

## Ring Ouzel

*Turdus torquatus*

Category A

Passage migrant, typically more numerous in autumn.

*World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):*

The nominate form breeds in northern and western Britain and northern Fenno-Scandia, wintering in southern Spain and north-west Africa. The *alpestris* form breeds in upland areas within southern Europe and winters within the south of the breeding range, making short-distance movements or perhaps resident. The *amicorum* form breeds in the Caucasus, eastern Turkey and Turkmenistan, wintering mainly in Iran and southern Turkmenistan.



Ring Ouzel at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)

*Kent status (KOS 2021):*

In Kent it is a regular passage migrant that is occasionally recorded in winter.

The Ring Ouzel was not 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 "a regular bird of passage through Kent during the periods of spring and autumn migration" and noted that "Ring-Ouzels have been recorded at different times from many localities in Kent, and all the local museums contain one or more specimens", so it does seem likely to have been present locally and a number of regular stopover sites are located within the current area.

The first documented record involved six seen by Roger Norman as they flew from an area of scrub at Hythe Ranges on the 28<sup>th</sup> March 1958 (Norman 2006). This was soon followed by ten seen by F. R. Wise at Folkestone on the 11<sup>th</sup> October 1959 and Kent Bird Reports for the 1960s/1970s contained reports of one "spring record" at Folkestone in 1960, one at Folkestone on the 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1961, one in Folkestone Warren in early October 1965, "some" there on the 16<sup>th</sup> September 1968 and three there on the 8<sup>th</sup> October 1972.

In the 1980s there were two at Copt Point on the 16<sup>th</sup> April 1981, a male at Hythe Roughs on the 28<sup>th</sup> April 1981, two at Copt Point on the 25<sup>th</sup> April 1982, one at Church Hougham on the 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1987, four at Round Down on the 21<sup>st</sup> April 1987 and one at Folkestone Warren on the 11<sup>th</sup> October 1988.

It has been recorded annually and sometimes in good numbers since 1991 when systematic coverage of the cliffs began. Whilst there can be no doubt that passage had previously gone undetected here, it very much favours higher ground and remains scarce in lower-lying areas.



Ring Ouzel at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



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## Overall distribution

Figure 1 shows the distribution of all records of Ring Ouzel by tetrad, with records in 18 tetrads (58%).

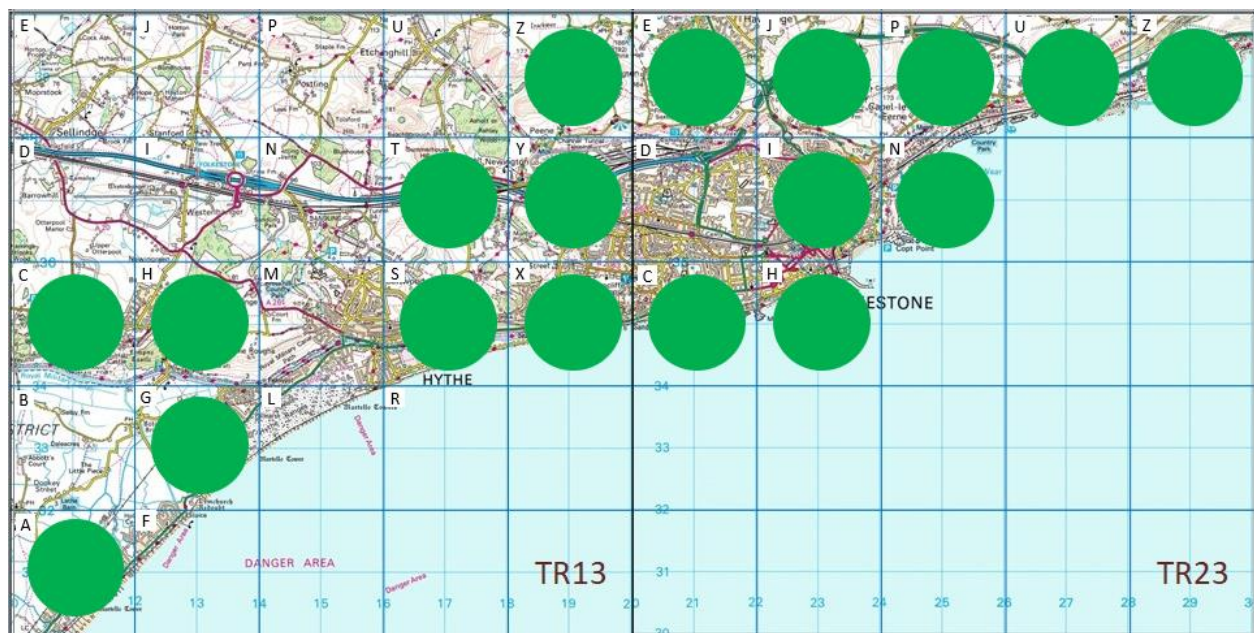


Figure 1: Distribution of all Ring Ouzel records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

There was an extremely early individual at Abbotscliffe on the 9<sup>th</sup> March 1997 and March arrivals are scarce, with records in just five other years since 1990: two at Abbotscliffe on the 19<sup>th</sup> March 1993 (with one the next day), one there on the 25<sup>th</sup> March (with it or another on the 30<sup>th</sup> and two on the 31<sup>st</sup>), two there on the 27<sup>th</sup> March 1996, one at Capel Battery on the 30<sup>th</sup> March 1998 and one at Samphire Hoe on the 28<sup>th</sup> March 2010 (with it or another on the 31<sup>st</sup>).

April sightings are more typical and the mean arrival date over the previous decade has been the 13<sup>th</sup> April. Spring records usually involve ones and twos, with three or more noted on just ten occasions since 1990:

- 3 at Capel Battery on the 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1992
- 3 at Abbotscliffe on the 13<sup>th</sup> Apr 1996
- 3 at Abbotscliffe on the 8<sup>th</sup> April 2000
- 3 at Capel Battery on the 9<sup>th</sup> April 2000
- 3 at Samphire Hoe on the 18<sup>th</sup> Apr 2010
- 5 at Abbotscliffe on the 12<sup>th</sup> April 2012
- 6 at Abbotscliffe on the 15<sup>th</sup> April 2015
- 3 at Hythe Roughs on the 24<sup>th</sup> April 2018
- 3 at Abbotscliffe on the 14<sup>th</sup> Apr 2020
- 3 at Samphire Hoe on the 18<sup>th</sup> Apr 2021

Spring numbers vary considerably, with none in some years (although the last 'blank' was in 2003) and a peak of 18 bird/days in 2017. Over the last thirty years there has been an average of around seven bird/days per spring (with a slightly higher mean of ten over the last decade).

Stragglers may linger into the second half of May, with one at Abbotscliffe on the 16<sup>th</sup> May 1992 (and two there on the 19<sup>th</sup>), one at Abbotscliffe on the 18<sup>th</sup> May 1994 (and two there the next day), one at Samphire Hoe on the 18<sup>th</sup> May 2008, two at Capel Battery on the 24<sup>th</sup> May 2008 and one at Samphire Hoe on the 18<sup>th</sup> May 2019.

The earliest arrivals since 1990 involved one at Cheriton Hill on the 16<sup>th</sup> September 1990 and five at Abbotscliffe on the 16<sup>th</sup> September 1993 (although there was also a historical record on this date in 1968), whilst in 1994 and 2014 there were singles at Abbotscliffe on the 18<sup>th</sup> September. The earliest double-figure count involved 11 at Capel Battery on the 20<sup>th</sup> September 1996, increasing to 42 on the 22<sup>nd</sup>.



Autumn numbers vary even more, with less than ten in some years (most recently in 2022) and a peak of over 900 in 1998. Over the last thirty years there has been an average of around 90 bird/days per autumn (with a slightly higher mean of 96 over the last decade), with marked irruptions in some years (for example 1998, 2013, 2015 and 2016). Counts in excess of 30 have occurred in six years:

37 at Abbotscliffe on the 10<sup>th</sup> October 1993

42 at Capel Battery on the 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1996

A peak of 500 in the area on the 7<sup>th</sup> October 1998 (with several other large counts – see account below)

55 at the cliffs (including 47 at Capel-le-Ferne Café) on the 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2000

72 in the area (including 35 at Crete Road East) on the 12<sup>th</sup> October 2013

102 in the area (including 35 at Samphire Hoe and 42 at Abbotscliffe) on the 12<sup>th</sup> October 2015

57 at Abbotscliffe on the 15<sup>th</sup> October 2015

42 in the area (including 25 at Abbotscliffe) on the 7<sup>th</sup> October 2016



Ring Ouzel at Abbotscliffe (Ian Roberts)



Ring Ouzel at Abbotscliffe (Ian Roberts)



Ring Ouzel at Samphire Hoe (Ian Roberts)



Ring Ouzel at Crete Road East (Brian Harper)

Stragglers occasionally linger into the second half of November. In 2005 there was one at Abbotscliffe on the 18<sup>th</sup> November, whilst one remained at Samphire Hoe until the 26<sup>th</sup> November, in 2013 one remained at Samphire Hoe until the 25<sup>th</sup> November, in 2015 one was at Abbotscliffe on the 20<sup>th</sup> November and in 2019 one overwintered for the first time, at Samphire Hoe, being seen on several dates between the 28<sup>th</sup> November 2019 and 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020.

An account of the exceptional influx in autumn is provided below, reproduced from the 1998 Folkestone and Hythe Bird Report (Roberts & Gibson 1999).

### **The Ring Ouzel influx in autumn 1998**

Until this year, the largest arrivals of Ring Ouzels in Kent involved 270 during a large fall of Scandinavian migrants on the 15<sup>th</sup> September 1968 (including 210 at Dungeness) and 199 on the 7<sup>th</sup> October 1992. At Folkestone the previous largest counts were 37 on the 10<sup>th</sup> October 1993 and 42 on the 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1996.

The first in autumn 1998 was at Abbotscliffe on the 25<sup>th</sup> September, with one at Church Hougham on the 27<sup>th</sup>, two there and one at Capel-le-Ferne on the 29<sup>th</sup> September, and one at Church Hougham on the 1<sup>st</sup> October. A high-pressure system became established over Scandinavia at the start of October, giving easterly winds and dull, moist conditions, and the first substantial arrival occurred on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, with 18 (including 12 at Abbotscliffe). The next day saw the previous record exceeded, when 60 were seen (including 53 in the vicinity of Abbot's Gully), and on the 5<sup>th</sup> a more widely distributed 65 were counted, with 30 at Abbotscliffe, 18 at Capel-le-Ferne and 17 at Church Hougham. The 6<sup>th</sup> produced another increase, with a total of 73 in the area, but gave no hint of what was to follow.

I arrived at Abbotscliffe at dawn on the 7<sup>th</sup>, and as I drove up the track I could see Ring Ouzels in the headlights, with about 20 grounded on the path and around the parking area. It was a dull, overcast morning with a light north to north-easterly wind, but at 06:45 it was dry, and as it was still fairly dark I decided to check the cliff towards Abbot's house before setting out on the usual route. The cliff and small bushes held more Ring Ouzels, so I walked as far as the horse paddock where around 50 had congregated. I returned to the car, and on to Abbot's Gully, where I found at least another 30.

It was now c. 07:45, I had by now seen 100 Ring Ouzels and (with drizzle setting in) I headed towards the blockhouse field already pleased with the morning's tally. As I passed the mound I heard the familiar 'chuckling' calls of a Ring Ouzel flock, and looked up to find two flocks totaling 60 moving north-east, with a further 10+ grounded in the rifle range area. I pressed on to the Farthingloe Battery even though time was getting on, and as I approached I stopped on the cliff edge a little distance away to scan for movement in the gully. I could see Ring Ouzels in the tops of the bushes, and as I watched a couple rose up calling, followed by a few more, then ten, and twenty, with others joining all the time, until a spectacular flock of 140 were spiraling up out of the gully, before heading off north-east towards Dover.

I kicked another 20 or so out of the gully, before following the cliff path back, with Ring Ouzels continuing to arrive, to Abbot's Gully. I arrived there almost expecting the birds there to have left and been 'double-counted' as migrants, but instead they had increased to at least 50. I just had time to collect the Shore Lark which Dale had found on the cliff before leaving (somewhat wet and late for work), but with a total of around 400 Ring Ouzels.

The final day total, after Dale had returned to Abbotscliffe and I had been to Church Hougham at lunchtime, was approximately 500.

This arrival was relatively localised, with an impressive 1,200 in the St. Margaret's Bay to Langdon area and 400 at Dungeness, but less than 100 in the rest of Kent in total. The most significant factor in this extraordinary event seems to have involved a rain-bearing trough, positioned over the southern edge of the Nord Pas de Calais at noon on the 6<sup>th</sup>, which moved slowly north overnight, to overlay East Anglia and the south-east by the 7<sup>th</sup>, bringing a belt of rain as it did so (see figure 2)

A day of very heavy rain followed on the 8<sup>th</sup>, and only 12 Ring Ouzels were seen at Abbotscliffe, but on the 9<sup>th</sup> a total of 125 were recorded, with 65 at Abbotscliffe and 60 at Capel Battery, with the latter at least being new birds as there were none there on the 7<sup>th</sup>. There was then a fairly rapid decrease, with 40 in the area the next day (20 at Abbotscliffe, 14 south over Folkestone and 6 at Church Hougham), and the last of the arrival at Abbotscliffe on the 13<sup>th</sup>.

Subsequently, two were at Church Hougham on the 16<sup>th</sup> October, one flew west at Abbotscliffe on the 18<sup>th</sup> October and two were seen there on the 1<sup>st</sup> November.



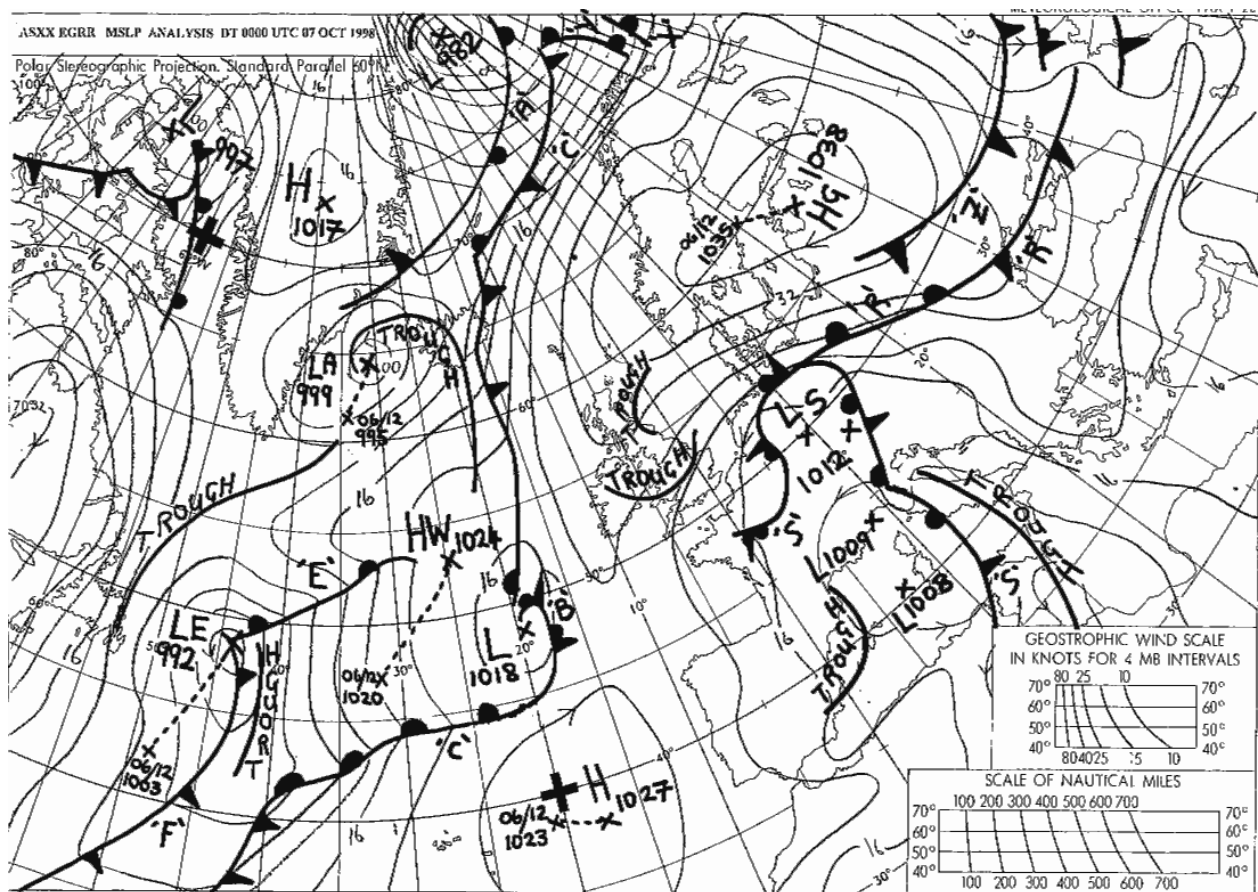


Figure 2: Synoptic chart at midnight on 7<sup>th</sup> October 1998, preceding the record arrival of Ring Ouzels



Ring Ouzel at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



Ring Ouzel at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)

## 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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Ring Ouzel at Crete Road East (Brian Harper)