The Status of the Birds of St.Margaret's

With reference to historical records in the writings of Ticehurst (1909) and Harrison (1953)

A Summary of Species Recorded at St.Margaret's

A review of the birds of the St.Margaret's area, covering the period from 1977 to 1989, was written in 1991 (Hodgson 1991). It included historical records from various sources such as the writings of Ticehurst in 1909 and Harrison in 1953, with the aim of summarising the occurrence of each of the 251 species then known to have occurred at the South Foreland. As at the end of 2002, the number of species known to have occurred in the area had risen to 280 and the following species accounts bring up to date the known status of each.

Divers to Herons 1977 – 2002

Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*

Red-throated Diver is listed in the Kent red data book since the Kentish wintering population of 500-2500 individuals represents over 20% of the numbers estimated to occur in British waters each winter (Waite 2000). Autumn birds begin to appear offshore from mid September and although up to 54 have been recorded in early November, it is more typical for numbers to increase to significant levels during December, when peaks have included 466 on Dec.11th 1990 and 223 on Dec.26th 1994. Winter numbers vary considerably each year and from day to day as birds move in response to the availability of food in the Channel; mostly shoals of sprats. The largest numbers on record include up to 470 in January 1995, 699 on Jan.3rd 1997, 463 on Mar.9th 1996 and 753 on Jan.7th 2002, although in most years many fewer are evident.
Although hundreds of individuals pass Dungeness each spring, divers presumably move past the South Foreland well out at sea. Although the separation of spring migrants from lingering winter birds is difficult, most have more or less disappeared by the end of March, though 18-22 have been recorded in the first week of April in two of the years under review and in 1996 up to 96 were evident in the first week of April, with up to 17 in the first half of May. These unusually large numbers followed an influx of over 450 in early March.

Black-throated Diver *Gavia arctica*

80% of the Black-throated Divers seen from St.Margaret's have been recorded in spring or autumn. The first appear at the end of September, though three on Oct.23rd is the earliest record of more than one. The largest movements include six on Nov.9th 1992 and three on five dates between Oct.23rd and Dec.23rd.
Apart from three on Jan.12th 1998, sporadic ones and twos are more usual in winter, but February records are very few. Spring passage stands out clearly as a result and migrants have been noted between Mar.6th and May 19th. Three were seen as early as Mar.18th in 2001, but most pass by in April and May. Peak periods of activity at this time include 18 bird-days from Apr.24th-28th 1995 (including five on the 25th and nine on the 28th), six individuals between May 11th-18th 1996, eight between May 5th-11th 1997 and five between May 1st-7th 1999.

BLACK-THROATED DIVER					Monthly distribution of records 1977-2002						
JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
24	4	21	43	35				5	17	49	16
		59%						41%			

Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer*

The scarcest of the three divers, Great Northern has most in common with Black-throated, occurring principally in autumn and spring, with relatively few winter records. Autumn migrants have been recorded from Sept.14th, with the majority in October and November, and spring passage has been recorded from Mar.18th to May 11th. Almost all occurrences relate to singles, although two were seen on May 5th 1996 and on May 11th 1997.

GREAT NORTHERN DIVER					Monthly distribution of records 1977-2002						
JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
8	3	1	10	9				2	4	6	1
		48%						26%			

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

This common species of lakes and gravel pits has been recorded here on only three occasions. Singles were seen sitting on the sea on Nov.4th 1990 and Nov.20th 1999 and one was seen on the pond in Pines Gardens on Jan.22nd 2000.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Winter numbers vary considerably each year. The largest flocks on record include 84 in January 1985, 111 in January 1993, 127 in February 1996 and 64 in January 1997, each of these influxes coinciding with periods of very cold weather, though this was not the case in February 2002 when 91 were seen offshore. There have been suggestions of spring passage, with small flocks suddenly appearing offshore in late February or early March and although most have left by early April, some linger into spring or later, including two on June 8th 1996 and one on July 16th 1998.

The first birds of autumn occur from late August but it is unusual for substantial numbers to accumulate before the turn of the year. A gathering of up to 15 in late December 1996 was the largest record in the final quarter of the year.

Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*

Breeding on shallow, well-vegetated lakes eastwards from the Baltic into central Europe and Fennoscandia (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997), Red-necked Grebes occur in Kent on passage and during winter. Autumn migrants have occurred here as early as Oct.2nd. Most subsequent records involve singles, except for one record of two in March and an exceptional cold-weather influx in February 1996, when there were eight records and a total of 24 bird-days, including 14 on Feb.11th. Although few have been recorded beyond mid March, spring migrants have been seen as late as Apr.23rd.

RED-NECKED GREBE	Monthly distribution of records 1977-2002							
	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR		OCT	NOV	DEC
Number of records	4	8	3	2		7	3	2
Total bird-days	5	25	4	2		7	3	2

Slavonian Grebe *Podiceps auritus*

This species, which breeds in shallow lakes across boreal regions of the Northern Hemisphere (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997), is the most northerly of the grebes that visit Kent in winter. It has been identified with certainty only twice in the Channel off St.Margaret's. A party of three flew downchannel on Nov.5th 1994 and a group of four was seen on the sea with three Red-necked Grebes *P.grisegena* during freezing weather on Feb.27th 1996.

However, there have been three occurrences of distant small grebes that were either Slavonian or the similar Black-necked *P.nigricollis*. These include three flying SW on Dec.22nd 1984, one on Oct.30th 1988 and two on Feb.11th 1996.

Fulmar *Fulmaris glacialis*

St.Kilda, 80km west of the Outer Hebrides, is thought to have been the Fulmar's only British breeding haunt until 12 pairs were found in Shetland in 1878, following expansion in Iceland and settlement on the Faeroe Islands from the mid 18th century (Sharrock 1976). St.Margaret's was first mentioned in historical records in May 1953 and by 1960 up to 50 are known to have summered, although breeding was not confirmed until 1966 (KOS 1981). Numbers remained stable throughout the 1980s, with around 15 breeding pairs between Langdon Cliffs and St.Margaret's Bay each year, increasing to 32 occupied nest sites in 1994. Since then, however, there has been a steep decline, and only seven-eight pairs were present in 2000 and 2001. This might be attributable to a reduction in suitable nest sites as a result of an increased level of cliff falls, or poor breeding success.

After breeding, Fulmars depart out to sea and only stragglers remain during September and October. Returning birds normally appear in early November and up to 130 can be seen on the sea below the cliffs by mid month. Peak early winter counts have remained consistently high, including 142 on Nov.28th and 200 on Dec.6th in 1992, up to 160 in the first week of December 2000 and 130 on Nov.17th 2001. Although this runs contrary to the fall in breeding numbers, Fulmars spend their early years entirely at sea, taking at least six years to reach maturity. Thus, any prolonged deterioration in the breeding population is unlikely to show immediately in the numbers returning to the colonies prior to the breeding season.

Dark morph individuals have been seen on several occasions, most recently in April/May 1993 and March 1995.

Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedia*

Cory's Shearwaters breed on rocky coasts and islands of the Mediterranean and Atlantic, often dispersing into the western reaches of the Channel during autumn (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). The only St.Margaret's record is of one flying NE on Sept.19th 1987.

Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus*

Sooty Shearwaters are real ocean wanderers. They breed on remote islands off southern South America, Australia and New Zealand and disperse into the Atlantic and Pacific, heading north-westwards, before moving on prevailing winds to reach the coasts of Europe and North America in late summer and autumn. Their subsequent movements probably take them back to their breeding grounds in a huge clockwise loop of the world's great oceans (del Hoyo, Elliott & Sargatal). Although Sooty Shearwaters are annual off the French coast in autumn, it takes very specific weather conditions to prompt a movement that might be visible on this side of the Channel, invariably involving onshore winds with bands of frontal rain. Offshore occurrences here have been noted in 14 years since 1977, amounting to 150 individuals. Passage has been noted from Aug.25th to Oct.28th, with one or two on three occasions in November, including an unusually late individual on the 25th. However, most (74%) have been recorded between Sept.26th and Oct.13th, including 35 on Sept.26th 1981, 15 on Oct.10th 1987 and 31 on Sept.28th 2000. There have also been records of up to five in the second week of September and the last week of October.

SOOTY SHEARWATER						Bird-days each month 1977-2002					
JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
							2	90	54	4	

Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus*

This enigmatic seabird breeds in burrows along the western seaboard of Britain, ranging several hundred kilometres from its colonies during the breeding season. Most spend the winter in the Atlantic off the coast of South America (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). Manx Shearwaters have been recorded here almost annually since 1980, their appearances being much less weather-dependent then Sooty Shearwater. Although they have been seen in spring between Apr.25th and June 1st, most have been recorded in May. Largest spring movements include 34 on May 6th 1985, 15 on May 27th 1996, 11 on May 10th 1997 and seven on May 2nd 2001, all involving birds flying downchannel.

Apart from ten on July 19th 2001, appearances in June, July and August are infrequent, most autumn migrants having occurred between early September and mid October. The most significant records include 29 in October 1987, including six on the 9th, 18 on the 10th and five on the 18th. Otherwise, there were eight on Sept.14th 1994 and six on Sept.7th 1996. The last in autumn was a very late individual on Nov.3rd 1995.

MANX SHEARWATER				Monthly distribution of individuals 1977-2002							
JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
			8	64	5	18	6	28	37	1	
				38%				39%			

Balearic Shearwater *Puffinus mauretanicus*

The taxonomy of the *Puffinus* group is constantly changing and not all authorities agree how they should be treated. However, birds in the western Mediterranean are distinctly browner and subtly different in flight silhouette to Manx Shearwater and in 1991 this species, formerly regarded as a race of Manx Shearwater *P.puffinus*, was given specific status (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997).

From June to October large numbers move out of the Mediterranean into the Atlantic and North Sea and since regular coverage began in 1977, Balearic Shearwaters have been recorded off St.Margaret's on eight occasions, in two distinct periods, between Aug.18th-31st and Oct.4th-21st. The total of 48 individuals includes seven occurrences of up to three and an exceptional movement of 38 on Aug.31st 1997, in a moderate south-easterly wind, following four days of fresh to strong south-westerlies.

MEDITERRANEAN SHEARWATER						Bird-days each month 1977-2002					
JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
							44		4		

Leach's Petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*

Small, secretive, nocturnal and relatively little known, Leach's Petrels breed in burrows on islands in the north Atlantic, occurring in Kentish waters mainly in autumn. An individual from St.Margaret's Bay, dated Nov.11th 1937, is in Maidstone Museum (Harrison 1953), but there are only two more recent records. One flew NE on Oct.24th 1984 and one definite and two probable Leach's Petrels flew SW on Oct.28th 1994.

Records of unidentified petrels include one on Oct.4th 1992, which was probably Leach's, with several elsewhere around the coast at the time, and although Storm Petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus* has yet to be recorded from St.Margaret's with certainty, two petrels seen flying downchannel on Oct.18th 1987 were almost certainly the two Storm Petrels seen earlier off North Foreland.

Gannet *Morus bassanus*

Gannets occur throughout the year, sometimes close inshore, also sometimes fishing in large groups over the Goodwin Sands. However, they are most numerous during autumn and spring. Post-breeding dispersal brings substantial numbers from late August, including 396 on Aug.31st 1997. Peaks in most years occur between September and November, largest movements including 401 on Oct.13th 1993 and 533 flying upchannel in four hours on Nov.19th 1995, with two other counts in excess of 300. Substantial numbers beyond this date are unlikely until the onset of spring passage, which usually lasts from mid March until late April, with residual movements possible until late May.

GANNET	Monthly peak counts 1977-2002 and number of 100+ counts in each month											
	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Monthly peak	262	168	452	286	144	104	100	396	267	401	533	149
100+ counts	3	1	6	5	1	1	1	3	7	10	7	2

Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

This species appears to have undergone a considerable local decline, more or less coinciding with the recent establishment of breeding colonies in the Stour Valley and at Dungeness in the early 1990s, though a local reduction in food supplies is also apparent, with fewer birds fishing offshore. Prior to this, more than 30 had been recorded in each month between September and April, mostly involving birds at roosts near Hope Point and on Langdon Cliffs. The most seen on one day was 84 on Sept.19th 1987, 55 of which were flushed from Langdon Cliffs by a passing helicopter. Although this roost seems to have been more or less abandoned, substantial numbers are still evident on the ledges at Hope Point, including 52 in January 1995 and 23 in February 2001.

Birds have often been seen flying overland in spring and autumn and the frequency of this type of behaviour seems to have increased. 14 were seen flying out to sea from inland on Oct.11th 1991 and six departed from the cliffs and flew inland over the village on Aug.16th 1994. Ten flew west along Reach Road on Oct.30th 1996, 15 flew west past the pylons on Aug.29th 1998 and seven flew north-east inland of the valley on Apr.22nd 2001, but the most interesting record of this type is two flying directly out to sea from inland towards Cap Gris Nez on Apr.1st 2002.

CORMORANT	Monthly peak counts 1977-2002											
	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Up to 1995	42	31	42	42	14	17	17	59	84	59	48	58
Post-1995	31	39	7	29	7		21	22	21	32	43	36

Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*

This species nested in a cave between Dover and St.Margaret's in 1928 and 1929 (Harrison 1953) and occasional summering individuals have been noted recently. However, the Shag is primarily northern and western in its breeding distribution and few pairs breed to the east of Dorset. Its status here is principally that of a spring and autumn migrant, with birds occasionally overwintering in small numbers.

Seven on Feb.11th 1996 is comfortably the most to have been recorded in the first two months of the year, prior to spring passage from early March to late May. Peaks include ten on Apr.22nd 1984 and seven-eight on seven occasions between Mar.26th and Apr.27th, although four or more have been frequent throughout these three months. A party of nine was seen on June 22nd 1996 and although there has been no serious suggestion of breeding, summering individuals have occurred repeatedly since 1991, with up to three offshore during June or July in seven years since.

Up to three have been recorded in August, but most autumn birds occur between early September and mid October, with several records of five or six during this period. Ones and twos have occurred sporadically in November and December.

SHAG	Approximate number of individuals each month 1977-2002											
	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
1977 – 1989	1	4	14	57	22			8	41	19	8	5
1990 – 2002	11	16	30	43	24	17	7	17	30	24	10	9
			47%						28%			

Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

This nocturnal heron breeds across the southern half of Europe. Small numbers are associated with lakes and river valleys in northern France, as far north as the Somme (Tombal 1996). Substantial numbers bred in the Netherlands during the 17th and 18th centuries (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). The only record for the area was an adult, flushed from conifers at the bottom of the South Foreland valley, adjacent to Pines Gardens, on Mar.29th 1983.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

This dainty white heron is currently spreading rapidly throughout southern Britain, to the extent that there were more than 250 in Kent during summer 2001 and there are signs that it will soon become established as a regular breeding species. First recorded here as recently as 1996, there have now been 14 records. Five have occurred in spring, between May 11th-29th, involving up to three individuals, mostly heading towards Pegwell Bay. Autumn records, nine in all, span the period from Aug.1st to October 3rd. Almost all involve one or two individuals, though six on Aug.6th 2000 were seen passing Samphire Hoe en route to Pegwell Bay. There are also winter records of singles on Dec.3rd 2000 and from Dec.3rd-5th 2002.

Great White Egret *Egretta alba*

This large white heron became increasingly regular to the north and west of its primarily south-eastern European breeding range during the 1970s, breeding for the first time in the Netherlands in 1978 (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997).
One was seen flying along the cliffs towards Dover on May 5th 1977, almost certainly the individual that had been seen at Stodmarsh in the Stour valley three hours earlier, which was the first record for Kent.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Grey Herons regularly visit garden ponds near the South Foreland valley, while others feed at rock pools at low tide. These individuals tend to obscure the presence of genuine migrants, but the regular occurrence of migrant flocks illustrates a pattern of migration in spring and autumn, with largest numbers in September.
Spring movements in March include a flock of four, which flew in off the sea before moving downchannel, on the 31st, and several individuals apparently arriving from the continent. An increase in migrant activity is evident in June, with three records of parties of between three and six, some of which have also been seen arriving from off the sea. Several immigrants have been recorded during July and August, including four on Aug.20th 1994, but most autumn migrants occur in September. These include six on Sept.21st 1991 and seven on Sept.20th 1993, all of which flew downchannel, and a flock of ten circling uncertainly over the cliffs after heavy rain, eventually heading south-west, on Sept.17th 1995.

GREY HERON Monthly bird-day totals 1977-2002											
JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
9	8	36	27	13	40	21	57	122	120	29	2
							62%				

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

Widely distributed in dense marshy situations across southern and eastern Europe, with a significant but currently declining population of over 250 pairs in the Netherlands (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). The sole record for the area is a juvenile, which flew downchannel with a Grey Heron, just out to sea from the cliff top, on Oct.17th 1978.

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*

A familiar bird of rooftops across southern and eastern Europe, with much folklore attached, White Storks have declined considerably in recent decades. However, re-introduction programmes have been established in several areas including northern France and these appear to have been partially successful, at least. One flew upchannel along the cliffs on May 22nd 1977 and another was seen soaring out at sea, eventually heading for Cap Gris Nez, on Sept.29th 1988. One drifted east over the valley on May 18th 1998 and in 1999 one flew in off the sea over the bay on Sept.28th (this record awaits formal acceptance).

Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

Spoonbills are patchily distributed across southern and eastern Europe, with a current population of more than 600 pairs in the Netherlands (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). The first record for St.Margaret's involved an individual picked up dead on the tide line on Feb.27th 1994. Subsequently, one was seen flying out to sea well offshore on Mar.3rd 1996 and another flew past the bay on May 7th 1998.

Wildfowl 1977 – 2002

Although St.Margaret's lies very much in the shadow of Dungeness where the rather esoteric pursuit of seawatching is concerned, there have been some spectacular movements of seabirds in the last 25 years. However, where wildfowl are involved, the identification of subtly marked ducks is far from easy in all but the most helpful of conditions and the quality of such movements is invariably judged by the recognition of a good variety of species rather than particularly large numbers. The most memorable movements have been prompted by periods of cold weather: 80 Shelduck, 51 Tufted Ducks, eight Scaup, 11 Goldeneye and a Smew flew by on Jan.19th 1985 and 141 Shelduck, 2,019 Wigeon and nine Goldeneye did so on Jan.10th 1987. A return movement on the afternoon of Feb.19th 1996, following a long period of cold weather, included 223 Wigeon, 15 Pintail and 60 Scaup. Probably the most outstanding day outside the winter period was Nov.6th 1982 when 102 Teal, 168 Mallard, 41 Pintail and 113 Red-breasted Mergansers flew past offshore.

WILDFOWL Peak monthly counts 1977 – 2002

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SWANS and GEESE												
Mute Swan	3	2	1	4	10	7		1	14	1	8	2
Bewick's Swan										1	17	
Whooper Swan			1							8	1	
Bean Goose			1									1
Pink-footed Goose	3									5	7	15
White -fronted Goose	60	5	6							22	16	60
Greylag Goose	12	3	20	2	5	5				13	9	1
Canada Goose	1		2	4	7	1			15	5		
Barnacle Goose	1	6	72									
Brent Goose	148	300	2853	486	11				434	4446	725	51
DUCKS												
Shelduck	141	12	41	24	6		2	2	10	28	119	91
Wigeon	2019	223	2				4	2	139	1063	125	123
Gadwall	2	4		2	2				1	6	10	
Teal	13	9	11	10				10	43	24	102	52
Mallard	5	2	2	8	4	2	2	1	22	14	168	7
Pintail	11	15	19	2				1	31	23	41	11
Shoveler			9	53	1			4	2	12	48	2
Pochard	24	1	2	7					8	1	24	
Tufted Duck	51	1		4	5				1	1	8	5
Scaup	8	60		6								
Eider	19	60	44	54	13	9	8	21	41	30	24	63
Long-tailed Duck				2								
Common Scoter	83	51	210	1134	526	60	80	270	613	460	1737	23
Velvet Scoter	4		6	8	9			1	4	13	25	1
Goldeneye	11	1	4	2						6	9	1
Smew	1			1							1	1
Red-breasted Merganser	17	3	9	17	31	2	1		1	18	113	11
Goosander	1		4	2							6	3

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

Recorded in each month of the year except July, this almost random pattern is reflected in the occurrence of the largest flocks. In chronological order, parties of more than four include ten on Sept.16th 1978, eight on Nov.4th 1989, seven on June 26th 1990, ten on May 15th 1993, seven on Nov.21st 1993 and 14 over Nelson Park on Sept.20th 1994.

Bewick's Swan *Cygnus columbianus*

Breeding in the high arctic tundra, Bewick's Swans winter annually in Britain, with regular flocks on the North Kent Marshes and, probably of greater local significance, on Romney Marsh. St.Margaret's records have occurred between Oct.29th and Nov.10th. Three on Nov.10th 1984 were seen later the same day in Pegwell Bay, 17 flew downchannel on Nov.3rd 1986, followed by two more the next day, and five flew downchannel on Nov.4th 1989. More recently, one flew over the valley on Oct.29th 1993 and one flew downchannel over Bockhill before continuing inland over the South Foreland on Nov.9th 1996.

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*

Although Whooper Swan has a less restricted breeding distribution than Bewicks's, occurring on lakes and ponds from Sweden eastwards, it is a good deal less common in Kent, though small numbers are regular each winter on Romney Marsh. Its pattern of occurrence here in autumn is very similar to Bewick's, all records falling within the period Oct.23rd to Nov.9th. These include one flying in off the sea on Oct.29th 1977, eight flying NE on Oct.30th 1983 and three flying SW on Oct.30th 1988. One was seen on Oct.23rd 1990 and one inland over Wanstone Farm on Nov.9th 1996. In spring, one flew over Bockhill on Mar.28th 1997.

Bean Goose *Anser fabalis*

Widely distributed from N Norway to E Siberia, Bean Goose is an occasional winter visitor to Kent, usually in small numbers. One was seen on fields behind the village with White-fronted Geese *A.albifrons* on Dec.19th 1996 and two flew over Bockhill on Mar.1st 1997.

Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*

Pink-footed Goose occurs in two populations. Those breeding in Iceland and Greenland winter in Britain, while birds breeding in Svalbard winter in Denmark, the Netherlands and Belgium. Although a ringing recovery confirms the occurrence of at least one Icelandic bird in Kent, it seems more likely that most originate from the Svalbard population. Three flew upchannel on Jan.11th 1981 and eight were present on fields opposite the entrance to Wanstone Farm on Dec.31st 1992. Most other records relate to flocks flying upchannel, including three on Nov.1st 1993 and seven the next day, a flock of 15 over the valley on Dec.24th 1994 and five on Oct.19th 1997, while two were seen on fields adjacent to Station Road on Dec.5th 2002.

White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*

Breeding in the remote Russian tundra, this is the most numerous and widespread grey goose in Kent in winter, apart from the Greylag, with 19 records at St.Margaret's in the last 25 years. 60 flew over on Jan.3rd in the Siberian winter of 1985, 60 did so on Dec.10th 1990 and flocks of 30 and 44 were seen on Dec.21st and 22nd 1991. Since then numbers have been a good deal smaller, including 20 on Dec.24th 1994, 16 on Nov.4th 1995 and ten on Nov.1st 1998.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

Although the number of records of this ubiquitous species is relatively small, there is evidence of some shuffling about in spring and autumn, mainly in March and, to a lesser extent, in October and November. The largest movements include a total of 23 flying upchannel on Oct.12th/13th 1985, 20 on Mar.20th 1986 and a total of 22 in March 1996. Smaller flocks include five over the farm on June 10th 1989, six on Jan.29th 1992, six on Oct.14th 1993, nine on Nov.3rd 1994, 12 on Jan.18th 1996 and five on Oct.18th 1999 and May 13th 2000.

Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*

Canada Goose has occurred only sporadically here, despite its abundance on inland lakes and gravel pits. The largest flocks recorded here were 15 flying SW on Sept.21st 1993 and seven, also flying SW, on May 25th 1996. Three to five have been seen on five dates in April, May and October, but all other records relate to one or two individuals.

Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis*

Until recently, the largest recorded Kent flocks of Barnacle Goose were 40 at the time of the Great War and 24 in January 1978. Recently, however, numbers visiting the county in winter have increased, despite the difficulty of distinguishing wild birds from feral individuals. There were significant influxes in eight winters since 1978/79, mostly in February, though arrivals have been noted in November/December in three of these. Against this background, a flock of 72, which landed briefly on the rocks in the bay before continuing upchannel at 13.55 on Mar.16th 1984 was quite exceptional, additionally so because few had been evident during the winter. The flock paused again on Kingsdown golf course then spent the night on Worth Marshes, where they remained the next day before moving on. Subsequently, one was seen feeding by the pylons on Jan.29th 1991 and six flew NE on Feb.9th later the same winter.

Brent Goose *Branta bernicla*

In spring, Brent Geese move upchannel from their wintering grounds in NW France and the south coast of Britain, to breed in the high arctic. Up to 300 have been recorded in the last few days of February and passage lasts into early April. Although as many as 6,479 were recorded between Feb.24th and Apr.8th 1996, numbers are negligible in years when weather conditions are unsuitable. Highest day totals include 1,295 on Mar.3rd 1983, in a strong SSW wind, and 2,853 on Mar.9th 1996, when the wind was light and

blowing from the SE. 970 flew upchannel on Mar.9th 1994 and totals of 300-490 have been recorded on several other occasions, mainly in March.
Autumn passage is a good deal more complex, with St.Margaret's situated at a crossroads for Brent Geese arriving in Britain in autumn. Although they invariably fly west off Thanet and Dungeness, here some fly NE towards their wintering grounds on the British east coast, mainly off Essex, while others proceed in the opposite direction towards NW France and southern Britain (Van der Dol 1980). As a result, it is commonplace for birds to fly in opposite directions on the same day. Autumn movements of more than 1,000 include 1,870 downchannel and 16 up on Oct.29th 1985 (the wind was NNE 4-5), 3,491 upchannel and 447 down on Nov.2nd 1986 (NNW 4) and 4,446 downchannel and 299 up on Oct.14th 1993 (NE 4-5). Lesser movements, involving at least ten records of 500 or more, have been noted between Sept.22nd and Nov.4th. The severe cold of early 1985 precipitated an unusual movement of 148 on Jan.5th.

Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

There have been at least 225 records of Shelduck since 1977. Almost all occasions on which 30 or more have been noted offshore have been between November and January, often in cold weather. In the severe winter of 1985, there were upchannel movements of 55 on Jan.3rd and 80 on the 19th, with 102 downchannel on the 5th. Cold weather in 1987 was also responsible for movements of 141 downchannel and 12 up on Jan.10th, followed by 42 upchannel the next day. There were also 151 bird-days in cold weather between Dec.21st-29th 1996, including 91 on the 21st.
There is evidence of a regular spring passage, from the start of March to early May, including a peak count of 41 on Mar.24th 1996. Autumn migration takes place mainly from mid September, reaching a peak in November, during which there have been movements of 119 upchannel on Nov.4th 1990, 105 bird-days between Nov.4th-25th 1995, including a peak of 63 on the 4th, and 51 on Nov.1st 1998.

Wigeon *Anas penelope*

The most numerous of the dabbling ducks on migration off St.Margaret's, all records span the period Aug.31st to Mar.15th, apart from four on July 17th 1994, though few have been recorded beyond the end of February.
Hard weather movements include up to 99 in January 1985 and, in an outstanding day for wildfowl on Jan.10th 1987, a total of 2,019 SW and 107 NE in 2½ hours in the morning. There was also a NE passage of 223 in the afternoon of Feb.19th 1996 at the end of a month of very cold weather. Otherwise, all movements of more than a hundred have taken place between Sept.16th and Dec.10th. Comfortably the largest of these was on Oct.14th 1993 when 1,063 flew downchannel, well in excess of the other six substantial movements of 114 – 183.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

Probably more regular offshore than we suspect, poor light conditions and the remoteness of passing flocks often preclude accurate identification of all but the most distinctively marked species. Nevertheless, there have been only 14 records of Gadwall since 1977. Two have occurred in the first two months of the year, involving up to four individuals, with two on three dates in spring between Apr.8th and May 3rd. The others have all occurred in autumn between Sept.9th and Nov.10th, including nine on Nov.6th 1982, ten on Nov.9th 1992, six on Oct.22nd 1993 and seven on Nov.10th 2001.

Teal *Anas crecca*

Since 1977, this species has been recorded on 87 occasions, including 63 in autumn, between September and November, in more or less equal measure each month. There have also been 12 records in January and 11 in March and April. Numbers are usually small, with only five records of more than 20, the largest involving 102 flying downchannel in an outstanding wildfowl movement on Nov.6th 1982. There were also 52 on Dec.10th 1990, 43 on Sept.1st 1998 and two counts of 30 and 38 in November 2000 and September 1993. Most other double figure counts have occurred between September and November, although ten or more have also been seen in January, April and August.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Most occurrences relate to small numbers of birds associated with ponds in the area, most notably in Pines Gardens, where one or two pairs bred in the late 1990s and early 2000s. However, records of apparently wild birds include 168 flying downchannel in an outstanding wildfowl movement on Nov.6th 1982 and several other records of 10-22 between September and November.

Pintail *Anas acuta*

This elegant species has been recorded on 73 occasions, with most (48) occurring in autumn. Although migrants have been seen from Aug.25th, most occur from mid September to early December, largest movements involving 31 on Sept.11th 1995, 41 on Nov.6th 1982 and 40 on Nov.11th 1999, plus 20-25 on three occasions and five records of 11-17, all between Oct.3rd and Dec.2nd. Movements of up to 11 in late December 1996 and 14 in January 1985 were all stimulated by cold weather and 15 flew upchannel on Feb.19th at the end of a month-long period of heavy frosts. Spring passage, from early March to early May, accounts for a further 11 records, including 19 flying NE with Brent Geese on Mar.8th 1996 and 25 flying in the same direction on Apr.4th 1987.

Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Shoveler is a scarce species here, with only 27 occurrences since 1977. It is perhaps significant that none were recorded in the large wildfowl movements of January 1985, when every other species regularly found in Kent in winter, except for Long-tailed, did occur. 13 records have occurred in spring, between Mar.17th and May 10th, the largest of which involved 53 on Apr.5th 1996, nine on Mar.17th 2001 and 16 on Mar.18th 2002. In autumn, there have been 14 records, including 48 on Nov.6th 1982 and 10-12 on Nov.1st 1993 and October 27th 1997.

Pochard *Aythya ferina*

Winter records involve two on two occasions in the Arctic conditions of January 1985 and 24 NE in freezing weather on Jan.10th 1987. One was also seen in February 1996 and there are spring records of two in March 1994 and seven SW on Apr.6th 1996. The remaining 15 records have all occurred between Sept.13th and Nov.21st, with 11 of these from Oct.29th onwards. Numbers have been small, with the exception of 24 – very possibly the same flock – on Nov.19th and 20th 1985, the only occasion on which more than nine have been recorded.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Of seven winter records, by far the most significant was a movement of 51 SW on Jan.19th 1985, during a period of particularly severe cold. Eight were seen during January in 1987 and 1995, also in cold weather. Spring occurrences amount to four records of up to five between Apr.24th and May 19th, and the remaining 12 appearances have occurred between Sept.12th and Nov.29th, all but two of which were in October and November. Eight on Nov.19th 1993 was the only autumn record of more than four.

Scaup *Aythya marila*

Eight flew SW on Jan.19th 1985 at a time of a very large cold-weather influx into Kentish waters and six flew NE on Apr.4th 1987, following another cold winter. One was seen on Feb.9th 1991 and in 1996, during another wildfowl movement subsequent to a period of cold weather, a flock of 60 flew NE on Feb.19th.

Eider *Somateria molissima*

Double figure counts have occurred on 17 dates between early March and the end of May and on 18 occasions from late August to late December. Small flocks are often present on the sea in summer and there have been sporadic winter influxes, most notably in the Arctic conditions of January 1985. Spring passage has featured five movements in excess of 30, between Mar.7th and Apr.17th, including 54 NE on Apr.8th 1996. Autumn numbers have been similar, including seven counts of more than 30, between Sept.6th and Dec.6th, the largest of which involved 51 SW on Dec.6th 1995 and 63 SW on Dec.22nd 1996.

There has been a noticeable decline in the frequency of summering flocks. Up to eight were present throughout summer 1980, with nine in early June 1983 and five from the end of July until early September in 1987. During the previous decade, however, there were only two records of one or two in June or July.

Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis*

A scarce winter visitor and passage migrant to Kent, the only local record is of two flying NE on Apr.11th 1985, having been seen earlier at Dungeness.

Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra*

Large-scale movements of scoter occur along the English Channel in spring and autumn, as they move to and from their wintering grounds off the French and Iberian coasts (Lack 1986). Numbers off Dungeness are invariably much greater than are visible here, but occasionally conditions force birds closer inshore, particularly when winds blowing from the S or SE are accompanied by rain. Spring passage is evident from mid March to late May, including peak counts of 210 on Mar.14th 1984, 621 on Mar.15th 2002, 1,134 on

Apr.4th 1987 and 526 on May 3rd 1980. Several hundreds regularly pass the Thanet coast during summer, but little seawatching takes place here at that time of year and the earliest substantial autumn movements have been noted in the second week of August. The largest movements include 1,737 on Nov.6th 1982, 613 on Sept.13th 1993 and 455-460 on two occasions in October.

Velvet Scoter *Melanitta fusca*

Much less common around Kent than the Common Scoter, this species occurs principally as a spring and autumn migrant and occasionally in winter, when up to four have been recorded. Spring passage, noted between Mar.3rd and May 9th, includes peak counts of eight on Apr.28th 1984 and nine on May 9th 1986. In autumn, one was seen on the sea on Aug.31st 1987 and four flew SW on Sept.17th 1995, but the rest have occurred from Oct.7th onwards, including four double figure counts. These involved 13 on Oct.26th 1980, a total of 49 bird-days between Nov.6th-9th, including 25 on the 6th and 15 on the 7th, and 17 on Nov.9th 1992.

Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*

Small wintering flocks of this attractive duck can be found on lakes and gravel pits throughout the county, with significant numbers nearby at Dungeness. Locally, the largest influx occurred in cold-weather in January 1985 when a total of 23 bird-days included six on the 7th and 11 on the 19th. Similarly cold weather in January 1987 produced a movement of nine on the 10th. Sporadic singles in February almost overlap with presumed spring migrants, which include three parties of up to four between Mar.2nd and Apr.4th. However, Goldeneye are most regular in autumn, when there have been 13 records of up to nine between Oct.9th and Nov.21st.

Smew *Mergus albellus*

Smew nest in northern Russia and winter mainly in the Netherlands, where up to 10,000 occur. Small numbers appear each winter at regularly used gravel pits and lakes in southern Britain. There have been four records here since 1977. In 1982, an immature or female flew past on Nov.6th and an adult drake did so during freezing weather on Jan.19th 1985. Another adult drake flew SW with a party of Eider on Dec.6th 1995 and a female or immature flew NE on Apr.6th 1996.

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*

Red-breasted Mergansers wintering on the sea off eastern and southern British coasts are thought to be mainly Scandinavian in origin (Lack 1986). Records from St.Margaret's suggest a regular but variable passage in autumn, from as early as Sept.19th, with the majority in October and November. Small winter numbers are followed by a return passage in spring, mainly during April and May, and there have been summer occurrences of two on June 16th 1996 and one on July 25th 1999.

In spring, largest numbers involve five records of 11-31 between Apr.5th and May 3rd. Autumn records include 11 double figure counts between Oct.22nd and Dec.2nd, including 113 on Nov.6th 1982 and 110 on Nov.9th 1992, with three records of 26-31, each in November.

Goosander *Mergus merganser*

Unlike the Red-breasted Merganser, Goosanders favour fresh water and are more likely to be found on inland lakes and gravel pits. Most, if not all birds wintering in Kent are thought to originate from Scandinavia or further to the east in Europe (Lack 1986). There have been eight records here since 1977. Four in autumn, between Nov.5th and Dec.10th, include six NE on Nov.9th 2001 and two other records of three individuals. Singles have been seen twice in January and in spring, two flew SW on Apr.2nd 1991 and a drake and three females flew NE on Mar.2nd 1996.

Birds of Prey 1977 – 2002

Only a few years ago, the sight of a Marsh Harrier drifting over clifftop fields or the arrival of a spring Honey Buzzard on a gentle southerly breeze would have been almost as exciting an event as the appearance of a Red-footed Falcon from eastern Europe. On an average day in the late 1970s, Kestrel would have been the only species of bird of prey likely to be seen in the area. Now, 25 years on, Kestrel, Peregrine and Sparrowhawk breed locally and during migration periods it is not unreasonable to expect to see five or more species in a day, with multiple sightings of Marsh Harrier, Common Buzzard and Hobby quite possible. The table below shows how numbers of birds of prey have increased, particularly since the early 1990s. This partially reflects better coverage, with regular observations at Bockhill since 1995 being of major significance, but there is no doubt that much of the increase is genuine and reflected throughout southern Britain.

BIRDS OF PREY AT BOCKHILL AND THE SOUTH FORELAND					Bird-days 1977-2002			
	1977-1989				1990-2002			
	Spring/ Summer	Autumn	Winter	TOTAL	Spring/ Summer	Autumn	Winter	TOTAL
Honey Buzzard	3	3		6	37	61		98
Black Kite					6	1		7
Red Kite		2		2	10	3	2	15
White-tailed Eagle						1		1
Marsh Harrier	4	3		7	68	65		133
Hen Harrier	12	30	4	46	19	48	7	74
Montagu's Harrier	5	1		6	13	10		23
Goshawk	1	1		2	1	1		2
Sparrowhawk	112	142	27	281	635	1567	101	2303
Common Buzzard	4	2		6	95	66	3	164
Rough-legged Buzzard	1	4		5		5		5
Osprey	6	2		8	20	10		30
Red-footed Falcon	1	1		2	6			6
Merlin	1	21	1	23	24	96	16	136
Hobby	10	25		35	129	239		368

Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*

Honey Buzzards migrate north from Africa each spring, utilising traditional migration 'bottlenecks' at the Straits of Gibraltar and, in autumn, at Falsterbo in southern Sweden. From an average of less than one per year during the 1980s, Honey Buzzards have steadily become more frequent, culminating in a record 20 individuals in 2000. The earliest in spring was on Apr.30th and wandering birds have been seen as late as July 31st, but 30 of the 40 spring migrants so far recorded have occurred in the second half of May and first half of June. There was a significant discovery in 1994 that raptor watching from the wartime magazine at the rear of the valley at the end of May or beginning of June could be productive, and four on June 1st that year remains a record for a single spring day. Clear conditions with a light southerly breeze have induced further spring arrivals of Honey Buzzards, mainly between Langdon and St.Margaret's Bay. Although good conditions can be elusive, eight were recorded in 1996 and three or four have been seen in six years since 1992. The increase in numbers appears to coincide with an increase in the Nord Pas-de-Calais region of northern France, where 130-220 pairs are thought to breed (Tombal 1996), and recent confirmation of breeding in Kent. Although almost all birds have been visibly migrating, one was seen on rocks at the base of the cliffs on June 22nd 1991 and another was disturbed from an anthill in the valley on May 24th 1992.

There have been 64 autumn records since 1977. Nine have been in August, from as early as the 9th, with 11 in the first half of September, 31 in the second half of the month, 12 in the first ten days of October and one on Oct.27th. The first year of multiple autumn records was 1993, when a total of six included four on Sept.17th. Six were also seen in 1995, including four on Sept.3rd, and five appeared in 1998 and 2001, including three at Bockhill on Oct.10th 1998. After 13 individuals in 1999, a huge arrival occurred on the east coast between Yorkshire and Suffolk on Sept.21st 2000, involving birds drifted across the North Sea from Scandinavia. Although no more than two were seen on any single day in 1999 and most passed to the west of Kent in 2000, six Honey Buzzards on Sept.25th 2000 created a new record for the area.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

Black Kites migrate north from Africa each spring, following similar migration routes to Honey Buzzards, and although numbers reaching northern France fluctuate greatly from year to year breeding has occurred (Tombal 1996). There is evidence of a steady increase, a trend reflected in occurrences at St.Margaret's, where the first Black Kite for the area flew NE over Nelson Park on Aug.3rd 1991. One was seen drifting over the South Foreland valley on June 20th 1993 and a series of three spring migrants in 1994 included singles on May 13th, 15th and 30th, two of which were seen over the valley, with one over Nelson Park. Singles NE over Wanstone on May 8th 2000 and along Lighthouse Down on June 4th 2002 take the total to seven.

Red Kite *Milvus milvus*

Before 1990, the only Red Kites to have been seen here were singles on Oct.5th 1979 and Nov.15th 1981. However, introduction of Spanish birds to England from 1989 onwards led to a rapid increase in the English breeding population and since 1990 there have been 15 further individuals. One was seen in February and ten have been recorded in spring, between Mar.13th and May 29th, with most in March and early April. Some are known to have wandered widely: one flew SW past Samphire Hoe and Capel-le-Ferne, while another was seen at Pegwell Bay and Margate, eventually reaching the Stour valley in mid afternoon, having spent most of the morning drifting around the South Foreland. One flew in off the sea on Mar.27th 1993, suggesting some cross-Channel activity, while others have remained in the general area for several days.
Autumn records amount to three between Sept.29th and Oct.25th and there has been one in early winter: a bird that remained from Nov.25th to Dec.1st, also visiting Sutton and Worth during its stay. Since regular coverage began at Bockhill, the distribution of records has slightly favoured that side of the bay.

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*

In one of the most memorable events of the period under review for those fortunate enough to have experienced it, a juvenile was seen soaring over the valley on Oct.22nd 1990. It eventually moved steadily NE over Bockhill, causing pandemonium among flocks of Lapwings and gulls as it did so.

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Described in *Birds of Kent* (KOS 1981) as an 'annual passage migrant in increasing numbers... occasionally present during winter and summer', the Marsh Harrier has undergone a dramatic change in status. 15 or so now regularly winter in the county and the well-established breeding population on Sheppey raised 42 young in 1998. Numbers of birds passing through St.Margaret's in spring and autumn has increased accordingly, though to date there have been no records in winter. Spring migration, noted from Mar.26th, almost exclusively involves adults until young birds begin to pass through from late April. Passage peaks during May and early June, before tailing off by the middle of the month, although an immature was recorded as late as July 9th. All spring records have been of one or two individuals.
Autumn migrants have occurred between Aug.9th and Oct.27th, with substantial numbers likely from mid month to late September, as peak counts of four on Aug.19th 1998 and Sept.26th and 29th 1999 illustrate. Since regular coverage commenced at Bockhill, a significant number of records have originated from that side of the bay, particularly in autumn. 54 have been seen there since 1994 and it seems very likely that birds appearing on the Bockhill side of the bay often move W or SW inland of the South Foreland valley.

MARSH HARRIER Monthly distribution of records 1977-2002											
JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
		7	23	29	12	1	23	36	9		

Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*

Hen Harriers from northern uplands have appeared regularly at southern British winter roosts in the last 20 years and a major influx during the severe 1978/79 winter led to breeding in northern France, where Hen Harriers were found in as many 10 km squares as Montagu's Harrier during the 1985-1995 breeding survey. The breeding population was also significantly larger, at 20-40 pairs (Tombal 1996).
Apart from August records in three consecutive years between 1999 and 2001, the local status of Hen Harrier has changed relatively little and any apparent increase in autumn probably results from better coverage since regular observations began at Bockhill in 1995. Up to six have occurred annually, though there were ten records in 1991, largely as a result of an exceptional influx of 13 bird-days in autumn, including five on Oct.12th. Three flew in off the sea on Oct.27th 1983 and three were also seen on the same date in the following year.
Prior to 1990, spring passage was apparent from Mar.5th to Apr.12th, with the first of autumn on Sept.20th and the bulk of autumn migrants occurring from late October to mid November. Since then, however, birds have been recorded later in spring (to June 9th) and earlier in autumn (from Aug.6th). There has also been a

tendency for Hen Harriers to appear earlier in October, creating a more even spread of records from just before mid month to the end of the first week of November. The incidence of grey adult males has also increased, from four out of a total of 46 during the 1980s to 16 of 69 records from 1990 onwards.

HEN HARRIER	Monthly distribution of records 1977-2002											
	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
1977-1989	3	1	8	4					2	15	13	
1990-2002	3	2	8	7	3	1		4	4	25	15	4

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*

A summer migrant that reaches Britain in very variable numbers each year, with a few pairs remaining to breed, though it does so only rarely in Kent. There is also a small breeding population in the Pas-de-Calais region of northern France, where up to 22 pairs were located during the 1985-1995 breeding survey (Tombal 1996).

The substantial increase in numbers during the previous decade can be explained only partly by improved coverage of the area by observers at Bockhill. Spring migration, recorded from Apr.29th to June 2nd, has involved a total of 18 individuals, half of which have occurred between May 20th and June 2nd. 11 individuals have been seen in autumn, between Aug.10th and Sept.15th. Spring migrants appear to pass quickly through and most seem to do so in autumn. However, some birds have lingered for an extended period, in particular an adult male and a female or immature, which were present between St.Margaret's and Mongeham for at least ten days in August 1990.

MONTAGU'S HARRIER	Monthly distribution of records 1977-2002										
JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
			1	14	3		9	2			

Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*

This huge relative of the Sparrowhawk is very scarce in Kent, and migrants are accordingly rare. However, 25-75 pairs were located during the 1985-1995 breeding bird survey of the Pas-de-Calais region of northern France (Tombal 1996) and although the majority of these were found in the most densely forested Hainaut-Avesnois region in the east, there were several records from the forests inland of Boulogne. At St.Margaret's, one was seen flying into clifftop gardens after a Woodpigeon on Oct.29th 1978 and another on Apr.20th 1987 was seen over Nelson Park before drifting towards Dover. A juvenile flew SW along the cliffs at Langdon on Mar.16th 1991 and an adult male flew inland over Wanstone on Sept.13th 1994.

Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

Pesticide contamination reduced numbers of all birds of prey to very low levels in the 1960s and 1970s and only one Sparrowhawk was seen in the three years from 1976-1978. Although coverage increased between 1979 and 1981, annual totals remained low, at 10-14 each year. As Sparrowhawks spread into East Kent during the 1980s a gradual increase took place, with 60 bird-days in 1989, and successful breeding was confirmed in 1994, by which time up to 230 bird-days were being recorded each year. At least three pairs were resident between St.Margaret's and Oxney in 1996, which made differentiation between resident and migrant birds increasingly difficult, although a large influx of migrants in October 1998 took the probable total for that year to approximately 300. More recently, however, the total of 218 bird/days in 2000 was the lowest for seven years, probably a response to a general decline in numbers of birds in the wider countryside.

Prior to the current year-round occupation of the area, spring migration was most pronounced during April and May. Autumn migrants were noted from early September, with a peak in late October and early November. This established a pattern of autumn arrival, mainly from the continent, as northern Sparrowhawks followed their prey out of Scandinavia, followed by a return passage in spring when birds were frequently seen leaving out to sea. This began to change as Sparrowhawks spread into Kent, coinciding with an increase in the breeding population in northern France, from just 5-10 pairs in 1976 to 225-550 pairs in the 1985-1995 breeding survey (Tombal 1996).

Since 1990, almost as many have been seen arriving from off the sea in spring as have been seen departing for France. To date, 55 cross-Channel migrants have been noted between Mar.15th and May 12th, mostly between mid March and mid April, including three on Apr.13th 1991 and four on Mar.26th 1994, all flying in off the sea. Largest spring day totals include seven at Bockhill on Mar.14th 1999, 11 at the S.Foreland on Mar.31st 1997 and 11 at Bockhill on Apr.29th 2000, with four counts of six-eight between Apr.8th-27th, three of which have been at Bockhill.

Up to 1989, the earliest individual to have been seen arriving from France in autumn was on Oct.11th, with a pronounced peak in late October and early November, including 19 in two days on Oct.29th-30th 1983 and

13, also over two days, on Nov.2nd-3rd 1986. Since 1990, at least 83 cross-Channel migrants have been recorded in autumn, 66 of which arrived from the continent, with 17 flying in the opposite direction. Interestingly, since 1994, departing Sparrowhawks have been seen leaving for the continent mostly from mid September to early October, including three flying out to sea together on Sept.30th 1996. Although immigration from the continent has been noted earlier than in the 1980s, including three flying in off the sea on Sept.14th 1998, most immigrants still occur from mid October to mid November.

The largest numbers of the last 25 years occurred during an influx of Scandinavian birds in October 1998, which included unprecedented numbers of Ring Ouzels and Common Buzzards. At least 70 Sparrowhawks were recorded on Oct.10th and a further influx took place on Nov.1st, during which at least 13 were recorded, mostly flying in off the sea with large numbers of Chaffinches and thrushes. Otherwise, large autumn influxes since 1990 include ten on the very early date of Sept.2nd 1994, almost certainly involving dispersing British birds, 10-15 at Bockhill on Sept.25th 1995, with ten between Langdon and Bockhill two days later, and nine on three dates between Sept.28th and Oct.5th 1999. Eight were also recorded at Bockhill on Oct.27th 1999 and on Sept.30th/Oct.1st 2000 at the S.Foreland, with nine there on Oct.19th 2002. This predominance of large numbers in September and early October hints very strongly at a decline in the number of migrants crossing the Channel in autumn, a feature that has also been noted in spring in recent years.

The Sparrowhawk has long been regarded as a skilful and furtive hunter of small birds, but it has been one of the great pleasures of the last 20 years to witness its extraordinary versatility. Although surprise in low-level flight remains its principal asset, individuals regularly soar to great heights, particularly in autumn, before dropping like stones toward passing flocks of migrants, Meadow Pipits seeming to be especially attractive. Others have been seen plucking sparrows from inside hawthorn bushes with their remarkably long legs and one young bird, in an ultimately futile but highly inventive hunting foray, was seen crouched and running along freshly ploughed furrows towards a flock of feeding Linnets. Another, in rapid low-level flight along the clifftop path, stalled suddenly as it passed through the wire strands of a cliff top fence, before deliberately quartering a patch of rough grass, with slow wing beats resembling a large butterfly, apparently oblivious to the presence of a human only a few yards away.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

In many respects, the recent fortunes of this species resemble those of the Sparrowhawk, on both sides of the Channel. In the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region of northern France, its population increased from just ten pairs in 1976 to 330-700 during the 1985-1995 breeding bird survey (Tombal 1996). In Kent, numbers increased steadily during the 1990s and breeding was confirmed for the first time since the early nineteenth century in 1999 (KBR 1999). Like the Sparrowhawk, the presence of summering birds in East Kent has blurred the distinction between spring and autumn migrants and there have records in almost every month of the year. Prior to 1990, there were only six local records of Common Buzzard: four in spring between Mar.3rd and May 7th and two in autumn on Oct.11th and 15th. Singles followed in 1990 and 1991, with two in 1992 and three-four annually from 1993 to 1995. Since then, there has been a dramatic increase, with significant numbers on the Bockhill side of the bay contributing to annual totals of 23-24 in 1996 and 1998, 29 in 1999 and 38 in 2000. Even allowing for duplication in these figures, inevitable in such a widely ranging species, there is no doubt that Common Buzzard has increased more in percentage terms in the last decade than any other bird of prey.

Since 1990, there have been two records in January, probably involving one individual, and two at the end of February, one of which was seen flying out to sea, while a very pale individual was seen arriving from France. These define the start of spring passage, which becomes most pronounced in the second half of March and early April, although stragglers have been noted arriving from off the sea as late as June 10th. Spring peak counts include eight on Mar.30th 1996 and possibly as many as 29 in March/April 1999, after a large influx the previous autumn, including seven at Bockhill on Apr.4th. Six were also seen over Bockhill on Apr.8th 2000, in a spring total of 23 bird-days on that side of the bay. Records in the first half of the year are summarised below:

COMMON BUZZARD		Bird-days during the first half of the year 1977-2002									
JAN		FEB		MAR		APR		MAY		JUN	
1-15	16-31	1-15	16-29	1-15	16-31	1-15	16-30	1-15	16-31	1-15	16-30
	2		1	16	41	22	9	7	2	2	
				77%							

Appearances in autumn are less concentrated than in spring, with peaks in August and from mid September to the end of October, as shown below. Peak counts include three over Bockhill on Aug.25th and 26th 1996 and a probable total of 14 on Oct.10th 1998, several of which were seen leaving out to sea. Although most have been seen flying over the area, one remained close to Sherley's Farm for several days in November 2001.

COMMON BUZZARD		Bird-days during the second half of the year 1977-2002									
JUL		AUG		SEP		OCT		NOV		DEC	
1-15	16-31	1-15	16-31	1-15	16-31	1-15	16-31	1-15	16-30	1-15	16-31
	1	3	13	3	13	21	8	3	3		
			19%		62%						

Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus*

This raptor is found in arctic and subarctic regions of the Northern Hemisphere, extending into the fell country of southern Scandinavia, wintering mainly to the east of the Netherlands (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). Rough-legged Buzzards are regular on the British east coast in winter and although numbers are usually small there have been periodic but entirely unpredictable larger influxes (Lack 1986).

Records at St.Margaret's follow the expected pattern, with nine in autumn and one in spring, but it remains one of the most enigmatic of raptors, with no change in numbers over the two decades of recent coverage. Apart from one flying SW on Sept.17th 1993, all autumn records have occurred between Oct.7th and Nov.5th, including five between Oct.24th and Nov.5th. The only individual to have lingered was one that arrived off the sea on Oct.7th 1978 and stayed in the area until the 10th. The sole spring record was on Mar.26th 1982.

Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus*

In the west of its European breeding range, Booted Eagles breed mainly in forests in the Iberian peninsula. There have been recent records from the northern regions of Champagne-Ardenne, Picardie and Haut Avesnois, close to the Belgian border (Tombal 1996). The fifth record for Belgium occurred in May 1997 and the fourth for the Netherlands in July-August the same year. One was claimed in Kent in August 1981 (rejected by BBRC) and one was seen near Cap Blanc Nez, just across the Channel, on Sept.7th 1996.

A pale morph individual was seen on Sept.28th 1999 at Hope Point. An individual in Ireland shortly before the occurrence here and one in Cornwall in early October seems to have persuaded the British Ornithologist's Union Records Committee to regard this as a potential escape. Needless to say, all local observers disagree strongly with this conclusion, plumage differences suggesting that this was a different individual from the Irish bird, at least.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

Ospreys breed annually in Britain and winter in Africa. They were exterminated from Scotland in the early 1900s and it was not until 1954 that breeding resumed. With the breeding population having steadily increased to more than 100 pairs in 1997 (Mead 2000), chicks from Scottish nests were released at Rutland Water, where successful breeding took place in 2001. Since 1977, there have been 27 spring records and 11 in autumn at St.Margaret's. In spring, one was seen as early as Mar.23rd, with eight in April and the remainder in May and the first half of June, the latest having been seen on June 15th. Although most records involve singles, two were seen on June 3rd 1992 and May 19th 1997. Most have been seen flying over the area, often following the coast, but one was disturbed from the clifftop in pouring rain on May 1st 2001.

Apart from one on Oct.25th, all autumn records have occurred between Aug.26th and Sept.29th. Several have been seen leaving out to sea, including one as early as 06.50 on Sept.5th 1996, illustrating this species' ability to cross substantial areas of open water without the need for long periods of soaring. This also leads to a tendency to arrive in spring along a very broad front, and birds have been seen flying in off the sea from Dover Castle to Kingsdown, without apparently favouring any particular landmark.

OSPREY			Distribution of spring and autumn migrants 1977-2002									
MAR	APR		MAY		JUN			AUG	SEP		OCT	
15-31	1-15	16-30	1-15	16-31	1-15	16-30		16-31	1-15	16-30	1-15	16-31
2	4	4	6	7	4			1	7	3		1

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Cross-Channel movement in spring has been evident from singles flying out to sea towards Calais on Feb.23rd and arriving from France on three dates between Mar.23rd and Apr.7th. Most other evidence of spring passage has involved coasting movements in late March or early April, including seven or eight flying SW on Apr.3rd 1991 and six on Mar.30th 1997, which included two individuals arriving from off the sea.

Early morning sojourns on the clifftop in autumn have revealed 47 individuals flying out to sea towards Cap Gris Nez, between Aug.29th and Nov.1st, most having done so between Sept.17th and Oct.24th, including four on Sept.27th 1994 and five on Oct.24th 1990. Such movements can begin almost immediately after sunrise. Otherwise, the heaviest movements, presumably including dispersing birds from within the county, occurred in 1983 when nine flew SW on Oct.17th, followed by 46 on the 19th, many of which appeared to arrive from off the sea before moving inland, and 15 more the next day. In 1984, 23 flew SW between Oct.23rd-27th, and in 1988 eight flew SW on Oct.18th, followed by a total of 23 SW on the 20th and 23rd. In 1989, eight flew in off the sea on Sept.30th and 13 flew NE on Oct.2nd, followed by 26 on the 15th, several of which arrived from off the sea. Since then, there have been SW movements of 19 on Sept.29th 1990, 14 on Oct.19th 1991 and on Sept.5th 1992, while in 1993, 24 flew SW on Oct.10th, with two others flying out to sea the same day. 32 flew SW on Sept.16th 1995, including several that appeared to arrive from France, but such movements have been very low-key since.

Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*

This graceful falcon breeds in loose colonies from Hungary eastwards into Asia. It also migrates in flocks, with a tendency to appear well to the west of its usual range in spring (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). The largest influx to Britain in the last century occurred in May 1992 when a probable 22 were seen in Kent.

Eight have been seen at St.Margaret's since regular recording began in 1977. One flew in off the sea and headed NE on May 3rd 1980, another was seen at Fan Bay on Sept.19th 1987 and a third was seen near the Swingate Inn on June 27th 1990: all of these were adult males. In 1992, the year of the large influx into Kent, females were recorded over the valley on June 15th and at Nelson Park on July 12th. In 1993, an adult male flew NE over the bay on June 29th, having been seen earlier by the A2, and another adult male was seen over the valley on May 20th 1999. A second-summer male in the bay at 05.20 on May 12th 2001 flew over the valley at 07.45 later the same morning.

Merlin *Falco columbarius*

Merlins have recovered recently from decimation by chemical pollution and persecution by gamekeepers partly by adopting safer breeding sites in forestry plantations (Mead 2000). At St.Margaret's, this tiny falcon has been recorded between Aug.13th and May 4th. There is clearly enough prey in the area to have enticed some birds to remain throughout January and February in several recent years. Some overwintering individuals have remained well into March, which has tended to obscure the extent of spring migration.

Some individuals have also remained in the area for long periods in autumn, most notably in 1994 when a female was present from Aug.13th until early winter, often emerging at first light from its overnight roost in the valley to hunt for migrants over the nearby fields. Other long-staying individuals remained for a month from mid September 1989 and until early November from mid September 1993 and late August 1995. However, a substantial number of cross-Channel migrants have been seen in autumn, mostly from mid September to early November, although two were seen arriving from off the sea as late as Dec.14th. Merlins often pursue their prey for long distances, sometimes out to sea, making apparent arrivals from France less than certain, but at least nine have been seen leaving for Calais or Cap Gris Nez since 1990. Such movements can occur very early in the morning: one flew out to sea at 06.55 on Sept.30th 2001, almost exactly at sunrise.

MERLIN					Monthly bird-days 1977-2002						
JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
7	5	15	9	1			3	30	73	14	5

Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

The British breeding population of this summer migrant from Africa rose from 100 pairs in the mid 1970s to over 600 pairs in 1997 (Mead 2000), and in Kent it is currently quite normal for flocks of twenty or more to accumulate in the Stour valley and on Romney Marsh each spring. At St.Margaret's, numbers increased from an average of only three or four records each year during the 1980s to an annual average of ten between 1990 and 1992. Over 30 were seen in 1993 and more than 50 from 1998 onwards. At St.Margaret's there has been an approximate six-fold increase in both spring and autumn since the early 1990s, as shown below. The largest spring arrivals have been observed from the wartime magazine at the rear of the valley at the end of May or beginning of June, including seven on June 1st 1994, four on June 1st 1998 and four on

June 12th 1999. However, three have been seen at Bockhill on the much earlier dates of Apr.21st and May 11th.
Although the distinction between spring arrivals and autumn migrants is usually clear, Hobbies have been seen in July in five years since 1992 as the Kentish breeding population has expanded. However, nearby breeding probably took place as early as 1986 when an adult and two juveniles were seen hunting bats at dusk for several days from the end of July and a pair was also seen regularly from late May until early July in 1989. Several records in June 2002 are also suggestive of local breeding.
Three at Bockhill on Aug.13th 1998 is the earliest record of more than one individual. Migration peaks in September, including eight on Sept.16th 1995, eight at Bockhill on Sept.12th 1998 and six-seven on Oct.1st 1999 and Sept.30th 2000. Multiple sightings in autumn have been regular since 1993 and there has also been a tendency for individuals to linger later into October: the latest was seen chasing dragonflies by the top wood on Oct.30th 1996. As would be expected for such a long-distance migrant, several have been seen leaving for the French coast, most notably four on Sept.16th 1995.

HOBBY	Approximate annual bird-day totals in spring and autumn 1990 – 2002												
	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Spring	3	3	8	13	11	6	18	15	12	14	18	8	9
Autumn	7	4	5	23	12	16	16	23	45	36	41	26	11

Peregrine *Falco peregrinus*
Six eyries were occupied annually between Dover and Kingsdown until 1940, when birds were shot by order of the War Office as a potential hazard to carrier pigeons. Even so, three pairs bred from the end of the war until 1960 but then numbers of breeding birds, passage migrants and winter visitors declined as a result of pesticide pollution. It was not until recently that this trend was reversed, though recolonisation was a protracted affair.
Single, mostly immature birds were seen in May 1976, October 1979 and October 1983 and from November 1984 until March 1985. An adult male and an immature female took up residence from October 1985 until April 1986, although the male was apparently present only during the winter, followed by an adult male from October 1986 to March 1987. After an immature female stayed for at least two weeks in May 1987, two remained throughout the following winter and an adult pair was seen for the first time in spring 1988, regularly displaying and hunting migrants until late summer. Although breeding did not take place that year, they fledged four young in 1989, raising a total of 27 young up to 1996 (a very high average of 3.375 per year), failing only in 1995, along with three others pairs in south-east England. However, only two young were fledged in 1997 and after three further years of failure, their nest site at Langdon Cliffs was abandoned. In 1999, however, a different pair bred successfully, raising two young, and by 2001 there was evidence of at least two pairs breeding in the area, with others known nearby.
With the recent increase in the Kent population and resumption of breeding in the Pas-de-Calais, it is impossible to comment upon the origins of individuals that frequently attract the attention of the resident birds, save to say that they demonstrate what phenomenal eyesight these creatures have. In one memorable incident the pair on Langdon Cliffs chased another Peregrine they had seen circling over Dover harbour, at a distance that made its identification difficult for us with binoculars!

Game Birds to Bustards 1977 – 2002

Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*
Local records probably reflect the prevalence of artificial stocking for shooting purposes throughout Kent. One or two were evident up to 1984, with up to five from 1985 to the end of the decade. Post-breeding coveys of up to 11 were frequent during the early 1990s and 27 were seen in October 1994. Since then, however, there has been a steady decline, with peaks of six-seven in the last few years of the 1990s but no more than four since. Up to five have been recorded at Bockhill in recent years. One of the more remarkable events of the last 25 years occurred on Apr.1st 1991 when, despite the obvious potential for a joke on such a date, one flew in off the sea from a dense fog bank and landed on rocks in the bay. Clearly exhausted, it was eventually rescued and released. A clue to this extraordinary episode came the following spring when one was seen being taken by a Peregrine – it seems most likely that this bird had flown out to sea to avoid a chasing falcon.

Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*

The fortunes of this generally declining species have fluctuated throughout the last 25 years, probably in response to the quality of each breeding season, though it is possible that the local population is augmented by artificial stocking nearby. At least 35 were present in mid September 1976 and coveys of 17-29 were recorded each autumn in 1977, 1979, 1982 and 1984. However, following the cool and wet summers of 1985 and 1986 no more than eight were seen until two coveys totalling 19 individuals appeared in early autumn 1989. Peaks of 12-17 were recorded almost annually between 1990 and 1994 and coveys totalling 42 and 38 individuals, respectively, were seen in October 1995 and 1996. Subsequent numbers have been a good deal lower, however, with only one or two pairs on either side of the bay.

Quail *Coturnix coturnix*

Numbers of Quails reaching Britain from their sub-Saharan winter quarters vary according to spring weather and there has been a substantial decline from the end of the 19th century. Nevertheless, they can be relatively common in 'invasion years', showing a preference for chalk downland. Locally, Quails were heard regularly around St.Margaret's until the late 1960s (Harrison 1953, KOS 1981) and nests were found in the early 1970s (the late GE Took, *verbatim*).

More recent records began with one on May 7th 1987, with up to nine calling individuals by late June, though the most heard at one time was seven on the evening of June 29th. One was seen on Aug.13th later the same year, suggesting successful breeding. Although none appeared in 1988, singles were heard on May 29th and June 15th in the excellent summer of 1989, which proved to be a very good year for Quails throughout the county. At least 13 individuals have been recorded in spring in eight subsequent years, including three at Bockhill since 1996. Apart from singles on Apr.29th 1992 and July 24th 1995, most were recorded from late May to mid July, including four near Westcliffe Farm on July 17th 1997. There have been four further autumn records, all between Aug.16th and 31st.

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Singles were recorded in six years between 1982 and 1989, but a steady increase took place during the last decade, culminating in the first breeding record for the area in 1996. Currently, it appears to be resident in small numbers at Bockhill, the South Foreland valley, Wanstone Farm and Langdon, with one or two pairs breeding each year.

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*

Singles were almost annual in autumn in the South Foreland valley from 1982 to 1990, between Sept.30th and Nov.15th, with two calling to each other in November 1984. One was also found under a hedge near the windmill in April 1987, apparently exhausted. Although it has proved to be less frequent since, one was seen at Bockhill in October 1994 and singles were heard in the valley in October 1995 and March 1997. The remains of a dead individual were found at Bockhill in April 1999 and a series of records in 2002 included one in a garden close to the valley on Mar.20th and at least one at the top of the valley from Oct.30th to Nov.19th.

Corncrake *Crex crex*

A summer migrant, mainly restricted in the British Isles to remote parts of Scotland and Ireland. Small, but declining populations exist in France and the Netherlands and throughout much of Europe, with largest numbers in the less agriculturally industrialised countries eastwards from Poland (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). Local historical records include one on Sept.6th 1957 and 'a maximum of two' on Sept.27th 1959 (KBR). There have been four records at St.Margaret's in the last 25 years. One was disturbed from long grass below the Hollow Wood in the South Foreland valley on Sept.22nd 1988 and another was flushed from the edge of standing crops at Langdon on Aug.28th 1993. At Bockhill, two were seen in September 2000; one was flushed from a paddock close to the memorial on the evening of the 4th and another was seen at Hope Point on the 26th.

Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Previously very scarce, a juvenile was seen in the South Foreland valley on Oct.30th 1982 and another was found dead there in January 1985, in severe cold. More recently, however, one was seen at the pond in Pines Gardens in June 1995 and breeding took place there annually from 1996 to 2001, when the pond was drained to allow for the installation of a new lining. Nearby, there have been sporadic records from the pond in Reach Road and one was present at a pond on Bere Farm from July to September 1994 before it was drained.

Coot *Fulica atra*

Despite its abundance on inland lakes and gravel pits and regular appearances in Dover Docks in winter, one on the sea on May 14th 2000 is the only record for the area.

Common Crane *Grus grus*

Breeding eastwards from Scandinavia and eastern Germany and wintering mainly in Spain, with small numbers in central France, the majority of Cranes pass to the east of the British Isles on migration (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997).
One circled over Nelson Park, eventually heading NE, on May 12th 1996 and one drifted over the Bockhill monument on May 12th 2002.

Great Bustard *Otis tarda*

Most European Great Bustards breed in Spain and Portugal, with fragmented and declining populations in Germany and eastwards from eastern Austria and Hungary. It was formerly much more common and widespread, following extensive forest clearance in W and C Europe, but began to retreat in response to human pressure during the late 18th century (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). Two were seen at St.Margaret's 'in severe weather' in 1783 (Ticehurst 1909). The date of this record has been erroneously given as 1873 (Harrison 1953, KOS 1981 and Hodgson 1991), but it is clearly an 18th century occurrence, Ticehurst having noted that it pre-dated another in 1797.
More recently, two appeared on clifftop fields on Jan.11th 1970.

Waders 1977 – 2002

WADERS Peak monthly counts 1977 – 2002												
	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Oystercatcher	20	17	14	21	24	12	16	25	28	11	32	14
Avocet		2	9	20	6					4	20	5
Stone Curlew			1		1		1	1				
Little Ringed Plover			1		1							
Ringed Plover	27	2	12	4	11	1	3	6	6	3	9	1
Dotterel					4			16	9			
Golden Plover	290	35	10	2	3		1	6	21	42	429	29
Grey Plover	27	4		4	59		1	1	3	4	2	1
Lapwing	1534	650	450	5	11	37	60	500	677	1100	1163	1200
Knot	76	2	3	10	30		1	5	1	3	12	
Sanderling	1	1		20	27				1	6	9	
Little Stint								4	4	1		
Curlew Sandpiper							1					
Purple Sandpiper	3	5	8	3					1	1	1	2
Dunlin	800	45	200	60	308		5	10	60	174	567	
Ruff				2				3	16			
Jack Snipe	1		2	2					1	3	1	
Common Snipe	7	1	5	5	1			5	15	10	6	11
Great Snipe										1		
Woodcock	6	5	4	1					1	4	3	1
Black-tailed Godwit			2	20	12			23	7	1		1
Bar-tailed Godwit	30			109	1440		6	140	23	2	3	
Whimbrel			1	23	126	1	12	45	2	1	1	
Curlew	7	12	23	26	2	18	4	4	10	17	15	5
Spotted Redshank	1			1	1			1	1			
Common Redshank	38	2	1	1	1		4	1	1	1	4	7
Greenshank				1	2			5	1	1		
Green Sandpiper							1	3	2	1	1	
Wood Sandpiper								1				
Common Sandpiper					6		1	11	3	1		
Turnstone	4	3			115		1	1				2

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Principally a winter visitor and passage migrant, this is one of the three most regularly recorded species of shorebird at St.Margaret's, with records in every month of the year. The highest count in the last 25 years was 32 on the rocks below Hope Point on Nov.4th 2000 – a flock of up to 20 is often resident here and many of the birds seen in the bay probably originate from this source, most tending to fly past relatively close inshore. Most birds occur from March to May and from mid July onwards, as shown above.

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

The only record of this elegant species during the 1980s was of two parties, each of three, flying NE in an outstanding shorebird movement on May 3rd 1980. Occurrences during the 1990s were far more frequent, amounting to eight records in five years, half in November/December and half between late February and mid April. In the current decade, there have been a further five occurrences, four on Oct.7th being the earliest in autumn but the remainder – one in November and four between mid March and early May – falling within previously defined limits. Largest movements include a flock of 20 NE inland of the South Foreland valley on Nov.7th 1993, 20 NE offshore on Apr.12th 1996 and 16 past Kingsdown on Nov.9th 2001.

Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*

Formerly not uncommon on the higher parts of the Downs, breeding Stone Curlews were restricted to the Dungeness peninsula by the end of the 19th century (Ticehurst 1909) and had ceased to breed in Kent in 1965. They are now scarce in Kent and Sussex, but recent attempts to increase the breeding population from Hampshire westwards have met with some success and breeding still occurs in northern France (Tombal 1996). Locally, there have been four recent records. Singles were seen on Aug.21st 1966, flying over the village on May 12th 1981, on the Free Down, just north of Bockhill Farm, where it remained for most of the morning on Mar.25th 2000 and on Wanstone from July 29th to Aug.1st 2002.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

On the South Foreland side of the bay, one flew in off the sea and landed briefly on the cliff top before continuing inland on May 1st 1980 and on May 4th 1991 one was found in fields just inland of the cliff top. A third individual was discovered on a ploughed field between the clifftop and the farm at Bockhill on Mar.28th 1998.

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

Although winter records are unusual, exceptional numbers occurred during freezing weather in January 1997, including 27 flying NE on Jan.9th and several other records of up to nine during the same month. The only other double figure counts involve a flock of 12 on the beach on Mar.3rd 1987, following a severe gale the previous day, and 11 on May 21st 2000. Otherwise, most records occur at migration periods, with autumn records – more than 80 in the last 25 years – far outweighing those in spring, of which there have been just over 20. About half of the autumn records have been in August, but the only other counts of more than three include five on one day in May, two records of six, in September and November, and nine on Nov.18th 1995.

Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus*

Dotterel breed in remote alpine regions of Europe, with significant populations only in northern Britain, northern Russia and Fennoscandia (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). They are regular on migration in few places, but have occurred here annually since 1992, with a historical record of one on Sept.2nd-3rd 1961 (KBR).

The only spring record of this delightful plover was of four on May 2nd 1994, the only recent occasion on which the surrounding fields have been suitably crop-free in spring. Otherwise, all records have been in autumn, between Aug.19th and Sept.24th. Although few were evident during the 1980s, a sudden surge in the frequency with which Dotterel appeared in autumn took place in 1992, when 12 were found on harvested fields on Wanstone on Aug.21st. Such numbers were not repeated until 1998, although singles or small parties continued to arrive in late August or early September, including the first records on the fields at Bockhill in 1996. The lion's share occurred at Bockhill in 1997 but in 1998, after three arrived at Bockhill on Aug.22nd, a flock that appeared on Wanstone the following day eventually reached a peak of 16 on Aug.30th. Subsequent peak numbers included nine on Sept.3rd 2000 and eight on Aug.21st-22nd 2001, all on the same stubble field on Wanstone. It has become apparent that there is an extensive turnover of birds each autumn, as new individuals appear and flocks disappear, presumably to other suitable fields in the general area, only to turn up again shortly afterwards. Also, entire flocks show a capacity to melt into their surroundings when alarmed and this ability to disappear even when being observed through a telescope increases the chances of some having been missed over the years.

DOTTEREL					Probable number of individuals in autumn 1987-2002										
87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02
1		1			18	2	1	5	7	9	20	3	17	13	4

Bird-day totals in five-day periods 1987-2002								
	Aug 19-23	Aug 24-28	Aug 29 Sept 2	Sept 3-7	Sept 8-12	Sept 13-17	Sept 18-22	Sept 23-24
Bird-days	73	59	60	32	5	5		1
Largest flocks	12	13	16	9	2	2		1

Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*

Large flocks of Golden Plovers are usually associated with periods of cold weather. Such conditions were responsible for the appearance of 290 on one of the cliff top fields on Jan.22nd 1984, 48 flying in off the sea on Jan.4th 1985 and a cold weather exodus of 429 flying out to sea towards the French coast on Nov.21st 1993. Otherwise, there have been eight other counts of 25-42, all between October and February.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

In winter, up to four have been seen at rock pools or on the beach during cold weather in each month from December to February, while 27 flew NE on Jan.10th 1987, also in cold weather. There has been only one March record, prior to spring migration between Apr.3rd and May 28th. The largest movements invariably occur in May, including 47 on May 3rd 1980, 59 on May 8th 1993 and three counts of 28-36 between May 11th-14th 1996, all flying NE. Autumn records have occurred from July 28th to Nov.8th, but numbers are much smaller then in spring, amounting to no more than four.

Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

The monthly peak counts in the preceding table mask a considerable recent decline in Lapwing numbers. Large flocks have been concentrated around the pylons at Langdon from September to January throughout the last 25 years, though peak counts in the 1980s were lower than during the first half of the 1990s, when peaks of 800-1500 were annual between October and January. Since 700 were recorded in November 1996, however, no more than 400 have been recorded and no more than 130 have been recorded in the current decade. This might be related to changes in agricultural practice in the area, but is also likely to be representative of a general decrease in Lapwing numbers in the county.

Lapwings have also been noted flying over the area in large numbers, most notably when 677 flew NE on Sept.16th 1984 in a light NW wind with low cloud and drizzle, in just an hour before visibility deteriorated completely (5,000 were recorded at Sandwich Bay the same day). 300 flew W at dusk on Feb.7th 1982, 286 flew SW on Oct.20th 1988, 600 flew in off the sea on Nov.15th 1990 and 200 flew SE out to sea at Bockhill on Feb.13th 1999. Among several other movements of up to 155 the most interesting involved a flock of 57 on the rocks at the base of the cliffs on Mar.7th 1996, which departed out to sea as the tide advanced.

Knot *Calidris canutus*

There have been five winter records in the last 25 years, between Jan.3rd and Feb.12th, the largest of which involved 76 flying NE in cold weather on Jan.7th 1985. Although most have been recorded flying past offshore, one was seen at rock pools in the bay in January 1987. Spring movement, involving 17 records, has been noted from Mar.24th to May 28th. Up to ten have been noted in April, but most have occurred in May, including 30 NE on May 3rd 1980 and four counts of 10-15 between May 8th-12th. There have been 22 autumn records; apart from an early record on July 17th, passage has been evident from Aug.8th to Nov.15th. The only records of more than three involved five flying SW on Aug.23rd and 12 flying NE on Nov.15th.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

This species has been recorded in eight of the last 25 years, mostly involving birds passing by offshore in spring and autumn, although at least two have been seen on the beach in cold winter weather. Spring migrants have been noted between Apr.27th and May 21st, most notably in 1996 when extensive periods of seawatching led to an outstanding series of records – 20 flew NE on Apr.28th and a total of 77 bird-days followed between May 11th-18th, including 27 on the 14th. Autumn passage has been recorded from Sept.12th to Nov.18th, including five flying W just below the cliff top at Bockhill on Sept.12th 1998, six in October 1984 and nine on Nov.18th 1995. Otherwise, all records have been of one or two individuals.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*

There have been four records in the last 25 years. One flew SW offshore on Oct.16th 1983, one flew in off the sea at clifftop height on Oct.27th 1985 and parties of four flew NE on Sept.22nd 1996 and Aug.27th 1997.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*

The only record of this species for the area was an adult flying NE along the clifftop on July 26th 1987.

Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima*

Although a dozen or so spend each winter on the rock platform between Dover and Folkestone, roosting in Dover harbour, it is clear that the rocks to the north of Dover are unsuitable for more than casual visits by this species. Nevertheless, there have been 20 records in the last 25 years, all between late September and early April. Seven singles have occurred between September and November and one or two have been recorded on two occasions in December. There are seven January-February occurrences, including three on the beach on Jan.1st 1997 and one party of five on the rocks in February. The remaining four appearances in March and April include a flock of eight that flew in off the sea and over the cliffs on Mar.3rd 1979 and eight flying NE from the rocks in the bay on Mar.13th 2002.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Occurrences early in the year are almost invariably associated with the onset of very cold weather. Such conditions were responsible for the record movement of 800 flying NE on Jan.5th 1985 and 259 flying NE on Jan.10th 1987. Peak numbers during spring include 200 feeding on the beach at low tide on Mar.3rd 1987 after a severe NW gale the previous day and a NE movement of 308 in eight hours on May 3rd 1980, during a day of heavy shorebird passage. Stragglers in spring have been noted as late as May 28th and the earliest autumn birds have been noted on July 18th. Up to 60 have been recorded in September, with 120-174 on four occasions in October, but the largest numbers in the last quarter occurred on Nov.19th 1985 when 567 flew NE in 2½ hours in frequent snow showers and a strong NE wind.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

The only spring occurrence was of two flying NE offshore on Apr.23rd 1985. Otherwise, this species is very much an autumn migrant, 52 individuals having occurred between Aug.7th and Sept.20th, with records in 14 of the last 25 years, more than 70% involving singles. The only records of more than three include six over Wanstone on Sept.15th 1990 and 16 on Sept.10th and 11 on Sept.17th in 1993.

Jack Snipe *Lymnocryptes minimus*

The only winter record among the 24 individuals recorded since 1977 was one on set-aside on Jan.30th 1993. Eight have appeared in spring, between Mar.31st and Apr.20th, while 16 have been seen in autumn, between Sept.21st and Nov.10th, all but three of which have occurred in October. Although most records involve singles, two have been seen twice in spring and once in autumn, with three flying up the valley together on Oct.15th 1997 being the largest flock on record.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

The figures in the table below obscures the fact that very few records involve more than three in a day, the main exceptions being 15 on Sept.16th 1984 and four counts of 10-11 in September, October and twice in December. Otherwise, five-seven have been recorded twice in January and on 14 occasions between August and December. Most have been seen flying over the area in assorted directions, but grounded migrants are by no means uncommon in spring and autumn.

SNIPE	Monthly distribution of records by bird-days 1977-2002										
JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
7	2	25	16	1			17	88	69	19	8

Great Snipe *Gallinago media*

The Great Snipe prefers damp, rich-soiled areas of the central Scandinavian mountains and from Poland eastwards, where it also occurs in boggy lowland areas (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). One was flushed several times from long grass in the valley on Oct.1st 1983. It was only the tenth county record since 1952.

Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*

There have been at least 130 records of Woodcock since 1977, including those recorded at Bockhill in recent years. The first autumn records occur in late September or early October and peak passage takes place during October and early November, when up to three have been recorded in a day. Cold weather influxes sometimes augment numbers in winter, most notably in January 1996 when up to six were present at the S.Foreland and in January 1997, when at least 26 individuals were recorded in the first two freezing weeks of the year. The main concentrations included four between Townsend and Bere Farms, seven on Wanstone and five in Pines Gardens, with several others in the South Foreland valley and adjacent gardens. Otherwise, winter suffers from low coverage, but three-four appeared regularly at dusk from mid February to early March in 1977 and two or three have been recorded on several occasions over the years. The upsurge in records from early March may well reflect resumption of regular coverage at that time, March records outnumbering those for April by about 2:1, with the last of spring having disappeared by mid April.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

Singles have been seen twice in winter, on Dec.21st 1968 and Dec.19th 1993. Spring migrants have been noted on three occasions: 12 few NE during a large wader movement on May 3rd 1980 and in 1996 two did so on Mar.24th and 20 flew NE on Apr.7th. In autumn, there have been six records, four involving flocks flying over the cliffs or adjacent fields. Seven flew NE over the cliffs on Sept.6th 1980, five flew NE past the lighthouse on Sept.5th 1992, one flew SW over Wanstone on Aug.24th 1994 and in 1998 two flew NE offshore on Aug.29th and one did so on Oct.17th, while 21 flew NE over the valley on Aug.26th 2002.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

There have been 54 records in spring since 1977, all during April and May when migrant flocks can be seen flying NE past the bay, particularly on days with an onshore wind. More than a hundred have been recorded on five occasions, most notably 1,440 in eight hours on May 3rd 1980. The other four involved movements of 105-119, between Apr.27th and May 9th.

Autumn records, 26 in all, almost pale into insignificance by comparison. By far the most seen in a day was 140 on Aug.9th 1998. The next largest movements include a flock of 23 SW over Wanstone on Sept.3rd 1994 and a party of 26 that flew in from the north at Hope Point on Aug.29th 1999 and continued W over the village. A flock of 18 flew from inland out to sea over Langdon Cliffs on Aug.21st 2000.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

Apart from one on Mar.6th 1999, spring passage has been recorded from Apr.7th to June 5th. Although it is typically light, there were 209 bird-days in 1994 and 54 bird-days in 2000, while highest counts include 126 on May 12th 1994, 41 on May 21st 2000 and 23 on Apr.27th 1995.

Autumn movement has been evident mainly from July 11th to Oct.6th, though there have been two later records. One was present on the clifftop from Oct.29th to Nov.1st in 1985 and in 2000 a dark-rumped individual, characteristic of birds breeding in eastern Siberia and Arctic Canada, flew past the bay on Nov.5th. Although 12 were seen on July 24th 1991, few have been recorded outside August, when highest counts include a noisy flock of 45 on Aug.20th 1984 and 28 on Aug.18th 1996, with five other records of 12-19. The autumn bird-day total has exceeded ten in only eight of the last 25 years, most notably 76 in 1984, 54 in 1996 and 52 in 1999.

Curlew *Numenius arquata*

There have been more than 350 records of Curlew in the last 25 years, making it one of the more frequent shorebirds to occur here. Although they have occurred in every month of the year, numbers are invariably small and records of more than one or two are unusual. There is evidence of passage in spring and autumn, however, with peak counts in April-May and October-November. In spring, these include 23 flying NE on Mar.8th 1996 and 26 on Apr.5th and 8th the same year, while a record of 18 on June 28th 1991 will have involved non-breeding individuals. Although records are more frequent in autumn than in spring, numbers have been lower, peak counts including 17 on Oct.21st 1990 and 15 on Nov.9th 1992.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

Of 11 singles recorded between 1977 and 1989, five occurred in 1980, but only two from 1983 onwards. Since 1990 only four more have been recorded. The total of 15 includes eight in September, two in August and October and one each in January, April and May.

Redshank *Tringa totanus*

By far the largest numbers have occurred in cold weather, including 38 at the rock pools in January 1985 and 34 in January 1987, with up to ten in several winters during the 1980s. No more than four have been recorded since, reflecting the trend towards generally milder winters. Passage in spring and autumn is invariably light, records of four on July 16th and 27th being the only occasions on which more than two have been recorded.

Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

There have been eight spring records, between Apr.29th and May 21st, involving 13 individuals, including six over Bockhill on May 21st 2000. By contrast, there have been 83 records in autumn, between July 8th and Oct.22nd, the majority of which (61) have occurred in August, with 15 in September and three each in July and October. Largest counts include seven on Aug.19th 1998 and five on Aug.30th 1999, with the highest annual totals being 13 in 1984, 11 in 1998 and 14 in 1999. Although there was a substantial decline in Greenshank records between the mid 1980s and mid 1990s, a significant increase has recently taken place, possibly reflecting improvements in habitats for migrating waders, notably at Grove Ferry, Oare and the Sandwich marshes.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

Only three have been seen in spring, between Mar.1st and Apr.8th. However, 52 have been recorded in autumn, between July 22nd and Sept.27th, with a late individual on Nov.6th 1984. Most (39) have occurred in August, including five on Aug.25th 1998 and six on Aug.7th 1999, all other records involving one or two.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

Recorded only once in spring, when two flew over Bockhill on May 13th 2000. Nine have been seen in autumn, between Aug.5th and Sept.12th, all but one of which have occurred in August. In common with other migrant fresh water waders, there has been an increase in the last few years, probably associated with the expansion of suitable areas of habitat in places such as the Stour valley and Sandwich marshes.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

35 migrants have been seen in spring since 1978, between May 2nd-19th, including five on May 9th 1981 and six on May 12th 1988. The only individual not to have been seen on the shore was in the pub car park!
Autumn migration has been evident from July 12th to Oct.26th, involving a total of 86 birds, 55 of which occurred in August, with 21 in September. Large flocks have occurred mostly in August, including seven on Aug.9th 1975, eight on Aug.5th 1976, 11 on Aug.28th 1977 and nine on Aug.23rd 2000, though ten were seen on Sept.11th the same year, while three-five have been recorded on four dates between Aug.9th-Sept.12th. Although many of these, including the large flocks, were seen in the bay, birds flying over the area in autumn are not unusual.

Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

Up to four have occurred on 15 occasions in the winter months from November to February, followed by 15 spring occurrences between Apr.26th and May 14th, involving up to 20, with the addition of an outstanding movement of 115 NE on May 3rd 1980. No more than three have been seen in autumn, when there have been 14 records between July 28th and Sept.24th.

Skuas to Auks 1977 – 2002

Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus*

Pomarine Skuas have been seen on 25 occasions in spring, as they migrate NE towards their breeding grounds on the Russian tundra. Passage has occurred between Apr.22nd and May 12th, including 21 on May 8th 1981, six on May 6th 1996, 13 on May 3rd 1999, 31 on May 13th 2001 and 13 on Apr.30th 2002. Movements have been noted in the morning and, more recently, in late afternoon, when seawatching for a couple of hours from 5pm has been productive.
Autumn is a more protracted affair, with 46 records from Aug.22nd to Nov.19th and a late individual on Dec.26th 1994. Records of more than three include eight on Aug.31st 1997, five on Sept.28th 1991 and four on Oct.21st 1990. Six were seen flying from the bay to the S.Goodwin lightship on Sept.8th 2001, having been attracted close inshore by a flock of 250 Sandwich Terns just off the base of the cliffs. This behaviour is characteristic of autumn movements, which often coincide with a substantial passage of terns and other seabirds.

Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*

Three have been seen in winter, between Dec.29th and Jan.10th. Spring passage has been noted from Mar.22nd to May 21st, with most in April and May, including 16 on May 6th 1981 and 16 on May 11th 1997. Occasional midsummer records in June or July include three on June 20th 1992, and small numbers are evident from early August, though the earliest movement of any substance was five on Aug.23rd. Passage is timed to coincide with the departure of terns and other seabirds from the North Sea, and peaks of 10-16 occurred on six dates between Aug.27th and Sept.19th. However, these were eclipsed in 1997 by downchannel movements of 17 on Aug.30th, 91 on Aug.31st and 53 on Sept.7th. Although only stragglers occur during October, eight flew by offshore as late as Nov.10th 1996.

ARCTIC SKUA Monthly distribution of records 1977-2002												
	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
No. of records	1		1	21	34	3	5	18	54	37	13	2
Peak counts	1		1	4	16	3	1	91	53	7	8	2

Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus*

This, the most delicate of the European skuas, is also the least common in Kentish waters. It has been seen on 12 occasions at St.Margaret's since the first was recorded in 1980. Three occurred in spring, between May 2nd and 13th, and there have been nine in autumn, involving ten individuals. Six of these occurred in what appears to be the peak period, between Aug.19th and Sept.14th, with singles on three dates between Oct.20th and Nov.7th and a very late individual on Dec.1st.

Bonxie *Catharacta skua*

This impressively robust skua has been seen in winter on seven occasions between Dec.26th and Jan.23rd, though four of these were in January 1994, suggesting that one bird was implicated. Spring passage has been evident on 25 dates between Apr.10th and May 16th, including eight flying NE on Apr.22nd and four doing so on Apr.29th in 2001, the remainder of records involving only ones and twos. One was seen in summer, on June 29th. The majority have been recorded in autumn, when there have been 56 records of up to six between Aug.6th and Nov.16th, with a straggler on Nov.30th Most of these have involved no more than three, however, the only double-figure movements being 12 on Sept.26th 1981, 23 on Oct.11th 1988, 17 on Aug.31st 1997 and ten on Sept.7th 1997.

Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*

From an average of only one record each year during the 1980s, this species has increased in frequency as the population in northern France has expanded to more than 3,000 in winter, leading to a corresponding increase in numbers at Copt Point, near Folkestone. Most have occurred here between September and February, with about 60% in October, though pairs were present among the Kittiwakes on Langdon Cliffs in five years between 1989 and 1997, on at least one occasion carrying nesting material to a rudimentary nest scrape. Although most records are of one or two individuals, there was an exceptional record of 29 on Oct.7th 1997, probably involving birds displaced from Folkestone by autumn storms. A colour-ringed adult, present in the bay in January and February 2001 and again in December the same year had been ringed at Berendrecht, on the Belgian coast northwest of Antwerp, on 21st June 2000.

Little Gull *Larus minutus*

Little Gulls breed on inland marshes from the Baltic eastwards, dispersing westwards in autumn (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). There have been five January/February records of one or two, either moving past offshore or roosting with Black-headed Gulls. Spring passage, recorded from Apr.8th to May 16th, has been evident in 11 of the 25 years under review, including five on May 16th 1982.

Most Little Gulls occur here in autumn, from as early as July 28th. Numbers vary tremendously each year and influxes into Kentish waters are not necessarily evident here, particularly if no easterly winds occur. Counts of 30 or more include 30 on Oct.8th 1977 and 113 bird-days on Nov.7th-8th 1982, including 98 on the 8th. In 1993, 38 flew by on Oct.9th and in 2001 there were 200 bird-days between Nov.23rd-28th, including 116 on the 23rd and two movements of 40-44, while 40 flew NE past Kingsdown on Nov.9th. Between 13 and 23 occurred on five dates between Sept.30th and Nov.10th, with a late movement of 23 on Dec.21st 1996. Although most occur offshore, two flew over the monument at Bockhill on Oct.3rd 1998.

Sabine's Gull *Larus sabini*

This delicate gull of marshy tundra in the high Arctic occurs annually in Kentish waters, almost exclusively in autumn. St.Margaret's records include an adult on Oct.17th 1993 and juveniles on Oct.8th 1997 and Oct.25th 1998, the first of which lingered in the bay for over half an hour.

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*

Common Gull *Larus canus*

Both of these species are relatively common to abundant except in midsummer and monitoring of their movements reflects observers' infrequent and random visits to the bay. Large numbers of mainly Black-headed Gulls congregate in Dover Harbour overnight and departure from the roost in the morning masks any genuine migration. However, there is a regular passage of Common Gulls in spring. Although this usually involves small flocks moving upchannel over the cliffs, 65 flew NE in an hour on Apr.23rd 1992 and movements of up to 186 were noted in April 1996.

Some particularly large numbers have also been evident, most notably 3,000 Black-headed Gulls and 300 Common Gulls in exceptionally cold weather in early January 1985. 2,000 Black-headed Gulls were seen 'anting' around the pylons at Langdon in early August 1990, 2,500 were present nearby in mid October 1991 and 310 Common Gulls flew NE in cold weather on Jan.26th 1996, with 384 NE in an hour on Jan.25th 1998.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Largest numbers are invariably recorded in September and October, including hourly counts of 1,220 SW on Sept.29th 1990 and 257 SW on Oct.18th 1982, though in most years many fewer are evident. By comparison, spring passage is unremarkable, though 60 flew NE on Apr.4th 1982, 39 flew NE in an hour on Mar.29th 1984 and in 1996 passage from Mar.6th to mid April included 98 on Apr.6th and 56 on the 14th, all flying NE.

Nesting took place on the cliffs during the early 1950s, four pairs being present in 1952, and attempts were made in 1975 and 1976. Adults have occasionally been seen in summer since, but without any firm evidence of breeding.

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

Breeding numbers between Dover Harbour and the South Foreland fluctuated between 44 and 76 occupied nests during the 1990s, with no obvious trend. Herring Gulls are present year round and are largely ignored, though up to 1,400 have been noted on the fields in winter. Yellow-legged Gulls *L.a.michahellis* were present in the bay on Sept.9th 1995, Sept.14th 1999 and Oct.12th 2002.

Iceland Gull *Larus glaucoides*

Iceland Gulls in Kent in winter almost certainly originate from their breeding grounds in Greenland (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). An adult was seen in the bay in early January 1988 and a first winter individual on Apr.6th 1991 was probably the same bird that had been present all winter at Deal. Another first winter individual was in the bay on Dec.31st 1998, a second winter bird was seen on Mar.18th 2000 and a second year individual flew NE on Apr.9th 2002.

Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus*

Glaucous Gulls from the Arctic from Canada eastwards to Iceland and western Russia disperse into the Atlantic after breeding (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997), occurring in Kent in small numbers each winter. At St.Margaret's, winter records involve singles on Jan.7th 1989 and nearby at Kingsdown on Jan.1st-3rd 1997. Most have occurred on passage in spring, however, including one on Mar.8th, three between Mar.29th and Apr.11th and singles on May 3rd and 5th. All have been immature individuals in either their first or second winter.

Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*

This species' movements are obscured by the presence of roosting flocks from autumn through to spring, and observer interest is affected accordingly. However, up to 200 have been recorded on the rocks at the base of the cliffs, mainly in winter, and 220 flew SW in an hour on Dec.31st 1994.

Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*

The British breeding population of Kittiwakes increased from around 180,000 pairs in 1959 to 470,000 a decade later (Sharrock 1976) and breeding was first confirmed in Kent in 1967, when 17 pairs bred. Numbers soared from over 500 pairs in 1974 to 1,385 by the end of the decade and 2,645 pairs were present on the cliffs in 1987. Numbers fluctuated around this level for several years, reaching a record 2,878 pairs in 1992, with 2,822 pairs still present in 1995. Various changes up to this point included the

disappearance of the colony at Kingsdown (where up to 261 pairs bred) during the mid 1980s and a gradual reduction in the size of the Eastern Arm (of Dover Harbour) colony at Langdon Bay, which held more than 1,600 pairs in the late 1980s, involving consolidation of the breeding population into the colonies further east along the cliffs towards the South Foreland. By the time this colony had become deserted in 1997 there was evidence of a long-term decline, and by 2002 numbers had fallen to 1,121 pairs, a reduction of 60% in the breeding population in seven years.
The return of breeding birds to the colonies takes place during late winter, with up to 4,000 on the sea off the base of the cliffs by the end of February. Occupation of the ledges is usually complete by the end of April and in most years the ledges are vacated shortly after the middle of August as birds head out to sea. Outside the breeding season, the most notable movement involved 10,400 flying SW in three hours on Jan.11th 1981, while 600-750 have been recorded on several occasions in disturbed weather between November and January.

KITTIWAKE	Numbers of breeding pairs 1989-2002				
	E.Arm colony	Fan Bay colony	St.Margaret's colony	TOTAL	% change
1989	1570	450	375	2395	
1990	1351	458	636	2445	+2
1991	1384	498	663	2395	**-2**
1992	1520	620	738	2878	+13
1993	1021	701	691	2413	**-16**
1994	1024	726	853	2603	+8
1995	864	812	1146	2822	+8
1996	501	818	947	2266	**-20**
1997	deserted	871	1107	1978	**-13**
1998	deserted	842	1078	1880	**-5**
1999	deserted	765	1096	1861	**-1**
2000	deserted	656	1020	1676	**-10**
2001	deserted	397	832	1229	**-26**
2002	deserted	365	756	1121	**-9**

Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia*
One was seen offshore in the bay on Sept.18th 1992.

Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*
In winter, one was seen off Kingsdown on Feb.16th-18th 1997 and another was seen in the bay on Jan.5th 2000. Although the origin of Sandwich Terns in winter is unknown, an individual of the North American race *S.s.acuflavida*, ringed in North Carolina, was recovered in the Netherlands during winter 1979 (BWP). Spring passage has been noted from Mar.18th, but fewer are visible here than at Dungeness, where birds tend to pass by much closer inshore. Largest movements include 104 on Apr.24th 1983, 195 on Apr.24th 1995, 102-110 on three dates between Apr.14th and May 12th 1996 and 127 on May 13th 2001.
Documentation of autumn migration is hampered by the infrequency of seawatching during late August and early September, the time of heaviest passage. Largest counts include 207 on Sept.4th 1983, 230 on Sept.13th 1993, 280 on Aug.30th 1997 and an unprecedented accumulation of 200-250 at the base of the cliffs on Sept.8th 2001. Stragglers have been recorded as late as Oct.24th.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*/ Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*
The most recorded in spring were 1,061 in eight hours on May 3rd 1980, 254 on May 12th 1988, 308 on Apr.28th 1995 and 1,100 on May 13th 2001, with 42-107 on six dates between Apr.25th and May 13th. These presumably include some Arctic Terns, but based on observations at Dungeness, where light conditions are generally less difficult and the birds closer, these are very much in the minority. In fact, Arctic Terns have been identified with certainty in spring only six times, with 17 on May 13th 1996 the only occasion on which more than two have been involved.
Substantial autumn movements have been evident from late August, including 102 on Aug.25th 1992, 167 on Aug.23rd 1996 and 340 on Aug.30th and 448 the next day in 1997. These sometimes coincide with large gatherings of feeding birds over the Goodwin Sands, which in turn attract groups of skuas, most notably when 933 flew SW on Sept.2nd 1988, with 477 flying SW on Sept.6th 1992 in similar circumstances. There have also been four movements of 121-244 between Sept.7th and 16th. Only stragglers have been recorded

beyond this period, late birds tending to be Arctic Terns, which have been recorded as late as Oct.14th, with a very late individual on Nov.16th 1996. Peak autumn counts of Arctic Terns include 80 on Oct.8th 1978 and 10-12 on three dates between Sept.6th and 26th.

Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii*

Two juveniles were watched feeding between Langdon Bay and Dover Harbour on Sept.23rd 1984 and a juvenile flew SW amid a large movement of Black Terns on Sept.6th 1992.

Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*

Although Little Terns are generally scarce in spring, 70 bird-days accrued between Apr.25th and May 10th 1980, including 20 on May 3rd and 21 on the 10th, while in 1996 there were 76 bird-days between May 5th and 14th, including 54 on May 11th. Otherwise, up to nine have been recorded in 14 of the last 25 years, between late April and May 19th.

There have been autumn records in only four years. The only movement of any significance involved 52 flying SW in a large Black Tern movement on Sept.6th 1992, apart from which up to seven have been recorded on five dates between Sept.12th-14th.

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*

The sporadic occurrences of this marsh tern involve nine spring records, between Apr.30th and June 3rd. These include 32 on May 3rd 1980, with eight on May 9th the same year, and ten on May 26th 1984.

Autumn movements have occurred between Aug.8th and Oct.3rd, involving a total of 17 records. Peaks include 14 on Aug.30th 1981, seven on Sept.12th same year and nine on Aug.24th 1996. However, these were overwhelmed by an extraordinary migration of 1,195 on Sept.6th 1992, which must have involved a substantial departure from sites around the Ijselmeer, where roosts of 150,000 – 200,000 accumulate during August (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). As usual, this was overshadowed by numbers off Dungeness, where over 10,200 flew SW the same day.

Guillemot *Uria aalge* / Razorbill *Alca torda*

Guillemots once bred on Dover cliffs, particularly at the South Foreland, until suitable sites began to be lost to cliff falls, reducing the population from 60 pairs in 1895 to 30 in 1908 and none after 1926 (Ticehurst 1909, Harrison 1953). Recent records from June to August have involved both Guillemots and Razorbills, though neither has been recorded in summer since 1996 when both Guillemots and Razorbills remained into June.

At other times of year, it is all but impossible to separate these two species unless they are close inshore, when the vast majority appear to be Guillemots. During the 1980s, auks were numerous only during the 1981/82 winter, when up to 603 were recorded in late December. This situation changed little until the 1993/94 winter, when up to 480 were present offshore in December and January, but an unprecedented accumulation in February 1996 involved nearly 2,000 on the 11th, probably enticed by unusually large numbers of sprats in the Channel. This influx was eclipsed in winter 1998/99, when up to 3,000 were present in December, with 1,200 in the first week of January. Up to 1,000 were also recorded throughout January 2001 and 1,280 flew SW in two hours on Jan.7th 2002.

Black Guillemot *Cepphus grylle*

Breeding along Arctic and North Atlantic coasts, Black Guillemots are relatively sedentary and Kentish records are accordingly scarce. The only St.Margaret's record is of one that was picked up in the bay on Feb.19th 1987, apparently exhausted. It was taken to the late George Took, who identified it as a first-winter individual.

Little Auk *Alle alle*

This tiny, enigmatic seabird breeds in millions in high Arctic islands from Greenland eastwards to NE Canada (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). It sometimes occurs in huge numbers off the British east coast in late autumn, but numbers reaching Kent are invariably relatively small. At St.Margaret's, apart from one on Jan.8th 1992 and two seen from a ferry leaving Dover on Mar.1st 1997, all records have occurred between Oct.14th and Nov.30th. Of the 75 individuals recorded in this period, all but four have been in November, including eight on Nov.4th 1990, 23 on Nov.4th 1995 (in a total of 37 bird-days for the month), eight on Nov.13th 1996 and six on Nov.9th 2001. Although most have been seen at sea, two individuals flew in off the sea with Starlings and five flew along the beach during the movements of November 1995, one of which landed on the beach, where a Magpie immediately attacked it. It was saved from its naïveté when its assailant was chased off by outraged birdwatchers!

Puffin *Fratercula arctica*

In Europe, Puffins breed mainly along the coasts of NW Britain, Norway, Iceland and Greenland, though some occur as far south as Brittany (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). Although it is scarce in Kent, numbers have recently increased slightly, possibly as a result of large influxes of other auk species in winter. At St.Margaret's, the first of 11 records in the last 25 years involved two on the sea with Guillemots in January 1982. Four of these were in autumn, involving one or two between Oct.20th and Nov.19th, with six in winter, from Dec.9th to Feb.11th, including three on Feb.11th 1996. The only spring occurrence was of two flying NE on Apr.27th 1985.

Pigeons to Woodpeckers 1977 – 2002

Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon *Columba livia*

Feral Pigeons are regular throughout the area and are studiously ignored, though probably not by the resident Peregrines.

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*

Numbers in winter are usually insignificant, but 85 were present on Wanstone in December 1993, rising to 160 in February 1994. Although spring migration is not always apparent, substantial flocks have been recorded in March and April, including 87 on Apr.13th 1987, 350 at Bockhill on Mar 1st 1997 and 112 near Fox Hill Down on Apr.27th 1997.

Up to 30 have been present at the end of August, but autumn migration is always most pronounced from mid October to mid November, when there have been 14 counts of more than a hundred, invariably heading SW with Woodpigeons. The largest single movement involved 400 SW on Nov.1st 1990, while prolonged periods of passage include three movements totalling 782 between Oct.28th and Nov.7th 1994, 701 between Oct.24th and Nov.4th 2000 and 516 between Oct.28th and Nov.5th 2002.

Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*

Up to 500 have been present on Wanstone in winter, prior to spring migration, which begins in late February. More than a thousand have been recorded on five occasions between Mar.11th and Apr.2nd, most notably when 4,000 flew out to sea on Mar.27th 1999, and seven other counts of 500+ have occurred between Mar.11th and Apr.18th. Although passage begins to tail off after mid April, 184 flew out to sea as late as May 19th in 1984.

A thousand or more have been recorded heading SW on 12 occasions in autumn, all but one (on Oct.11th) between Oct.28th and Nov.17th. The most notable movements involved 2,000 on Nov.17th 1986 and 3,670 on Nov.4th 1993, while the most to have been recorded in a prolonged period was 7,760 between Oct.27th and Nov.4th in 1993.

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

This predominantly Asian species colonised Britain as recently as 1955, with the first record for St.Margaret's in 1959. It is now a familiar garden bird, resident throughout the year. Largest flocks include 250 at East Valley Farm in October 1994 and up to 98 at Bockhill Farm, 73 on Wanstone Farm and 36 on Bay Hill, but its migratory movements provide most interest. A flock of seven was seen flying towards Kent from Cap Gris Nez on Sept.1st 1997, confirming that immigration still takes place, and several have been seen apparently arriving from off the sea in April and May, with one doing so as late as June 20th in 1993. Spring passage varies greatly in strength each year and 84 bird-days from May 8th-13th 1981 and 44 bird-days from Apr.14th-25th 1984 are easily the largest totals on record.

Autumn movements are uncertain in origin, but regularly involve flocks flying SW from late September to mid November, often loosely associated with migrating Woodpigeons. Peak counts include 42 on Nov.1st 1990, 52 on Sept.20th 1993, 75 on Sept.27th 1994 and 41-55 on Oct.12th-13th 1998.

Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*

Spring arrival varies greatly from year to year, from Apr.21st to May 9th in both recent decades, though the mean arrival date of Apr.28th during the 1990s was two days earlier than that for the 1980s, quite late by county standards. Spring weather also dictates the timing of peak numbers, 25 on June 17th in the cool, wet spring of 1991 contrasting with the appearance of 31 at Bockhill on May 9th 1998, for example. Otherwise, spring peaks of 20 or more have all occurred between May 20th and June 1st, including 29 SW on June 1st 1994 and 36 on May 20th 2000.

Although there have been considerable annual fluctuations, numbers breeding in the area have increased in the last 20 years or so, in line with expanding levels of scrub in the valley. Only one pair bred in the late

1970s, rising to two or three from 1981 and four from 1986 onwards. Five or six pairs were present from 1990 until 1996, but a steep decline followed, with only one or two calling males in 1998. A subsequent recovery took place, however, to three pairs in 1999 and five-six in 2000 and 2001.
Turtle Doves are a good deal less numerous in autumn than in spring, 29 on Sept.2nd 1994 being the only occasion on which more than a dozen have been recorded. The latest of several October records was on Oct.21st 2000.

Ring-necked Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*

Although this noisy green parakeet is more at home on the Indian subcontinent, it is nevertheless familiar to residents of Thanet, where at least 70 pairs breed and up to 480 have been counted flying to roost in recent years (KBR). There have been 15 records at St.Margaret's since 1977, involving a probable eight individuals in spring, between Feb.20th and Apr.22nd, and 13 in autumn, between Aug.12th and Nov.1st. An increase in frequency has been apparent in the last six years, during which nine individuals have been seen.

Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

The earliest spring migrant was on Apr.12th, though the mean arrival date during the 1980s of Apr.29th was a week later than the mean arrival date during the 1990s. Largest spring arrivals include six on June 22nd 1982, five in 1993 and 1996 and three or four in six other years. Locally, Cuckoos are scarce after August, with none beyond the end of June in some years, but the latest on Oct.15th 1993, one of three October records, was one of the latest ever seen in Kent.

Barn Owl *Tyto alba*

In addition to one found on the South Goodwin lightship on Dec.29th 1971 (KOS 1981) there have been eight records since 1977. Five of these occurred in October, with singles in January 1994, August 1999 and September 2001.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*

This small diurnal owl has bred locally throughout the last 25 years, utilising a hole in the cliffs in 1977. Although on both sides of the bay there are usually only a few records annually, it has been seen or heard in all months of the year, most often in autumn. Most, if not all occurrences almost certainly involve local birds.

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*

A pair bred in the valley up to 1979 and may have done so in the mid 1980s. Breeding has not been suspected since the storm of October 1987, but calling birds are still heard periodically, suggesting that one or two pairs may be resident.

Long-eared Owl *Asio otus*

Up to three were present in January/February 1987. However, the sporadic nature of winter records probably reflects observers' habits to some extent, while creating an overlap with the appearance of spring migrants, which amount to 23 records between Mar.6th and May 13th, all but two of which occurred in March and April. Some of these also overlap with instances of probable breeding, which has probably occurred in four years since 1977, usually following an influx the previous autumn.
There have also been at least 38 autumn records, between Sept.8th and Nov.6th, with the majority (33) in October and November, including a roost of up to six in October 1978. Roosts of three or four have also been discovered in early November, but these tend to be transitory, probably because of levels of disturbance.

Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*

Absent during January and February, spring passage has been evident mainly from Mar.3rd to Apr.15th, involving 35 individuals, with five stragglers in May. Apart from three August occurrences, there have been 132 in autumn, between Sept.8th and Nov.24th, with the majority in October, as shown below. Most records are of singles, though five or six have occurred on three dates between Oct.19th-24th. Cross-Channel movement is always difficult to confirm, since migrating owls are often chased out to sea by crows, but one was seen flying out to sea on Mar.22nd, and in autumn at least seven have apparently arrived from off the sea, with one leaving for the French coast in October.

SHORT-EARED OWL		Monthly distribution of individuals 1976-2002									
JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
		21	12	5			3	28	92	14	2

Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*

One on Oct.1st 1985 was possibly an individual that was released in the St.Margaret's area after being hit by a car at Martin a few days earlier, while another, picked up in Dover Docks on June 4th 2001, flew north-east along the coast past Fan Bay when released. (There was also one in the docks in May 2002, released at Sandwich Bay).

Common Swift *Apus apus*

The earliest in spring was seen on Apr.19th 1971, but the mean spring arrival date advanced from May 1st in the 1980s to Apr.28th during the 1990s. A movement of 1,116 over Bockhill on May 18th 1996 was by far the largest to have been recorded in May, substantial arrivals not usually occurring until June, when up to 3,000 have been recorded. The major movements in the last 25 years have occurred between early July and the start of August, including 10,000 on July 10th 2000, five counts of 5-6,000 between July 1st and 14th and one of 4,000 on Aug.2nd, mostly involving foraging birds moving over the area in response to frontal weather systems. There are several late records up to Oct.17th, but the latest of all was seen on Nov.8th 1999.

Alpine Swift *Apus melba*

In Europe, Alpine Swifts have a mainly Mediterranean distribution, where they breed colonially along rocky coasts and in mountain regions (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997).

There are historical records from 'Dover' on Aug.20th 1830 and July 6th 1891, which may have been contributed by the Dover bird catchers, who operated on Langdon cliffs at that time. More recently, there were two records from Dover Castle during the 1980s. At St.Margaret's, one was seen on May 27th 1972, another was seen at the South Foreland on Oct.4th 1990 and one was reported on May 3rd 1992. The fourth and fifth definite records for the area both occurred in 2002, involving singles over the Droveway on Apr.10th and Bockhill on May 17th.

Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

14 individuals have been recorded since 1977. Two have been in winter, on Dec.9th 1995 and Jan.17th 1990, while the remainder have occurred in autumn, between Aug.29th and Nov.15th. Seven of these were seen in September, with two each in October and November, including two on Sept.30th 1990. Two individuals were seen at the pond in Pines Gardens, at least three were seen in the bay and the remainder have been recorded in and around the valley.

KINGFISHER Monthly distribution of individuals 1976-2002											
JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
1							1	7	2	2	1

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*

There have been 11 records of this beautiful bird at St.Margaret's, involving a total of 15 individuals. One was seen flying out to sea on May 19th 1979, a party of five flew NE on May 28th 1989 and singles were seen on June 2nd 1993 and heard on May 30th 1996. In 1997, one was seen at the S.Foreland on May 9th and one was seen over Bockhill and the S.Foreland on Aug.12th, with another heard over the valley (and seen later at Dungeness) on Sept.8th. One was seen at the S.Foreland and Bockhill on May 31st and June 1st 2001 and singles were seen on May 31st and June 20th and at Bockhill on Sept.4th in 2002. This increase in frequency coincides with a northerly spread in France, where breeding was recorded north of the Somme for the first time in 1982 and several pairs were resident in Nord Pas de Calais during the second half of the 1990s (Tombal 1996).

EUROPEAN BEE-EATER Monthly distribution of individuals 1976 - 2002				
MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER
10	2		1	2

Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

Historical records include one on Dover cliffs in 1870 (Harrison 1953) and six between 1946 and 1970 (KBR). Six more occurred during the 1980s, with six more to the end of 2001, making a total of 19 individuals. Of nine spring records, eight were seen between Mar.30th and Apr.28th, with one on May 22nd. Of ten in autumn, nine were recorded between Aug.6th and Oct.14th. One was present for two weeks to Nov.18th, with another long-staying individual near Hope Point from Aug.30th to Sept.10th in 2001. The equality of records in spring and autumn has remained more or less unchanged throughout.

Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*

Prior to the decline of this cryptically marked relative of the woodpeckers since the late 1950s, the Wryneck would have been a good deal more common here. Although it has become slightly more frequent in the latter part of the last 25 years, as shown below, it has continued to decline markedly in spring, occurring most often in autumn, probably from the breeding populations from the Low Countries north-east through Scandinavia (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997).

Spring records have occurred between Apr.10th and May 16th and autumn migrants have been seen between Aug.19th and Oct.17th. Although it is unusual for more than one or two to appear each year, a probable ten individuals occurred in autumn 1995.

WRYNECK Seasonal distribution of records 1976 - 2002							
	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER
1976-1989	7				18		
1990-2002	2	2			10	19	3

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*

Despite being regular in winter, spring and autumn, 1991 was the first year since regular coverage began in 1977 that Green Woodpeckers were recorded in summer. Although breeding was confirmed near Pines Gardens in 1993 it was not until six were seen in the valley in late March 1995 that this was repeated, but since then there has been a gradual increase in numbers at all seasons, particularly in 1998 when there were probably as many as 20 between Bockhill and Langdon in September and six trapped in autumn that year were the first ringing records for the area. Currently, it seems likely that there may be as many as four pairs breeding between Langdon and Bockhill, probably as a result of the recent sequence of very mild winters.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

Interestingly, in view of the timing of the first instances of summering Green Woodpeckers, breeding was proved for the first time in the valley in 1991. Since then single pairs have bred annually, with two present in 2002, probably benefiting from increasing areas of woodland and the recent run of mild winters. Although spring migrants are scarce, one flew strongly NE past the monument at Bockhill on Apr.2nd 2001. Despite the year-round presence of resident birds, dispersal is evident from mid July onwards, usually involving birds flying SW past the S.Foreland. Although such movements do not take place every year, up to 47 have been involved in years with largest numbers of visibly migrating birds, the most notable period of activity being Oct.10th-13th 1998 when 20 flew SW. Two main periods of activity are apparent: one in the second half of August and another, much longer period from the second week of September to late October, with evidence of dispersal continuing into early November in some years. This is likely to be linked to the separate dispersal of British and northern European birds, which exhibit highly eruptive behaviour in response to reductions in availability of food (BWP).

GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER Distribution of birds flying SW in autumn 1977-2002											
AUGUST				SEPTEMBER				OCTOBER			
1-7	8-15	16-22	23-31	1-7	8-15	16-22	23-30	1-7	8-15	16-22	23-31
4	10	12	24	7	24	18	33	55	48	37	17

Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos medius*

At 08.35 on Aug.19th 1995, in a gentle N to NW breeze, a woodpecker flew across Fan Bay and alighted on a twig sticking up from a patch of gorse. It was immediately obvious that it was not a Great Spotted Woodpecker, as expected, but a Middle Spotted Woodpecker – a potential first British record. Although it was watched through a telescope for the best part of a minute and was seen later in the Lower Wood by at least one local observer, it did not co-operate further for the huge numbers of people who would have wished to see it. The British Birds Rarities Committee eventually declined to accept the record, on the grounds that the extent of the white patch in the wing and the colour of the bill were not fully described, though all relevant identification features had been noted. That this was an extraordinary and controversial record is beyond doubt, but both observers who saw the bird are convinced of its identification.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*

Records from the Singledge and Ringwould areas during fieldwork for the 1988-1994 Kent Atlas (KBR 1996) provide a clue to the origins of at least some of the 13 occurrences of this diminutive woodpecker, which frequents the woods around Canterbury and several of the wooded valleys closer to Dover. Nine have occurred in autumn, including singles on July 9th and Aug.19th and seven between Sept.16th and Nov.7th. Spring records include three singles between Mar.30th and Apr.29th and one on June 2nd. Although most of these were seen on single dates, one was present in the valley from Oct.7th-10th 1979 and another stayed for six days from Sept.27th to Oct.2nd in 1990.

Larks to Accentors 1977 – 2002

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*

Although this species breeds in the dunes surrounding Calais and its breeding range extends across much of Europe (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997), it is extremely rare in Britain, with only two records in Kent. One of these was trapped by one of the Dover bird catchers on Dover Cliff on Apr.22nd 1879 (Ticehurst 1909).

Woodlark *Lullula arborea*

The recent increase in the Woodlark's British breeding population from a low point induced by a succession of hard winters in the 1980s (Mead 2000) has been reflected in its increasingly frequent appearances on migration here. Only 21 individuals were recorded between 1979 and 1991, but over a hundred have been recorded since, including annual totals of 27 in 1993 and 21 in 1997. One was seen in winter, on Jan.2nd 1993, although spring passage can begin very early, with the first records on Feb.23rd. However, the majority occur in March, with stragglers as late as Apr.23rd, and the beautiful song of this otherwise plain bird has been heard on several occasions. Most spring records have involved one or two individuals, but four were recorded on Mar.17th 1984. Autumn migrants have occurred between Sept.13th and Nov.15th, with the majority in October and early November. Peaks include six-seven on three dates between Oct.10th-15th in 1993 and, in 1997, five at Bockhill on Oct.4th-5th and five at the S.Foreland on Oct.11th.

WOODLARK Monthly distribution of records 1979-2002												
	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
1979-1989			5						1	10		
1990-2002	1	2	19	2					3	86	17	

Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

Largest winter numbers invariably coincide with cold weather, most notably 800 on the fields in February 1991 and arrivals from the continent of 890 on Dec.22nd 1981 and 2,112 in an hour on Jan.4th 1985. Although flocks of 200-300 were regular during the 1980s, a hundred or more occurred in only three winters since 1992 and not at all since 1997.

Spring passage was always negligible, but large flocks congregate on the fields from late September, including 300 on Sept.27th 1990 and 400 on Nov.18th 1995. Autumn passage has also featured some significant influxes from the continent, usually into NW winds, including 1,758 on Oct.30th 1983 and nine counts of 300-750, all between Oct.9th and Nov.13th. These influxes have also declined in size and frequency and no more than 140 have been recorded arriving from off the sea since 1994. The Skylark has been one of the most conspicuous casualties of the agricultural changes that have taken place in the last 20 years and there is currently no sign of improvement.

Shore Lark *Eremophila alpestris*

Shore Larks that visit Kent in autumn and winter almost certainly originate from the mountains of Fennoscandia, rather than from the populations breeding eastwards from the Carpathians (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). No fewer than 16 individuals were trapped by the Dover bird catchers between 1868 and 1910, mostly in November, which accords with its recent status, though by the 1950s, Shore Larks had clearly become a good deal scarcer than around the turn of the century (Harrison 1953).

Locally, Shore Larks have been recorded in only six years since 1977, although two were seen nearby at Kingsdown in autumn 1994. Four flew SW on Nov.19th 1977 and singles were seen on the clifftop on Oct.13th 1980 and Oct.17th 1985. A series of records in 1998 involved two on Wanstone on Oct.9th, two-three at Bockhill from Oct.10th-12th and three at Bockhill on Nov.15th, while in 2000 there were four at Bockhill between Mar.25th and Apr.22nd, almost certainly the same birds that had been present on the beach at Kingsdown in February. One was seen with Skylarks on Wanstone on Nov.3rd 2002.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*

During the 1980s, the earliest spring record was on Apr.9th, but in seven of the eight years since 1993 Sand Martins have appeared in March, with the earliest involving five at Bockhill on Mar.2nd 1997. However, spring is generally quiet, 74 on Apr.4th 1995 having been the largest arrival and 215 bird-days in 1999 the heaviest spring passage.

Return movement begins in July, with up to 400 having been recorded as early as the 17th, and although 2,400 have been recorded as early as Aug.29th passage does not reach its full intensity until September. Peak counts include 2,400 on Sept.29th 1989, 2,100 in an hour on Sept.11th 1992, 4,000 on Sept.3rd 1994 and 5,000 at Bockhill on Sept.15th 1996, with 500-950 on twelve dates between Aug.26th and Sept.24th. October birds are regular and the latest individuals were seen on Oct.11th in 2001 and 2002.

Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

The mean date of spring arrival advanced by over a week, from Apr.8th during the 1980s to Mar.31st during the 1990s, with the earliest of all on Mar.14th 2000. It is unusual for more than a hundred to be recorded on an average spring day, however, the largest influx having involved 150 in an hour on May 18th 1984.

Although spring and summer are relatively quiet, some spectacular movements have occurred in autumn as swarms of migrants flood along the cliffs, usually early in the morning. All counts of more than 5,000 have taken place between Sept.3rd and Oct.9th, the largest of which have tended to occur from mid September onwards. These include 30,000 on Sept.24th 1994, 22,000 on Sept.15th 1995, 30,000 at dusk on Oct.9th 1998 and 25,000 on Sept.26th 1999, on a day when up to five million Swallows were estimated to have passed through the county (Kent Ornithological Society website). November records, which occurred in seven of the 13 years from 1977-1989, have been annual since 1990, including one as late as Nov.29th 2000.

Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica.*

There have been four records of this mainly Mediterranean species, involving five individuals, the first of which was seen on Nov.1st 1987. The remainder have been in spring, including singles on June 5th 1993 and May 28th 1994 and two at Bockhill on May 7th 2000.

House Martin *Delichon urbica*

Earliest spring arrivals of this species also became earlier in the previous decade, from a mean of Apr.19th during the 1980s to Apr.4th, including appearances as early as Mar.14th in three years since 1997. Never very numerous in spring, the largest arrival occurred on May 28th 1996 when 250 arrived from off the sea at the South Foreland and 131 flew NE at Bockhill. A deterioration in breeding numbers has been evident throughout the period under review. Ten pairs nested on the cliffs at Fan Bay in 1984 and although five pairs were present in 1990 numbers continued to fall and none has bred since 1999. The colony on the cliffs at Kingsdown, which contained more than 50 nests in the late 1970s, has also been deserted over the same period.

In autumn, movements of more than 7,000 have been recorded between Aug.31st and Oct.10th, the largest of which include the amazing spectacle of 100,000 flying NE in three hours on Sept.28th 1994, followed by 50,000 on the afternoon of the next day, and 100,000 at Bockhill on Oct.7th 1999, when far fewer were evident at the South Foreland. November records are almost annual, including 107 on Nov.1st 1989, the latest being one on Nov.26th 2000, although six lingered at Kingsdown to Dec.4th 1986 and one was seen there on Dec.10th 1999.

Richard's Pipit *Anthus richardi*

This species breeds across the grasslands of Siberia and Central Asia from the Tien Shan mountains of Kazakhstan, wintering on the Indian subcontinent and South-east Asia. However, it is regular in W. Europe, mainly in autumn, and records in Kent are annual. British records show a strong north-easterly bias, with most occurring on north-facing coasts from Norfolk to Yorkshire (Dymond *et al* 1989) and in Kent it is a good deal more regular along the north coast and Sandwich Bay than along the Channel coast between St.Margaret's and Dungeness.

Prior to the commencement of regular coverage at Bockhill in 1994 there were only two records: singles on Sept.27th 1986 and Nov.11th 1993. Since 1994, however, there have been eight further records, six of which have come from the Bockhill side of the bay. The current total of ten records includes two in spring, on May 5th 1997 and Apr.23rd 2000, and eight in autumn, between Sept.17th and Nov.14th.

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*

The breeding range of this pipit extends from the Iberian peninsula and North Africa across Europe to the steppes of Inner Mongolia (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). It breeds in the Low Countries, but is absent from northern France (Tombal 1996), although there have been several records in late summer in recent years (Leclercq *et al*, D.B.Rosair *verbatim*) and it occurs annually in Kent, in small numbers.

There have been ten records from St.Margaret's, involving 11 individuals. The only one to have occurred in spring was seen on Apr.21st 1979 and there was a late summer individual on July 29th 1990, but otherwise all birds have appeared between Sept.2nd and Oct.4th. Although most occurrences relate to single individuals on one day only, one stayed on clifftop fields for four days from Sept.20th-23rd 1985 and there were two on Sept.16th 1993.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*

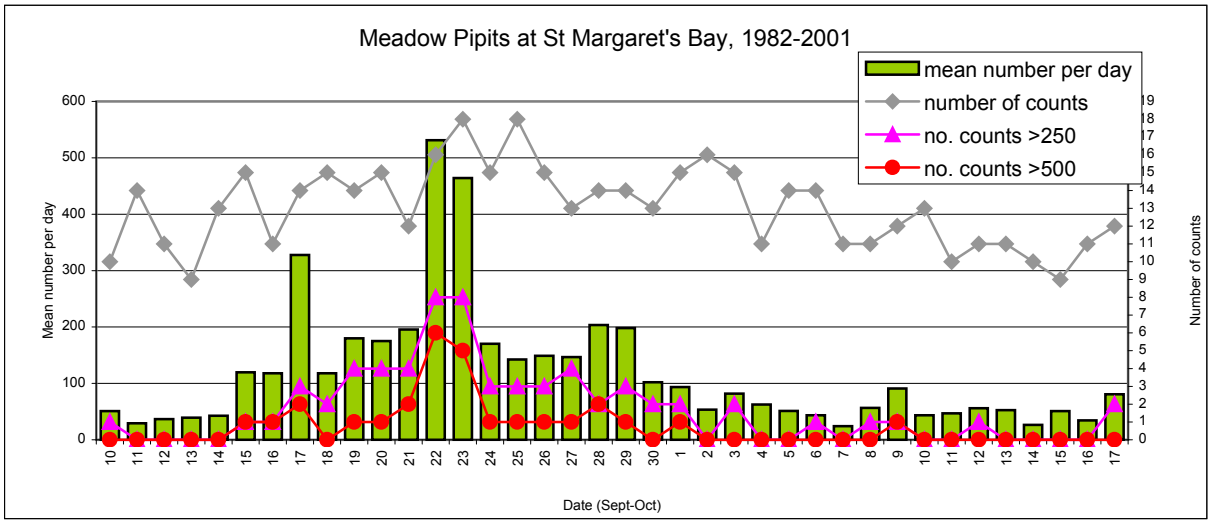
During the 1980s, spring occurrences of this summer migrant varied from 2-32 each year with an annual average of 13 and a peak count of 13 on Apr.23rd 1989. The annual average fell to only seven during the 1990s, with a maximum spring total of only 15, and this decline has continued, with only five individuals in the three years since 2000. There has been no obvious change in the passage period, however, migrants having occurred from Mar.28th to June 5th.

The first autumn migrants occur in early August, with annual bird/day totals of more than 100 on three occasions in the 1980s and four in the 1990s. However, an increase in the strength of autumn passage during the 1990s to an annual average of 117 bird/days, compared with 75 in the 1980s, was coupled with a significant change in the timing of peak migration. Peaks in the 1980s consistently occurred between Aug.17th-28th, including 54 on Aug.28th 1979 and four movements of 19-32 between Aug.17th-25th in 1984 and 1985, with only one double figure count in September. However, no more than 14 have been recorded in August since then, suggesting a link to the decline of more than 50% in the British breeding population, which has been most pronounced in the south-east (Mead 2000) and evident also in northern France (Tombal 1996). Instead, the heaviest movements in the 1990s occurred during periods of moist north-easterly winds in September and October, almost certainly involving birds of Scandinavian origin. 88% of a record autumn total of 346 in 1993 occurred between Sept.14th-25th, including 61 on the 16th and a county record 134 on the 18th. No fewer than 93% of autumn migrants in 1996 were recorded between Sept.20th-28th, including 51 on the 23rd and 75 on the 24th and in 1998 peak passage occurred even later, between Oct.3rd-10th, including 58 on the 3rd and 30 on the 7th. Late October migrants are not unusual, with one as late as Nov.8th in 1996, though the possibility of Olive-backed Pipit *A.hodgsoni* being involved cannot be ruled out; such a date would not be unusual for this Asian vagrant.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

Up to 52 were present during the 1992/93 winter in a substantial area of agricultural set-aside on the clifftop, but such overwintering numbers are an exception. Although the first spring migrants become apparent in early March, most move through from mid March to early April. Peak counts at this time include arrivals from France of 234 and 277 on Mar.30th and Apr.2nd in 1980, 188 off the sea in an hour on Mar.30th 1984, three counts of 200-330 between Mar.20th and Apr.4th in 1994 and 1995, 107 at Bockhill on Mar.30th 1997 and 117 off the sea on Mar.14th 2001.

Autumn migration starts in early September, with a pronounced peak around Sept.22nd/23rd, tailing off after the end of the month, with smaller numbers continuing throughout October, as shown below. The isolated peak on Sept.17th results from 3,000 arriving from off the sea or moving NE on Sept.17th 1993, when Tree Pipits and Honey Buzzards were also arriving, in all probability drifting off the North Sea as they moved south from Scandinavia. Otherwise, peak numbers include 3,000 on Sept.23rd 1982, 2,700 on Sept.22nd 1984, 1,360 on Sept.23rd 1996, 1,300 on Sept.28th 1997, 1,130 on Sept.22nd 1999 and 1,300 on Sept.29th 2001. Although substantial movements in October are uncommon, 614 moved NE on Oct.23rd 1998, with 400 the following day.



Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*

Breeding across arctic and subarctic regions from Fennoscandia eastwards (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997), this pipit occurs annually in Britain in small numbers (Dymond *et al* 1989). Although there were only 12 records in Kent up to 1999, three of these were from St.Margaret's, including singles on June 6th 1985, Oct.4th 1987 and Oct.10th 1998. One was also heard and seen on Oct.12th 1981, flying over the top of the valley with a party of Meadow Pipits, but was rejected by the national rarities committee, who have an apparent blanket ban on the acceptance of calling Red-throated Pipits, even though the observers had extensive experience of this species from Israel, where it is an abundant migrant.

Rock Pipit *Anthus petrosus*

Although *Birds of Kent* (KOS 1981) stated that breeding occurs occasionally, it was suspected at the commencement of the current period of study in the late 1970s that several pairs bred at the base of the cliffs each year (Hodgson 1991). Winter counts in 1984 of 22 on Feb.14th and 43 on Dec.15th suggested a substantial overwintering population, but no formal survey of the breeding population was attempted until 2001, when Foot & Mouth restrictions prevented access to much of the clifftop area. This was carried out on Apr.30th and May 1st, long after any migrants would have departed, and at least 21 probable nest sites were found between Dover Harbour and Kingsdown, well above previous estimates.

Although feeding individuals on clifftop fields in autumn are most likely to be local birds, migrant Rock Pipits definitely occur at St.Margaret's, individuals of the pink-flushed Scandinavian race *A.p.littoralis* having been seen on the clifftop on Mar.3rd 1994, at Kingsdown on Mar.1st 1997 and in the bay on Mar.20th 2001.

Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*

Water Pipits inhabit Alpine regions of central and southern Europe from the Pyrenees eastwards into Asia. They disperse fairly widely in winter, some reaching the lowlands of Britain and Ireland (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). One was seen on the clifftop on Jan.21st 1991.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

The earliest spring arrival was on Apr.1st 1988, but the mean arrival date in spring is Apr.11th, about two weeks later than migrants tend to appear elsewhere in the county. Its scarcity in spring has remained unchanged in the last 25 years, varying between 13 and 124 bird/days each year, with largest arrivals of 31 on Apr.29th 1990 and 31 at Bockhill on the same date in 2000. At least 15 examples of the blue-headed continental race have occurred, including four at Bockhill on Apr.25th 1999. Although most have passed through by mid May, one or two pairs have remained to breed on Wanstone in seven years since 1989.

A trickle of migrants begins in mid July, but peak passage does not begin until mid August. An exceptional total of 3,395 bird-days occurred in 1997, surpassing the previous highest total of 1,308 in 1988, and in both of these years more than 90% of migrants occurred between Aug.13th and Sept.12th. Otherwise, the average strength of passage has been very similar in both recent decades. Most birds tend to fly over the area in autumn, including 320 SW on Aug.29th 1988, but the outstanding numbers of 1997 resulted from large numbers on cereal stubble at Langdon, where 300-400 were present from Aug.20th-25th, with up to 661 on

the fields at Bockhill in early September the same year. Apart from these two exceptional years, there have been 18 other movements of between 70 and 147 at the South Foreland and Bockhill, all between Aug.13th and Sept.11th. There were October records in seven years between 1977 and 1989, but in the 1990s late birds occurred in October in all but one year. The latest was seen on Oct.20th 1988.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

This elegant bird is regular but scarce in spring, a total of 96 migrants having occurred since 1980; an annual average of just over four. Although there were nine in the best year, only six occurred in the four years between 1992 and 1995 following a series of summer droughts. Apart from one on Feb.24th, passage has been evident from early March until mid April, with seven in May and one on June 16th 1984. Three on Mar.10th 1990 was the most seen in a day and, as in autumn, most fly directly over, though occasionally birds can be seen at puddles of rainwater in the area.

Although occasional early autumn migrants have been seen as early as July 14th, first birds usually appear in late August. Apart from nine over Bockhill on Sept.2nd 1998, all 20 movements of ten or more occurred between Sept.10th and Oct.10th, including 21 on Sept.25th 1992, 33 on the same date in 1993 and 33 at Bockhill on Oct.10th 1999. Autumn passage has increased in strength from an annual average of 46 in the 1980s to 61 in the 1990s, highest totals including 164 bird-days in 1993, 126 in 2002 and 114 in 1988.

Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

Although this species is mainly a spring and autumn migrant, 30 were seen flying over Jubilee Way to roost in Dover in late February 1995 and a flock of 18 near the pylons at Langdon in December 1999 may have originated from the same source. Spring passage takes place mainly in March and April, including peak counts of 10-17 on six dates between Mar.12th and Apr.6th. Numbers involved are relatively small, 70 bird-days in 1996 being the most on record, but examples of the continental race *M.a.alba* occur each year, most notably at least 20 in spring 1999, including a flock of eight that alighted by the monument at Bockhill before moving off to the north.

Occasional midsummer appearances and small numbers in August precede the main period of autumn migration, which typically lasts from mid September to early November. The strength of passage varies considerably, from 1,209 bird-days in 1985 to 119 bird-days in the quietest year, though the averages for each of the previous decades (342 and 387) have been similar. Of a total of 30 movements of 50 or more, all but one occurred between Sept.25th and Oct.18th, the exception being 52 at Bockhill on Nov.1st. The largest movements took place in the record year of 1985, including 137 on Oct.15th, 225 on the 17th and 313 on the 18th, while 169 were recorded on Oct.6th 1986, 110 moved over on Oct.16th 1999 and there were movements at Bockhill of 115 on Oct.3rd and 103 on Oct.15th in 2000.

Waxwing *Bombycilla garrulus*

The Waxwings that visit Britain in winter almost certainly originate from breeding populations in Fennoscandia, although they breed eastwards across the Russian taiga into Siberia and the boreal forests of N.America (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). They are highly irruptive in their behaviour and numbers reaching our shores each year are subject to great variation. Historical records for St.Margaret's include up to five at both St.Margaret's at Cliffe and St.Margaret's Bay between Nov.16th and Dec.10th 1957, reports of birds in January-February 1959, five on Oct.27th 1965 and singles on Nov.23rd 1968 and Nov.18th 1972.

More recently, a flock of 40 flew SW across Wanstone on Nov.2nd 1986 and in 1988 six were seen on Nov.1st, with at least one remaining in the Nelson Park area well into December. Two were seen at the top of the valley on Nov.3rd 1990, one flew over Wanstone on Dec.1st 1991 and in 1996, when there was a large winter influx into the county, one was seen in a garden in Lighthouse Road on Jan.10th and two flew NE on the outskirts of the village on Apr.7th.

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Its typically elusive behaviour makes this enigmatic little bird difficult to record accurately, and ringing results since 1977 provide the most reliable guide to its status over the last 25 years. There have been no recoveries or controls from outside the St.Margaret's area, which suggests that the majority, if not all, are local in origin. During the 1980s, 37 were trapped in 1983 and 1984, but only 14 were caught in 1987, following three consecutive hard winters, but the population had recovered by the end of the decade and a record 41 were trapped in 1989. Although ringing effort declined during the 1990s, 25-28 were trapped annually from 1998 to 2000 and 34 were caught in 2001, suggesting that it is currently relatively numerous, following the absence of any really cold winters since the mid 1980s.

Dunnock *Prunella modularis*

This species is resident throughout the area, with pockets of abundance in the scrubby parts of Wanstone Farm and the South Foreland valley, although many forsake the most exposed areas in winter in favour of better feeding opportunities in nearby gardens. There is rarely any sign of spring migration, though some shuffling about was apparent in March 1997, including 20 flying SW on the 16th. Although the breeding population has never been accurately assessed, there has almost certainly been a decline since at least 40 pairs were counted in April 1988, in line with a 40% decline in the British breeding population (Mead 2000).
Four years of reasonably constant ringing effort in autumn from 1998 to 2002 resulted in annual captures of 46-60, suggesting a fairly stable and static population. The furthest ringing control, involving a bird ringed at Sandwich Bay in October 1988 and captured here six days later hardly dispels this impression. However, numbers regularly increase during September and although the intensity of autumn dispersal varies greatly from year to year and numbers have been generally depressed since the mid 1990s there have been counts of 100 or more on 16 dates between Sept.13th and Oct.19th in the last 25 years. The highest of these include 200 on Oct.17th 1983 and 150 on Oct.18th 1988, while in 1992 a record passage included 100 more or less daily from Sept.19th to Oct.1st and a peak count of 200 on Sept.26th, when 74 were counted moving along the clifftop below the lighthouse in an hour after dawn. These early morning movements act as a good barometer of migrant activity and 53 were also recorded in an hour on Oct.17th 1983.

Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris*

This species breeds on rocky mountain slopes eastwards across Europe from the Pyrenees (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997), though it descends to lower altitudes in winter. There have been four records in Kent, between May 1st-8th, including one on the Bockhill side of the bay on May 1st 1932 and, remarkably, one at almost exactly the same spot on May 6th 2000, which was relocated at the South Foreland in the afternoon. This individual was the 36th for Britain.

Chats to Thrushes 1977 – 2002

Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

The British Robin population consists largely of resident birds, augmented in spring and particularly in autumn by mostly Scandinavian migrants. Spring is relatively quiet, arrivals of 50 on Mar.19th 1992 and 25-30 on Apr.20th in both 1992 and 1994 being the largest on record. However, autumn is an entirely different affair, with arrivals of a hundred or more having taken place on at least 22 occasions between Sept.13th and Nov.1st since 1977. These are invariably associated with periods of north-easterly winds and peak counts include 200 on Oct.26th 1979, 200 on Oct.19th 1988 and 300 on Oct.15th 1993. More than a thousand Robins have been caught and ringed since 1977 and among the longest-distance recoveries are two individuals ringed here in October 1979 and October 1997 that were found in Spain in the following winter, each having travelled more than 1,600 km. Two others were recovered or controlled in the Netherlands and the Channel Islands.

Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*

Singing male Nightingales have appeared in April or May in all but six years since 1977, between Apr.8th and June 2nd. At least 30 individuals have been involved, 85% of which occurred in April. Most records are of single short-staying migrants, but three were present on Apr.20th 1988 and singing birds were present in the wood by the South Foreland lighthouse from May 15th to June 15th in 1977 and at Otty Bottom near Kingsdown from May 6th-26th 2001.
The secretive nature of this species makes it scarcer in autumn than in spring. 29 migrants have been recorded since 1978, between July 20th and Sept.27th, the majority (73%) between Aug.8th and Sept.6th.

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*

The breeding range of this lovely bird extends somewhat discontinuously from Spain through coastal areas of France and the Low Countries into Fennoscandia and central and eastern Europe (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). In the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region of northern France there has been an apparent increase from 30 pairs in 1976 to at least 350 in 1995 (Tombal 1996), but still the Bluethroat is a scarce migrant in Kent and the only record for St.Margaret's is a male on the clifftop near Hope Point on Mar.28th 1996.

Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus*

Breeding from Finland eastwards and wintering in south-east Asia, this spectacular bird is one of the most sought-after rarities on the British list, with only 22 records up to 2000. One at Bockhill Farm on Oct.18th-19th 1998 was only the second record for Kent, and the first to have been seen alive.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*

This species has a strong affinity with towns and villages on the continent, with a healthy population of at least 8,500 pairs in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region of northern France in 1995 (Tombal 1996). It is much scarcer on this side of the Channel, however, occurring in Kent as a winter visitor, passage migrant and very local breeder, with a fluctuating UK population of around 100 pairs (Mead 2000).

Up to five were recorded in winter in all but two years between 1977 and 1988, but overwintering birds have been found in only six years since then and smaller numbers have been involved. Spring migration is most clearly defined in years when wintering birds are absent, with the first migrants appearing in early March and passage lasting well into April, though numbers involved each year are highly variable: from only nine bird-days in 1983 to a record 190 bird-days in 1996, 130 of which occurred at Bockhill, where numbers tend to be higher than those at the S.Foreland. Ten or more have been recorded between Mar.16th and Apr.8th on 11 occasions since 1977, including 23 at Bockhill on Apr.8th 1996 and 31 between the S.Foreland and Langdon Cliffs and 24 at Bockhill on Mar.28th 1998. Breeding probably occurs annually, up to four pairs having been located between Kingsdown and Dover Harbour in recent years.

Although post-breeding dispersal sometimes obscures the onset of autumn migration, records in August and the first half of September are relatively few. Even so, significant autumn passage is sporadic, counts in excess of five birds having been recorded in only nine years since 1977. Apart from six at Langdon on Sept.22nd 2001, all of these occurred between Oct.14th and 29th, including 11 on Oct.23rd 1982 and, in 1988, ten on Oct.19th and 19 on Oct.23rd, since when no more than eight have been seen on any one day. Bird-day totals each year vary from 48 in 1988 to only two in the poorest year, though the average bird-day total for each of the last two decades has been the same, at 15 each year.

Although only three Black Redstarts have been ringed at St.Margaret's, a juvenile caught on Sept.29th 1986 was re-trapped at Dungeness on Oct.24th the same year.

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

This beautiful trans-Saharan summer migrant has a predominantly northern and western breeding distribution in the UK, though small numbers breed in Kent. In both spring and autumn it is most likely to be seen flitting along field edges during periods of north-easterly winds, its orange tail quivering characteristically as it perches in hedgerows and on fences. It has been almost annual at St.Margaret's in spring in the last 25 years, a total of 90 bird-days having accumulated between Apr.3rd and May 23rd, with a late individual on June 22nd 1983. Numbers tend to be small, the only arrival of more than three being 11 on Apr.27th 1997.

Although one was noted as early as July 23rd, the first departing migrants usually appear in the first half of August, though the annual strength of passage is highly variable: from as few as 15 bird-days in a westerly-dominated 2000 to a record 199 bird-days at Bockhill and 174 at the S.Foreland in 1995, when substantial numbers of migrants were drifted across the North Sea from Scandinavia. However, it is rather salutary to note that in the seven years since then the annual strength of autumn migration has averaged only 47 bird-days. Peak migration occurs from the end of August to the beginning of October, including early arrivals of nine on Aug.26th 1990 and eight on Aug.28th 1993, though the bulk of migrants, involving at least 30 arrivals of ten or more, have been recorded between Sept.9th and 28th. The largest influx involved 63 on Sept.21st 1995, including 35 at Bockhill and 28 at the S.Foreland, 51 of which remained the next day, with 32 on the 23rd. Otherwise, 16-25 have occurred on 11 dates between Sept.10th and 28th and although most migrants have departed by late October, one was seen on Nov.4th 1993.

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*

Whinchats were 'sparingly distributed' along the cliffs about a hundred years ago (Ticehurst 1909), but there has since been a serious decline in Kent, with only sporadic breeding since the 1960s (KOS 1981), despite there being as many as 40 pairs in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region of northern France in 1995, though this represents a decline from 100-200 pairs in 1976 (Tombal 1996).

Spring migrants have occurred between Apr.7th and June 4th, mostly in the hollow by Fox Hill Down, inland of Langdon Cliffs. Although Whinchats are usually scarce in spring, there have been 11-22 bird-days in five of the last 25 years, with largest arrivals including nine on May 3rd 1984, 13 on May 15th 1985 and 13 between Bockhill and Langdon Cliffs on Apr.27th 1997. The overall strength of passage seems to have changed little, 64 bird-days between 1979 and 1989 comparing with 67 bird-days between 1990 and 2002.

Early autumn migrants have occurred from July 12th, but passage usually lasts from mid August to the second half of October, although one lingered at Nelson Park until Nov.2nd 1992. Largest arrivals, involving 32 counts of 20 or more, have all occurred between Aug.21st and Sept.26th, including 62 on Aug.28th and 55 on Aug.30th in 1993, 41 on Sept.19th 1992 and, at Bockhill, 40 on Sept.10th 1995. The average strength of passage rose from 120 bird-days during the 1980s to 163 in the 1990s, probably due to a greater frequency of NE winds, which add a Scandinavian element to east coast migration. Years of greatest abundance of this species have also tended to feature good numbers of other Scandinavian migrants, notably Tree Pipits, Redstarts and Pied Flycatchers; typical of the five years since 1977 in which bird-day totals of 269-339 have occurred. Whinchats also tend to be more numerous in autumn along the county's North Sea coast, with fewer along the Channel and it is significant that since regular coverage began at Bockhill, where there were 323 bird-days in 1995, autumn passage has been consistently twice as heavy there as at the S.Foreland.

Stonechat *Saxicola torquata*

Ticehurst (1909) remarked upon the preference of Stonechats for the chalk downs around Folkestone and Dover and up to three pairs have attempted to breed between Langdon Cliffs and Kingsdown almost annually during the last 25 years. Up to three have been present in most winters since 1978 and it is not until recently that there has been a clear distinction between winter and spring records. Influxes of seven in mid March 2001 and ten on Mar.4th 2002, comfortably the largest in spring since 1977, may well have involved birds returning to breed along the coast between here and Folkestone, where numbers have recently increased, particularly since the creation of Samphire Hoe.

A marked increase in numbers takes place from mid September to late October, all autumn records of more than five having occurred between Sept.18th and Oct.27th, including 10 on Oct.1st 1977 and 11 on Oct.8th 1993. However, regular observations at Bockhill since 1995 show a discernible preference for that side of the bay, more than three times as many having occurred there as at the S.Foreland, including a 'Siberian' Stonechat of the race *S.t.maura* or *stejnegeri* from Oct.12th-14th 1994.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Early in the last century, isolated pairs of Wheatears were scattered along the North Downs from the South Foreland (Ticehurst 1909), with numerous breeding pairs on Romney Marsh and Thanet. It began to decline during the 1960s as agricultural changes gathered pace and it now occurs only as a passage migrant away from the Dungeness area. A less severe but similar reduction in breeding numbers has also been evident in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region of northern France (Tombal 1996).

At St.Margaret's, spring migrants have occurred between Mar.6th and June 8th. In good years most pass through during the second half of April, but cool springs with N winds can delay migration until May and in 1991 a flock of 12 was seen as late as June 2nd. Passage has varied in strength from 43 to 342 bird-days, with an average of 116, though some of the largest spring totals have resulted from flocks of moderate size being held up for several days by bad weather. The one constant feature of spring is that most occur in the sheep-grazed hollow adjacent to Fox Hill Down, inland of Langdon Cliffs, where largest arrivals include 53 on Apr.20th 1988 and 49 on Apr.17th 1996.

Autumn migrants have appeared from as early as July 12th, but most occur from late July onwards. Of 20 arrivals of 40 or more in the last 25 years, all have occurred between Aug.19th and Sept.19th, including 72 on Aug.29th 1987, 74 on Aug.26th 1992, 82 on Aug.24th 1995 and 68 on Sept.19th 2002. Passage varied from 116 to 596 bird-days during the 1980s, with an average of 276, increasing in the 1990s to an annual average of 520 bird-days, including a record total of 1,176 bird-days in 1990, although there has been an average of only 204 bird-days during a succession of poor years since 1996. In marked contrast to spring passage, migrants are more evenly distributed along the cliffs than in spring and since regular coverage began at Bockhill in 1994, slightly more have tended to occur on that side of the bay. Although numbers tend to fall away in September, there is often a fresh influx of large birds resembling the Greenland race *O.o.leucorhoa* from late in the month to mid October, most notably in 1990 when 16 arrived on Oct.19th. Lingering individuals have been seen in November in six years, the latest of which was recorded at Bockhill on Nov.19th 2000.

Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*

Breeding in the deserts of Morocco to northern Egypt and eastwards to the plateaux of Tibet and Mongolia (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997), the Desert Wheatear had occurred as a vagrant to Britain only 17 times up to 1988 (Dymond *et al* 1989), though this total increased to over 70 by 1999. Singles by the lighthouse on Apr.7th 1989 and on the sheep-grazed fields near the pylons inland of Langdon Cliffs on Nov.24th 1991 were the first Kent records.

Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus*

In Europe, the Ring Ouzel breeds in two distinct zones: one in upland regions of northern and western Britain and Scandinavia, the other in forests of alpine regions from the Pyrenees to eastern Europe (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). It occurs in Kent as a passage migrant in spring and autumn and in the last 25 years St.Margaret's has proved to be one of the best places in south-east England to see this stubbornly unpredictable species on migration, its deep 'chook' being one of the most evocative sounds of autumn, synonymous with calm, damp October mornings.

Spring migration during the 1980s was evident from Apr.4th to May 17th, though numbers were generally small until 1988 when there were arrivals in the sheep-grazed hollow adjacent to Fox Hill Down, inland of Langdon Cliffs, of 11 on Apr.16th and 11-13 from Apr.23rd-30th, including a strikingly marked individual resembling the central European race *T.t.alpestris*, of which there are few British records. 18 appeared on Apr.23rd 1989 and good numbers continued briefly into the 1990s, including an arrival of 17 on May 7th 1991, but since then its previous scarcity in spring has resumed. First arrivals occurred notably earlier in the 1990s, with migrants appearing in March in five years, including one on Mar.12th 1999, and a late individual was seen on May 28th 1994.

Autumn migration, which has been noted from Sept.6th, really gets under way from mid September, with substantial arrivals likely until late October. Since 1977, there have been 22 arrivals of ten or more, all between Sept.16th and Oct.28th, including 66 on Oct.7th 1992, 67 on Oct.10th 1993, 67 on Oct.22nd 2000 and 49 on Oct.12th 1991. This reflects an increase in the strength of passage during the 1990s, when the annual average (excluding 1998) amounted to 108 bird-days, compared with 17 and 42 bird-days in each half of the 1980s.

The most prominent arrivals in Kent show a distinct preference for the county's south-facing coast, with 43% of migrants recorded at St.Margaret's and 27% at Dungeness between 1988 and 1996 (Hodgson 1998). Previous large influxes along the Channel coast include 210 on Sept.15th 1968 and 100 on Oct.7th 1966, both at Dungeness, and arrivals at Beachy Head in Sussex of 200 on Oct.9th 1966 and over 400 during a few days from Oct.12th 1988. Elsewhere, apart from 100 in Suffolk on Oct.7th 1960, large numbers have historically been restricted to Scotland, where falls of over 1,000 have been noted (Baxter & Rintoul 1953). This was the background to an exceptional arrival of at least 1,200 on Oct.7th 1998, precipitated by the combination of a rain-bearing front across south-east England and an easterly airflow resulting from high pressure over Scandinavia. The total of at least 2,200 along the coast between St.Margaret's and Dungeness re-wrote the record books for southern Britain and, probably, for the entire UK.

Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Spring migration of Blackbirds has been evident from late February to late March in several of the last 25 years, usually in conjunction with influxes of other thrushes, though numbers are small in comparison with autumn. However, such arrivals are irregular and counts of 75 on Feb.26th 1984, 100 on Mar.18th 1986 and 200 on Mar.17th 1996, with three other records of 50-60 between Mar.9th-17th, are the exception rather than the rule.

However, there is a substantial autumn passage in most years, and frequent arrivals of 100 or more have been noted between early October and mid November. Blackbirds tend to arrive later in autumn than other migrant thrushes and all 14 influxes of 150 or more since 1977 occurred between Oct.15th and Nov.15th. Some very large flocks have been seen arriving from off the sea at this time, most notably a party of 70 that flew into the bay on Nov.15th 1998. Most migrant flocks appear to make landfall at the cliff edge, from where they cross low over the fields into the valley, contrasting with the spectacularly high altitude arrivals of Fieldfares and Redwings.

The most interesting results from ringing in autumn include three Blackbirds ringed in Belgium in summer and trapped here in October one or two years later and another, ringed here in October 1999, that was re-trapped in Sweden in spring 2001, more than 1,500km to the north-east.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*

Fieldfares breed across C and N Europe from France through the Low Countries and Germany and NE throughout Scandinavia, though they are absent from Mediterranean regions, the western half of France and Britain (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). At St.Margaret's they are usually scarce in winter, though up to 1,400 were seen flying west from the valley towards the pylons during the first half of January 1996, presumably from an overnight roost, and 180 were present on Jan.22nd 1984. Every so often, substantial flocks appear on the surrounding fields in spring, from late February to early April, including 500 on Mar.17th 1986, 750 on Feb.27th 1994 and, in 1996, three counts of 300-450 between Mar.10th-17th and 1,000 on Apr.8th. Some have been recorded flying out to sea, notably 1,250 on Mar.28th 1998, followed by 484 the next day. Late individuals have been noted on May 19th or 20th on three occasions since 1977.

Autumn migrants have appeared as early as Sept.2nd, but most arrive in October and November, all counts of 150 or more having occurred between Oct.7th and Nov.10th. The most outstanding influxes of the last 25 years include 2,374 bird-days in 1985, mainly between Oct.22nd-29th, and a truly memorable four days in 1993 during which 16,790 were counted arriving from the NE between Oct.31st and Nov.3rd, including 6,230 on Nov.2nd and 3,290-3,940 on each of the other days. Other substantial arrivals include 1,600 on Nov.1st 1998 and 1,270 on Oct.20th 1999, though such numbers are by no means regular and in 2000, dominated by W winds, only 20 migrants were seen in the entire autumn. Fieldfares and Redwings often migrate in mixed flocks and all of the major influxes have taken place when the wind has been blowing between NW and NE. On mornings when there is a sudden shift to a more W direction, movement invariably ceases. Although several hundred have been recorded on clear days with a NW wind, large influxes tend to occur when it is cloudy, when flocks can be seen emerging from the cloud base to drop into the South Foreland valley or the fields just inland, clearly having arrived from considerable altitude. This behaviour makes them more frequent at the South Foreland than at Bockhill, where many are probably too high to be seen. Arrivals sometimes continue well into December, most notably 459 flying NE in cold weather on Dec.12th 1981.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

24 were at rock pools at the base of the cliffs in hard weather on Jan.20th 1987 and in spring there was an exceptional arrival of 100 on Apr.23rd 1989, coinciding with an influx of Ring Ouzels, but Song Thrushes are easily at their most abundant in autumn. Recently, however, as the breeding population in SE England has declined, they have become increasingly scarce until arrivals of continental birds begin in late September. Immigration lasts into early November and there have been 34 counts of 100 or more in the last 25 years, between Sept.23rd and Oct.29th, the largest of which were 600 on Oct.14th 1993, 400 on Oct.1st 1983 and three influxes of 300-320 between Oct.9th and 24th, all during periods of NW winds with low cloud. Arrivals do not occur with the same visible intensity of influxes of Redwings and Fieldfares, probably because Song Thrushes are more nocturnal in their movements, but there has been a similar tendency for larger numbers to occur at the South Foreland than at Bockhill since regular coverage began there in 1994. Two individuals trapped here in October were recovered during winter in Spain and Portugal – over 1,600 km away.

Redwing *Turdus iliacus*

Cold weather movements in winter include 2,330 flying SW on Dec.12th 1981 and 400 arriving from off the sea on Jan.4th 1985, while 200 roosted in the valley during the first half of January 1996 and 428 appeared on Feb.10th 1983. Return passage can begin in the third week of February, but most spring migrants occur from mid March to early April, including 1,500 on Mar.17th 1986 and 4,864 the following day, mostly flying SE out to sea towards the French coast, and 3,500 on the fields on Mar.15th 1991. Record spring numbers occurred in 1996 when a SW movement of 846 on Mar.17th was followed by an exodus of 7,780 from the valley on Mar.28th and 5,070 flew SE out to sea on the same date in 1998. Interestingly, there seems to be little correlation between the size of autumn influxes and the strength of spring passage. Some have lingered well into April, but a singing male in the top wood from May 26th-29th 1984 was easily the latest.

The earliest autumn migrant was seen on Sept.16th and although there are records prior to October in most years, an influx of 172 on Sept.23rd 2001 was comfortably the largest September arrival in the last 25 years. Peak migration takes place during October and November, all counts of 500 or more having occurred between Oct.4th and Nov.3rd, including 13 arrivals of a thousand or more, which amount to some of the most spectacular events in the ornithological calendar. Two of the largest of these included 6,500 dropping in from the sky in just under an hour on Oct.15th 1985 on a bright day with a strong NW wind, and 3,600 arriving on Oct.19th 2002, in similar, though less windy conditions, dispelling the notion that large influxes take place only on cloudy days. Other large arrivals include 5,000 bird-days between Oct.15th-30th in 1985, including 2,000 dropping in from the NE on Oct.30th, and 4,283 arrived from off the sea, heading low across the top of the valley in bitterly cold NW winds on Oct.19th and 20th in 1991. However, the largest prolonged period of immigration occurred over a memorable four days in 1993 when 18,860 arrived between Oct.31st and Nov.3rd. This influx occurred with an equally intense arrival of Fieldfares, all of the flocks arriving from the NE on strong NE winds, including 6,880 on Nov.2nd and 6,450 the next day.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

While there has been very little evidence of spring migration in the last 25 years, up to 25 were recorded in the Langdon Cliffs area during heavy Redwing movements in mid March 1996. This is the exception rather than the rule, however, most spring activity resulting from the three or four pairs that breed in the area. Post-breeding flocks are usually evident on the surrounding fields from late summer, but numbers involved are relatively small, 14 during August 2000 being fairly typical. Autumn dispersal is most apparent from mid September to late October, all counts of 20 or more in the last 25 years having occurred between Sept.13th and Oct.24th. The largest of these include 54 on Oct.18th 1983 and four counts of 44-49 between Sept.17th and Oct.8th in three of the four years from 1991 to 1994. The average strength of autumn passage increased from 182 bird-days in the 1980s to 218 the following decade, with 372 bird-days in 1993 and 430 in 1994 being the highest autumn totals of the last 25 years. The origin of these birds is by no means clear, though the sudden appearance of 27 on Oct.28th 2001 was notable in that it took place at the same time as an unexpected arrival of Ring Ouzels and other thrushes, presumably from Scandinavia, and ringing recoveries from elsewhere in Kent confirm the continental origin of some Mistle Thrushes.

Warblers 1977 – 2002

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*

Following a northward spread along the Rhône valley in France, Cetti's Warbler first bred in Britain in 1972, following colonisation of Belgium in 1964 (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997) and the county's breeding population quickly expanded in the 1970s. A migrant in the South Foreland valley on Oct.15th 1978 occurred during this process of colonisation, which ended after a series of severe winters between 1985 and 1987 that decimated the Kent population and initiated a withdrawal from northern France. Since then, the county population has recovered as the residual breeding population in southern England has expanded once again and a second record for the area occurred at Bockhill on Oct.20th 2000.

Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*

Even a hundred years ago this skulking warbler of grassland and scrub was patchily distributed in Kent (Ticehurst 1909) but as recently as 1988 there were two definite pairs and four singing males between Kingsdown and Fan Bay. Spring arrivals took place from early April – the earliest was on Apr.9th 1985 – and one or two pairs were present annually at the South Foreland during the 1980s. Returning migrants were noted from late July until late September, with an annual average of three bird-days in autumn and a maximum arrival of eight.

Particularly in spring, the decline of the Grasshopper Warbler from this point has been precipitous. In 1990, breeding failed to take place for the first time since 1977 and the number of passage birds in spring began to decline steadily, with only one or two annually from 1992 and none in 1995. Spring arrivals have been intermittent ever since and in 2001 there were none at the South Foreland all year.

Curiously, numbers occurring in autumn seem to have remained immune from the decline in the British breeding population, which amounted to 60% between 1972 and 1996 (Mead 2000). At the South Foreland, the annual autumn average rose during the 1990s to four bird-days, with a maximum of nine in 1995, while observers at Bockhill have noted much larger numbers from the start of regular coverage of that side of the bay in 1994. Peak totals at Bockhill include 38 bird-days in 1996 and 26 in 2000, including four arrivals of six-eight between Aug.1st and Sept.21st. There has also been a tendency, exhibited on both sides of the bay, for birds to occur much later in autumn, the latest of several October records having been at Bockhill on Oct.26th 1999.

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

Although 'an influx' at St.Margaret's on Apr.24th 1966 (KBR) implies a substantial arrival, this summer migrant is relatively scarce in spring, with none at all in 2000 and 2001. However, numbers occurring in spring have undoubtedly increased since the 1980s, when only 18 individuals were recorded, and breeding has probably taken place in scrubby areas of Wanstone Farm in at least six years since the hot summer of 1989, with two pairs in the area in 1993. Early arrivals have occurred four times on Apr.20th, although in some years none appear before late May or early June.

Although Sedge Warblers are a good deal more numerous in autumn, there is considerable variation from year to year, between 11 and 156 bird-days having occurred annually since 1978. However, the annual averages for the previous two decades are very similar, at 60 and 67 bird-days, respectively. Most migrants appear in standing crops before they are harvested in August and of 16 arrivals of 15 or more since 1978, all but two occurred between July 30th and Aug.19th. Peaks include 64 on Aug.4th 1993, 38 on Aug.2nd 1988, 35

on July 30th 1994 and 30 on Aug.11th 1995 and even in years when harvesting has been delayed until late August no more than 20 have been recorded beyond Aug.11th. However, 15-18 remained in a bean field from Aug.21st-23rd 2000 and 15 appeared in the valley amid a huge arrival of over a thousand warblers on Sept.10th 1995. Stragglers usually occur well into September and there have been two records in October, the latest of which was on Oct.13th 1979.

Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*

Although it is relatively common on the near continent, including a breeding population of at least 9,000 pairs in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region of northern France (Tombal 1996), the Marsh Warbler is a nationally rare breeding species in Britain, with a population of fewer than 40 pairs. Despite its dull appearance, its song is a remarkably complex composition of mimicry of other species, performed with extraordinary speed, accuracy and versatility. Breeding Marsh Warblers were first discovered at the South Foreland in 1981 and although it is likely that their presence had been previously missed, there was evidence of a genuine subsequent increase and by 1993 there were 16 singing males in the area, resulting partly from the creation of new areas of suitable habitat by the storm of October 1987. Although the population declined to 11 territories in 1995, this was not unduly troubling, since these new habitats were becoming unsuitable and this figure still represented around 40% of the British breeding population. 10-11 singing males continued to arrive each spring until 1998, but only seven singing birds appeared in 1999 and the situation worsened the following year, creating serious concerns for the birds' welfare, particularly when allied to strong suspicions that egg thieves had been active in the area. The extent to which they had pillaged the colony was revealed starkly in 2001 when none arrived in spring, a situation that was repeated in 2002. It seems quite possible that egg collectors may also have been responsible for the previous decline of breeding birds in Worcestershire and this sorry episode remains one of the most depressing features of the last 25 years.

The Marsh Warbler is one of the last summer migrants to arrive from Africa, with an average spring arrival date at St.Margaret's of May 20th, although an exceptionally early individual appeared on May 9th 1998 and two others arrived on May 13th and 15th. Always eagerly awaited in spring, the sense of anticipation was intensified by the knowledge that males would often sing for very short periods – sometimes no more than 24 hours – suggesting that they arrive in pairs. Individuals singing for longer periods were almost certainly unpaired, probably 40-50% of the population in years of greatest abundance. Breeding lasted well into August, with adults feeding young as late as the 22nd. The secretive nature of the species and difficulties of identification in autumn made precise departure dates difficult to determine, but birds were regularly trapped as late as mid September.

Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

Reed Warblers have been regular in spring during the last 25 years, though arrivals have been late by county standards and occurrences of more than one or two have been sporadic and unpredictable. Although the breeding population is usually well established in the Stour valley by the end of April, early birds have not been noted here before Apr.24th and it is more typical for first arrivals to occur from May 10th onwards, with larger numbers at the end of May and beginning of June. Highest counts include 13 on June 1st 1986, seven on May 30th 1992 and nine on June 5th 1996.

Probable breeding has taken place in at least five years since 1977, usually when there has been a large amount of oilseed rape on the farm. At least four singing males remained into July in 1986, six males stayed throughout June 1996 and one or two singing males were present in 1987, 1992 and 1997, fields of rape with one or more edges bordered by scrub appearing to be particularly favourable.

Autumn migrants begin to appear in the second half of July, with passage peaking from mid August to mid September, though a substantial decline in the strength of autumn passage over the last 25 years runs contrary to the trend of increasing breeding numbers in Britain (Mead 2000). There were between 125 and 422 bird-days during the 1980s, with an annual average of 217, but during the previous decade the annual total fluctuated between 25 and 109 bird-days, with an average of just 65, though there were 119 bird-days in autumn 2001. Peaks of 30-40 occurred on six dates between Aug.16th and Sept.1st in the 1980s, while the highest counts between 1990 and 2001 included five arrivals of 15-25 between Aug.7th and Sept.10th. October records are regular and the latest of several in the second half of the month occurred on Oct.31st 2002.

Ringing recoveries and controls – 22 in all – emphasise the north-south migration of Reed Warblers to and from sub-Saharan Africa, including individuals ringed or controlled in Algeria (2,131 km to the south) and Norway (872 km to the north-east).

Booted Warbler *Hippolais caligata*

The nearest breeding Booted Warblers to Britain occur in low-lying river valleys of eastern European Russia, though its breeding distribution is predominantly Asian (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). The first of two at St.Margaret's, at the top of the South Foreland valley on Nov.12th 1996, was the seventh county record, while the other was found at Bockhill on Sept.10th 2000.

Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina*

The breeding range of this large warbler lies mainly to the north and east of France, being replaced throughout most of France and Iberia by the similar Melodious Warbler. It breeds fairly commonly in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region of northern France, where there are around 1,200 pairs (Tombal 1996), though it has declined there from an estimated 2,000 pairs in 1976, while Melodious Warbler has become nearly as numerous in the last two decades, from a position of great scarcity 30 years ago, presumably as climate change brings conditions more suitable to the mainly southern European distribution of Melodious Warbler. In Britain, it is very rare in spring, despite its close proximity on the near continent, most records being of autumn migrants.

Three individuals between 1978 and 1983 included singles on Sept.19th 1978, Sept.24th 1982 and Aug.31st 1983. One at Bockhill from Sept.8th-10th 1996 ended a long period of absence and in 1997 a singing individual at the top of the valley on Apr.26th was followed by one at Bockhill on Aug.10th.

In addition to these, singing Icterine or Melodious Warblers were present in the valley on June 7th 1987 and at Bockhill on June 6th 1997; in both cases certain identification was made impossible by the variability of the birds' song and furtive habits. Unidentified autumn *Hippolais* warblers include singles in the valley on Sept.10th 1997 and in the farm wood at Bockhill from Oct.18th-19th 1998.

Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta*

This mainly southern European species has been expanding its range northwards during the last 50 years, with its population in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region of northern France expanding from virtual absence in 1976 to an estimated 1,000 pairs by the mid 1990s (Tombal 1996). Unlike its close relative, the Icterine Warbler, spring arrivals of this species in Kent have been increasing in frequency and size in recent years, to the point that there must be a possibility that Melodious Warbler will breed in southern Britain in the fairly near future.

To date, there have been three records in the St.Margaret's area. The first, a singing male near the top of the valley on May 24th 1993, was followed by an autumn migrant at Bockhill on Aug.29th 1998 and another singing individual at the bottom of the valley near Pines Gardens on May 29th 2000.

Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*

This relatively sedentary warbler, restricted in Britain to the heaths and gorse scrub of southern England, has always been susceptible to hard winters, which have subjected its breeding population to extensive fluctuations. However, following two successive severe winters, a mere ten pairs remained in 1964; probably the most critical point in its recent history in this country. Since then, with generally milder winters becoming the norm, its breeding population has recovered spectacularly and a national survey in 1994 revealed the presence of 1,600 pairs (Mead 2000). Breeding was confirmed in Kent for the first time since the 19th century in 1995, following a steady increase in the occurrence of non-breeding birds during the 1980s, which continued throughout the last decade.

One in the gorse on Langdon cliffs on Mar.8th 1992 was the first of a total of 17 individuals, ten of which have been recorded on the Bockhill side of the bay. Three of these have been found in spring, between Mar.4th and Apr.17th, while two juveniles were present in a field of peas on Wanstone Farm from July 28th to Aug.3rd 1994. The rest have occurred in autumn, between Oct.14th and Nov.4th, including a record total of four – all at Bockhill – in autumn 1999, one of which remained until the following January at least.

Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans*

This attractive warbler breeds commonly in dense bushy undergrowth throughout the Mediterranean region, a habitat also favoured by the Sardinian Warbler (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997), though as a vagrant to the British Isles it is a good deal more common, with about three-quarters of its occurrences in spring.

An adult male, first found on Wanstone Farm with substantial numbers of Lesser Whitethroats on Sept.2nd 1995, remained within a few yards of its favoured row of bushes until at least the 17th. It was the 12th record for the county.

Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala*

Sardinian Warblers inhabit maquis, olive and citrus groves, vineyards, orchards and scrubby woodland margins around the Mediterranean, breeding eastwards to Afghanistan. A range expansion has been taking place since the end of the 19th century and since the 1970s it has occupied new breeding areas in northern Italy, inland parts of southern France, Bulgaria and, probably, Romania (Hagemeijer and Blair 1997). Nevertheless, it remains a rare vagrant to Britain (59 records up to 2001) and there have been only five previously in Kent, four of which have been at Dungeness Bird Observatory, where the first Kent record occurred in 1973. Significantly, perhaps, four have occurred in Kent since 1993, one of which was an adult male of the western race *S.m.melanocephala* at the edge of Lighthouse Down from Apr.10th to 15th 2001.

Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*

Barred Warblers breed eastwards into Central Asia, from a line that runs from southern Finland and Sweden through central Germany to north-west Italy. They have a curious affinity with Red-backed Shrikes on their breeding grounds and occur as scarce autumn passage migrants in Kent, with an average of two or three records each year. There have been seven records at St.Margaret's of this large grey warbler, between Aug.23rd and Oct.6th. Singles were seen in the valley on Oct.1st 1988 and in the nearby farmyard and subsequently flying into the top wood on Sept.19th 1992. One was trapped on the farm on Sept.30th 2000 and two more were trapped in 2001: on the farm on Aug.23rd and in the valley on Sept.26th. In 2002 there were two individuals at Hope Point, on the Bockhill side of the bay, on Sept.1st and from Oct.2nd-6th.

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*

Lesser Whitethroats winter in Ethiopia and Sudan, migrating through the Middle East each spring to reach Britain during April, when their dry but cheerful rattle can be heard in scrubby habitats and gardens and woodland edges with tangled undergrowth. The tendency for one or two pairs to occupy fairly extensive areas of habitat makes accurate population estimates quite difficult, a task further exacerbated by the rather sporadic nature of song in spring. Nevertheless, there has been a clear decline in the British breeding population (Mead 2000), most evident here in falling numbers of autumn migrants.

Spring arrivals have changed little in character during the last 25 years, with earliest arrivals of Apr.16th and a mean arrival date of Apr.23rd in both of the last two decades. Spring influxes rarely exceed the eventual breeding population by very much, largest arrivals amounting to 18 on May 9th 1979 and 31 at Bockhill and the S.Foreland on May 6th 1996, with several other counts of 11-16. Four or five breeding territories were occupied annually from 1984-1996, with evidence of six in 1988, and although there was an apparent reduction to between one and three territories from 1997-1999 the number of territorial males in spring has stabilised at five or six for the last three seasons.

Autumn passage, at its strongest from mid August to mid September, has shown a steep decline in numbers since the mid 1990s. Between 1980 and 1997, there were 38 counts of 50-80 and 11 of 100-200 between Aug.9th and Sept.17th and in one of the outstanding events of the last 25 years, 2,000 were present in the valley on Aug.28th 1979, in the largest arrival of this species ever recorded in the county. Since 1997, however, there has been no arrival of more than 40 and the average annual bird-day total has fallen from 765 in the 16 years from 1980-1995 to only 334 in the seven years since. This coincides with a crash in breeding numbers in 1997, when the Kent breeding index reached its lowest level since 1977, falling again in 1998 (KBR), which suggests trouble in the wintering area. A few stragglers linger into October in most years, with the latest on Nov.1st 1987.

The reduction in the strength of autumn passage is also reflected in ringing results for the last 25 years. During the 1980s, 7% of birds trapped and ringed were Lesser Whitethroats, with up to 82 being caught each year, at an annual average of 65. No more than 61 were trapped during the 1990s, however, and in the last four years this species accounted for less than 3% of the total.

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*

The breeding population of this summer migrant has fluctuated as a result of droughts in its wintering grounds in the Sahel region of sub-Saharan Africa. The most recent of these induced a crash in summer 1969, the effects of which were still evident when regular coverage commenced at St.Margaret's in 1977.

The mean arrival date in spring has advanced from Apr.20th during the 1980s to Apr.15th, including two appearances on Apr.8th, and subsequent influxes mainly involve local breeding birds, though an arrival of 75 on May 14th 1978 was noteworthy. The Whitethroat's lively, scratchy song is one of the most characteristic sounds of summer, particularly as St.Margaret's currently enjoys one of the highest densities of breeding Whitethroats in the county. Breeding numbers increased steadily throughout the 1980s, reaching 37 pairs by 1990, before declining to only 21 in 1996. However, 40 territories were evident in 1997 and numbers have remained consistently high since, including a record 53 territories in 2001.

The presence of large numbers of young birds in the area from late July obscures the onset of autumn migration, though August tends to be the peak month, with six counts of 100-150 from the 9th onwards. However, the timing of peak passage is variable and exceptional numbers occurred in September 1995, including 125 on the 2nd and 300 on the 10th, after which numbers gradually subsided to 150 on the 13th. There was also an exceptionally late arrival of 30 on Oct.1st 1996, a month normally reserved for stragglers, though the latest by far was on Nov.1st 1978.
Increases in the number of birds trapped and ringed during the 1980s were much in line with the rise in breeding numbers, with Whitethroats comprising about 4% of the annual total by the end of the decade, a situation that pertained throughout most of the 1990s. However, after record breeding numbers in 2000 and 2001, presumably coupled with good levels of fledging and increased ringing activity on Wanstone Farm, the proportion of Whitethroats involved in 2001 was a most impressive 8.6%.

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*

Despite the connotations of its scientific name and the frequent use of the word 'featureless' to describe its appearance, this summer migrant possesses a melodic and varied song and a subtle beauty. The trend towards earlier arrival in spring is evident in this species, as with most other summer migrants, with April records in six years since 1990, compared to just two during the 1980s, the earliest of which was on Apr.22nd 1990. Breeding attempts are sporadic and large spring influxes very unusual, the largest including 30 on May 14th 1978, 13 on May 10th 1985 and at least 25 on Apr.27th 1997, most of which were on Langdon Cliffs.
Although the presence of occasional breeding birds sometimes obscures the start of autumn passage, movement is invariably strongest for about five weeks from mid August, all 23 counts of ten or more having occurred between Aug.12th and Sept.17th. Influxes of 10-15 are relatively regular, with the largest arrivals of 30 on Sept.7th 1997 and 20 on Sept.2nd 1998, but numbers of migrants have been consistently falling during the last 25 years. Between 50-120 bird-days were recorded annually during the 1980s, at an average of 75, but only 15-108 bird-days were recorded each year during the following decade, with an average of just 56. The three years since have continued the trend, with annual bird-day totals of no more than 47. This runs contrary to the national picture, however, and it may be that habitat changes in the valley are responsible for at least some of this apparent decline. Late migrants sometimes occur in the second half of October, but the latest by far was seen on Nov.11th 1978.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

Although wintering Blackcaps have recently become increasingly regular in Kent, there are relatively few such records for St.Margaret's. However, it seems likely that small numbers are overlooked in gardens at this time of year, since local birdwatchers have recorded one or two in January in at least three years since 1977, with lingering individuals in late November or December in two other years.
There has been a considerable recent increase in the local breeding population, reflected throughout southern England, from three-five territories up to 1996 to between nine and eleven in each subsequent summer. Although migrants have appeared as early as Mar.3rd, first arrivals tend to occur during the second half of March or even early April, with none until the second week of the month in some years. Although breeding birds arrive on territory by mid April elsewhere in the county, most singing males arrive here much later. Since the sudden increase in apparent breeding numbers in 1997, the full complement of singing birds has generally not become established until early May, and with migrants still moving through in mid month it may be that many of these territories are occupied by young, unpaired males. Substantial spring influxes are unusual, the main exceptions being 21, mostly males, on Apr.16th 1988 and 60 between Langdon and the S.Foreland on Apr.26th 1997, with 50 between Langdon and Bockhill the following day.
Local breeders and their offspring probably account for the generally small numbers that occur from late July until the onset of autumn passage in mid August. Arrivals of 30 have been noted as early as Aug.15th and as late as Oct.23rd, but apart from an early influx of 100 on Aug.28th 1999, the bulk of migrants usually occur between early September and mid October. 36 arrivals of 100 or more have occurred during this period, between Sept.6th and Oct.2nd, including particularly large influxes of 500 on Sept.25th 1992, 600 on Sept.16th 1993 and 400 on Sept.10th 1995. In line with the increase in breeding numbers throughout southern Britain, the strength of autumn passage increased from an annual average of 725 bird-days during the 1980s to 1,285 in the following decade, including a record 2,685 bird-days in 1992. Blackcaps are currently the most numerous of the migrant warblers at St.Margaret's, having increased from 11% of birds trapped and ringed at the end of the 1980s (second only to Willow Warbler at 13%) to 24% in the four years from 1998 to 2001, with Chiffchaff being the next most abundant at 8%.
Ringing results include three recoveries in Algeria and Morocco and two to the east, to the Netherlands and Luxembourg, suggesting a possible continental origin for some of the Blackcaps that winter in Britain.

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*

The Greenish Warbler complex, comprising three variably distinct species or subspecies, depending upon taxonomic opinion, inhabits forests from NE Europe across the entire Asian continent. A westward expansion of its range from west Asia reached the Baltic in the early 1900s and it has since spread into central Europe (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997), with recent breeding in southern Sweden. There have been nearly 350 British records.

The bulk of British autumn records occur in late August and early September (Dymond *et al* 1989), so one in the top wood on Oct.27th 1982 was very late by British standards. Even more unusually, perhaps, it spent much of the morning singing strongly. One on Sept.10th-11th 1989 and singing individuals on June 12th 1993 and May 31st to June 1st 1994 take the total to four, all of which have been located in the top wood.

Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*

The Arctic Warbler breeds locally in Scandinavia, occurring with increasing frequency across northern Russia and Asia (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997).

Although there had been 244 British records by the end of 2001, one along Granville Road on Oct.14th 1995 was only the second county record.

Pallas's Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus*

This tiny warbler, no larger than a Goldcrest and crammed with crown and eye stripes, wingbars and a bright yellow rump, is one of the most eagerly sought-after birds in autumn. It breeds eastwards from south central Siberia and the Himalayas, wintering in the Himalayan foothills, southern China and south-east Asia. There were only three British records prior to 1958, but 341 occurred between 1958 and 1985, including 123 in 1982 (Dymond *et al* 1989), an increase that was maintained throughout the last decade.

The first record for the area involved one at the top of the South Foreland valley in October 1982. After two more during the 1980s and one in 1993, two occurred in 1994, the first in an ongoing period of record influxes into Kent, which involved 15 that year. Significantly, perhaps, there was no coverage at Bockhill until 1995, when a total of 27 in Kent included ten at St.Margaret's, eight of which were found at Bockhill. County totals of 36 in 1996 and 32 in 1997 included twelve at St.Margaret's in 1996 and nine in 1997, with five at Bockhill in both years. Four in 1998 (two at Bockhill) were followed by a total of at least 16 in 1999, of which 12 were found in the South Foreland valley. Although only five have occurred since, they bring the total for the area to at least 62 individuals, including 38 at the South Foreland, 21 at Bockhill, two in the village and one at Langdon.

In terms of county significance, records from the St.Margaret's area represent more than 30% of the Kent total since 1982, compared with about 20% in both the Foreness and Dungeness areas and 11% at Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory. Prior to 1977, all but one of the county's 13 Pallas's Warblers had occurred at the two observatories in the 25 years since their creation, and the combined total of over 50 in the 20 years since 1982 suggests that a genuine increase has taken place. Although the reasons for this are by no means clear and despite the recent run of relatively indifferent years, totals of 150 in Sweden, 118 in Finland and 55 in Denmark in 1996 suggest that the potential for continued vagrancy of this tiny gem is well established.

Influxes are linked to the prevalence of easterly winds during October and November and all records have occurred between Oct.13th and Nov.15th, with the majority during the last ten days of October and the first week of November.

Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus*

The Yellow-browed Warbler, slightly smaller and neater than a Chiffchaff, breeds eastwards of a line from northern Siberia south to Afghanistan and north-west India, wintering in India and south-east Asia (Dymond *et al* 1989). Its regular arrivals in autumn are almost as keenly anticipated as those of Pallas's Warbler, which has similarly occurred with increased frequency in the last few decades.

36 individuals had been recorded in Kent up to 1976 and it was described as 'a scarce autumn vagrant' in *The Birds of Kent* (KOS 1981). However, by 1984 this total had risen to 83 and unprecedented influxes occurred in the following four years, with 61 individuals in 1985, 31-37 in 1986 and 1987 and at least 97 in 1988. Although these remain the largest arrivals yet recorded in Kent, 41 in 1989 brought the county total to 350, rising to 565 by the end of the 1990s, including 46 in 1994. Individuals found in the St.Margaret's area represent about 13% of the county total.

Since the first record at St.Margaret's in October 1977, there have been at least 77 Yellow-browed Warblers at the S.Foreland, plus at least 14 at Bockhill (all since 1994), three on Langdon Cliffs and three in the village. Peak annual totals include nine in 1985, including four on Oct.16th and 14 in 1988, when there were four on Sept.22nd.There were also three at Bockhill on Nov.4th 1995 and four on Oct.7th 1999, which included singles in the village and at Bockhill. Arrivals, in five-day periods, are shown in the table below.

YELLOW-BROWED WARBLER Arrivals at the S.Foreland in five-day periods 1977-2002											
	September			October						November	
	16-20	21-25	26-30	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-31	1-5	TOTAL
1977-1984				1	5	4		3	2		15
1985-1989	2	5	4	5	1	9	9	1			36
1990-1994			4	3	4						11
1995-1999			1		2	2		2	2	2	11
2000-2002			1	1				1		1	4
TOTAL	2	5	10	10	12	15	9	7	4	3	77

Hume's Warbler *Phylloscopus humei*

Hume's Warbler has only recently been regarded as distinct from the very similar Yellow-browed Warbler. It breeds in mainly mountainous regions eastwards of a line from the Altai Mountains in the north of its range to north-west Afghanistan and the Himalayas in the south. It winters from southern Afghanistan to northern India and west Bengal and on the lower slopes of the Tibetan plateau (BB). An individual at the top of the valley on Nov.23rd 1987 was the first record for the county and a second was present on Nov.2nd-3rd 1998.

Radde's Warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzii*

This skulking, heavy *Phylloscopus* warbler breeds eastwards from south-central Siberia, wintering in south-east Asia (Dymond *et al* 1989). There have been seven records at St.Margaret's since one was found on the clifftop near the lighthouse on Nov.3rd 1993. Five have been located at Bockhill and all have occurred between Oct.9th and Nov.4th. Significantly, seven of the last nine county records have come from the St.Margaret's area, making a county total of 14.

Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*

Similar to, but generally less robust than Radde's Warbler, Dusky Warbler breeds eastwards from west-central Siberia, wintering in north-east India and south-east Asia (Dymond *et al* 1989). One on Wanstone Farm on Oct.12th 1992 remains the only record for the area. 26 have been recorded in Kent.

Western Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus bonelli*

This warbler of light woodland edges is fairly common from Iberia through France and Italy, with occasional records recently in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region of northern France (Tombal 1996). The closely related but specifically distinct Eastern Bonelli's Warbler *P.orientalis* occurs eastwards from Greece and Anatolia to Iran, and in the Atlas Mountains of north-west Africa (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). A singing bird in the valley on Apr.28th 1987 is the only record for the area. There have been 11 Kent records of *P.bonelli/ orientalis*, six of which were assigned to Western Bonelli's when the two were separated in 1996 (KBR 1996).

Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*

This large, bright warbler breeds across Europe from the Pyrenees to the Urals, favouring mature woodland with a sparse shrub layer (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). The population in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region of northern France, estimated at a minimum of 3,500 pairs, is thought to be higher now than in the mid 1970s (Tombal 1996). However, in Britain, where the Wood Warbler has always been more common in airy western oak woods than in eastern counties, a decline in eastern England has been evident for some years (Mead 2000) and its county population has undoubtedly retreated since an estimate of 20-30 pairs between 1988-1994 (KBR 1996).

Multiple occurrences are more likely in spring, even though spring migrants have occurred in just eight of the last 25 years, compared to twenty-one in autumn. The total of 14 individuals, all of which occurred between Apr.27th and May 29th, included three on May 27th 1985, two of which were singing beautifully from the Hollow Wood. Only four have been recorded in spring since 1989, however. 44 autumn individuals have been recorded between July 28th and Oct.5th, 30 of which occurred between late July and the end of August. Five in 1993 and 1996 were the highest autumn totals, four of which were at Bockhill in the latter year, but only six have been seen since 1998, mirroring a decline that has also been evident in spring.

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

Not so long ago, the Chiffchaff was regarded as scarce in winter, typically appearing in spring in the first half of March. However, the status of this species in winter has altered dramatically in the last two decades, and although four together in February 1971 was regarded as exceptional (KOS 1981), around a hundred now spend the winter in Kent each year. The paucity of local winter records is hardly surprising, since Chiffchaffs favour low-lying areas such as river valleys, but at least four individuals have been reported in January or February since 1981, with another nearby at Kingsdown. It is probable that many Chiffchaffs now occur well to the north of their main wintering grounds around the Mediterranean at this time of year, and spring arrivals reflect this, having advanced from a mean of Mar.21st during the 1980s to Mar 11th since 1990, with early arrivals on Mar.4th-5th in four years. Influxes of more than ten are fairly unusual, and records of 41 at Bockhill on Apr.9th 1996 and 88 between Langdon Cliffs and the South Foreland on Mar.28th 1998 are very much the exception. Passage in spring is prolonged, with up to 15 having been recorded as late as May 5th.

The breeding population has increased in the last 25 years from four-five territories during the 1980s to six-seven since the mid 1990s. To some extent this probably reflects an increase in this species' preferred habitat, in which tall trees for song posts are essential.

Chiffchaffs are among the most prolific of autumn migrants at the South Foreland, typically comprising 8-9% of all birds trapped and ringed annually since 1978. Local family parties, predominant during August, are joined by the first waves of migrants in early September. Peak passage lasts until mid October, all 121 counts of 50 or more having occurred between Sept.7th and Oct.10th, including 32 arrivals in excess of 100, the largest of which include 250-300 on five dates between Sept.10th and 24th. Although the strength of autumn migration has varied from 141 to 1,547 bird-days, the annual average of 875 during the 1980s was not radically different to that of 954 during the 1990s. At Bockhill, where regular coverage began in 1995, the largest arrival involved 152 on Sept.17th 2000.

The majority of local ringing recoveries show a pattern of movement from west to east within southern England, with one spring recovery from Spain of a bird ringed here the previous autumn.

Most current taxonomic opinion treats the Chiffchaff complex as a series of races extending across Europe into Asia, with closely related forms in the Caucasus, Iberia and the Canaries having recently been recognised as distinct species. Future studies, DNA-based and otherwise, might persuade opinion to diverge even further, although the most geographically distant population to reach our shores on a regular basis, the Siberian *P.c.tristis*, is still regarded as only racially discrete. At least ten individuals showing the very grey characters of this race have been recorded since 1977, all between Oct.20th and Nov.21st.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*

The Willow Warbler is one of the commonest breeding birds in much of its breeding range, which stretches eastwards from western Europe through Siberia (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). It is essentially a northern species, being absent from Mediterranean regions, occurring north of a line drawn more or less through the Alps. It winters in sub-Saharan Africa.

Early spring arrivals occurred on Mar.28th in two years during the 1980s, with a mean first date of Apr.7th. The mean arrival date advanced to Apr.1st during the 1990s, including one on Mar.17th 1990, although as numbers have continued to decline, the earliest in the current decade has been on Apr.8th. St.Margaret's does not typically experience the large spring arrivals that occur with some regularity along the coast at Dungeness, but among 13 counts of 25 or more since 1977, all of which occurred between Apr.12th and May 25th, an arrival of 350 on Apr.27th 1997 is outstanding, no other influx having exceeded 60.

Numbers breeding at St.Margaret's rose to 13-18 territories between 1987 and 1989 before stabilising at 12-14 during the 1990s, with a record 20 singing males in 1997. Only ten singing males were evident in 1999, though, and after six in the following two seasons, only two were present in 2002, neither of which were definitely paired. This free-fall in breeding numbers, apparent throughout southern Britain, has not been mirrored in northern populations (Mead 2000), possibly implicating climate change.

Migrant Willow Warblers begin to pass through in late July, all arrivals of 50 or more since 1977 having occurred between July 31st and Sept.20th, with the largest influxes, involving nine counts of 100 or more, having occurred between Aug.12th and 29th. However, only three such arrivals have been recorded since 1985, when a record influx of 350 took place on Aug.17th. This apparent decline is reflected in annual bird-day totals, which averaged 692 during the 1980s, but only 378 in the 1990s, falling even further so far in the current decade. Ringing results also confirm the decline: although Willow Warblers comprised 13% of birds trapped and ringed at the end of the 1980s, they amounted to only 5% of the total from 1998 onwards.

Grey-looking individuals resembling birds from northern European populations have been noted regularly, mostly in September, and one very pale, greyish individual, present on Wanstone Farm from Oct.12th-15th 1992, is worth recalling. It was within a hundred yards of a Dusky Warbler that was found on Oct.12th and although it is unrealistic to say with certainty that it also came from west-central Siberia, circumstantial evidence seems compelling. October records have occurred sporadically, though the latest individual of the last 25 years was present from Nov.7th-9th 1995.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

Goldcrests breed abundantly in boreal and temperate forests, especially those of spruce and fir, across most of north and central Europe and into Asia (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997).

Locally, winter numbers of this tiny bird are so low that the onset of spring passage is clearly apparent, most passing through during March and April. Numbers involved in spring are very variable, with particularly low numbers following hard winters. In fact, there have been only 21 spring counts of ten or more in nine of the last 25 years, the largest arrival by far being 75 on Mar.28th 1998, with 25-30 on four other occasions. One or two pairs breed sporadically, usually in the conifers at the bottom of the valley adjacent to Pines Gardens.

This variability in the strength of migration is also evident in autumn. Annual totals have varied from a low of 155 bird-days in 1986, following two particularly hard winters, to 2,835 bird-days in 1990, when large numbers arrived on north-easterly winds during October, which drifted large numbers of Scandinavian migrants across the North Sea. This record influx included arrivals of 150 on Oct.22nd, 300 on the 22nd and 500 on the 24th before numbers peaked at 600 on the 27th, which prompted even local dog-walkers to remark upon the spectacle of hundreds of these little mites fizzing about in the valley. Other large arrivals include 400 on Oct.30th 1983, 300 on Oct.8th 1992, 350 on Oct.15th 1993, 300 at Bockhill on Oct.28th 1997 and 200-250 on three other occasions in October.

Firecrest *Regulus ignicapilla*

Unlike its close relative the Goldcrest, this delightful little bird has a relatively restricted breeding distribution, mainly in central Europe and Iberia. In Europe it breeds in a wide range of conifers, but in Britain, where up to 130 pairs have been recorded breeding, it has a particular partiality for Norway spruce (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997, Mead 2000).

At the South Foreland, winter records are confined to one on Dec.22nd 1999 and a group of four with a mixed party of Goldcrests and Long-tailed Tits on Jan.14th 2001, though up to 15 were present around Kingsdown and Walmer in January-February 1999. Spring passage is an annual feature, however, extending over a lengthy period, from Mar.3rd to May 30th. Although in most years only a few individuals occur, south-easterly winds have prompted some notable arrivals, including 18 on Apr.11th 1979 and 25 on Apr.14th the same year, 19 on Mar.29th 1998 and 14 on Mar.14th 1999.

As in spring, autumn migration can be a protracted affair. Early individuals have occasionally appeared in the last few days of August and movement often continues well into November and although up to five have been noted as early as Sept.7th, all influxes of ten or more have occurred between Sept.17th and Nov.2nd. The strength of passage has varied enormously, from nine to 299 bird-days each year, with averages of 47 bird-days in the 1980s and 68 in the 1990s, though numbers are strongly influenced by the occurrence of winds with an easterly component, as in spring. Largest arrivals include 20-29 on eight dates between Oct.11th-30th, with numbers at Bockhill since 1994 being of equal significance to those at the South Foreland. However, these figures were eclipsed by exceptional numbers in autumn 1996, when large arrivals occurred along the cliffs from mid September, prompted by a north-easterly airflow in mid September and south-easterlies in the second period of activity in the second week of October. The combined total of 592 bird-days for Bockhill and the South Foreland comfortably constituted a county record and the pattern of arrival was as follows: -

FIRECREST Arrivals in autumn 1996													
	September								October				
	17	18	19	20	21	22	23		11	12	13	14	15
Bockhill		17	25	31	93	30	1		9	11	8	2	10
S.Foreland	10	9		40	57	40	11		2	5	30	6	
Langdon					5	1	7				1		
TOTAL	10	26	25	71	155	71	19		11	16	39	8	10

Flycatchers to Crows 1977 – 2002

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*

This once widespread summer migrant has declined very seriously in the UK, probably by more than 80% in the last 30 years (Mead 2000). The reasons for this are uncertain, but recent cool, wet springs and bad conditions in Africa, where the species winters, could both be responsible. Its recent history at St.Margaret's is very much a tale of two decades.

Spring migrants have been noted from May 5th and although arrivals have involved no more than five in the last 25 years, one or two pairs bred occasionally in the South Foreland valley during the 1980s. A pair probably bred in the bay in 1995 and 1996, but breeding was last confirmed in the valley in 1990 and Spotted Flycatchers are now very scarce in spring.

It is a similar story in autumn. Autumn bird-day totals have always fluctuated considerably, but from a range of 47 to 269 bird-days in the 1980s they fell to between 11 and 116 bird-days during the 1990s. The annual average has also declined, from 124 bird-days in the 1980s to only 51 in the last decade and even further to a maximum of only 27 since 1998. Arrivals of 20 or more, all of which have occurred between Aug.22nd and Sept.20th, were noted on ten occasions during the 1980s, but only twice since. Peak counts include 42 on Sept.20th 1980 and 27-28 on three other dates, the latest of which involved 27 at Langdon Cliffs and the South Foreland on Sept.10th 1995. Since then, no more than seven have been recorded on one day in autumn. The latest of several October records was a very late individual on Oct.27th 1982.

Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*

At the western edge of its range this species breeds in Denmark, Germany and Austria, though the bulk of its range extends from eastern Europe to China (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). There have been recent suggestions of breeding in the Netherlands, but it remains a scarce, though regular autumn migrant to the UK, with around 130 Kent records (KBR). The last 25 years have brought a total of 15 Red-breasted Flycatchers at St.Margaret's, between Sept.26th and Nov.2nd. Although most have been singles, notable exceptions include three in the South Foreland valley on Oct.2nd 1983, two in the valley on Oct.28th-30th 1993 and two in the farm wood at Bockhill on Oct.13th-14th 1999.

Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca*

Breeding across Europe from Iberia through C France and eastwards north of Italy and the Balkans, the Pied Flycatcher is scarce in E Britain and N France (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). Locally, it is a scarce but regular spring migrant, with records between Apr.16th and May 29th in 16 of the last 25 years. At least 31 individuals have been involved and although most occurred singly, there were three in the valley on May 10th 1980. Although totals were similar in both recent decades, only one has been seen in spring since 1997.

Autumn numbers are strongly dependant upon the incidence of north-easterly winds, which add a Scandinavian element to east coast migration. As few as seven individuals have been recorded in the poorest years, but some large influxes took place in the 1980s, including 214 bird-days in 1984 and 263 in 1989. These were not repeated in the 1990s, however, and the respective average annual bird-day totals of 84 and 29 underline the difference between the two decades. Autumn migrants have been noted from Aug.4th, with arrivals of ten or more having been recorded between Aug.14th and Oct.1st. The largest of these, involving 17 counts of 20 or more, all occurred between Aug.23rd and Sept.16th, including 40 on Sept.14th 1989 and 34 on Aug.26th 1984. No more than ten have been recorded since 1989, however.

The latest of several October individuals was seen on Oct.15th 1985.

Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus*

Dispersal from the large breeding colonies on the Dutch polders created a rapid expansion in the British population during the 1960s and by the mid 1970s around 100 pairs were breeding in Kent, mainly in the Stour valley, representing 10-20% of the British population (KOS 1981).

Although its faltering flight makes it seem a most unlikely migrant, it has occurred at St.Margaret's in 11 of the last 25 years. Apart from one in spring, on Apr.10th 1987, records have been confined to autumn, between Sept.27th and Nov.3rd, involving flocks of up to 14. Maximum numbers occurred in 1984 when four parties totalling 40 birds were seen on Oct.21st, followed by nine more on the 26th, while 16 bird-days accrued in October 1992, including eight on the 16th.

One individual among a party of four that was ringed on Oct.27th 1978 was re-trapped in Sussex, 51 km away, on Nov.30th the same year.

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*

Although our knowledge of the extent to which this species migrates is largely speculative, there have been several county records of the white-headed continental race *A.c.caudatus,* including one individual by the entrance to Pines Gardens on Mar.14th 1997. Otherwise, apart from occasional small parties on the clifftop, mainly in March and October, there has been scant evidence from the last 25 years that our Long-tailed Tits are anything more than locally dispersing birds, the longest-distance ringing recovery having been to Dover.

One or two pairs bred during the 1980s, increasing to three in 1992. Since then, probably reflecting the mildness of recent winters, at least four pairs were evident annually from 1997, increasing to a probable six pairs in 2002. Post-breeding flocks are a regular feature of autumn and particularly large accumulations include 46-55 at Bockhill between Oct.13th-15th 1996 and several counts of up to 45 at the South Foreland from late August to early November. Larger numbers have been apparent since the mid 1990s as the breeding population has increased.

Although Long-tailed Tits are very vulnerable to hard winters, an individual originally ringed in 1978 was re-trapped in the valley in 1986, having survived at least three very tough winters during its lifetime.

Marsh Tit *Parus palustris*

Marsh Tits are fairly common in deciduous woodlands in Kent and the nearby continent, even though they have been declining steadily since the late 1960s (KBR 1996, Mead 2000). Their sedentary nature makes coastal records very scarce (there have been only three occurrences at Dungeness Bird Observatory in 50 years), so the five local records since 1977 are of particular interest. One was present in the valley from Sept.30th to Oct.22nd 1978 and one was seen on Oct.5th 1987. Although one at the clifftop on June 28th 1989 was thought unusual at the time, the two subsequent records, both at Bockhill, have come at much the same time of year, involving singles on June 29th 1996 and June 18th 2000.

Willow Tit *Parus montanus*

The recent decline of the Willow Tit in Kent has been precipitous, and it is currently only just hanging on as a breeding species in the county. It has probably always bred further away from this part of the coast than the closely related Marsh Tit, which may account for the fact that there has been only one record since 1977; a singing bird in the lighthouse wood on Mar.30th 1980.

Coal Tit *Parus ater*

Coal Tits are typically scarce in winter and their breeding attempts are best described as intermittent, but the last 25 years have featured some very strong autumn influxes, particularly during the 1980s, invariably followed by a return movement in spring when at least two individuals have been watched flying out to sea until lost to sight.

Significant numbers have been noted in autumn from the last week of September to mid November, invariably involving grey-looking continental birds, usually in highly mobile parties that skip across the tree tops before disappearing inland. In the 1980s, the largest influxes involved 99 bird-days in 1983, including a peak of 19 on Oct.30th and 124 bird-days in 1985, when the highest counts were 21 on Sept.29th and 30 on Oct.30th. An arrival of 22 on Oct.30th 1989 contributed to an otherwise moderate autumn total of 39 bird-days.

The majority of spring migrants have been noted between mid March and early May. Return movements following the largest autumn influxes described above amounted to 47 bird-days in 1984 and 25 in 1986, including 15 on Mar.18th 1986 and three counts of eight or nine between Apr.1st-18th.

Such numbers have occurred in autumn only once since 1989, however, when there were 144 bird-days at Bockhill and 104 at the South Foreland in autumn 1996. Peak numbers included 26-28 daily at Bockhill from Sept.19th-21st, with 32 at the South Foreland on the 21st, then 17 in the valley on Oct.11th and 14-16 at Bockhill shortly afterwards. Returning birds featured strongly at Bockhill the following spring, when 101 bird-days included 18 on Mar.15th, 37 on the 22nd and 28 on the 30th. This species' irruptions have become increasingly capricious, in fact, the annual average of 43 bird-days in the 1980s falling to just 23 during the following decade. Since then Coal Tits have become truly scarce, with entirely blank autumns in 2001 and 2002.

Only seven Coal Tits have been trapped and ringed in the last 25 years, reflecting to no small extent that in eruption years Coal Tits are not only highly mobile but also tend to perch in the tops of trees on their way through or across the valley.

Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus*

Although Blue Tits are present throughout the year, they are a good deal less numerous in winter, presumably having vacated the valley in favour of nearby gardens. The subsequent return to breeding sites probably accounts for much of the apparent movement in spring, though largest numbers tend to follow influxes of tits the previous autumn, often involving continental Coal and Great Tits. Peak counts include 25-35 in late March and early April in both 1980 and 1981, a flock of eight flying SW along the cliff with a party of Great Tits on Apr.9th 1985 and, in 1997, also a year when passage Great Tits were conspicuous, 25-40 on three dates between Mar.8th-16th. In 1998, 12 flew SW along the cliff on Mar.8th and seven did so on Apr.22nd 2000.

Numbers in autumn are strongly dependent upon local breeding success, and it is salutary to note that although Blue Tits comprised 6% of birds trapped and ringed during the 1980s, they made up only 3% of the total between 1998 and 2001, suggesting poor recent productivity. This more or less confirms the impression given by post-breeding numbers, with far more having been evident in the early part of the last 25 years. Although numbers have always been very variable, estimates of 100 on Oct.21st 1978 and 80-90 on two dates in September 1979 and 1981 far exceed peak numbers during the 1990s, 80 in late August 1996 being the only count of more than 60. Restless clifftop flocks, a feature of the first hour after dawn during October, have also become much less obvious. Although 30-40 were regularly noted at the clifftop during the 1980s, with a peak of 56 in an hour on Oct.7th 1986, numbers since then have been poor, even negligible, particularly since the mid 1990s.

Although ringing recoveries confirm the ability of this species to move from the continent (KOS 1981), the evidence here from the last 25 years is that this species is a good deal less mobile in that respect than Great and Coal Tits. Although several birds have been ringed and subsequently recovered elsewhere, the longest-distance movement involves an individual ringed 53 km away in Sussex in June 1986 and re-trapped here in October the same year.

Great Tit *Parus major*

Historical recognition of this species' periodic autumn influxes from the continent, followed by return movement in spring, is shown by reference to 'large numbers' at St.Margaret's from October to December 1957 and 100 coasting NE on Mar.30th 1958 (KOS 1981, KBR). This pattern has been repeated twice in the last 25 years.

The first influx occurred in autumn 1985 when arrivals included 40 on Sept.29th, 27 on Oct.14th and 40 on Oct.30th. Return movement the following spring included 100 on Mar.28th, 68 of which were seen flying out to sea or coasting NE, and 55 flying SW on Mar.21st. Following considerable numbers in autumn 1996, mostly apparent between Folkestone and Dungeness, spring 1997 brought movements throughout March, including 30 SW on the 16th and three counts of 11-15.

Several other significant movements since 1977 reflect this species' highly mobile nature in spring and autumn. 30 flew SW on Mar.8th 1990 and 27 did so on Mar.8th 1998, while active parties of migrants have been recorded in several other years during March and early April. Largest autumn counts also include 52 on Oct.10th 1979 and 18 flying SW on Oct.10th 1993, with 12 other counts of 25 or more, almost exclusively in October.

There has been no long-distance recovery from the birds trapped and ringed at St.Margaret's and the proportion of Great Tits in the overall total has remained more or less constant throughout the last 25 years.

Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*

The sedentary nature of this species of deciduous woodland makes it an unlikely coastal migrant, particularly as it probably does not breed regularly within 15 km of St.Margaret's. However, there have been four recent records. The first was seen in the lighthouse wood on Apr.19th 1987 and one flew up the valley into umbellifers by the lighthouse on Sept.27th 1991. Another was seen on Mar.20th 1993 but the most intriguing record involved an individual in Fan Bay and later in the windmill wood on Mar.17th 1997, during a period of strong return movement of continental Coal Tits. The same spring produced the first records of Crested Tit *Parus cristatus* for Sussex (SBR 1997), which had presumably arrived from the continent the previous autumn.

Common Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*

There were two pairs of Treecreepers in the South Foreland valley throughout the 1980s, with post-breeding dispersal involving up to four each autumn, mainly from September to November. This situation pertained until 1996 when, despite spring and autumn occurrences, breeding birds appeared to be absent, following a decline to just one pair the previous year. Only three individuals were recorded in 1997 and although one or two were seen annually until 2001, there were no records at all in 2002, for the first time since 1977.

Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla*

This species occurs more or less throughout continental Europe where, for the most part, it replaces the very similar Common Treecreeper *C.familiaris* at lower altitudes. Their great visual similarity is compounded by the fact that in areas where their ranges overlap males may produce mixed songs and other vocalisations (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). As a result, sight records of this species are rarely accepted and most individuals recorded in Britain have been trapped. It is common and widespread just across the Channel in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais, where the breeding population is estimated at 15-20,000 pairs (Tombal 1996).

The Channel coast of Kent has been a regular recipient of visiting Short-toed Treecreepers, presumably from the Nord-Pas-de-Calais, with eight confirmed records at Dungeness Bird Observatory and two at St.Margaret's, both of which were trapped. The first occurred on Sept.24th 1983 and another was caught on Oct.14th 1990 shortly before two others at each of the Kent observatories. This one was still present in the valley on the 21st. It is worth recording a third individual that was seen and heard calling repeatedly in the valley on Nov.7th 1985.

Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus*

Although this species, with its distinctive flask-shaped nest, is absent from most of France, its European population now includes the Netherlands and parts of Belgium, following a westward range expansion that began in the 1950s, reaching these western limits in the mid 1980s (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997).

One at Stodmarsh in May 1980 was the first county record and the third in Britain, since when it has been occurring with increasing frequency, with annual records in Kent, particularly around Dungeness. One in the South Foreland valley on Oct.17th and 27th 1983 was the eighth record for Kent.

Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*

The beautiful fluting song of the bright yellow but surprisingly inconspicuous male Golden Oriole is a familiar spring sound in light deciduous woodlands throughout most of Europe (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). In Britain it is a rare breeding summer visitor, though spring migrants are regular, with around 10-15 annually in Kent.

35 individuals have been seen at St.Margaret's since 1980, including autumn records on Sept.3rd 1994 and Aug.25th 1997. The remaining 33 have been in spring, mostly in May, although extreme dates are Apr.21st and June 15th. The tendency for overnight arrivals to leave the area very early in the morning makes them easy to miss, and although Golden Orioles have been found in 18 of the last 25 years it is likely that they are more frequent. However, there is evidence of a decline; 14 individuals occurred in the 1980s, with 16 more in the seven years from 1991 to 1997, but there have been only five since, four of which occurred in 2002.

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*

Red-backed Shrikes breed in a variety of scrubby situations throughout much of Europe, wintering mainly in the Kalahari region of Africa. They have been declining in NW Europe since the 1970s and are now absent from Britain, where they were once fairly common (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). Nevertheless, migrants are still regular in spring and autumn and a dozen or so still occur in Kent in most years.

Historical records make reference to singles in 1959 on Aug.23rd and Sept.3rd (KBR), but since 1977 there have been records of at least 33 individuals. Spring records amount to single individuals in six different years, between May 15th and June 27th, while the remaining 27 occurred in autumn, between July 23rd and Oct.19th, with a record four in autumn 1998. Apart from an early individual on July 23rd 1977, nine have occurred between Aug.25th and Sept.7th, with 11 between Sept.14th and Oct.1st and six more from Oct.7th-19th. Whilst these dates may not be of particular significance, the contribution of annual records from Bockhill since 1996 certainly is, with eight of the last eleven records for the area having come from there.

Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor*

This attractive shrike of hot, dry steppe areas breeds from southern France through Italy and the Balkans eastwards to Turkestan and Afghanistan (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). There were 158 British records up to 2001, but only seven in Kent (KBR), the most recent of which was at Foxhill Down, just inland of Langdon Battery, from Aug.13th-17th 1995.

Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*

This impressive and highly aggressive shrike breeds from C France east through C Europe and north into Fennoscandia, though in S France and Iberia it is replaced by the similar Southern Grey Shrike *L.meridionalis,* which most authorities treat as a distinct species. It occurs in Britain primarily as a winter visitor, but numbers visiting Kent have been declining since the early 1980s, possibly as a result of reducing C European populations and the changing migratory strategy of northern birds, which appear to have become more sedentary in their habits (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997).

Historical records for the St.Margaret's area include singles on Nov.6th 1954 and Oct.26th-30th 1958 (KBR), both of which conform to the recent pattern of occurrence. More recently, apart from one in spring, on Apr.5th 1977, all appearances have been in autumn, involving a probable 14 individuals between Oct.6th and Nov.20th. There were annual occurrences from 1977 to 1982, followed by singles in 1985 and 1986 and a series of records probably involving two birds in each year in 1990, 1993 and 1998, then one in 1999. The precise numbers of birds involved should be treated with some caution, however, as one at Langdon on Nov.4th 1996 may have been the same individual that was seen sporadically around the South Foreland valley for two weeks from Oct.25th to Nov.7th. This species is highly mobile and records of apparently different individuals more than a mile apart on different dates might relate to one temporarily resident bird, since others have remained in the area for several days.

Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

One of the earliest documented records of this species' periodic irruptions into Kent from the continent involved a flock of 200-300 at St.Margaret's Bay in October 1880 (Crichton 1880). In late September 1957, at least a thousand birds were seen around the Kent coast, including 50 at St.Margaret's on Sept.23rd (KOS 1981, KBR) and further influxes occurred at St.Margaret's in 1977, when a total of 157 bird-days included 90 moving SW on Oct.8th-9th, and in 1981 when there were 267 bird-days during October, including three counts of 34-38, all coasting SW. This was the background to the extraordinary events of October 1983.

Nothing out of the ordinary had happened that autumn until suddenly, on Oct.2nd, the largest recorded immigration of Jays into Britain began with 896 flying SW through the South Foreland valley or along the cliffs in a three hour period from just after dawn, clearly having arrived from off the sea somewhere to the north of the bay, possibly around Hope Point. There were further influxes of a hundred or more on no fewer than six subsequent days, and by Nov.9th an almost implausible total of 2,730 bird-days had amassed. The other most significant movements included 157 on Oct.8th, 199 on the 11th, 139 on the 17th, 248 on the 19th, 201 on the 25th and 113 on the 26th, all following the same south-westerly flight path.

It seems likely that this phenomenal influx was precipitated by a widespread severe failure of the acorn crop, an event that occurs naturally from time to time (John & Roskell 1985). Quite why such large numbers were associated with this particular crop failure is not clear, but such an event has probably occurred on this scale only rarely. Comparable influxes may have occurred in the late 19th century, since Ticehurst (1909) recorded 'immense numbers' of Jays in north Kent from Oct.8th-15th 1886 and although other records from around this time tend to be similarly anecdotal, Gätke (1985) describes a truly awesome passage across the German island of Heligoland between Oct.21st-23rd 1876 that involved millions of birds.

The largest immigration during the 1990s featured 257 bird-days in October 1993, including 135 on the 10th and 42 on the 15th, all flying SW from the direction of Bockhill through the South Foreland valley. Although up to 44 were evident at the South Foreland, with up to 36 at Bockhill in mid October 1996, most were moving about in apparently random fashion, suggesting that they were more local in origin. A total of 224 bird-days in October 1998 included one SW movement across Wanstone Farm of 121 on the 10th, but relatively low numbers otherwise.

Spring movements occur in April and May and the two most significant followed the autumn influxes of 1983 and 1996. Up to 16 were recorded during April 1984 and parties of up to seven were seen leaving out to sea in the second half of May. Surprisingly, larger numbers were evident in spring 1997, when 62 were recorded on Apr.29th, followed by 51 the next day, 58 on May 1st, 44 on the 2nd and 67 on the 3rd. As with the influx of the previous autumn, the direction of movement was muddled, suggesting a non-continental origin.

Magpie *Pica pica*

Despite the fact that the Magpie has never been proved to have a detrimental effect on the overall breeding success of other species, it has strong roots in British folklore and remains one of the most consistently disliked of all our birds, even by birdwatchers. Locally, largest flocks are evident following the breeding season, with up to 40 having been recorded in September and October during the early 1980s, since when peak numbers have tended to be in the region of 20-30.

Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes*

The distinctive nasal rasping call of this noisy and often conspicuous species can be heard throughout boreal coniferous forests from Scandinavia to the Urals and also from the mountains of SE France eastwards through central Europe. At the western edge of its range it occurs in the Belgian Ardennes. Periodic failures in conifer seed crops trigger sporadic irruptions similar to those of the Jay (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). The most recent of these during which Nutcrackers were seen in numbers in Kent took place in autumn 1968, when four were seen together near Dover in late August and several others were reported along the coast from Deal to Thanet. One was seen flying in off the sea at Kingsdown on Sept.6th 1998. It spent the day around Kingsdown village and was seen briefly over Bockhill the next morning as it departed.

Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*

The presence of this red-billed crow on the coat of arms of Canterbury hints at its history as a Kentish breeding bird and it appears in Shakespeare's description of the cliffs of Dover in *King Lear*. However, it is now confined to the west coasts of Britain and Ireland, having ceased to breed on Dover cliffs in 1840 or 1850. The colony originally became extinct sometime between the late 17th and mid 18th centuries, before an apparently accidental reintroduction around 1776 from a pair captured in Cornwall allowed a further period of occupation of the cliffs that lasted another 60 or 70 years (Ticehurst 1909).

Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*

Jackdaws breed numerously in holes on the cliffs, with noisy parties decamping to feed on clifftop fields, usually around the sheep grazing at Foxhill Down, where up to 170 accumulate during autumn and winter. However, most interest is generated by their periodic autumn influxes from the continent, though these have declined seriously during the last 25 years, even though the breeding population in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region of northern France has remained more or less stable (Tombal 1996). Large arrivals in autumn were regular during the early 1980s, including 300 on Oct.27th 1979, 216 on Oct.25th 1981, 246 on Nov.2nd 1982 and 1,282 on Oct.30th 1983, all of which arrived from the French coast on light NW winds. Although 379 bird-days accrued in October 1986, immigration ceased almost entirely from then onwards and arrivals of 45 on Nov.6th 1991 and 60 on Oct.16th 1999 are the only subsequent influxes of more than five or six birds.
Evidence of return spring migration is sparse, even following the large influxes described above. However, 30 flew high to the SW on Mar.29th 1983, followed by 60 more the following day, and nine flew out to sea on Mar.29th 1997. Observers on Thanet detected a regular spring passage of birds heading SE in March and April during the 1980s, suggesting that birds that arrive in the county in autumn take a more northerly return route in spring.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*

Arrivals of Rooks from the French coast in late autumn were a regular feature of the 1980s, often in mixed flocks with Jackdaws. Years of peak immigration generally featured both species and a similar decline has affected both species. Largest arrivals in the 1980s included 835 on Oct.27th 1982, 825 on Oct.30th 1983 and 573 on Nov.3rd 1986. The subsequent decade featured arrivals of 114 on Nov.1st 1990 and 236 on Oct.27th 1983, but only a trickle of immigrants has been evident since, with no immigration in several of the last seven years.
It seems likely that the rookery in the village has declined in size in the last 25 years, since there were about 20 nests throughout the 1980s but only 12 in 2002.

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*

A few pairs have bred locally throughout the last 25 years. Movements of Carrion Crows in spring and autumn have been obscured to some extent by the much larger immigrations of Jackdaws and Rooks that occurred during the 1980s, though a regular spring passage was detected on Thanet during the 1980s. Nevertheless, as influxes of the other corvids have diminished, Carrion Crows have been easier to detect and it is clear that small migratory movements do take place. Flocks of up to 35 are regular on the fields from late March to the end of April and a flock of 22 was seen on rocks at the base of the cliffs Apr.30th 2001. NE movements are regular at this time of year, the largest of which involved 140 bird-days at Bockhill from late March 1996, including 56 on Apr.8th, while 44 flew NE at the South Foreland on Apr.13th. To confuse the situation even further, parties of up to ten have been seen flying out to sea and also arriving from the French coast at the same time of year.
In autumn, 30 flew in from the east at Bockhill on Sept.6th 1998 and 40 flew in off the sea there on Oct.10th 1999, while gatherings on the fields include several flocks of 70-80 on Wanstone in October or early November.

Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix*

In Britain, the Hooded Crow is confined mainly to Scotland and Ireland, overlapping with Carrion Crow in southern Scotland and in continental Europe the two are also separated mainly on an east-west basis. Carrion Crow breeds eastwards from the Iberian Peninsula and France to Poland, with Hooded Crow breeding east of a line from Scandinavia south to Italy, creating a large zone of overlap in central Europe. The two species were recently accorded specific status, rather than being regarded as races of the same species (BOU 2002).
Historical records of Hooded Crows include four on Dec.4th 1958 and one on Oct.15th 1960 (KBR). More recently, 13 have been recorded since 1977, involving five singles between Apr.5th and May 30th and eight in autumn, between Sept.14th and Nov.19th. Although most occurrences have been of a solitary nature, one was seen moving SW with Carrion Crows at Bockhill on Apr.21st 2000.

Raven *Corvus corax*

Even Ticehurst is rather vague about the past history of this species in Kent, since by the time of his *Birds of Kent* it had disappeared from the county. However, he mentions three nests at the South Foreland in 1841 and it seems likely that Ravens bred on the chalk cliffs until the late 19th century (Ticehurst 1909).

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

The decline in numbers of Starlings arriving from the continent at the end of October or beginning of November each year has been one of the saddest features of the last 25 years. During the 1980s, flocks would arrive on a broad front, sometimes stretching as far as the eye could see towards both Kingsdown and Dover. Particularly large arrivals included 6,500 on Oct.27th 1978, 8,550 on Oct.24th 1981 and 5,060 on Nov.2nd and 14,500 the next day in 1986. More recently, large arrivals have included 10,700 on Oct.5th and 5,660 on Oct.26th in 1991 and 10,900 on Oct.27th 1992. Since then there has been a clear decline, and arrivals of 3,295 on Oct.29th and 3,330 on Nov.5th in 1995 and 2,700 on Nov.7th 1998 have been the only influxes of more than 2,000 in the last ten years.

Spring movement is very light by comparison with autumn, although 500 flew out to sea on Mar.24th 1979 and 2,200 flew NE on Mar.19th 1986.

Sparrows to Buntings 1977 – 2002

Numbers of migrants of all species associated with farmland have followed a similar downward trend at St.Margaret's to those indicated by national monitoring schemes. Although these mostly involve censuses of breeding birds, the trends have also been evident in numbers recorded here during autumn migration. The four most numerous finch species principally affected are shown in the table below, which illustrates the decline in passage that has been apparent since the mid 1980s. Numbers are based on the cumulative hourly count for each species during each autumn. This is calculated by adding together the hourly visible migration totals for the first hour of each morning while passage is in progress from mid September to mid November each year.

	Average		Annual cumulative hourly count totals for the past ten years									
	1982 to 1989	1990 to 1999	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Tree Sparrow	1620	*	*	*	*	*	102	71	119	57	26	226
Greenfinch	1728	1031	792	533	419	377	295	389	438	615	1050	284
Goldfinch	3506	2490	1755	2233	1416	1595	1578	2901	4119	3674	5823	3974
Linnet	3674	2745	2770	3705	2759	2698	2221	1251	2142	2508	1981	1337

- Numbers of Tree Sparrows had fallen so low by 1991 that hourly counts were no longer useful. The figures shown for this species from 1997 onwards relate to annual autumn bird-day totals.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Just about everyone involved with birdwatching, even at a serious level, has to admit to having taken the House Sparrow for granted in the recent past and the previous summary of St.Margaret's birds included the rather sad admission that 'this familiar species is greeted with disinterest for much of the year' (Hodgson 1991). Even so, flocks totalling 500 or more were regular on the fields and around the farmyard during September and October, with 1,100 having occurred on Wanstone as recently as September 1994 and 2,000 on fields inland of Langdon Battery in October 1992. Coasting movements occurred in October each year, the largest of which involved 580 in an hour on Oct.24th 1989 and 1,520 on Nov.1st 1990. Since the mid 1990s there has been a sharp decline, however, with 400 at Langdon in September 1996 being the largest flock in the last seven years, when no other gathering or movement has amounted to more than two hundred.

Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*

Although Ticehurst (1909) considered the Tree Sparrow to be a rare breeding species in Kent, Harrison (1953) described a considerable increase that began in the first half of the last century. This continued up to the 1970s (KOS 1981) and when systematic coverage began at St.Margaret's in 1977 large movements were a regular feature of October mornings, including 1,000 on Oct.29th 1977, a two-hour total of 1,325 on Oct.10th 1981 and a spectacular 3,045 flying SW in an hour on Oct.17th 1983. After 695 flew SW on Oct.21st 1984, however, alarm bells started to sound, with no count exceeding 229 in the post-dawn hour in the last five years of the 1980s. This coincided with a large-scale decline in farmland birds that began to accelerate

in the mid 1980s and although declines have been general among finches, sparrows and buntings, the Tree Sparrow has undoubtedly been the most seriously affected of all the species involved. Significantly, since a proportion of migrants at St.Margaret's are continental birds, the population in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region of northern France is thought to have halved in 20 years since the mid 1970s (Tombal 1996).
Although 695 flew SW in an hour on Oct.29th 1990, the decline became almost absolute in the 1990s. Within a few years numbers of Tree Sparrows had fallen so low that hourly counts were replaced by counts of all birds seen during autumn passage and numbers continued to fall, from an autumn total of 102 bird-days in 1997 to only 26 in 2001, an almost unbelievable reversal in fortunes for a species that was once considered to be abundant. Although 226 bird-days in autumn 2002 was the largest autumn total since 1996 it is difficult to view this as more than a temporary improvement.
Even when numbers were at their peak in the early 1980s, Tree Sparrows were relatively scarce in spring, peaks of 35-50 occurring from mid March to early April, although 50 were recorded as late as May 20th in 1978.

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

References in the literature to 'a large passage' on Mar.30th 1958, 'a southerly movement' on Jan.6th-7th 1962, 'heavy passage' on Oct.18th 1964 and 'a large movement' on Nov.15th 1968 (KBR) are largely compatible with this species' movements in spring and autumn, though there have been no significant winter records in the recent period of coverage.
The level of NE winds dictates the extent to which spring migration is visible, and the earliest flocks, invariably all males, begin to move upchannel along the cliffs from the end of February. The point at which females become apparent seems to be variable, perhaps depending upon the severity of the previous winter; females can become dominant in the migrant flocks at any time between mid March and early April. Largest movements have all occurred in March, including 1,200 on Mar.8th 1992, 1,333 on Mar.26th 1994 and 1,662 over Bockhill on Mar.21st 1998, though substantial numbers continue into April, including 630 in an hour on Apr.16th 1979 and 160 in an hour as late as the 25th. Although movements have diminished by the start of May, small parties, probably immature birds, sometimes continue to move in early June.
Although spring flocks are generally easy to locate as they progress steadily along the cliffs, the same cannot be said of migrants in autumn, when birds can often be heard calling, too high to be seen, as they bound in off the sea, almost invariably on NW winds in October. Some large movements have taken place in clear conditions, most notably 1,577 on Oct.30th 1996, arriving into a light WNW breeze, and at least 9,000 on Oct.13th 1997, which included 5,792 coasting N at Bockhill and at least 3,000 flying in off the sea at the South Foreland, with the wind NNW 6-7. It is salutary to note that a quarter of a million Chaffinches and Bramblings were seen leaving the French coast from Cap Gris Nez the same morning, all of which were heading for the chalk cliffs on this side of the Channel, mostly in the direction of the Dover-Folkestone escarpment. However, most autumn flocks arrive from the continent at considerable altitude, and although they can be heard calling as they do so they often become visible only during periods of drizzle or low cloud. The largest influx in such conditions involved 15,000 birds over three days from Oct.21st-23rd 1982, including 10,000 arriving from off the sea or moving NE on the 22nd in gloomy conditions with low cloud, drizzle and poor visibility. Arrivals of 2,000 on Oct.27th 1978 and 3,100 on Oct.19th 1981 also took place in similar circumstances, with the wind in the WNW or NW.
Although coverage on the Bockhill side of the bay has been regular only since 1995, on several occasions Chaffinches have been observed flying NE there at the same time as birds are arriving from off the sea over the South Foreland valley, indicating that some migrants head for the county's north-facing coast while others continue directly inland.

Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*

The Brambling has a much more northerly distribution in Europe than the closely related Chaffinch. Although small numbers exist in the Netherlands, its range lies mainly from Fennoscandia into Russia (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). Its wintering habits are nomadic, with mass influxes into different parts of Europe in different years, influenced mainly by feeding conditions in its main wintering areas. Several millions have been recorded in Switzerland in good beechmast years, while numbers wintering in Britain vary widely (BWP).
Numbers occurring at St.Margaret's on passage in autumn each year are accordingly highly variable, from a record 2,357 bird-days in 1985 to as few as 25 bird-days in 1980. Arrivals begin in late September and migrants sometimes continue to pass through well into November, but peak passage invariably occurs in October, all 15 movements of a hundred or more in the last 25 years having taken place between Oct.9th-31st. Eight of these were in 1985, when peak counts included 228 on Oct.13th and 400 on the 23rd, while the remainder occurred in five other years, involving influxes of 110-184.
Migrants are regular but scarce in spring, with few movements of more than ten individuals. The largest involved 31 flying NE on Mar.19th 1998.

Serin *Serinus serinus*

Serins breed across much of southern and central Europe, with the largest populations in the Iberian Peninsula and Germany (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). In the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region of northern France the population is thought to have increased from 1,000 pairs in the mid 1970s to at least 1,750 pairs twenty years later (Tombal 1996). In the UK, Serins have been recorded with increasing frequency in the last 40 years, but although up to nine may have bred in one year, breeding attempts continue to be sporadic (Mead 2000).

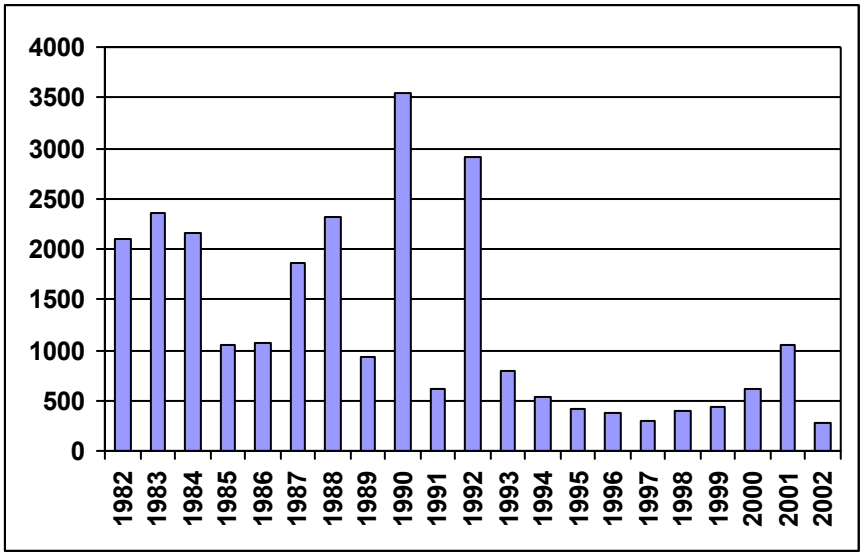
Historical records include one on Jan.27th 1879 and singles in 1924 on Nov.13th and 16th, while one in Dover Museum was probably also trapped by the Dover bird-catchers (Ticehurst 1909, Harrison 1953). More recently, 39 Serins have been recorded in the area in the last 25 years, 30 of which occurred in spring. Five of these were recorded between Mar.29th and Apr.13th, with a further 17 between Apr.19th and May 8th, three between May 22nd-24th and subsequent records of one on June 2nd, two on June 19th and two between July 15th-19th. Of the nine autumn records, between Oct.17th and Nov.9th, all but one occurred in the first nine days of November.

Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*

Although winter flocks are unusual, 100 remained on clifftop stubble throughout December 1992. There is evidence of passage in most years, though movements in spring are usually light, particularly since the mid 1990s. Peak counts include 94 coasting NE along the cliffs in an hour on Apr.4th 1990 and a flock on the fields at the top of the valley that reached 250 in mid March 1993.

However, Greenfinches are very much more numerous in autumn. Post-breeding flocks are evident from mid August onwards, though their presence is dictated by the existence of suitable feeding in the area. The largest of these include 150 in a mixed flock of 450 Linnets and Greenfinches in early September 1990 and 240 on linseed stubble at the top of the valley in mid September 1994, increasing to 500 in the second half of October. Visible migration is usually under way by mid September, with peak passage invariably occurring between late September and the end of October. Counts of migrating birds in the first hour after dawn are of particular significance, since movement generally slackens soon afterwards, and these counts have been carried out regularly each autumn since 1982, forming the basis for assessing the strength of passage of the most numerous finch species (Greenfinch, Goldfinch and Linnet). The largest such movements on record include 951/hr on Oct.10th 1982, 873/hr on Oct.17th 1984 and 1,090/hr on Oct.29th 1990, but since then there has been an unambiguous decline, with no hourly movement of more than 250 in the last nine years.

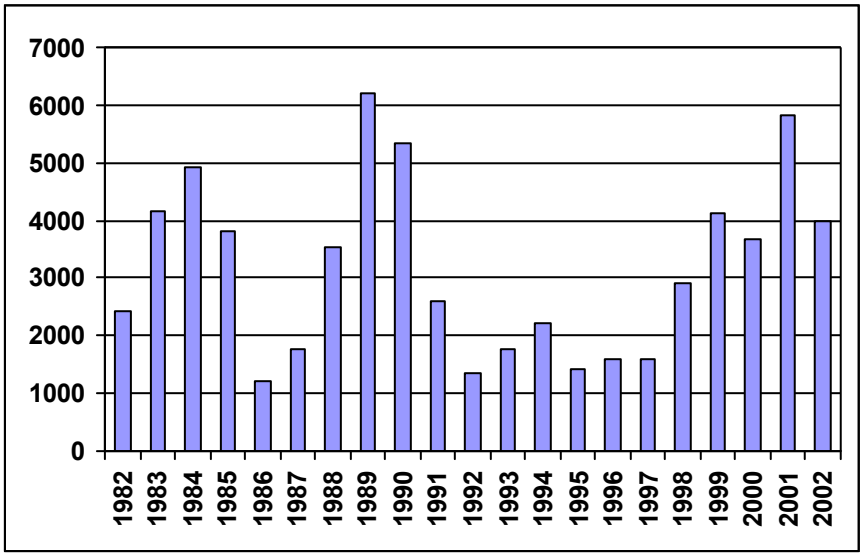
Such declines have also been evident in autumn numbers of Tree Sparrows and Linnets, both previously abundant migrants that winter mainly in Britain, while Goldfinches, which winter mainly in France and Spain, have been less badly affected. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that relentlessly efficient modern farming is incompatible with winter survival of these species.



Cumulative hourly autumn count totals for Greenfinch 1982-2002

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

As with the preceding species, spring passage of Goldfinches is very light by comparison with autumn, largest numbers including six movements of 116-180 between Apr.21st and May 12th. British Goldfinches winter mainly in W France and Spain (Lack 1986), a factor that has probably supported their recovery from the decline in farmland birds that began in the early part of the last decade. This contrasts starkly with the recent consistently grim fortunes of the more sedentary Tree Sparrow, Greenfinch and Linnet. Large flocks can be seen bounding along the cliffs or over the valley from the last week of September through to the end of October, all 14 records of a thousand or more having occurred between Sept.29th and Oct.25th. The largest movements include 2,400 on Oct.3rd 1989, 1,700 on Oct.19th 2001 and 1,565 at Bockhill on Oct.9th 1998, while the biggest single gathering was a flock of 1,000 on linseed stubble at the top of the valley on Oct.23rd 1994. Few remain beyond mid November until the onset of spring passage in April.



Cumulative hourly autumn count totals for Goldfinch 1982-2002

Siskin *Carduelis spinus*

90% of European Siskins breed in northern conifer forests from Fennoscandia to Russia (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). Although they have become more widespread in Britain in the last 20 years they are still very localised in the breeding season in southern Britain, where they occur mainly as migrants and winter visitors. Their seasonal movements to and from their breeding grounds are influenced by the relative success of the season's cone crop (Wernham *et al* 2002), the unpredictable nature of which presumably explains the extreme fluctuations in Siskin numbers from year to year. The variability in timing of passage as birds arrive on the British east coast in autumn is less easy to explain.

Despite the low level of coverage between December and February, it is clear that Siskins are more frequent in winter than might be expected, given their preference for alder-rich lowlands at that time of year. Several movements of 35-52 have been noted between mid December and early February, though those of 150 on Dec.19th 1992 and 226 on Dec.27th 1993 were exceptional.

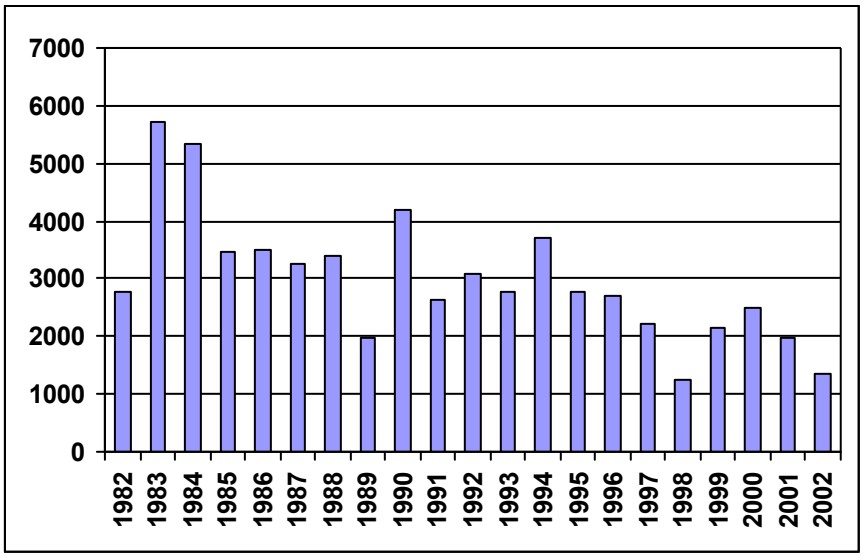
Spring passage, which takes place mainly during March and April, is highly variable, with bird-day totals varying from as few as six in 1982 to 572 in 1997, at an annual average of 115. All 14 movements of fifty or more have taken place between Mar.16th and Apr.23rd, including 153 NE on Apr.5th 1984 and 183 in off the sea on Apr.23rd 1989, with five other records of 106-132. Although sizeable movements have been noted at both the South Foreland and Bockhill, there is often little or no correlation between the two sites, despite their close proximity. Small numbers of migrants continue into May, but despite occasional records between June and August, Siskins are very scarce in the summer months.

Autumn passage often begins suddenly, and substantial movements are likely at any time from mid September until early November, all 56 records of a hundred or more since 1977 having occurred between Sept.15th and Nov.2nd. As in spring, the strength of passage each year is very variable, with annual numbers varying from 73 bird-days in 1982 to 4,587 in 1993, at an annual average of 1,272. The precise timing of peak migration is also very unpredictable, passage having finished by the end of September in some years, while in others few are evident until mid October. It is also not unusual for disproportionately large numbers

to be confined to a single period of two or three days, though in most years passage tends to be more extended. The largest movements of the last 25 years include 1,539 over two days on Sept.17th-18th 1988, 881 on Oct.12th 1991 and, in 1993, 946 on Oct.10th and 1,445 over two days on Nov.1st-2nd, though the record for a single day was 1,251 on Sept.24th 1996.
Since regular coverage began at Bockhill in 1994, up to 797 have been recorded there on a single day, though as in spring there seems to be little correlation in numbers moving on either side of the bay. At the South Foreland at least, it is noticeable that flocks move NE on a broad front, which can make movements difficult to assess. Some parties move along the clifftop, while others take a more inland route, particularly in windy conditions, either flying over the South Foreland valley or along the shallow valley between there and Reach Road.

Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*

Linnets are partial migrants, with some British birds remaining throughout the year while others move S or SW to winter in France or Spain (Wernham *et al* 2002). Their dependence on seeds has made them vulnerable to the effects of agricultural intensification and numbers occurring at St.Margaret's at all seasons in the last 25 years reflect the decline that has been evident in arable areas of the country.
Although 'large numbers' were present in January 1966 (KBR), Linnets are normally scarce in winter, though a flock of 300 was present in cabbages at Nelson Park in February 1983 and up to 250 stayed in a field of set-aside at the top of the valley throughout the 1992/93 winter.
This scarcity in winter makes the onset of spring passage easy to detect. The first migrants usually begin to appear in early March and passage reaches a peak in April, with all movements of a hundred or more having been recorded between Mar.30th and Apr.25th. The largest of these include 522 NE in an hour on Apr.16th 1991, 492 NE in an hour on Apr.21st 1981, 400 NE on Apr.25th 1990 and 382 in an hour on Apr.17th 1991, with 17 other counts of up to 303. Feeding flocks often accumulate during spring passage, the largest of which was 450 on fields inland of Langdon Cliffs in mid April 1995, though gatherings 100-150 are more usual. Both the numbers of birds moving over the area and the size of these transient flocks has decreased significantly since the mid 1990s, however, and no movement or flock has exceeded a hundred since 1999.
Linnets breed regularly in the scrubby parts of the area, though currently their numbers are much lower than in the 1980s, when up to 20 pairs bred annually.
Declining numbers have been particularly apparent in autumn, when numbers are a good deal higher. Post-breeding flocks begin to accumulate in August, increasing in size during September, though their size and the length of time they remain depends upon the availability of food. While in some years numbers struggle to reach a hundred, particularly large gatherings include 740 on Sept.24th 1981, 1,000 in early October 1990 and a flock on the fields at Langdon in 1993 that increased from 800 in late August to 4,000 by Sept.25th. A flock of 2,000 was also present there from mid September until early October in 1994, but such large numbers have not been repeated since, 300-350 being more typical. Years of greatest abundance seem to coincide with the presence of a good acreage of oilseed rape, a factor that has also been suggested for the recent small recovery in British breeding numbers (Mead 2000, Wernham *et al* 2002).
Visible migration gets under way around mid September, with substantial numbers likely until early November. Counts of migrants flying along the cliffs early in the morning, usually in the first hour after dawn, have formed the backbone of autumn recording since the early 1980s. Cumulative autumn totals of these counts, shown below, illustrate the decline in visible migration that has been evident in the last 25 years, particularly during the last decade. Counts of 1,309/hr on Oct.10th 1982 and 942/hr on Oct.18th 1983 remain the largest on record, though hourly movements of 500-830 were evident almost annually as recently as 1997. Since then, however, no such movement has exceeded 374 and the average peak annual hourly count in the last five years has been just 341.



Cumulative hourly autumn count totals for Linnet 1982-2002

Twite *Carduelis flavirostris*

Twite breed in open upland areas of Britain and Scandinavia, with a separate population located eastwards from the Caucasus (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). They occur as winter visitors to southern Britain.

At St.Margaret's, winter records amount to one on the clifftop on Jan.6th 1979 and at least one in a large flock of Linnets in cabbages at Nelson Park on Jan.12th 1985. All other records relate to passage birds in autumn, between Oct.2nd and Nov.11th. The total of at least 217 since 1977 is rather speculative, since most have been recorded moving along the clifftop in mixed flocks with Linnets, which are visually very similar. The precise proportion of Twite in these flocks is almost impossible to determine, but it is certain that a major decline has occurred in the last 25 years, also reflected in records within Kent (KBR).

The highest numbers in a day include six records of 17-29 and annual totals include 31 in 1978, 71 in 1984, 22 in 1985, 18 in 1986 and 49 in 1988. Eight occurred in autumn 1989 but since then only 16 have been recorded, with no more than three in a single autumn. Nine of these occurred at Bockhill, where regular coverage began in 1994.

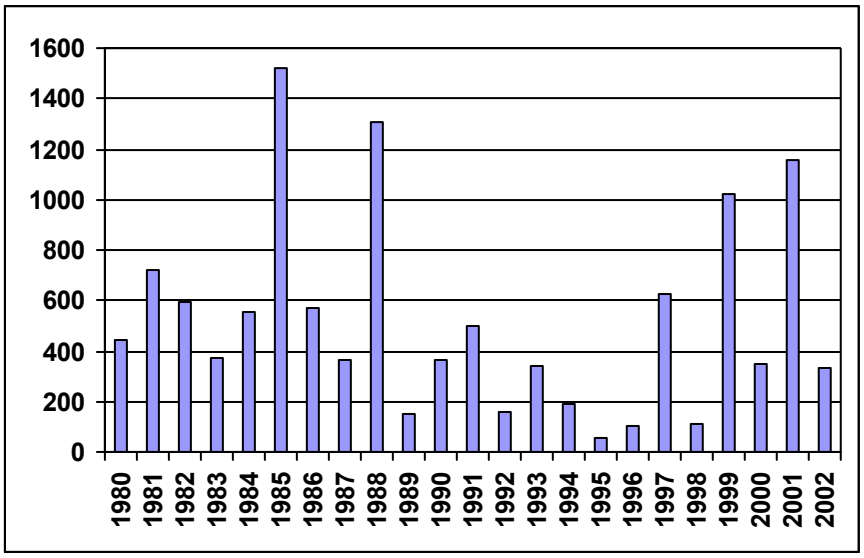
Lesser Redpoll *Carduelis cabaret*

The British Ornithologists' Union recently decided to regard Lesser Redpoll *C.cabaret* and Common Redpoll *C.flammea* as distinct species (BOU 2001). Around 80% of Lesser Redpolls, generally smaller, darker and browner than their counterpart, occur mainly in Britain and Ireland, with small populations in Denmark, S.Sweden, the Alps and C.Europe. Common (which embraces Mealy *C.f.flammea* and Greater *C.f.rostrata*) tends to be larger and greyer and breeds in N.Fenno-Scandia, Russia and Siberia. The vast majority of redpolls that have occurred at St.Margaret's since 1977 have been Lesser Redpolls.

Numbers at St.Margaret's vary greatly from year to year, in common with other finches that feed mainly on tree seeds and undertake eruptive movements in response to high population levels and/or poor seed crops. This species is primarily an autumn migrant, with only five singles in winter apart from an exceptional record of 30 on Jan.4th 1992, while spring passage has always been disproportionately small compared to that of autumn, the strongest migration involving just 42 bird-days in 1984 and the largest day total being 21 on May 21st 1981. Migrants have been noted from Mar.6th, though most occur in April and May, leaving only stragglers in the summer months. However, numbers have declined since the 1980s from an annual average of 15 bird-days from 1979-1992 to a total of only 13 individuals in the ten years since. The reasons for this are by no means clear, since autumn peaks have remained relatively high more or less throughout the last 25 years.

Autumn has featured 23 counts of a hundred or more, between Sept.27th and Oct.25th, the largest of which include 400 on Oct.9th 1977, of which 250 were feeding on willowherb in the valley, 300 on Oct.22nd the same year, 357 on Oct.24th 1979 and 580 on Oct.25th 1999. Annual totals (shown in the table below) have varied from a record 1,518 bird-days in 1985 to as few as 56 in 1995, but in spite of a decline in numbers over an eight-year period from 1989 there has since been a recovery to the peaks and troughs that were evident for much of the 1980s. Ringing recoveries indicate that many birds cross the Channel to Belgium, the Netherlands and France in years when birch seed crops in southern Britain are poor (Wernham *et al*

2002), and this may be the main determining factor for the size of movements here in autumn. Although a change in ringing emphasis at St.Margaret's since 1998 has led to increasing numbers of redpolls being trapped, there has yet to be any long-distance ringing recovery to indicate the origins of the birds involved. Interestingly, there is often little correlation between peak movements at the South Foreland and those elsewhere on the coast: the scale of the movement in October 1999 was not evident at either Dungeness, where 80 were recorded, or even nearer on the Bockhill side of the bay, where fewer than 30 were seen.



Annual autumn bird-day totals for Lesser Redpoll 1980-2002

Common Redpoll *Carduelis flammea*

County records of Common or 'Mealy' Redpoll include a spectacular invasion in December 1895, during which the Dover bird-catchers trapped as many as two hundred in one day on the hills above the town, averaging as many as five or six dozen a day for a fortnight (Ticehurst 1909). This invasion followed unusually severe weather on the continent, but Ticehurst regarded this species (regarded then, as now, as distinct from Lesser Redpoll) as an irregular winter visitor to Kent and another significant invasion was noted in October and November 1910 when 'vast numbers' were taken by the bird-catchers (Harrison 1953). Both Ticehurst and Harrison mention several others that were trapped on Dover cliffs and it is clear from their writings that the St.Margaret's area, where the Dover bird-catchers operated, has long been of significance for this species.

During the last 25 years, there has been one spring record, of two adult males on Apr.20th 1987, during a prolonged period of SE winds, while all four autumn occurrences have been associated with an airflow from the N or NE. A few on Oct.24th 1979 appeared amid an arrival of Fieldfares and Redwings, with a Great Grey Shrike the same day, and one on Oct.15th 1989 was seen on the same day that five Yellow-browed Warblers arrived in the South Foreland valley. Another on Oct.21st 1991 coincided with a large influx of thrushes and 20 were seen at Bockhill on Nov.24th 1996 during a spell of cold N winds.

Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*

All of the 25 forms of crossbill inhabit coniferous forests across the northern hemisphere. Although there is disagreement over the number of species involved, each exhibits a strong relationship between bill size and a particular conifer seed, on which it is largely dependent for breeding. Common Crossbills, which breed throughout Europe, are adapted to feed on seeds of Norway Spruce, which are mainly available from November to April. As this food source becomes depleted, they are forced to switch to new crops or move to an area where spruce seeds are available. This often involves their moving to areas of Scots Pine during summer prior to onward migration in search of new spruce crops (Wernham *et al* 2002).

Movements of Common Crossbills at St.Margaret's in the last 25 years fall into four fairly distinct periods, involving a total of around 1,220 individuals. Spring movements between Mar.10th and Apr.21st have been noted in six years. They account for 11% of the total, including 18 on Mar.25th 1991 and 19 on Mar.11th 1994. In 11 of the last 25 years a second period of activity has been evident from May 10th to July 15th, during which 23% of the total has occurred, including peak counts of 38 on June 2nd 1985, 98 on May 14th 1994 and 20 on June 1st the same year. 26% of migrants have been recorded in 12 years between July 17th

and Sept.30th, including 22 on Aug.3rd 1997 and 87 on Aug.31st 2002, and a further 40% between Oct.4th and Nov.24th, during which period there have been 14 records of 12-28 individuals together with movements in 1993 of 49 on Nov.2nd and 61 on Nov.7th.

	Mar 10 – Apr 21	May 10 – July 15		July 17 – Sep 30	Oct 4 – Nov 24	Total
1981				1		1
1982						
1983		1			28	29
1984	24	6				30
1985	1	45		5	46	97
1986		14			5	19
1987		1				1
1988				23		23
1989				2		2
1990	1			37	41	79
1991	49	26		44		119
1992						
1993					149	149
1994	48	142		9		199
1995						
1996					1	1
1997		20		37	166	223
1998	16	18				34
1999				14	25	39
2000		5		1		6
2001		3		21	7	31
2002				122	16	138
Total	139	281		316	484	1220

Periodic distribution of Common Crossbill movements 1981-2002

Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*

The European portion of this species' extensive global range extends westwards from Russia into C.Europe and Scandinavia. Most of its range to the west of Russia has been occupied only in the last hundred years and sporadic breeding has recently taken place as far west as the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region of northern France, where breeding birds occupied habitat very similar to the Downs around Dover from the late 1980s (Tombal 1996), the same time that breeding was confirmed in East Anglia (Mead 2000). The spread has since slowed but, given decent spring and summer weather, this species probably has the potential to become established as a regular breeding bird in Britain.

The only definite record for the area was a first-winter individual near the windmill on Sept.16th 1999.

Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

The recent history of the Bullfinch in the UK is one of steep decline, with losses of 62% between 1972-1996 still continuing (Mead 2000). This decline has been evident at all seasons at St.Margaret's, where small numbers of Bullfinches have bred in the area throughout the last 25 years, though numbers have fallen from five or six pairs in the 1980s to no more than one or two pairs in the last two years. Spring passage, which involved up to eight coasting birds on several occasions from early March to mid April in the 1980s, has also declined, with no more than three or four individuals having been involved in such movements each spring during the 1990s.

Although northern populations exhibit strong migratory tendencies, British and Irish Bullfinches are largely sedentary, though some autumn dispersal is evident and a bird caught at St.Margaret's in autumn and re-trapped 33km away at Whitstable confirms this. During the 1980s, Bullfinches comprised 5% of the total of birds caught and ringed, with an average of 42 individuals trapped each year, but in the most recent four years of ringing this proportion was below 1%, with an annual average of fewer than five. Some substantial movements have occurred, including 47 SW on Oct.21st 1981 and 50 on Oct.15th 1989, with five counts of 23-34 in the last week of October or the first two days of November. The largest day totals, including visibly migrating birds, regularly reached 40-50 during the 1980s and as many as 70 have been present, but all of these records were eclipsed by a count of 120 on Oct.28th 1987, including 107 flying NE over the valley. The reason for this is obscure, but may involve disruption of the birds' food supplies by the severe storm earlier in the month. Numbers occurring in the 1990s have been much lower, though sporadic movements have continued to take place, including seven arriving from off the sea on Oct.23rd 1991 and 29 on Nov.2nd 1999.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

This difficult-to-find species has probably always been patchily distributed in Britain and although it is still most numerous in the south-east, it has been in long-term decline throughout its range, a situation probably exacerbated by the storm of October 1987, which created substantial losses among its favoured food-bearing trees. Nevertheless, it remains relatively common in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region of northern France, where the population is thought to have increased slightly in the last 20 years (Tombal 1996).

At St.Margaret's, one was seen 'outside the breeding season' in 1958 (KBR). Since 1977 there have been 22 spring records, spread fairly evenly throughout the period from Mar.17th to June 3rd, with a further 15 in autumn, between Oct.2nd and Nov.13th. Although most of these involve singles, two have occurred on four occasions, with three on Oct.14th 1991 and eight on Apr.22nd 1984. The origin of these birds is unclear, but Hawfinch remains very scarce at the observatories and the South Foreland seems to be the most reliable place for this species anywhere on the Kent coast. Most records relate to birds flying over, but several have been seen in trees bordering the valley and its approach roads.

Lapland Bunting *Calcarius lapponicus*

Lapland Buntings breed in the Arctic zone of the northern hemisphere and although there is some dispute over the precise origin of birds that winter in Britain, they do so almost exclusively along the east coast, suggesting that the majority are of Scandinavian origin (Lack 1986).

There have been only two winter occurrences at St.Margaret's since 1977, involving up to two birds on the clifftop between Feb.3rd-6th 1993 and one at Bockhill on Dec.16th 1995. Appearances in spring are almost as unusual, amounting to only four singles between Mar.5th and Apr.15th in four of the last 25 years. However, Lapland Buntings are very much more regular in autumn, between Sept.7th and Nov.25th. Numbers occurring each year are highly variable, from none at all to an exceptional 102 bird-days in 1993, when large flocks were also evident on the east coast of Yorkshire and across the Channel at Cap Gris Nez. The next highest autumn total was 30 bird-days in 1985 and the annual average of 11 bird-days gives a reasonably fair reflection of how many might be expected each autumn. Small flocks of between three and five have occurred on 15 occasions, with five records of six or seven and, in the record autumn of 1993, eight on Sept.18th and 11 on Oct.2nd. Although many of these have been recorded flying along the clifftop (few have been seen over the valley), flocks regularly appear on autumn stubble, though they are often elusive and tend to move on to more favoured areas after a short while. Like Snow Buntings, which similarly breed in remote Arctic areas, some individuals can be surprisingly tame, allowing approach to within a few feet.

Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis*

The Snow Bunting is unique in breeding further north than any other land bird, occupying sparsely vegetated tundra on the fringes of the Arctic Ocean and, more closely, Greenland, Iceland and the mountains of Scotland and Scandinavia (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). Its winter distribution in southern Britain is strongly biased towards the east coast, with relatively few occurring with any regularity along the south coast (Lack 1986).

Apart from a wintering flock of up to ten in January 1977, this species was previously regarded exclusively as an autumn migrant until regular coverage commenced on the Bockhill side of the bay in 1994. Since then wintering birds have been found on the Kingsdown ranges, including three in 1998 and up to 16 in early 2000, and the first spring migrants were recorded: two on Mar.29th 1997 and four on Mar.14th 1999, all over Bockhill.

Nevertheless, Snow Buntings still occur principally in autumn, mostly in October and November, with the earliest on Sept.21st 1978. As with the previous species, annual numbers are very variable, from just one or two to an exceptional 172 bird-days in 1981, with an annual average since 1979 of 18. Largest numbers recorded in autumn include 40 on Nov.20th 1975, 21 on Nov.14th 1981, followed by 49 arriving from off the sea the next day and up to 41 on the clifftop fields during the first week of December the same year. More recently, 19 flew SW on Nov.1st 1990 and 20 were present on the fields on Nov.23rd 1999.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*

One of the principal victims of agricultural intensification throughout the UK, the Yellowhammer has declined greatly during the last 25 years, particularly in the last decade when a 60% fall in breeding numbers was evident (Mead 2000).

At St.Margaret's, the breeding population was not seriously studied during the 1980s, but recent levels of eight territories in 2000 and 2002 are clearly much lower than at that time. Numbers wintering in the area have also declined, from around a hundred, usually present between late November and the end of March each year. Even as recently as Feb.15th 1994, 208 were counted between the South Foreland and Langdon, but the story since then has been of catastrophic decline. 26 on Wanstone on Feb.7th 1998 was the biggest gathering for four years and peak numbers have not reached even this dismal level since.

The detection of migrants has always been difficult because of movements to and from roosts in the area. Nevertheless, there have been instances of migrants arriving from off the sea in spring, including two, both accompanied by a Yellow Wagtail, on Apr.24th 1984 and two on Apr.10th 1988. In autumn, prior to the recent crash, numbers tended to reach a peak during September and October, usually involving between 60-100 each autumn, with a particularly high count of 150 on Oct.29th 1977. Coasting movements were regular, though numbers were generally small, and apparent arrivals from off the sea included ten on Oct.26th 1985 and 22 on Oct.31st 1988.

Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus*

Almost 90% of European Cirl Buntings breed in France, Spain, Italy and Turkey, utilising areas where weedy fields provide winter feeding and thick bushes are present for breeding (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). Such conditions have become extremely rare in post-War Britain and its recent history has been of contraction towards the south-west. It appears to have been scarce in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region of northern France even as long ago as the 19th century (Tombal 1996).

Ticehurst (1909) considered the Cirl Bunting to be extremely local in its distribution within Kent, with the chalk country about Folkestone and Dover being the area in which it was probably most numerous. However, by the time Harrison (1953) published his review of the birds of the county, this was no longer the case and it had clearly undergone a major withdrawal from the east of the county, although a male, seen annually at St.Margaret's from 1961 to 1967 (KOS 1981), was one of the last Kentish records. It may seem rather unlikely that the same bird was involved throughout this period but the fact remains that the Cirl Bunting has not been recorded here since.

Ortolan *Emberiza hortulana*

The Ortolan prefers areas with a climate of low rainfall coupled with plenty of sunshine, where low-intensity mixed farming predominates, though in many areas of Europe where such conditions exist it has been undergoing a decline that has been evident since the 1980s. Its breeding distribution extends north-eastwards in a widening band from Spain and southern France through Italy and Greece in the south and Germany and much of Scandinavia in the north, stretching eastwards through Russia (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997).

In Kent, it is a rare but regular passage migrant that has been recorded with increasing frequency during the last 50 years, quite likely a reflection of increased observer awareness. At St.Margaret's, one was trapped on Sept.14th 1874, presumably by the Dover bird catchers, who operated on the cliffs in the Fan Bay area. More recently, one was found on Aug.29th 1981 and there have been a further 13 records since 1990, five of which have been on the Bockhill side of the bay, where regular coverage began in 1994. Of the most recent 14 records, the only one in spring was on the lighthouse lawn on Apr.22nd 1996, with the remainder in autumn, including three on Aug.28th-29th, eight between Sept.10th-23rd and singles on Oct.5th and 31st.

Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*

This rusty-cheeked bunting breeds in areas of moist dwarf birch and willow throughout the northern tundra, its range extending from north Sweden and Finland eastwards across Siberia (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). In Britain, it occurs as a rare but regular vagrant, mostly in autumn between late September and the end of October (Dymond *et al* 1989).

The Dover bird catchers trapped one on Nov.16th 1907 (Ticehurst 1909), but more recently one was seen at the top of the valley on Sept.29th 1993 and another, discovered at Bockhill on Apr.23rd 1998, was the sixth record for the county.

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Winter records are restricted to just two singles, both in early January, which is surprising, perhaps, given that Reed Buntings are known to winter in small numbers on Dover's Western Heights. However, spring reshuffling can commence as early as the last week of February, though numbers involved each year rarely reach double figures and records of five-six moving along the cliffs on Mar.9th 1990 and on Mar.23rd 1996 are the exception rather than the rule. Most migrants occur during March and early April, but some linger well into May and breeding occurred annually between 1980 and 1985, including seven singing males in June 1982, all holding territory at the edges of fields of oilseed rape. Although breeding has been confirmed only twice since then, the presence of post-breeding flocks in July and August, including 11 in mid August 1992, suggests that breeding attempts are more frequent, if not actually within our recording area.

If any single species epitomises the rather esoteric nature of autumn birdwatching at St.Margaret's, it has to be the Reed Bunting, whose flight call is almost certainly the most insignificant of all the species that regularly occur here on migration. The great majority of autumn migrants occur on a surprisingly narrow front along the clifftop, with probably no more than 10% visible from the top of the valley. It is also possible that better recognition of migrating birds has contributed to some extent to the apparent increase from an annual

average of 123 bird-days in the 1980s to 285 bird-days in the following decade. Migration begins in the first week of September, with double-figure counts possible from the middle of the month, but all counts of 20 or more – 60 since 1977 – have occurred between Sept.20th and Oct.31st. The largest, involving 11 totals of 40 or more, have been noted on or after Oct.3rd. These include 62 on Oct.10th and 201 on Oct.13th in the record year of 1998 and 76 on Oct.15th 1997, with 56 as early as Oct.3rd 1999 and 38 as late as Oct.29th 1998. Only single-figure movements have been recorded in November, however, and few have occurred beyond the middle of the month.

Corn Bunting *Miliaria calandra*

The jingling song of the Corn Bunting, once a familiar background to summer, has become increasingly scarce over the whole of the UK in the last 25 years, declining by no less than 74% in the 25 years between 1972 and 1996 and even further since (Mead 2000).

Locally, three or four pairs bred annually up to 1984, but breeding then ceased and none were present in summer during the second half of the 1980s. This would have been in addition to several pairs that occupied territories along Westcliffe Road each year. However, numbers recovered during the 1990s, reaching three territories in 1997, in addition to five along Westcliffe Road and three around Bere Farm, before declining once again to near-extinction in each of these areas early in the current decade.

These fluctuations have also been evident in the size and occurrence of post-breeding and wintering flocks. Although such gatherings were rare in the 1980s, apart from a flock of 52 at Nelson Park in September 1985, a substantial roost of up to 66 developed on Langdon Cliffs in September 1990, while good feeding conditions in autumn 1991 prompting up to 111 to remain throughout September. Up to 120 were present in February 1992, with 270 in August later the same year, and up to 224 were counted in August 1994, but hopes of a long-term recovery foundered following a peak of 68 in August 1995. The largest congregation since then involved 47 on stubble on Wanstone in August 1998, but these disappeared when ploughing took place and very few have been apparent since then.

Coasting movements in autumn have followed an unwavering downward trend, from peaks of 36-38 in early November 1982 and 1984, respectively, to a mere handful in recent autumns.

Contributors

The information contained in this account would have been impossible to collate without the contributions of the observers who have been active in the area since 1977. Some have come and gone and some of them are greatly missed, but their help and company is gratefully acknowledged. Their names, in alphabetical order, are as follows: -

Dave Allan (1996); Christine Allison (for artwork in the annual reports 1992-2002); David Anning (1989); Jonathan Barnard (1993); David Belshaw (2000-2002); Peter Burness (1977-1987); Heather Chantler (1995-2003); Jack Chantler (1988-2003); Phil Chantler (1988-2003); John Clements (1977-2003); Chris Cox (1988-2003); Dave Gilbert (1980-1983); the late Peter Grant (1978-1984); Bryn Green (2000-2003); Tony Greenland (1977-2003); Perry Haines (2001); Andy Hanby (1993-2000); Richard Heading (1988-2003); Andrew Henderson (1985); Ian Hodgson (1978-2003); Carol Inskipp (1977-1982); Tim Inskipp (1977-1982); Garth James (1990-2003); Nigel Jarman (1988-2003); Colin Johnson (1991-2003); Kevin Johnson (1992-2003); Paul Laurie (1982-1995); Roger Lawrence (1997-1999); Lucy Love (1997-2003); Mark Love (1997-2003); Ivan Macey (2000-2001); Trevor Morgan (1997-2003); Ross Newham (1998); Phil Oliver (1980-2003); Brendan Ryan (1995-2002); Gerald Segelbacher (2002); Mick Stephenson (1975-2003); Martin Sutherland (1996); Ray Turley (1977-1986); John Walton (1990); Stuart Warren (1979-1984); Peter Wells (1992-2003); Dylan Wrathall (1996-2002); Trevor Wyatt (1981-1986) and the late David Yates (1984-1985).

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Probable Escapes and Feral Birds

The names and taxonomic order of these exotica follow that used by James F. Clements in *Birds of the World: A Checklist*

PINK-BACKED PELICAN *Pelecanus rufescens*
An individual seen at Bockhill on Sept.23rd 1995 had been seen earlier in the Stour valley.

GREATER ADJUTANT *Leptoptilos dubius*
Two on Oct.11th and 13th 1981 were presumed to have originated from Howlett's Zoo Park.

SNOW GOOSE *Anser caerulescens*
One flew NE on Jan.6th 1979. It is impossible to say with certainty that this was a genuinely wild bird, but a Canadian-ringed individual was present in a winter flock in Kent and the Netherlands in 1980, so the possibility does exist.

RUDDY SHELDUCK *Tadorna ferruginea*
Three flew over clifftop fields on Sept.24th 1994.

LANNER *Falco biarmicus*
An escaped falconer's bird flew over the South Foreland valley on Oct.7th 1998 and one was seen over Nelson Park on June 18th 2001, being mobbed by a male Peregrine.

SAKER *Falco cherrug*
An individual trailing jesses flew along the cliffs on Aug.29th 1998.

COCKATIEL *Nymphicus hollandicus*
The only individuals to have been recorded were seen on Sept.22nd 1982, Apr.15th-16th 1985 and Aug.5th 1987, but this Australian species is known to have occurred more often: it and Canary *Serinus sp.* have been the most frequent escapees from captivity over the last 25 years.

EASTERN ROSELLA *Platycercus eximius*
Two were seen on the wartime building, now demolished, by the lighthouse on May 7th 1983.

BUDGERIGAR *Melopsittacus undulatus*
One was present with the Wanstone Farm House Sparrows from Sept.24th-Oct.4th 1990 and another stayed at the South Foreland from Aug.20th-Sept.2nd 1995. Without doubt this species has been seen a good deal more often.

GREY PARROT *Psittacus erithacus*
One was seen at the top of the valley on Aug.29th 1987.

COMMON/SOUTHERN HILL MYNA *Gracula religiosa/indica*
One was seen at Bockhill on Sept.30th 1995.

SUDAN GOLDEN SPARROW *Passer luteus*
A beautiful male was seen (and trapped) on Sept.11th 1988.

VILLAGE WEAVER *Ploceus cucullatus*
One, seen in a garden close to the South Foreland valley on Oct.8th 2000, appeared around the top wood the next day.

WHITE-HEADED MUNIA *Lonchura maja*
One was present between Aug.14th-16th 1980 and another was seen on Langdon Cliffs on Aug.29th 1998.

HOODED SISKIN *Carduelis magellanica*/SAFFRON SISKIN *C.siemiradzkii*
A bird resembling each of these South American species was videotaped as it visited a feeder in a garden in St.Margaret's Road in late February 2002. They are best separated by the streaked mantle of Hooded, but two of the races of that species occurring in Peru have cleaner, unstreaked backs, making identification very difficult (Clements & Shany 2001). Saffron Siskin is confined to SW Ecuador and extreme NW Peru, whereas Hooded is widespread in South America, so on the basis of distribution and abundance, it seems more likely that this bird was a Hooded Siskin, though its identification is not entirely certain.

CANARY *Serinus sp.*
The only individual to have been recorded was on May 7th 1983, but it has undoubtedly occurred more often.

YELLOW-FRONTED CANARY *Serinus mozambicus*
One was present on Wanstone from Sept.3rd-7th 1990.

RED-HEADED BUNTING *Emberiza bruniceps*
A singing male was present on Aug.19th 1978.

25 Years of Bird Ringing and Migration at St.Margaret's

Ian Hodgson, John Clements and Mark Love

Between 1978 and the end of 2002 a total of 21,069 birds were trapped and ringed in mist nets in the South Foreland valley and on Wanstone Farm at St.Margaret's, almost exclusively in autumn. While contributing to our understanding of their migratory movements, along with breeding bird surveys and visual observations ringing has played a significant part in identifying and quantifying some of the transformations in the status of many bird species in the last 25 years. For example, between them, Lesser Whitethroat and Willow Warbler comprised 20% of all birds trapped and ringed during the 1980s, but only 10% of birds caught during the 1990s were of these two species. On the other hand, the proportion of Blackcaps increased over the same period from 11% to 23%. Less extreme but still noteworthy declines occurred in the averages for each decade in the cases of Reed Warbler (down from 6% to 3%) and Bullfinch (from 5% to 3%), while Chiffchaff increased slightly, from 9% to 10%.

The introduction of tape luring in 1998 proved most effective in capturing some species, notably Lesser Redpoll, which made up 4% of birds trapped and ringed since 1999, having previously been captured only sporadically. Spectacular successes have also been achieved with Swallows and House Martins, which respond well on calm days when flocks tend to gather over the fields rather than moving directly through the area as they do on days with a light to moderate wind. There is no doubt that recent ringing totals owe a good deal to the use of tapes and such has been the decline in numbers of some migrants that it seems almost inconceivable that nearly a thousand birds were trapped annually without any such assistance more or less throughout the 1980s. Nevertheless, except in the case of Swallow and Lesser Redpoll, it is unlikely that their use has dramatically affected the proportions of each species captured since taping was introduced and both the increases and declines mentioned above have also been apparent from visual observations.

Evidence of orientation of migrating birds within the UK has also become apparent from ringing controls and recoveries. While the NW/SE orientation of Lesser Whitethroat, a species that migrates to and from East Africa via the Middle East, is hardly surprising, there is evidence that Chiffchaff, which winters south to Mediterranean regions, also orientates towards SE England to take advantage of the short sea crossing to the continent. Blackcaps exhibit a tendency to move S towards North Africa and E in the direction of Central Europe. This is thought to reflect movements of different populations; British birds that winter in places such as Morocco and Algeria, from where three recoveries of St.Margaret's have come, and immigrants from the continent that spend the winter here, suggested by individuals that have been ringed here and subsequently found in the Netherlands and Luxembourg (Wernham *et al* 2002).

Further afield, three Blackbirds ringed in Belgium give a fair indication of the origins of the large arrivals that occur here in late October and November, while Robin, Blackcap and Goldcrest have also been tracked to or from the Low Countries. The importance of the Iberian Peninsula is shown by the recovery of three Song Thrushes in Southern France, Spain and Portugal, while two Robins have made their way to Spain, where one Chiffchaff was also recovered. A northern element is evident from a Garden Warbler, ringed in August more than 900 km away in Norway and trapped here two weeks later on its way south, and a Reed Warbler, also originally ringed in Norway. Several Robins, including those mentioned above, almost certainly originated in Scandinavia and a Blackbird, ringed here in October, was found in April on its breeding grounds in Sweden, more than 1,500 km distant, two years later. It is sometimes easy to forget that parts of the UK are also pretty far away, and in a notable catch of over 200 Swallows on October 10th 1998, two birds from the Highland region of Scotland were trapped in the same nets as an individual from Wales. To date, the longest movement of any of the birds ringed locally is a Reed Warbler. Caught here one September it was found 2,131 km away in the Ksour Mountains of Algeria, at the edge of the great western desert, south of the Atlas Mountains, in June the following year.

It is tempting to focus on recoveries of birds that have moved particularly long distances and the subtle trends in direction of movement that have become evident, but some interesting instances of longevity have also come to light. Among these are a Long-tailed Tit, trapped here in 1978 and re-trapped in 1986, eight years later, having survived at least three hard winters in its lifetime, a Blackbird, ringed and re-trapped at St.Margaret's after six years, ten months (between Sept 1979 – March 1986) and a Blue Tit, ringed at St.Margaret's and re-trapped five years, eleven months later (from Oct 1991 – Sept 1997).

Birds ringed at St.Margaret's 1978-2002

	TOTAL	% of total in each decade				TOTAL	% of total in each decade		
	1978 to 2002	1978 to 1989	1990 to 1999	2000 to 2002		1978 to 2002	1978 to 1989	1990 to 1999	2000 to 2002
Sparrowhawk	13				Icterine Warbler	1			
Kestrel	5				Barred Warbler	3			
Merlin	1				Lesser Whitethroat	1017	7	3	3
Grey Partridge	1				Common Whitethroat	947	4	4	6
Woodcock	3				Garden Warbler	429	2	2	1
Herring Gull	1				Blackcap	3471	11	23	18
Stock Dove	1				Pallas's Warbler	1			
Woodpigeon	5				Yellow-browed Warbler	5			
Turtle Dove	1				Wood Warbler	4			
Cuckoo	1				Chiffchaff	1931	9	10	9
Barn Owl	1				Willow Warbler	1924	13	7	4
Tawny Owl	1				Goldcrest	994	4	6	4
Long-eared Owl	3				Firecrest	88			
Short-eared Owl	1				Spotted Flycatcher	74			
Kingfisher	2				Pied Flycatcher	59			
Wryneck	2				Bearded Tit	4			
Green Woodpecker	12				Long-tailed Tit	245			
G.S. Woodpecker	27				Coal Tit	7			
Sand Martin	10				Blue Tit	937	6	4	3
Swallow	741	-	3	10	Great Tit	264			
House Martin	187			3	Common Treecreeper	34			
Tree Pipit	9				Short-toed Treecreeper	2			
Meadow Pipit	29				Red-backed Shrike	1			
Yellow Wagtail	15				Jay	25			
Wren	592	3	3	2	Magpie	12			
Dunnock	731	4	3	3	Jackdaw	2			
Robin	1059	5	5	5	Starling	24			
Nightingale	13				House Sparrow	67			
Black Redstart	3				Tree Sparrow	49			
Common Redstart	22				Chaffinch	95			
Wheatear	1				Brambling	2			
Stonechat	1				Greenfinch	393	2	2	-
Whinchat	9				Goldfinch	289			
Ring Ouzel	20				Siskin	50			
Blackbird	821	4	4	5	Linnet	179			
Song Thrush	554	3	3	2	Lesser Redpoll	389			4
Redwing	51				Bullfinch	679	5	3	-
Mistle Thrush	3				Yellowhammer	149			
Grasshopper Warbler	25				Reed Bunting	18			
Sedge Warbler	211				Corn Bunting	2			
Marsh Warbler	76								
Reed Warbler	939	6	3	3	TOTAL BIRDS	21069	(9686)	(6914)	(4469)
					TOTAL SPECIES	81	(69)	(77)	(81)

Selected Controls and Recoveries at St.Margaret's

Kestrel	River Rother, Sussex 25.6.97	St.Margaret's 4.10.97	52 Km ENE
Swallow	Baltinore, Highland 15.8.98	St.Margaret's 10.10.98	811 Km SSE
	Loans of Tullich, Highland 24.8.98	St.Margaret's 10.10.98	811 Km SSE
	St.Margaret's 10.10.98	Clwyd, Wales 12.8.00	373 Km WNW
	St.Margaret's 28.9.02	Aude **FRANCE** 3.10.02	890 Km S
Robin	St.Margaret's 2.10.79	Moron de la Frontera **SPAIN** 1.1.80	1648 Km S
	St.Margaret's 14.10.79	Griend **NETHERLANDS** 22.4.80	223 Km ENE
	St.Margaret's 24.10.82	Sark **CHANNEL ISLANDS** 10.11.83	323 Km WSW
	St.Margaret's 4.10.97	Grazalema **SPAIN** 18.1.98	1684 Km SSW
Black Redstart	St.Margaret's 27.9.86	Dungeness 24.10.86	36 Km SW
Blackbird	Moerbeke-Waas **BELGIUM** 13.7.81	St.Margaret's 23.10.82	179 Km W
	Stabroek **BELGIUM** 4.6.79	St.Margaret's 17.10.81	210 Km W
	BELGIUM (details incomplete)	St.Margaret's 27.10.81	
	St.Margaret's 26.10.99	Uppsala **SWEDEN** 22.4.01	1510 Km NNE
Song Thrush	St.Margaret's 3.10.95	Baixo Alentejo **PORTUGAL** 11.2.96	1608 Km SW
	St.Margaret's 10.10.98	Sevilla **SPAIN** 24.11.99	1563 Km SSW
	St.Margaret's 26.9.01	Gironde **FRANCE** 8.10.02	697 Km S
Sedge Warbler	St.Margaret's 25.8.89	Seine-Maritime **FRANCE** 17.8.90	197 Km SW
Reed Warbler	St.Margaret's 2.9.85	Beni-Ounif **ALGERIA** 3.6.86	2131 Km S
	Bjerkreim **NORWAY** 24.8.97	St.Margaret's 14.9.97	872 Km SSW
Garden Warbler	Grimstad **NORWAY** 11.8.87	St.Margaret's 28.8.87	918 Km SSW
Blackcap	St.Margaret's 23.9.81	Esch-sur-Alzette	
		LUXEMBOURG 27.5.83	373 Km ESE
	St.Margaret's 20.7.86	Nador **MOROCCO** 13.10.86	1805 Km SSW
	St.Margaret's 23.9.89	Aghrib **ALGERIA** 11.11.89	1610 Km S
	St.Margaret's 12.9.93	Sint Nicolaasga	
		NETHERLANDS 26.4.96	358 Km ENE
	St.Margaret's 25.8.98	Tanger **MOROCCO** 13.7.00	1798 Km SSW
Chiffchaff	St.Margaret's 2.10.85	Alava **SPAIN** 8.4.86	969 Km SSW
Willow Warbler	Wakefield, N.Yorks 31.7.82	St.Margaret's 2.9.82	336 Km SE
	Newshott, Strathclyde 11.8.84	St.Margaret's 26.8.84	653 Km SE
	Kippo Plantation, Fife 19.6.98	St.Margaret's 23.8.98	632 Km SSE
Goldcrest	Koohuis **NETHERLANDS** 2.10.92	St.Margaret's 10.10.92	394 Km SW
Bearded Tit	St.Margaret's 27.10.78	Pett Level, Sussex 30.11.78	51 Km WSW
Blue Tit	Icklesham, Sussex 4.6.86	St.Margaret's 12.10.86	53 Km ENE
Starling	St.Margaret's 21.9.86	Wervicq-sud **FRANCE** 16.3.88	125 Km ESE
Lesser Redpoll	Sevenoaks 31.12.00	St.Margaret's 28.10.01	84 Km ESE
	St.Margaret's 20.10.01	Icklesham, Sussex	53 Km ESE
Bullfinch	St.Margaret's 19.10.80	Whitstable 12.2.84	33 Km NW

Annual Autumn Bird-day Totals of Selected Migrants

	Decade average		Annual totals in the last ten years									
	1980 to 1989	1990 to 1999	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Woodlark	1	7	24	3	3	6	13	3	3	6	8	1
Tree Pipit	70	117	346	28	206	202	10	182	42	92	52	73
Yellow Wagtail	530	849	831	460	626	455	3395	170	336	403	693	335
Grey Wagtail	46	61	164	96	87	42	30	30	51	68	58	126
Pied Wagtail	342	387	576	537	189	181	257	282	565	407	247	555
Black Redstart	15	15	7	18	27	8	11	5	9	17	44	15
Common Redstart	43	81	87	81	174	95	49	82	15	22	44	22
Whinchat	120	163	339	125	154	93	49	53	81	50	63	86
Wheatear	276	520	615	329	718	288	178	285	189	215	252	531
Ring Ouzel	29	283*	351	46	5	94	34	1854	7	109	81	52
Mistle Thrush	182	218	372	412	193	163	240	139	151	166	227	172
Sedge Warbler	60	67	156	125	95	21	11	19	22	153	60	20
Reed Warbler	227	65	80	81	94	25	47	56	64	88	119	35
Lesser Whitethroat	673	590	1365	615	979	327	292	324	278	427	260	430
Whitethroat	416	655	683	1001	1702	813	434	379	381	1182	1015	783
Garden Warbler	75	56	61	41	67	15	55	56	41	34	47	22
Blackcap	725	1285	1678	1039	1736	390	871	1563	1586	1359	1082	1029
Chiffchaff	875	954	908	1275	920	414	899	1273	887	892	822	1305
Willow Warbler	692	378	689	532	332	255	207	485	235	546	216	227
Goldcrest	855	921	1306	819	323	159	1119	345	1167	463	363	352
Firecrest	47	68	60	45	38	299	54	39	72	64	30	147
Spotted Flycatcher	124	51	49	113	76	11	50	20	26	24	27	11
Pied Flycatcher	84	29	40	55	32	35	28	8	7	4	13	21
Coal Tit	43	23	12	16	9	104	25	4	14	-	3	-
Brambling	417	308	434	339	394	164	114	418	290	64	121	143
Siskin	943	1730	4587	1276	254	2393	3063	751	975	317	2075	134
Lesser Redpoll	660	348	339	191	56	101	628	110	1021	352	1154	331
Lapland Bunting	8	16	102	8	1	-	-	16	3	7	8	11
Snow Bunting	25	18	12	-	20	17	2	15	49	2	13	4
Reed Bunting	126	285	321	241	268	207	225	601	338	188	173	294

The migrant totals for each autumn have been gained from a combination of counts of visibly migrating birds (such as Tree Pipits and Grey Wagtails), a combination of visibly migrating birds and those feeding in the area (Yellow Wagtail, for example) and counts of birds in the valley's scrub and woods or on the surrounding fields each morning (mostly chats and warblers). The counts of warblers, which because of their habits tend to be more difficult to see, have been augmented to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the species, by numbers of birds trapped and ringed whenever ringing activity has taken place.

While these bird-day totals and ringing results, already documented, overlap each other to some extent, trends in some species are better illustrated by one set of figures than the other. For example, few Tree Pipits and Grey Wagtails tend to be trapped, so the totals above are a better indication of their numbers over the last 25 years, while numbers of Robins and Wrens are difficult to estimate accurately and thus are better illustrated by ringing results.

Serious declines have been apparent in several species; notably Lesser Whitethroat, Garden Warbler, Willow Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher and Pied Flycatcher. On the other hand, there have been increases in numbers of Grey and Pied Wagtails, Common Whitethroats, Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs, while Firecrests have been more numerous in recent years and there have been notable recent influxes of Lesser Redpolls and Reed Buntings. However, the declines in numbers of Willow Warblers and Lesser Whitethroats have conspired to make August a quiet month, changing the character of autumn very considerably, with the bulk of migrants moving though in September and October, while climatic warming has tended to extend passage further into November. However, when the declines in numbers of finches are taken into account (see page 60), there is no doubt that, overall, autumn numbers have fallen dramatically since the mid 1980s.

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