

Sparrowhawk

Accipiter nisus

Category A

Breeding resident, winter visitor and passage migrant.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds across much of Europe and northern Asia, also in Iran, the Himalayas and Japan. In Europe the more northern and eastern populations are migratory, moving south or south-west, with some passing through or wintering in Britain, alongside the sedentary local birds.

Kent status (KOS 2021):

In Kent it is a widespread breeding species, a passage migrant and a winter visitor.



Sparrowhawk at Saltwood Castle (Brian Harper)

The Sparrowhawk 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 "generally, if sparingly, distributed throughout the wooded districts" as a breeding bird, as well as an autumn and winter visitor to "the more open districts", so there can be little doubt that it was to be found locally.



Sparrowhawk at Saltwood Castle (Brian Harper)



Sparrowhawk at Lympne (Phil Sharp)

Its status had change little by the time of Harrison (1953) but Taylor *et al.* (1981) described a dramatic change in its fortunes and considered that "the Sparrowhawk has probably suffered more at the hands of man than any other species on the county list, and undoubtedly one of the more serious threats has been pesticide contamination during the 1950s and early 1960s, although keeping and woodland clearance will have also played a part. At this time numbers reached an all-time low and there was no confirmation of successful breeding between 1953 and 1974".

Fortunately, Henderson & Hodge (1998) were able to report that "the subsequent recovery in fortunes of this agile raptor has been remarkable. There was confirmation of six pairs nesting in Kent in 1975 and since then there has been a steady increase and eastward expansion, resulting in Sparrowhawks being present in ... 21% of all tetrads" in the 1988-94 survey. The expansion has since continued and Clements *et al.* (2015) described it as now widespread in Kent, nesting in woodland, hedgerows and even in town centres.

Breeding atlas distribution

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

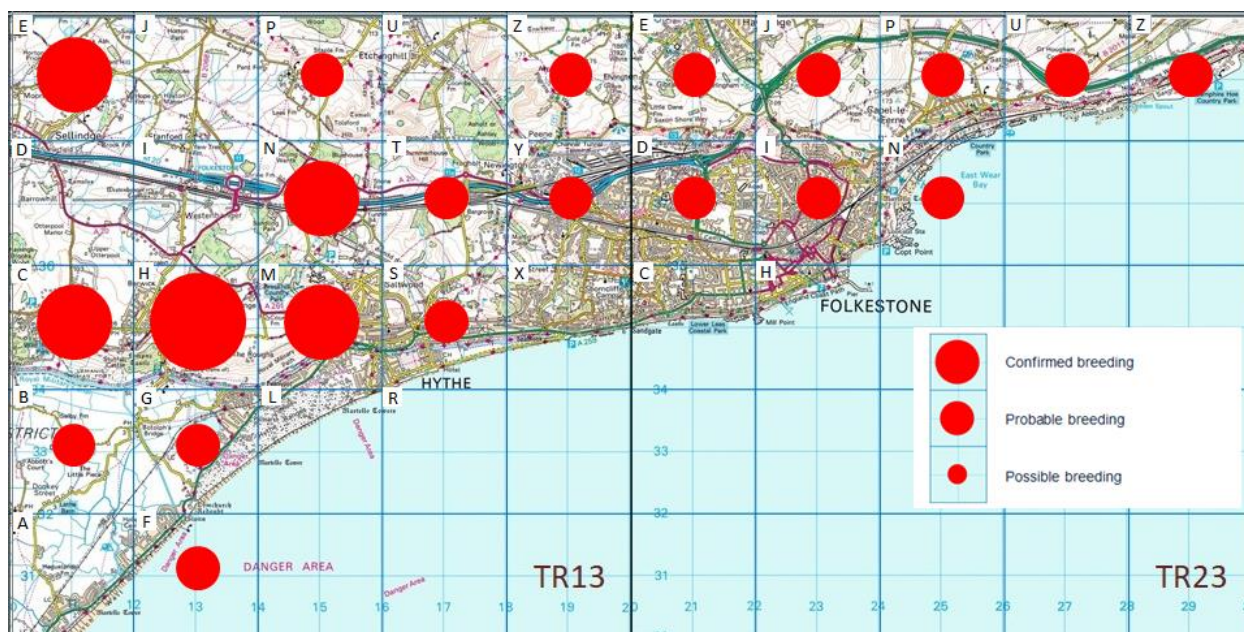


Figure 1: Breeding distribution of Sparrowhawk at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in one tetrad, with probable breeding in four more and possible breeding in 16 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	-	-	4	(13%)	16	(52%)
Probable/Confirmed	-	-	4	(13%)	5	(16%)
Total	-	-	8	(26%)	21	(68%)
Change			+8	(--%)	+13	(+63%)

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	--%	+63%	--%
Kent	+1,047%	+244%	+3,616%

The results of the first atlas were not published due to the species scarcity at the time, with it being only noted in 2% of the tetrads in the county (probable breeding in just two tetrads, with possible breeding in a further 17) so it was most likely to have been absent locally.

Both Henderson & Hodge and Clements *et al.* remarked on how notoriously secretive this species is during the breeding season and how this resulted in a high proportion of records that referred only to possible breeding, and this was reflected locally in the latest atlas. Clements *et al.* note that it is assumed that much such tetrads will in fact hold breeding birds.

Overall distribution

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

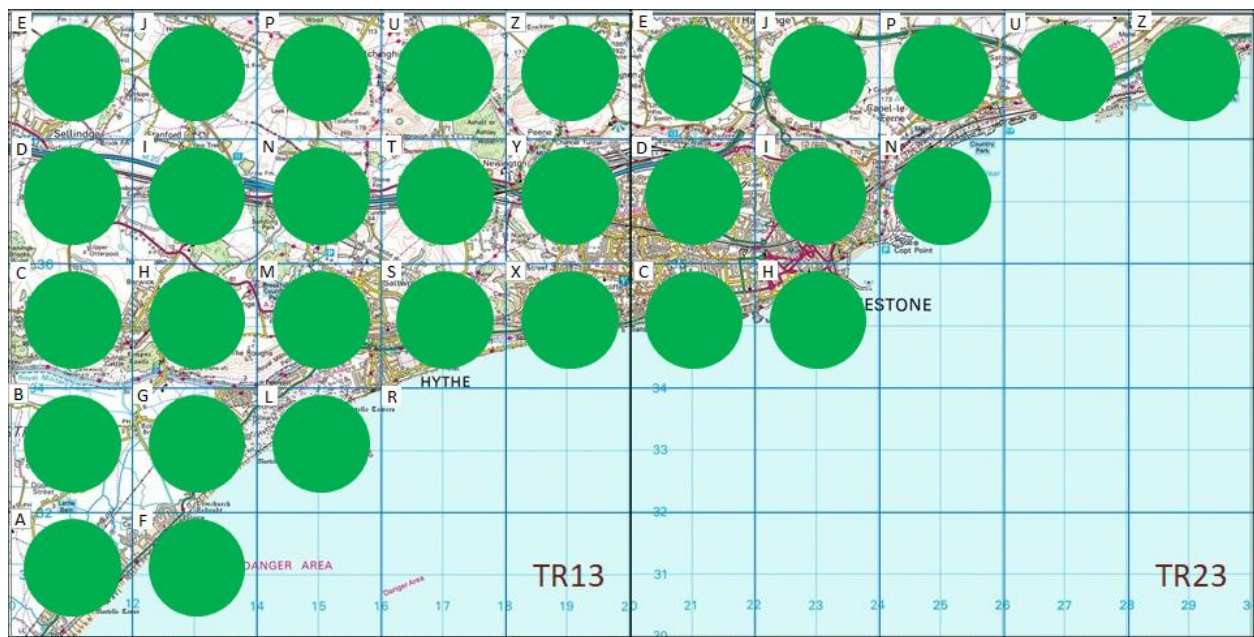


Figure 2: Distribution of all Sparrowhawk records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Taylor *et al* stated that during the period when the Sparrowhawk was absent as a breeding bird in Kent there were still almost annual records of migrants and these increased during their review period due to greater observer coverage. Wernham *et al.* (2002) describe an autumn passage from northern Europe, through eastern Britain, to wintering grounds in the Netherlands, Belgium and France, with a return movement in spring.



Sparrowhawk at Saltwood Castle (Brian Harper)



Sparrowhawk at West Hythe (Brian Harper)

Suspected migrants have been seen locally on many occasions, including birds seen arriving in off the sea or departing out to sea. Often these records involve single birds but up to six have been noted on several occasions, and on the 12th October 1998 a total of 13 flew in/west at Abbotscliffe, with a further seven flying in/west there three days later.

An historical winter count of 10 to 15 present at Sandling Park during a cold spell in January 1956 is also worthy of note.

References

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Acknowledgements

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