

Kestrel

Falco tinnunculus

Category A, E

Breeding resident and passage migrant.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

A widespread breeding species throughout Europe, much of Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Northern and eastern populations are mainly migratory (with some even crossing the Sahara), but more southerly birds are partially migratory or dispersive.

Kent status (KOS 2021):

It is a widespread resident in Kent and a passage migrant in variable numbers.



Kestrel at Mill Point (Tony Poole)

The Kestrel 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 "the most common of all the hawks are found in Kent, and is sparingly distributed throughout the county", 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 Kestrel at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in two tetrads, with probable breeding in five more and possible breeding in 15 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	2	(6%)	15	(48%)	15	(48%)
Probable/Confirmed	12	(39%)	6	(19%)	7	(23%)
Total	14	(45%)	21	(68%)	22	(71%)
Change			+7	(+50%)	+1	(+5%)

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	+50%	+5%	+57%
Kent	+84%	+14%	+111%

Kestrels, like many raptors, were heavily affected by pesticide poisoning in the 1950s and there was a dramatic collapse in numbers in Kent, so that in 1962 there were no records of breeding in the county. A recovery was noted later in the 1960s and Taylor *et al.* reported that by 1968 the species had virtually re-established itself, making full use of the new motorway verges. It seems likely however that at the time of the first atlas the species was still recovering locally, being recorded in less than half of the tetrads, compared to around 70% in later atlases.

The results of the second and third atlas surveys were remarkably similar, suggesting very little change in status, however Clements *et al.* (2015) commented on evidence of a shallow decline in south-east England and the latest Kent Bird Report stated that any decline in the county may be masked by a lack of systematic surveys.



Kestrel at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



Kestrel at Cinderella Farm, Burmarsh Road (Ian Roberts)



Kestrel at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)



Kestrel at the Willop Basin (Brian Harper)

Overall distribution

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

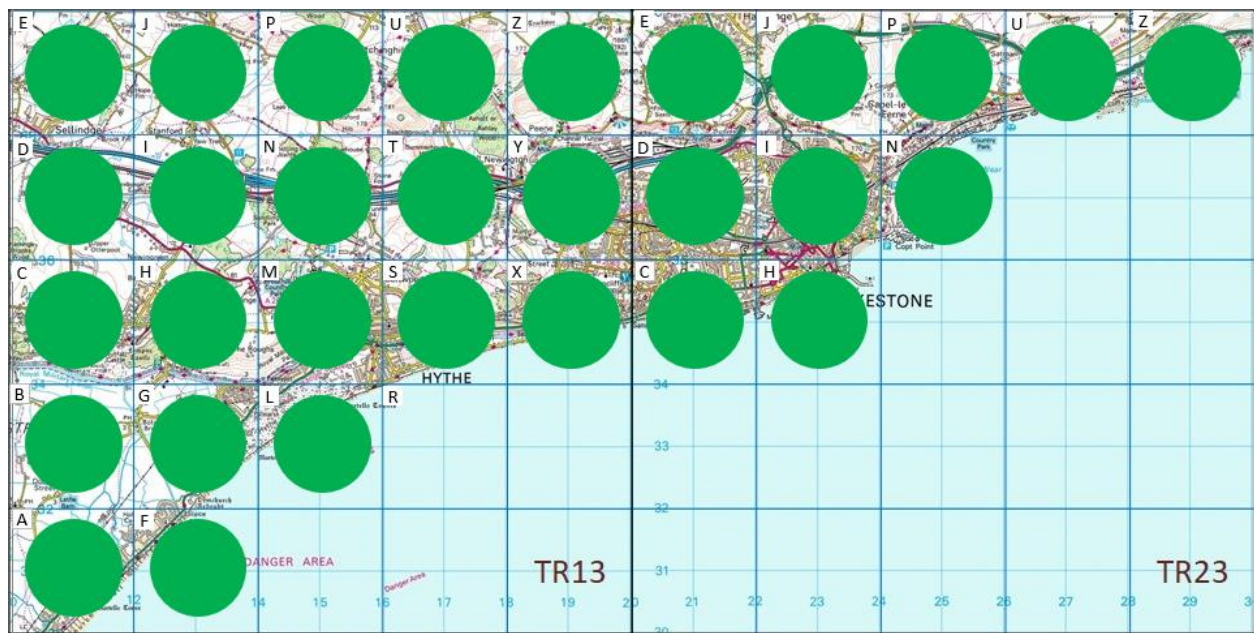


Figure 2: Distribution of all Kestrel records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Highest counts occur in the autumn, when the post-breeding population is at its highest and numbers may be increased by migrants. The largest count to date involved a total of 27 flying west at Abbotscliffe on the 12th October 1998 (at a time of pronounced passage in the county), with 15 seen there a week later on the 19th October 1998. There was a count of 12 at the same site on the 23rd September 2000, with 15 at Samphire on the 9th October 2008 and 13 there on the 16th September 2018. The only double-figure count away from the cliffs related to 11 at Nickolls Quarry on the 10th February 1996.

Small numbers of migrants are typically noted in March/April and September/October.



Kestrel at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)



Kestrel at West Hythe (Brian Harper)

An apparently escaped individual (bearing jesses) was present at Capel Battery for a couple of weeks in September 1992.



Kestrel at Samphire Hoe (Paul Holt)



Kestrel at Princes Parade (Brian Harper)

References

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Acknowledgements

The tetrad map images were produced from the Ordnance Survey [Get-a-map service](#) and are reproduced with kind permission of [Ordnance Survey](#).

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