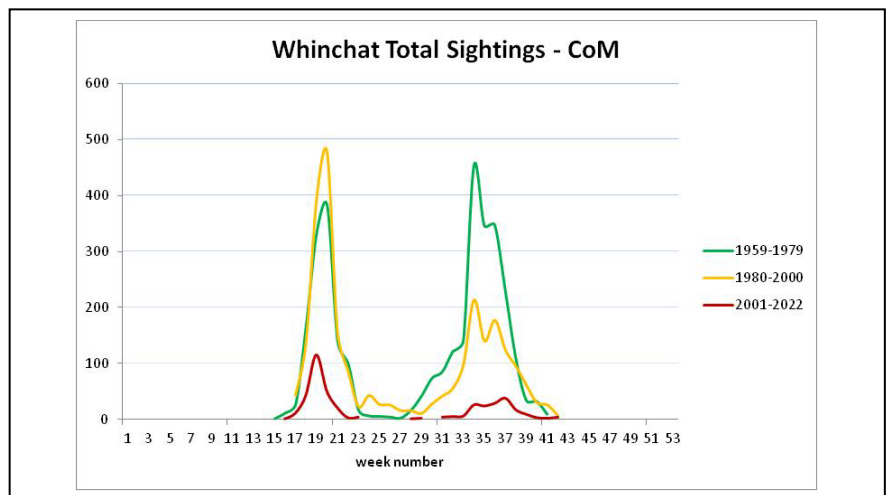
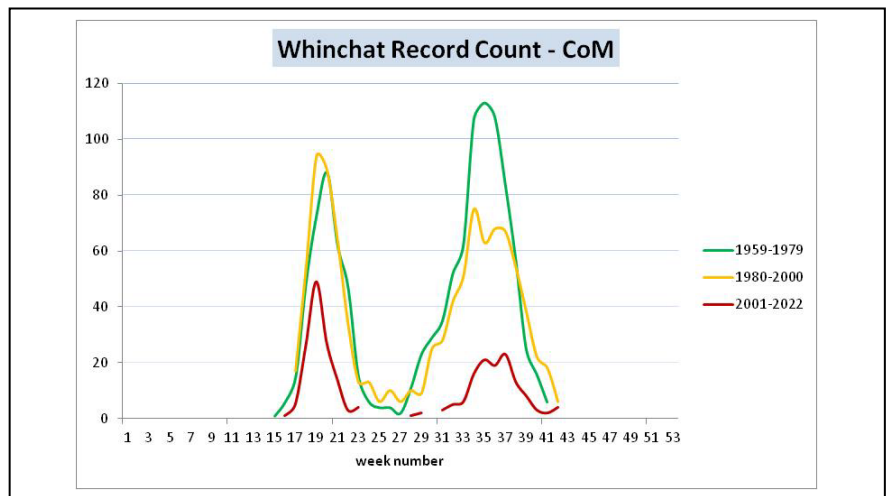


Common Name:	Whinchat
Scientific Name:	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>
Manx Name:	Eean yn aittin
BoCC IoM 21 classification:	RED
IUCN 3.1 classification:	Least concern
MBRC:	A
Legal classification:	Schedule 1

The Whinchat, once a regular passage migrant, has become increasingly scarce during both spring and autumn migrations in recent years. Historically, it was noted as a regular passage migrant, but more recent observations have shown a marked decline. Breeding was recorded in 1943 and 1957, with possible breeding in 1979 and 1990.



Data from the total sightings and annual record count graphs indicate that the Whinchat was more numerous during the earlier vicennials compared to the period from 2001 to 2022. The total sightings graph reveals a 20% increase in spring passage numbers between 1959 and 1979 compared to 1980 to 2000, but a significant 82% decrease during 2001 to 2022. substantial between 1959 and 1979, with a 45% reduction observed in 1980 to 2000. This



decline aligns with a broader contraction in range across Britain and Ireland during the 1970s and 1980s, contrary to the Manx Bird Atlas, which suggested no clear change in passage volume over recent decades. In fact, Calf data shows a consistent downward trend in autumn passage since 1989 and spring migration since 1995, worsening through the 2001 to 2022 period with a further reduction of up to 85%.

Wintering grounds for British and Irish Whinchats remain speculative, likely lying towards the western part of their African range, with records from grasslands north of the Congo from late October to early April (Wernham et al, 2002). On the Calf, spring passage typically starts in mid-April (weeks 16–17), with records occurring in April in 45 years of this review, the earliest being on April 9, 1963. Peak passage usually occurs in May, with 12 of the 14 highest counts recorded during this month. Occasionally, migration extends into June, with records in 27 years and an exceptional 29 records in June 1982. That year saw a particularly late spring migration, with no April records and a peak count of 20 on June 7—the highest June count on record.

The Whinchat has been confirmed to breed twice on the Calf: a pair with young was observed on June 12, 1943, and a brood of four was seen near the nest on June 26, 1957. Additionally, a male sang in the Glen for a few days in June 1979, and in 1990, two very young juveniles were caught on July 30 and August 3. Given the absence of adult birds, these juveniles were likely hatched elsewhere and dispersed to the Calf.

The breeding history of the Whinchat on the Isle of Man has been inconsistent. While Kermode and Ralfe thought the species did not breed, Madoc suspected it might in small numbers. Cullen & Jennings (1986) reported a few breeding records throughout the 20th century, noting that regular breeding occurred in the late 1970s and early 1980s, particularly in the Laxey valley. Surprisingly, the Manx Bird Atlas survey revealed a small, thriving breeding population of around 60 pairs. However, this was interpreted as unlikely to represent a recent major increase, given that Whinchats were more widespread and abundant in Britain at that time. Unfortunately, the current status has worsened, with Sharpe (2022) noting only one breeding record between 2017 and 2020, suggesting the Whinchat may soon be a "former breeder" on the Manx list.

Records in July were relatively common from 1959 to 1979, with 86 records across 15 years. In the 1980 to 2000 period, sightings were similar but reduced by 22% to 67 records. Between 2001 and 2022, records were even scarcer, with only single records from five years. This decline reflects the dwindling breeding population, with autumn migration peaking between mid-August and mid-September. Although peak counts in autumn are generally lower than in spring, the passage often extends longer, sometimes resulting in higher overall numbers. From 1959 to 1979, autumn passage was 41% greater than spring, with spring surpassing autumn in only five of 21 years. In the 1980 to 2000 period, autumn records exceeded spring by 32%, but spring had 21% more bird-days with stronger passage in 12 years. From 2001 to 2022, spring and autumn records were equal, but spring bird-days were 31% higher, with 14 years showing stronger spring passage. The decline in both autumn records and bird-days suggests reduced breeding numbers and/or poor productivity, leading to fewer birds passing through the Calf in autumn.

Table 1 illustrates the volume of Whinchat passage during spring and autumn between 1959 – 2022.

	1959 – 1979	1980 – 2000	2001 – 2022
Spring records	371	398	129
Autum records	731	580	129
Spring bird-days	1193	1427	250
Autumn bird-days	2040	1128	173
Average birds per record (spring)	3.2	3.5	1.9
Average birds per record (autumn)	2.8	1.9	1.3

Accumulative monthly total of records (1959 – 2022):

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
			100	721	77	158	672	556	51	3	

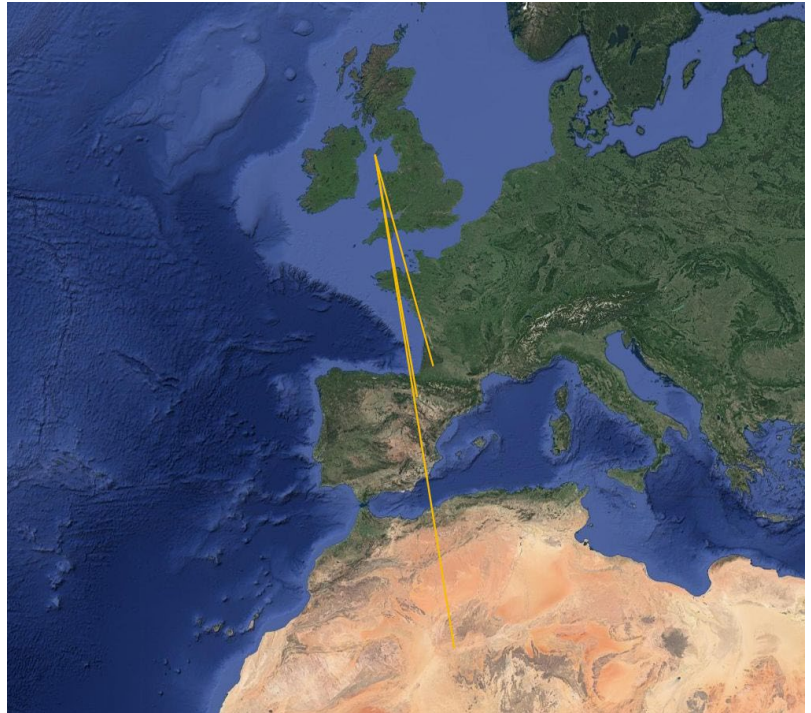
Between 1959 and 2022, a total of 2,328 records were generated. Nearly half of these records (49%) were of single birds, while another 972 records (42%) involved counts of between 2 – 5 birds. There were 58 occasions where counts ranged from 6 – 15 birds, and an additional 13 occasions with counts between 17 – 30 birds. The top five counts recorded were 75 on 11th May 1993, 50 on both 12th May 1965 and 12th May 1993, and 40 on both 5th May 1972 and 19th August 1966.

A total of 763 Whinchat have been ringed on the Calf between 1959 – 2022, with the following reports:

Whinchat	ALGERIA	FRANCE	SPAIN	Grand Total
Recoveries (yellow)	1	1	1	3
Controls (red)	0	0	0	0

The number of recoveries for Whinchats ringed by the BTO is notably low, reflecting the broader decline in the British lowland Whinchat population and a consequent reduction in ringing efforts in recent years (MA). This trend is evident in the Calf data, where the average number of Whinchats ringed annually fell from 16 per year up to the end of the 20th century to just 3.4 per year between 2001 and 2022. Unremarkably, all three recoveries of Calf-ringed Whinchats occurred before 1977.

The first recovery involved a 1st winter bird ringed in August 1963, which was found just 10 days later in Navarra, Spain (1316 km). This aligns with other BTO recoveries in southwest France and northern Spain, suggesting these areas may serve as initial stopover points for migrating Whinchats leaving the British Isles (Wernham, 2002).



The other two recoveries were from birds ringed in May 1970 and August 1975. The May 1970 bird was reported in early April 1971 in Adrar, Algeria (2979 km), approximately 10 months and 24 days later, while the August 1975 bird was found dead in Landes, France (1104 km), about nine months and two days after ringing. These recoveries illustrate the timing and progress of the northward spring migration of Whinchats.

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