

Whitethroat

Sylvia communis

Category A

Breeding summer visitor and passage migrant.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds across most of Europe eastwards to Lake Baikal and south to the Mediterranean Sea and northern Iran. Winters in sub-Saharan Africa, from Senegal east to Ethiopia and south to South Africa.

Kent status (KOS 2021):

In Kent it is a widespread and increasing summer visitor and passage migrant.



Whitethroat at Princes Parade (Brian Harper)

The Whitethroat was included in Knight and Tolputt's "List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood" (1871). This list covered an area of six miles radius from Folkestone town hall, therefore extending further inland than the current Folkestone and Hythe area, so this does not provide conclusive evidence of its occurrence here. However, Ticehurst (1909) considered that it was "not only the most generally distributed but also the commonest of the warblers that visit Kent", being "found everywhere where there are tangles of coarse herbage, nettles and brambles, in the gardens, orchards and woodlands, as well as in the thorn hedges and bushes of the marshlands" so there can be little doubt that it was common and widespread locally.

Breeding atlas distribution

Figure 1 shows the breeding distribution by tetrad based on the results of the 2007-13 BTO/KOS atlas fieldwork.

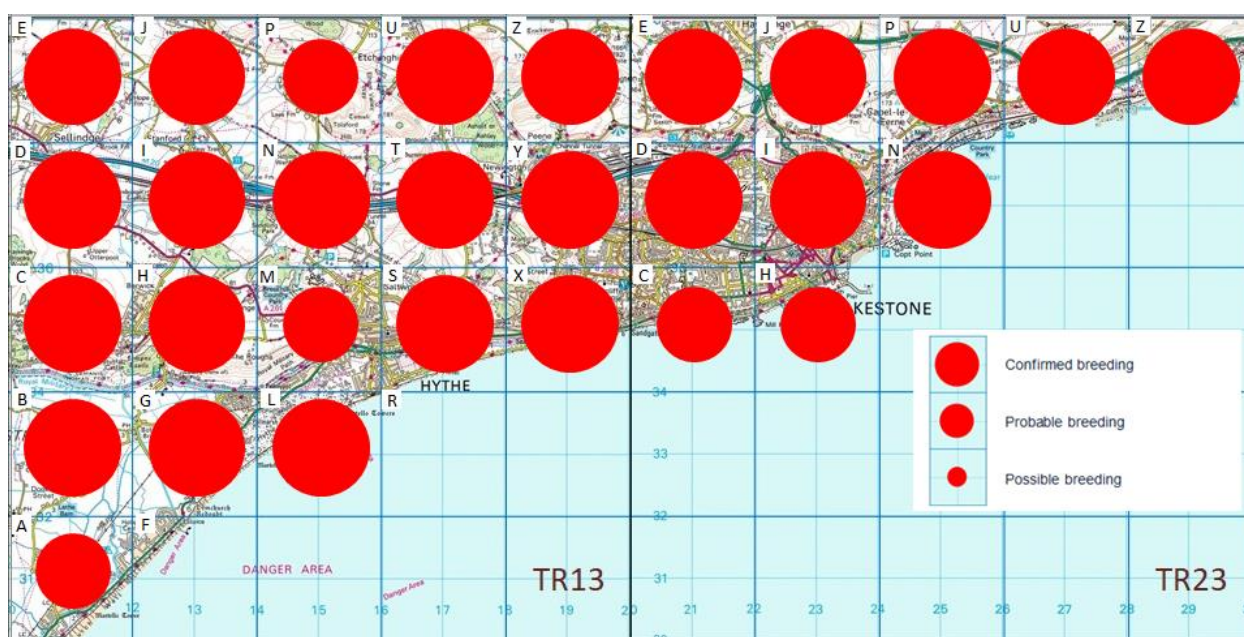


Figure 1: Breeding distribution of Whitethroat at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in 24 tetrads, with probable breeding in five more. The table below shows how this compares to previous atlases (Taylor *et al.* 1981; Henderson & Hodge 1998). The confirmed and probable breeding categories have been combined to account for differing definitions of these in the first atlas.

Breeding atlases	1967 - 1973		1988 - 1994		2007 - 2013	
Possible	0	(0%)	0	(0%)	0	(0%)
Probable/Confirmed	20	(65%)	28	(90%)	29	(94%)
Total	20	(65%)	28	(90%)	29	(94%)
Change			+8	(+40%)	+1	(+4%)

The table below shows the changes in tetrad occupancy across the three atlas periods.

Trends	First to second atlas (1967-73 to 1988-94)	Second to third atlas (1988-94 to 2007-13)	First to third atlas (1967-73 to 2007-13)
Local	+40%	+4%	+45%
Kent	+43%	+8%	+54%

There was a dramatic crash in Whitethroat numbers between the 1968 and 1969 breeding seasons, almost certainly due to prolonged drought in the Sahel region of Africa through which they migrate. This would appear to have adversely affected the results of the first county atlas, when it was found in only 65% of tetrads locally. The second county atlas showed a marked recovery which continued into the most recent period, with a 7% increase in occupied tetrads across the county (4% locally). Clements *et al.* (2015) noted that it now appears to be present in every hedgerow and woodland edge in Kent, even occupying tetrads in coastal areas and on Romney Marsh where few other passerines are present.

Overall distribution

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of Whitethroat by tetrad, with records in 29 tetrads (94%).

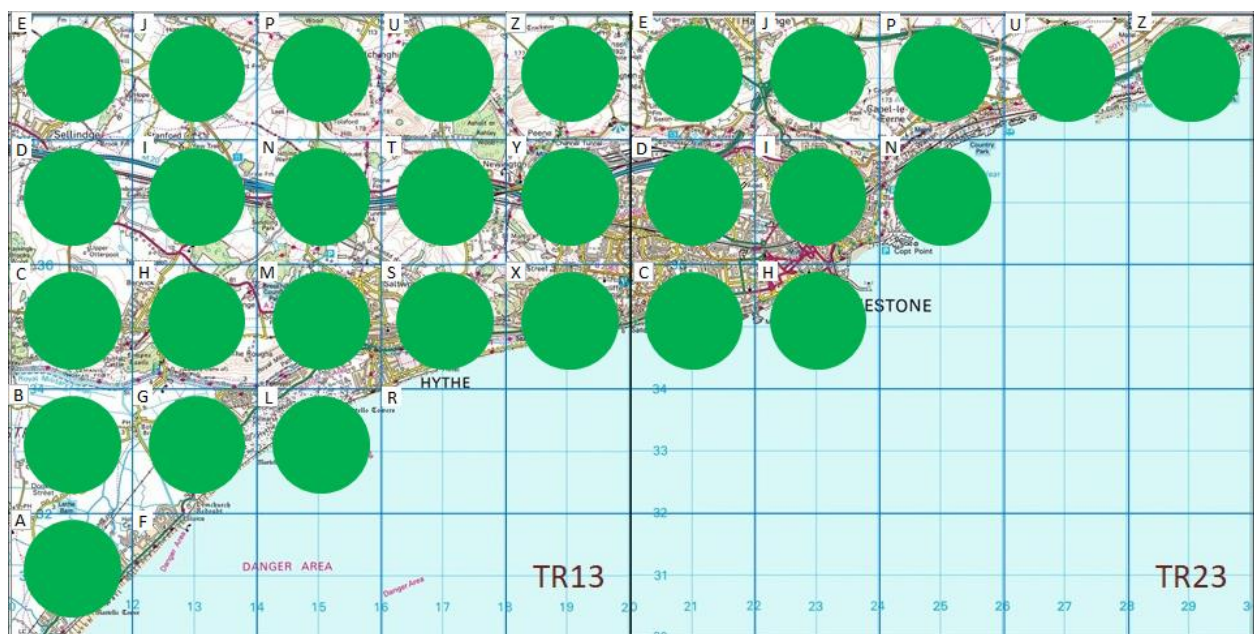


Figure 2: Distribution of all Whitethroat records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad



Whitethroat at Creteway Down (Brian Harper)



Whitethroat at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)

The earliest ever arrival involved one at Nickolls Quarry on the 30th March 2002, whilst the only other record in that month was at the same site on the 31st March 2021. The next earliest arrivals were at Princes Parade on the 3rd April 2011 and at Nickolls Quarry on the 4th April 1999, whilst the mean arrival date over the last decade has been the 9th April.

Spring arrivals in excess of 20 have been noted on seven occasions: 21 at Abbotscliffe on the 13th May 1992, a total of 95 at the cliffs (35 at Abbotscliffe and 60 at Capel Battery) on the 27th April 1997, a total of 65 at the cliffs (25 at Abbotscliffe and 40 at Capel Battery) on the 3rd May 1999, 30 at Capel Battery on the 9th May 1999 and 25 there on the 27th April 2000, 7th May 2000 and 1st May 2004.



Whitethroat at Princes Parade (Brian Harper)



Whitethroat at Capel Battery (Brian Harper)

Autumn passage can be noted from late July, with an early count of 24 at Abbotscliffe on the 24th July 2019. Counts of 25 or more have been logged as follows:

25 at Abbotscliffe on the 19th to 21st August 1993, with 30 there on the 26th August
49 at Capel Battery on the 21st August 1994
28 at Capel Battery on the 23rd August 1995
29 at Capel Battery on the 19th September 1995
45 at Capel Battery on the 14th August 1996, with up to 30 on several dates to the 1st September
25 at Capel Battery on the 11th and 16th August 1998
At least 130 across the area on the 1st September 2015, including 50 at Capel Battery and Samphire Hoe
25 at Abbotscliffe on the 24th August 2017
36 at Abbotscliffe on the 15th August 2021

The last sighting is typically in the first week of October, with a mean departure date over the last decade of the 4th October, and the only records in the second week of the month have involved one at Abbotscliffe on the 8th October 2021, one at West Hythe on the 9th October 1985, one at Hythe Ranges on the 9th October 1992, two at Abbotscliffe on the 10th October 1998 and one at Abbotscliffe on the 13th October 2019. A particularly late individual was seen at Beachborough Lakes on the 19th October 2016.

Click [here](#) to listen to a local recording of one singing at Botolph's Bridge Road on the 13th April 2022 (Ian Roberts).

References

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Whitethroat at Pond Hill Road (Brian Harper)



Whitethroat at Princes Parade (Nigel Webster)



Whitethroat at Princes Parade (Brian Harper)



Whitethroat at Princes Parade (Brian Harper)

Acknowledgements

The tetrad map images were produced from the Ordnance Survey [Get-a-map service](http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/get-a-map) and are reproduced with kind permission of [Ordnance Survey](http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk). I am indebted to Andrew Henderson and Tim Hodge for providing access to the Kent Ornithological Society archives.