)

A bird of the black-bellied race *Cinclus c. cinclus* was seen at Sandling Park in South on Jan. 20th (DRC) and is the first authenticated record since 1966.

Meet the Member – Norman McCanch



Drawing a Great Grey Shrike, Freedown, Bockhill 8th November 2019

1.

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

I am currently the editor of the KOS Newsletter. My role is to collect and collate all the relevant contributions from various interested parties and compile the newsletter. This involves constant scrutiny of the KOS Facebook page in search of decent photographs and liaising with authors and photographers. I took on the role about twelve years ago, when the newsletter was quarterly and printed paper. Circumstances changed and I suggested we move to an online format and expand to six issues a year as we now enjoy.

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

I grew up in South Wales in an extended family who were largely fishermen and small farmers. Most of my male role models were wildfowlers of necessity and I was enthralled by the plumage of birds they brought home for the pot. I recall my Nan cooking Curlew casserole and rabbit pies. My Dad took me to the National Museum of Wales where I was captivated by the collections of mounted birds. I started to collect feathers, wings, skulls and bones and taught myself to prepare skins and mounts of birds and animals I found dead. I also began drawing and painting birds and wildlife, inspired mostly by the work of Charles Tunnicliffe. Later we moved to the Sussex Weald, and I met a couple who were keen birdwatchers and introduced me to bird ringing. I ringed my first bird (a House Sparrow) at the age of eleven and had an A permit for forty-two years, when arthritis brought my involvement to an end. In that time, I was warden of the bird observatories at Sandwich Bay and the Calf of Man.

4. How are you involved with birds in Kent?

Mostly through the KOS, although I am also a member of Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory. In the past I was actively involved in ringing, nest recording and all kinds of survey work, but since retirement various health issues have restricted my capacity to be an effective surveyor, Now I mostly watch in the Stour Valley and East Kent Coast, but always upload all my records onto BTO Birdwatch. I have been a BTO member/fellow for fifty-four years and support the vital role it plays in providing a scientific basis for wider conservation.

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5.

6. What has been your biggest birding blunder?

In a birding career lasting more than sixty years there have been a few! Probably the most frustrating was my early attempts to ring Raven chicks in Wales. I found a good nest on a high sea cliff a near home and figured out that it was only accessible by boat with a stiff climb up to the nest. My cousin lent me his boat and I managed to pull it up on the narrow beach below the nest. It was a pretty scary climb and the tide was turning fast but I reached the nest which held four spiky partly feathered young just about at the right age for ringing. A quick job with the ringing pliers and an abseil down was all that was required, but search as I might through every pocket, I could not find the rings!! The chicks looked at me curiously and croaked occasionally, while mum and dad were distinctly miffed. I abseiled down but there were no rings in the boat, so I had to head for home, getting quite wet on the way. The weather turned for the worse the next day and by the time it was suitable again, the chicks had fledged!

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

Look at birds constantly, watch what they do, make notes on what you see; read books about birds, not just identification guides but more general volumes that will help you find answers to your questions; talk to other birders. Bird songs and calls are important, always try to find the singer/caller and identify it visually. Simple really!!

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

Notebook/sketchbook, pencils. Binoculars and Scope.

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

By making more people aware of the role of birds (and other wildlife) as indicators of the damage we are doing in our wider ecosystem and the consequences for all life. Young people are vital to the future, as a secondary teacher I saw teenagers able to name fifty dinosaurs or over a hundred Pokemon characters, but incapable of naming half a dozen birds that appeared in the playground every day. Birding is still not very cool! Sadly, I am fairly pessimistic given the relentless destruction I have personally seen in my lifetime. Many of the proposals touted by governments as solutions derive from commercial and industrial interests whose motives are seldom transparent.

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

When I was eleven, I made my first visit to Skomer Island, just off the coast of Pembrokeshire close to my grandparents' home. The warden, the late David Saunders, placed a fluffy, squeaky ball of down in my hands, my first contact with a Manx shearwater! An adjacent nestbox held a sleek and muscular adult which bit me, I was hooked! Five years later I twice spent part of the summer on the island as a volunteer warden and helped to ring many adults and fledglings. I also met my first Storm Petrels and if I had thought Shearwaters were wonderful, the tiny, bold fragrant Storm Petrels completely stole my heart. I went on to ring many more of both and even worked as a lighthouse keeper and island observatory warden so that I could experience them further. If pressed, I still say Storm Petrel is my favourite bird!