

Greylag Goose

Anser anser

Category A, C2, C4

Formerly a rare winter visitor and passage migrant but now frequently recorded throughout the year, with most birds thought to originate from an increasing introduced population. Has bred in recent years.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds mainly across northern and middle latitudes in Europe and Asia, east to the Pacific coast. It underwent a widespread increase throughout its north-west and central European range during the twentieth century, with increases in part due to introduced birds. Populations in northern and central Europe are migratory but the British population is generally fairly sedentary.

Kent status (KOS 2021):

There is an increasingly widespread feral population in Kent. It is also a scarce migrant, with occasional winter influxes of wild birds.

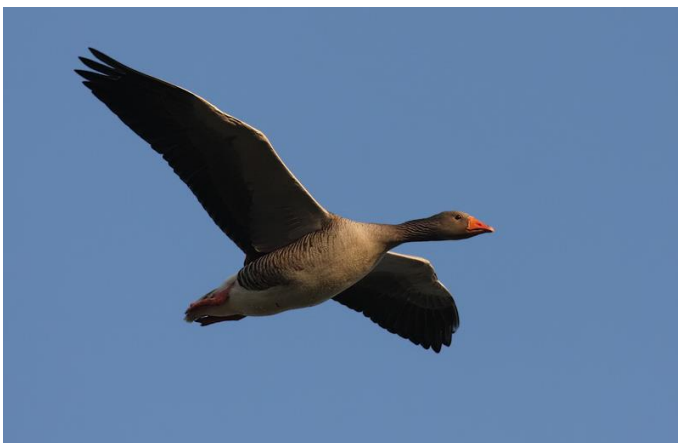
The Greylag Goose was not included in Knight and Tolputt's "List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood" (1871), whilst Ticehurst (1909) was unable to locate any documented records in the county, stating that "it is well-known that the Greylag is the least numerous of the grey geese on the south coast of England generally, so that it is most probable that it is in reality one of the rarest visitors to Kent, and it appears to be entirely unrepresented in the local museums and collections". He did lament however that many grey geese "went into the pot" unidentified.

Harrison (1953) was able to document the first acceptable occurrence in the county in 1925 and thereafter it became an almost annual winter visitor and passage migrant, with most records on the north Kent marshes in the winter period and very few on Romney Marsh, whilst most east Kent records concerned passage migrants.

Taylor *et al.* (1981) reported that Greylag Geese were first introduced into the county in 1963, at the Sevenoaks reserve, with further releases at Dungeness in 1968, Westbere in 1969 and south Medway in 1970, and these went on to establish a successful feral population, which continues to increase as it does elsewhere in Britain, and Mitchell *et al.* (2012) proposed that (for conservation management purposes) the remnant native Scottish and more widespread feral populations should be merged to form a new British Greylag Goose population. As a result of recent large increases in the abundance and distribution of both populations, there are now numerous areas where birds of mixed or uncertain provenance occur, making it impractical to continue to treat them as separate populations.



Greylag Goose at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)



Greylag Goose at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)



Greylag Goose at Nickolls Quarry (Ian Roberts)

The first local records, one at Nickolls Quarry on the 5th February 1962 and one at West Hythe from the 6th to the 11th May in the same year, certainly relate to wild individuals as they pre-date the introductions into the county (Norman 2007). A further record of three flying east past Hythe on the 19th October 1966 also appears very likely to have involved genuine migrants as the population at Sevenoaks at the time was small and fairly sedentary.

The next record, involving five arriving in off the sea at Folkestone on the 15th January 1983, probably also related to immigrants but it has become increasingly difficult to separate wild and introduced birds. Two at Nickolls Quarry on the 16th January 1984 may have been wild but six there on the 8th June of that year seem certain to have originated from feral stock as wild birds had not been recorded later than mid-May.

Another was seen at Nickolls Quarry on the 29th March 1987 whilst birds were noted moving up-channel past Mill Point on the 6th March 1989 (four), 1st April 1990 (two), 4th May 1990 (two) and 10th May 1991 (two). Up to three were present at Nickolls Quarry between March and May 1991, two flew west at Abbotscliffe on the 2nd April 1992, one flew west at Hythe Ranges on the 30th May 1992 and up to two were at Nickolls Quarry in May 1993 and May 1994. The following year saw the first double-figure count, when 18 flew east past Copt Point on the 11th March and nine were at Nickolls Quarry on 19th May 1995, with one remaining until the end of May (and with four there between the 3rd and 6th May), whilst two were seen on single dates in August and September.

In 1996 one remained at Nickolls Quarry between the 17th January and the 1st September, with 3 or 4 present on two dates in April, and three flew west at Abbotscliffe on the 10th April. There was an unprecedented flock of at least 85 at Copt Point on the 17th September and ten were at Nickolls Quarry on the 20th October.



Greylag Geese at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)

A similar pattern of records ensued, with small numbers making protracted stays at Nickolls Quarry or passing coastal sites typically in spring or autumn.

Larger counts included 16 flying high south-west over Nickolls Quarry on the 7th October 1998, 13 flying north-east there on the 3rd March 2003, 53 flying north-east there on the 7th September 2003, c.20 flying north-east over Mill Point on the 6th February 2005 and 48 flying east over Hythe on the 3rd March 2005.

Further double figure counts involved 13 flying west past Samphire Hoe on the 10th June 2001, 12 flying south over Abbotscliffe on the 28th March 2006, 14 flying west past Samphire Hoe on the 14th October 2008, an exceptional flock of c.100 reported flying east there on the 31st January 2009, 14 flying east there on the 4th February 2010 and 10 flying east past Mill Point on the 8th November 2011, when 11 were seen at Nickolls Quarry.

Cold weather in February 2013 led to a small influx, when a total of 24 (flocks of 3 and 21) flew east past Samphire Hoe on the 12th and 18 were seen at the Willop Basin on the 16th. A further 14 flew east past Samphire Hoe on the 17th March 2013.

A flock of 33 were seen at Botolph's Bridge on the 5th September 2015, 13 flew east past Hythe on the 10th April 2016, 15 were at Cock Ash Lake on the 7th December 2019 and a flock of 60 were feeding in fields in the Folkestone Racecourse area (near Westenhangar) from the 8th February 2020 (with 39 still present at the month's end, decreasing to 18 by the 4th March and to two by the 10th March). 2021 saw further counts of up to 25 at Cock Ash Lake in March, 31 flying east past Seabrook on the 23rd September and 74 at Botolph's Bridge on the 3rd October, whilst large numbers were again seen in the Folkestone Racecourse area in early 2022 (with a peak of 51 on the 26th January).

Although small numbers had been seen regularly in the Nickolls Quarry area in spring or early summer since 1993 breeding had not been suspected until a pair bred successfully in 2014 (with three chicks hatching in May, although only one appeared to survive beyond the end of the month). Birds have been present in subsequent years but breeding has not reoccurred. In 2020 up to 11 were present at Cock Ash Lake (TR13 E) from April to June and a pair bred, raising five young, whilst there were also five at Stanford Lake (TR13 E) and 19 at Horton Park Lakes (TR13 J) in May, although breeding was not suspected. Birds were again present at Cock Ash Lake in spring 2021 but breeding was not noted, however a pair again bred in 2022 (raising one young), whilst a pair also bred at Stanford Lake (raising four young).

Breeding atlas distribution

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

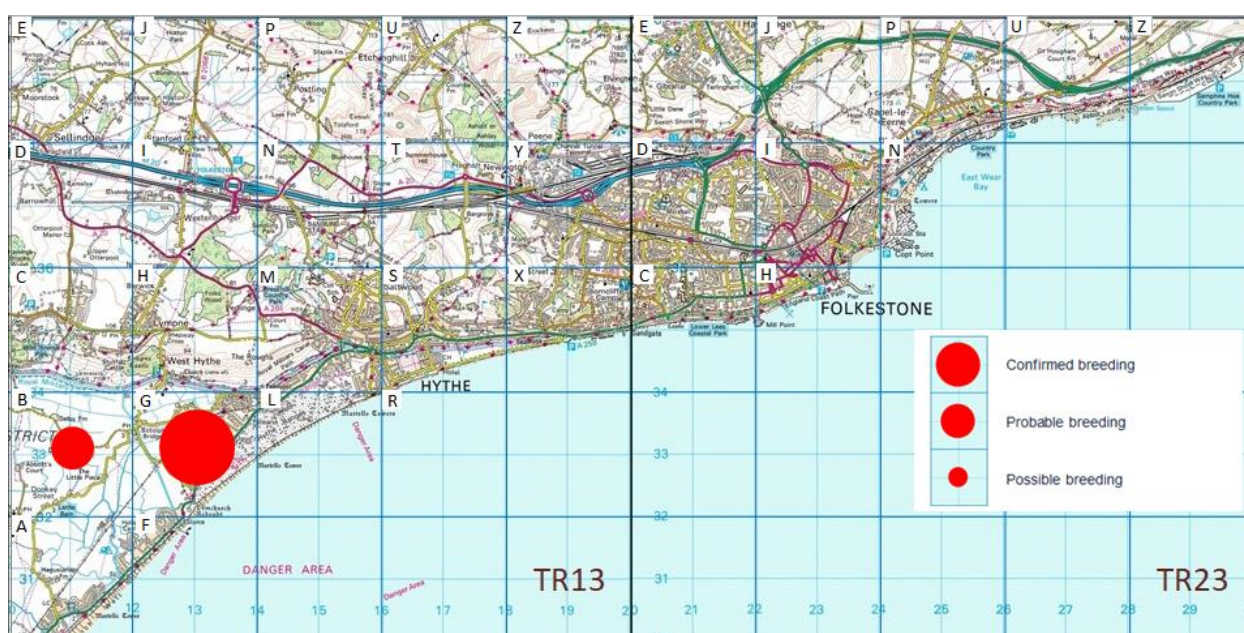


Figure 1: Breeding distribution of Greylag Goose at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

A pair was present in suitable breeding habitat at Nickolls Quarry (TR13 G) during the atlas period so this was recorded as 'probable breeding' under the BTO definitions, even though young were not detected. A bird was also noted in potential breeding habitat in the adjacent TR13 B, which was categorised as 'possible breeding'.

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%)	1	(3%)
Probable/Confirmed	0	(0%)	0	(0%)	1	(3%)
Total	0	(0%)	0	(0%)	1	(6%)
Change			0	(--%)	+1	(--%)

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	--%	--X%	--X%
Kent	--%	+115%	--%

Greylag Goose was not recorded in either of the previous atlases. Balmer *et al.* (2013) in the 2007-11 Bird Atlas describe how the species has shown an increase in the breeding range across Britain of 138% since the previous Atlas in 1988-91, and of 748% since the 1968-72 Breeding Atlas.

Overall distribution

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of Greylag Goose by tetrad, with records in 21 tetrads (68%) and a noticeable gap from the Cheriton/Folkestone area and inland of here.

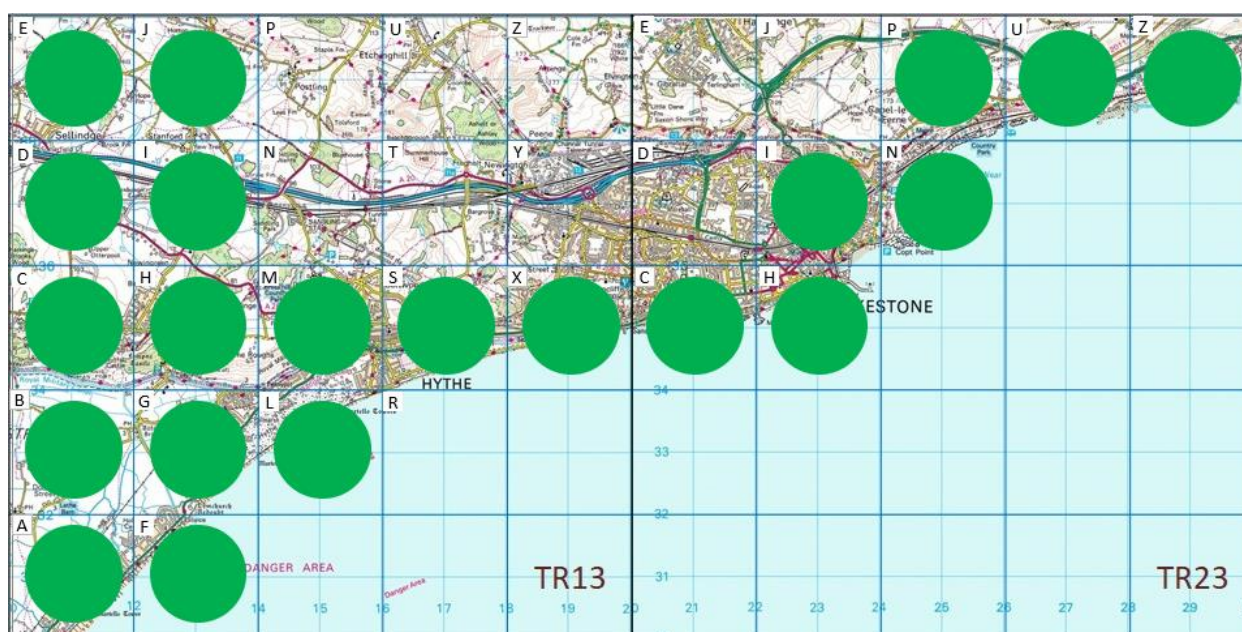


Figure 2: Distribution of all Greylag Goose records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

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](#).

I am indebted to Andrew Henderson and Tim Hodge for providing access to the Kent Ornithological Society archives.



Greylag Goose family at Nickolls Quarry (Ian Roberts)



Greylag Geese at Cock Ash Lake (Ian Roberts)