

The Birds of Kench Hill and its surroundings

All of the birds listed have been recorded at Kench Hill since 2005.

Grey heron

Common visitor

This shy bird is most often seen by one or other pond early in the morning, before possible disturbance.

Mallard

Common resident

Almost always found on one or both of the ponds, although breeding success is not great. In winter, local birds bred for shooting bolster resident birds.

Red kite

Rare vagrant

With a successful re-introduction programme underway, this could be a relatively common bird here in the not too distant future. For the moment, though, this record was an unusual flyover bird.

Sparrowhawk

Common visitor

Seen either soaring high in spring displays or speeding along hedgerows, often throwing 90° turns to twist through a flock of unsuspecting birds. Piles of feathers on the lawn are often all that remains of a blackbird or collared dove that has been killed by the sparrowhawks.

Buzzard

Common visitor

A fairly large bird of prey, it is seen soaring high with broad wings held in a shallow 'V'. Often heard before seen, its 'mewing' is characteristic of hot summer days at Kench Hill.

Kestrel

Common visitor

Usually seen on a high perch, looking for prey, or distinctively hovering over long grass or hedgerows.

Hobby

Rare summer visitor

This once rare bird of prey is becoming more widespread. Nevertheless, you would be quite lucky to see this beautiful bird of prey, which resembles a large swift.

Red legged partridge

Uncommon resident

You would be lucky to see this in the grounds of Kench Hill unless you are very quiet, but occasionally they are spotted in the arable fields adjacent to the football pitch field.

Pheasant

Common resident

Often ignored as a captive-bred introduction, the male of this species, in particular, is spectacular and worth studying in detail. That is easy here, as they are very common.

Moorhen

Common resident

Always present at or close to the ponds, these pretty birds are successful breeders with 3 broods each year and part of the character of Kench Hill.

Lapwing

Uncommon visitor

Lapwings are fairly common in the low-lying land south of Kench Hill. Occasionally pass overhead en route from one wet place to another.

Whimbrel

Rare visitor

This small version of a curlew might be spotted flying over in small flocks during the spring migration.

Woodcock

Fairly common winter visitor

Most likely encountered on the drive, along hedgerows or in the plantation by the entrance, where this heavy wader with a long bill will take flight only if absolutely necessary.

Snipe

Rare winter visitor

You might be lucky and see one by a pond, along the drive or in a damp patch.

Black-headed gull

Common gull

Herring gull

Great black backed gull

Lesser black backed gull

Occasional visitors

The first two species are the most likely, but in winter any are possible.

Woodpigeon

Common resident

Often in trees or on the lawns, they also visit feeding stations. In winter, flocks several thousand strong can be seen on nearby farmland.

Stock dove

Fairly common visitor

Smaller, neater and far less common than the previous species.

Collared dove

Common resident

A beautiful long-tailed dove, with a distinctive 'wheezy' call.

Turtle dove

Summer visitor

A very good candidate for the most special bird of Kench Hill. Turtle doves are rare in large swathes of the UK, but are still found locally in parts of Kent. One of the best sounds of summer is the distinctive soft puuuuuurrrrrring of the turtle dove. 2009 were seen rarely and breeding seemed doubtful.

Cuckoo

Summer visitor

Another Kench Hill speciality. Once common, cuckoos are absent from many parts of the UK. Their call is a traditional affirmation that spring is here. Less often seen, they look like a long-tailed bird of prey.

Barn owl

Fairly common resident

There is a fair chance of seeing this brilliant bird along the drive or along the hedgerows of adjacent fields in the early morning or just before dusk. Probably the most spectacular ornithological sight at Kench Hill.

Tawny owl

Common resident

Most often heard, the female goes 'kew-wik' and the male goes 'woo-oooh'.

Little owl

Uncommon resident

Less likely to see this than other owls, but is more active in the day and can be quite bold.

Swift

Occasional summer visitor

More associated with towns, but sometimes seen in good numbers as they move around in search of food.

Kingfisher

Fairly common visitor

Most likely encountered by the early riser, the kingfisher enjoys an early morning fish before it gets too busy. Usually seen outside the breeding season.

Green woodpecker

Common resident

Most often seen feeding on the lawns, this is a large, colourful and unmistakable bird.

Great spotted woodpecker

Common resident

Listen out for its 'kek' call and keep an eye on the bird feeders for this common and spectacular bird, which breeds here in some years.

Swallow

Common summer visitor

Nesting in nearby farm buildings, swallows are a common sight and sound in the summer months, with larger numbers passing through during the autumn migration.

House martin

Fairly common summer visitor

Less common than the swallow, the house martin is nevertheless occasionally seen overhead. They have been noted inspecting the eaves of Kench Hill, possibly weighing up its suitability as a nesting site.

Pied wagtail

Fairly common resident

A breeding bird, most often seen on the roof of Kench Hill or around other man-made features, such as the basketball court.

Wren

Common resident

Seen all year round, but this tiny bird is fairly shy and skulking, although it has been known to pop indoors to hunt for spiders! Best located in spring by its loud, explosive song.

Dunnock

Common resident

Easily overlooked, these subtly pretty birds are most likely encountered in hedgerows or feeding on the ground beneath bird feeders.

Robin

Common resident

Easily recognised and seen all around Kench Hill. One pair raised a family in an old tyre in 2009.

Nightingale

Rare visitor

Worth listening out for, but thus far there is only one record of a singleton singing on two consecutive late April nights in 2009, from one of the thickets near the main road.

Blackbird

Common resident

Easily recognised and seen all around Kench Hill. Perhaps the most beautiful songster.

Fieldfare

Fairly common winter visitor

A large, noisy thrush, with its distinctive 'chuckling' call. Usually found in hedgerows, or flying overhead, flocks can be several hundred strong.

Redwing

Fairly common winter visitor

Most often found in flocks with fieldfares, it is smaller, quieter and rarely as populous at Kench Hill.

Song thrush

Fairly common resident

Breeding birds can be bolstered by larger numbers of wintering visitors.

Mistle thrush

Fairly common resident

This largest of the thrush family can be heard singing early in the season and can often be located by its rattling flight call.

Lesser whitethroat

Rare summer visitor

This skulking warbler of hedgerows and scrub can occasionally be heard singing in late spring and may occasionally breed here.

Whitethroat

Summer visitor

Larger, lankier and more noticeable than the lesser whitethroat, this jolly bird sings for large chunks of the day in spring and early summer from patches of bramble where it builds its nest. 1-2 pairs present.

Blackcap

Summer visitor

You are more likely to hear the rich, liquid warbler of the blackcap than see it in its preferred home of thick scrub. The male has a black cap, the female a reddish-brown cap.

Willow warbler

Occasional summer visitor

Its sweet, descending song can sometimes be heard from the plantation by the drive up to Kench Hill. It prefers young woodland and as the plantation matures, it is less likely to be encountered.

Chiffchaff

Fairly common summer visitor

The chiffchaff is virtually identical to the willow warbler, but it prefers older trees and is best located by its repetitive song: 'chiff chaff, chiff chaff'. As the plantation matures, it is more likely to be encountered.

Goldcrest

Fairly common resident

This smallest of all European birds is closely associated with coniferous trees. Listen for its high pitched calls and, in spring, its song like a tiny bell. Breeds in the garden, with up to 12 chicks fledging.

Spotted flycatcher

Rare summer visitor

We are really lucky to still have this bird breeding at Kench Hill as it has disappeared from much of the British countryside. It is distinctively pale and upright, flying off and returning to favoured perches in aerial search for insects. It has a habit of nesting in daft places, such as above the door of the games hut!

Blue tit

Common resident

Very common visitor to the bird feeders and occasional star of the nest box webcam. Being so common, it can be easy to take the blue tit for granted, but this is one of Europe's most beautiful birds.

Great tit

Common resident

Larger than its blue cousin, look out for the broad black stripe down its chest and listen for its song... it says 'teacher teacher teacher'!

Coal tit

Common resident

A tiny, nervous tit that rarely sits still. Look out for the large white patch on the back of its head.

Long tailed tit

Fairly common visitor

Tiny, tiny birds with very long tails, they like to hang out in groups for most of the year.

Nuthatch

Occasional visitor

Attractive, noisy birds that climb on tree trunks and branches in search of food.

Treecreeper

Fairly common visitor

A tiny bird that spirals, rather mouse-like, up tree trunks, dropping to the base of the next tree in search of insects in cracks in the bark.

Starling

Common resident

A noisy character, often overlooked and rarely appreciated. Breeds in buildings and holes in trees.

Jay

Fairly common visitor

Noisy, attractive members of the crow family.

Magpie

Common visitor

Although never too far away, magpies are nowhere near as common as they are in towns and cities.

Jackdaw

Common resident

The frequent 'jack' calls are part of the aural landscape of Kench Hill, where they nest in old trees and chimneys.

Carrion crow

Common visitor

Occasionally seen on the lawns or perched in the trees.

Rook

Rare visitor

Though rare in the grounds of Kench Hill, the surrounding countryside is full of rooks. Large flocks, mixed with jackdaws and carrion crows can be seen and heard at dawn and dusk in winter months.

House sparrow

Common resident

Good numbers are found in hedgerows and house sparrows are the commonest visitor to the bird feeders. Thankfully, the massive national reductions in populations of this once common species are not reflected at Kench Hill. Star of the webcam nest box in 2008!

Chaffinch

Common resident

Common visitors to the feeders, although they prefer to pick food on the ground beneath them. They have a lovely accelerating fruity-trill of a song.

Greenfinch

Common resident

Its distinctive wheezy and variably pretty song is redolent of long summer days at Kench Hill. Otherwise, common on prominent perches and a regular in small numbers at bird feeders.

Goldfinch

Common resident

Small parties of this beautiful bird can be seen at any time of the year and breeding has taken place.

Bullfinch

Fairly common resident

This is another speciality of Kench Hill and its surroundings, especially in winter months. In some parts of the country you can go for months on end without seeing a bullfinch. Here, the soft, plaintive call and obvious white rumps in flight are characteristic of a healthy local population.

68 species

Other birds nearby, as the crow flies:

Within walking distance:

Turn left at top of the drive onto the road, take the first path on the left down to Forstal Farm, turn left at the bottom and explore the valley's wet woodland, hedgerows and lake. The landscape opens to reveal the flatlands of the Rother Levels with wide open spaces and ditches. Additional birds to be seen on this lovely (though often muddy) walk: teal, pochard, tufted duck, green sandpiper, lesser spotted woodpecker (if you are lucky), marsh tit, siskin, redpoll, yellowhammer, reed bunting and possibly tree sparrow.

A bus or car journey away:

Within a half hour drive of Kench Hill are some of the best bird watching sites in south-east England. There is great variety and interest at all times of the year. The following list gives a flavour of what is on offer, giving just a small selection of the birds to be found at just a few of these sites:

Dungeness RSPB (15 miles):

Winter: smew, goosander, pintail, rare grebes, bittern, birds of prey

Summer: terns, hobby, garganey, little ringed plover

Migration: waders and rarities

Dungeness Bird Observatory and beach (15 miles):

Winter: rare gulls, auks and divers

Summer: shearwaters

Migration: one of the UK mainland's best spots for rarities and large numbers of migrants

Rye Harbour, East Sussex (12 miles):

Winter: bittern, merlin, golden plover, long eared owl

Summer: sandwich and little terns, Mediterranean gull, wheatear

Migration: whimbrel, other waders, yellow wagtail

Hemsted Forest (5 miles)

Summer: nightjar, woodcock, tree pipit

Park Wood (5 miles)

Summer: nightingale

Please remember to birdwatch responsibly:

- Respect the rights of landowners
- The welfare of birds must come first
- Do not damage habitats
- Do not disturb birds
- Remember that all breeding birds are protected by law

Please pass on any interesting sightings to the staff at Kench Hill.