

Starling

Sturnus vulgaris

Category A

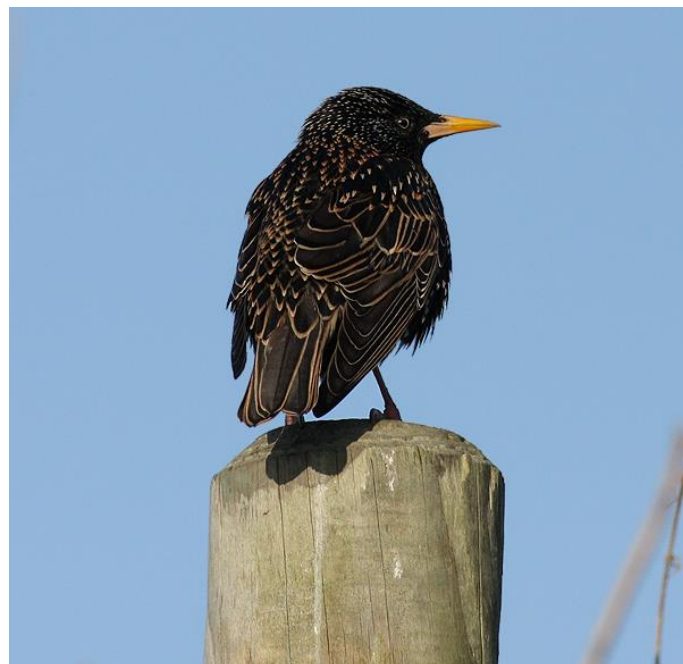
Breeding resident, winter visitor and passage migrant.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds throughout Europe (except in Spain and some southern parts of Italy and Greece) and Asia east to the Baikal region and south to eastern Tien Shan, also from Iran to Pakistan. It has been introduced and is now widespread in North America, southern Africa and Australia. It is generally migratory in the north and east of its range, and a partial migrant or resident in the south and west. Migrant populations winter in western and southern Europe, northern Africa, Arabia, Iran and northern India.

Kent status (KOS 2021):

In Kent it is an abundant and widespread but declining breeding species, also a passage migrant and winter visitor.



Starling at Seabrook (Brian Harper)

The Starling 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 it to be "an abundant species throughout the county", being "almost as common in town as in country, and breeding in numbers about every farm and cottage, both in the wooded districts and in the marshes", so there can be little doubt that it was to be found locally.

Breeding atlas distribution

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

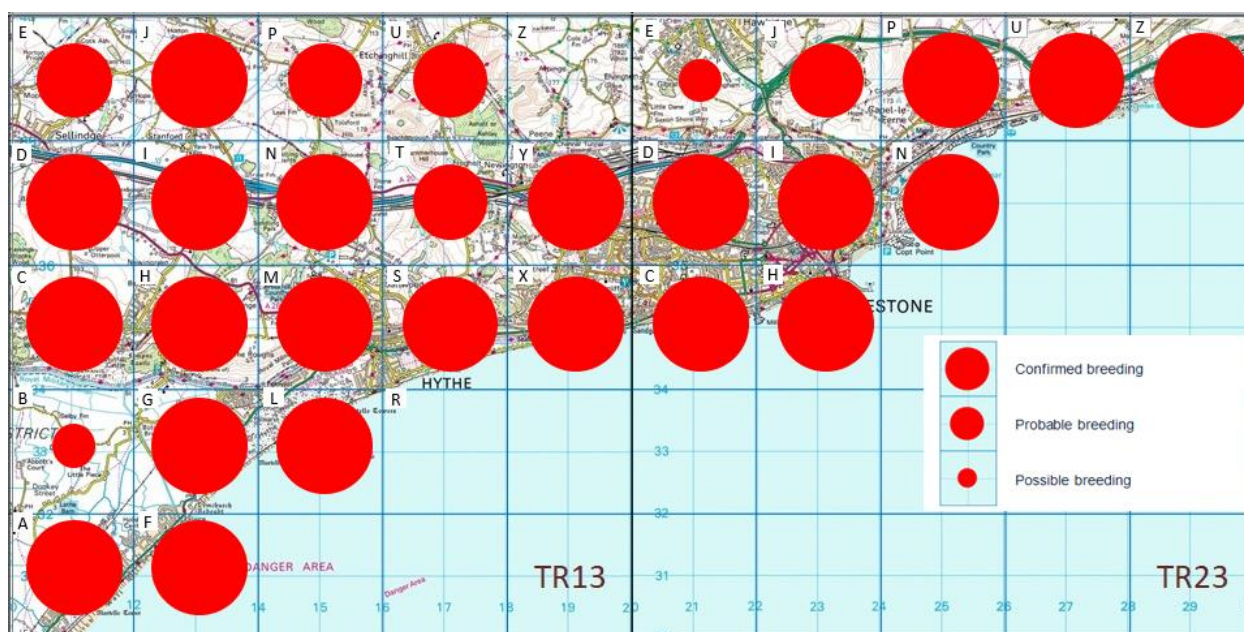


Figure 1: Breeding distribution of Starling at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in 22 tetrads, with probable breeding in five more and possible breeding in two others. 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%)	2	(6%)
Probable/Confirmed	28	(90%)	30	(97%)	27	(87%)
Total	28	(90%)	30	(97%)	29	(94%)
Change			+2	(+7%)	-1	(-3%)

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	+7%	-3%	+4%
Kent	+7%	-2%	+5%

The Starling was listed as being of “red” concern by Eaton *et al.* (2015) due to a severe decline in the UK breeding population over both the moderate and longer-term periods and Harris *et al.* (2020) reported a 61% decrease in the national population and a 65% decrease across South-east England.

Whilst a range contraction has been noted in Scotland, Wales and south-west England (Balmer *et al.* 2013) it remains a widespread breeding species in Kent, with only a small (1.8%) reduction in occupied tetrads (Clements *et al.* 2015). Locally the distribution has decreased by one tetrad (3.3%) which does not reflect the significant reduction in breeding population. Some sites have seen dramatic losses, for example a breeding bird survey at Brockhill Country Park in 2021 found it to be absent as a breeding species, whereas an earlier survey (in 2003) had found 15 territories within the park. Clements *et al.* stated that most losses in Kent had been in woodland areas (rather than urban areas) and cited good evidence that changes in agricultural practice, including conversion of grassland to cereals, have caused a major reduction in food resources.

Overall distribution

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of Starling by tetrad, with records in 30 tetrads (97%).

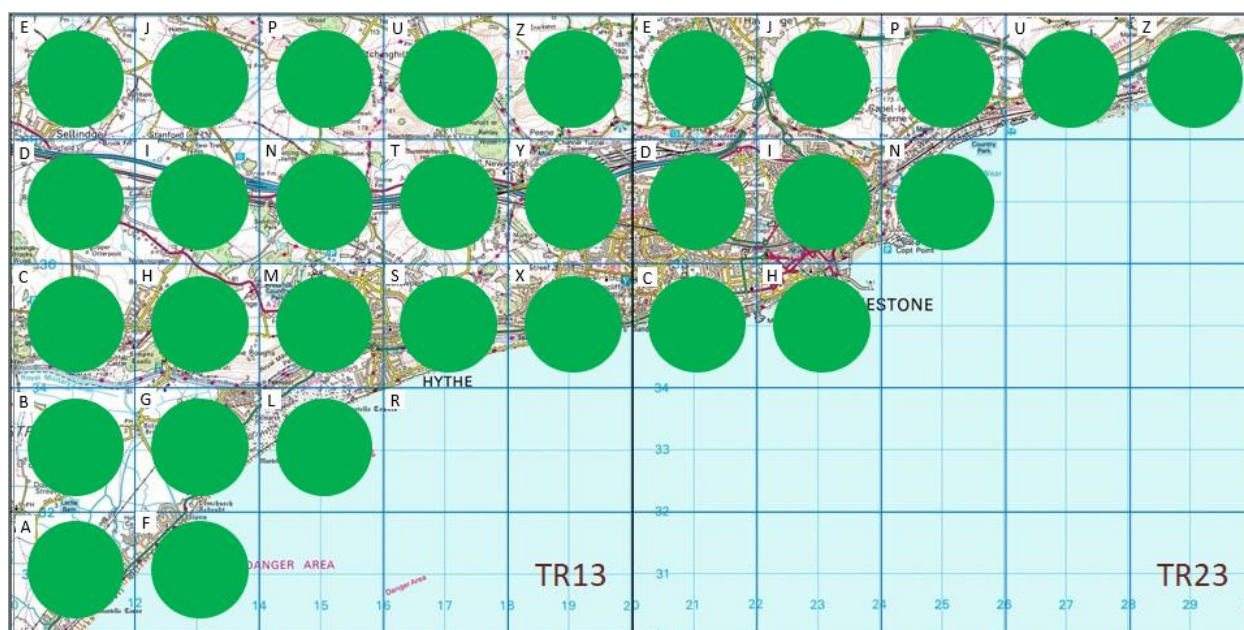


Figure 2: Distribution of all Starling records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

After fledging around mid-May, it quickly forms post-breeding flocks. The earliest count in excess of 50 involved 65 at Hythe Ranges on the 22nd May 2016, whilst c.200 had accumulated at Little Switzerland (in Folkestone Warren) by the 31st May 2001.

Flocks tend to increase during June, with around 250 at Abbotscliffe on the 3rd June 2000 (later increasing to c.600 by the 18th June), at least 300 at Hythe Ranges on the 6th June 2021, 400 in fields north of Nickolls Quarry on the 14th June 2021 and c.1,000 in a rape field near Botolph's Bridge on the 23rd June 2002.

Some dispersal follows and flocks diminish over the summer, when counts of 200 or more are noteworthy. A flock of 380 were at Hougham Court on the 27th July 2010, whilst Samphire regularly holds between 200 and 300 between July and early September.

Autumn passage may be noted from late September, when 220 flew west at Abbotscliffe on the 23rd September 2000, with 295 flying west there on the 25th September 2000, but peaks in October or the first half of November, when movements in excess of 1,000 have been noted on a number of occasions:

- 1,100 north-west at Hythe Ranges on the 2nd October 1957
- 1,420 in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 13th October 1998
- 1,690 in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 15th October 1998
- 1,030 in/west at Abbotscliffe on the 19th October 1998
- 1,800 in off the sea at Abbotscliffe 7th November 1998
- 1,125 in off the sea (with 550 present) at Abbotscliffe on the 17th November 1998
- 1,600 in/west at Abbotscliffe on the 5th October 1999
- 2,460 in off the sea at Copt Point on the 2nd November 2000
- 4,200 in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 28th October 2001
- 1,810 in/west at Abbotscliffe on the 2nd November 2001
- 3,000 in off the sea at Hythe Ranges on the 5th November 2002
- 1,300 present (with 420 in off the sea) at Abbotscliffe on the 11th October 2003
- 1,825 in/west (with 100 present) at Abbotscliffe on the 18th October 2003
- c.3,000 (in one flock) in off the sea at Copt Point on the 19th October 2006
- 1,735 in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 4th November 2006
- 1,500 in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 14th October 2009
- 1,430 in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 1st November 2010
- 2,000 in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 11th November 2012
- 2,500 in off the sea at Hythe Ranges on the 29th October 2017
- 5,000+ (in one flock) in off the sea at Folkestone Harbour on the 13th October 2019

The largest count from this time of year however relates to a record of "at least 20,000 in two fields at Folkestone" on the 12th November 1966.



Starling at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



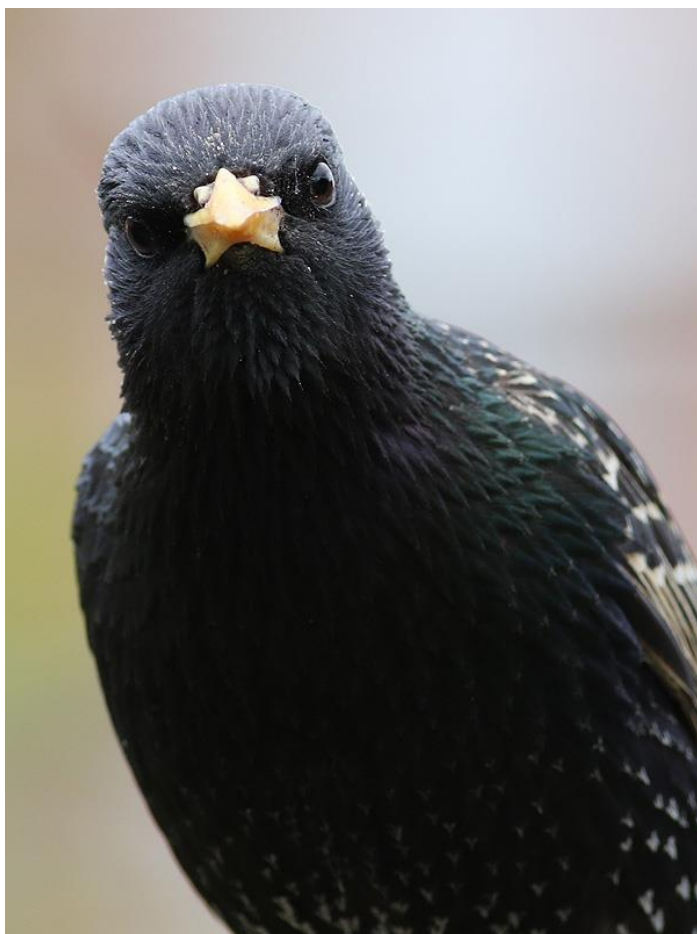
Starling at Seabrook (Paul Howe)

Winter roosts are generally small and only occasionally exceed 500. In late December 2016 a murmuration of around 1,000 was seen over Folkestone and steadily increased during January 2017 to a peak of at least 6,000 on the 20th January, with these birds found to be roosting in Holm Oaks in Pleydell Gardens. At least 5,000 remained until the 4th February before the trees were unfortunately pollarded by the local council to disperse the roost.

During a period of severe weather in early 2021 there was a huge murmuration and roost of around 10,000 birds at the Willop Sewage Works on the 10th February 2021. The only other large winter counts have involved c.750 feeding near the Willop Sewage Works on the 7th February 2020 and a flock of about 2,000 flying east along Hythe seafront in the early morning of the 21st February 2018.

Spring passage has mainly been noted in March, with peak numbers in the last week of the month. Movements in excess of 1,000 have been noted as follows:

c.2,500 east at Hythe Ranges on the 28th March 1958
c.2,500 east at Hythe Ranges on the 31st March 1958
5,100 east at Hythe Ranges on the 23rd March 1960
5,600 east at Hythe Ranges on the 24th March 1960
1,300 west at Abbotscliffe on the 8th March 1997
1,275 north-east at Saltwood on the 11th March 2012



Starling at Cheriton (Brian Harper)



Starling at Palmarsh (Brian Harper)

Taylor *et al.* cited “a typical ringing recovery, from the easternmost limits” concerning a nestling ringed at Gryozovets, c.400km north-east of Moscow (58°N, 40°E) in Russia in May 1959 and killed at Hythe in February 1961 (having travelled over 2,500km).

To watch a video clip of the murmuration at Folkestone in winter 2016/17 click on one of the links below:

[Starling murmuration, Folkestone, 31st Dec 2016 \(John Tomlinson\)](#)

[Starling murmuration, Folkestone, 19th Jan 2017 \(Brian Harper\)](#)

[Starling murmuration, Folkestone, 20th Jan 2017 #1 \(Ian Roberts\)](#)

[Starling murmuration, Folkestone, 20th Jan 2017 #2 \(Ian Roberts\)](#)

References

- Balmer, D., Gillings, S., Caffrey, B., Swann, B., Downie, I & Fuller, R. 2013. *Bird Atlas 2007-11: The Breeding and Wintering Birds of Britain and Ireland*. British Trust for Ornithology.
- Clements, R., Orchard, M., McCanch, N. & Wood, S. 2015. *Kent Breeding Bird Atlas 2008-13*. Kent Ornithological Society.
- Eaton, M.A., Aebischer, N.J., Brown, A.F., Hearn, R.D., Lock, L., Musgrove, A.J., Noble, D.G., Stroud, D.A. & Gregory, R.D. 2015. Birds of Conservation Concern 4: the population status of birds in the United Kingdom, Channel Islands and Isle of Man. *British Birds* 108: 708–746.
- Harris, S.J., Massimino, D., Balmer, D.E., Eaton, M.A., Noble, D.G., Pearce-Higgins, J.W., Woodcock, P. & Gillings, S. 2020. The Breeding Bird Survey 2019. British Trust for Ornithology. Available at: www.bto.org/our-science/publications/breeding-bird-survey-report/breeding-bird-survey-2019
- Henderson, A. & Hodge, T. 1998. The Kent Breeding Bird Atlas 1988-94. *Kent Bird Report* 1996: 134-272.
- Kent Ornithological Society (KOS). 1953-2021. *Kent Bird Reports*. Kent Ornithological Society.
- Knight, V. & Tolputt, F. 1871. List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood. *Fourth Annual Report of the Folkestone Natural History Society*. Available at: www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/46103
- Snow, D. & Perrins, C.M. 1998. *The Birds of the Western Palearctic*. Oxford University Press.
- Taylor, D., Davenport, D. & Flegg, J. 1981. *Birds of Kent*. Kent Ornithological Society.
- Ticehurst, N. F. 1909. *A History of the Birds of Kent*. Witherby, London.



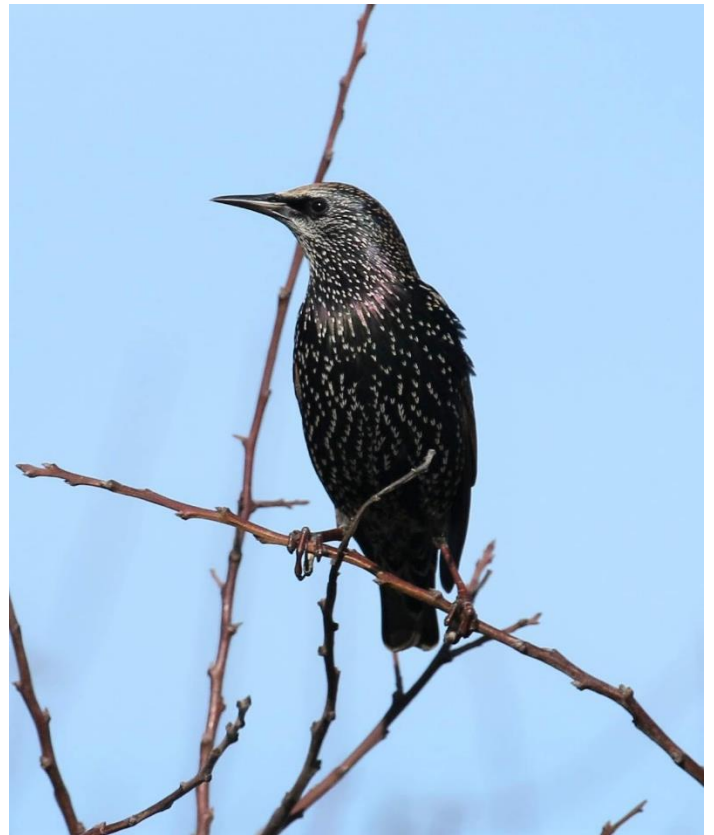
Starlings at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)

Acknowledgements

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



Starling at Cheriton (Brian Harper)



Starling at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



Starlings at Folkestone (Brian Harper)



Starlings at Folkestone (Brian Harper)



Starlings at Folkestone (David Featherbe)