

Black-headed Gull

Chroicocephalus ridibundus

Category A

Winter visitor and passage migrant.

Breeds across upper and middle latitudes of Europe eastwards through northern Asia to Kamchatka and Ussuriland, also in Greenland and Newfoundland. It is mainly migratory to the east and north of the zone of winter freezing, dispersive or partially migratory elsewhere. The winter range extends south to western Africa and the Middle East (Snow & Perrins, 1998).

In Kent it breeds mainly around the Medway and Swale estuaries, with smaller numbers at Dungeness. The total county breeding population has been estimated at between 5,000 and 10,000 pairs. Elsewhere it is a common and widespread passage migrant and winter visitor (Clements *et al*, 2015, KOS, 2020).



Black-headed Gull at Seabrook (Brian Harper)

It is uncommon in summer as the nearest breeding population is at Dungeness but large numbers are present throughout the rest of the year. Four figure counts can be recorded as early as August, when at least 1,500 were seen in the Botolph's Bridge area on the 11th August 2000 and numbers increase during September, with a peak of 3,800 at Copt Point on the 15th September 1988.

Counts of 1,000 or more are not infrequent in the winter months although this species is often taken for granted and roosts are rarely counted. Congregations of 1,500 or more have been noted on a number of occasions:

- 5,000 at Hythe in January 1982
- 2,000 at Nickolls Quarry on the 14th February 1994
- 2,000 at Copt Point on the 10th December 1996
- 2,500+ at Copt Point on the 28th January 1998
- 2,000 at Copt Point on the 11th February 1998
- 2,000 at the Dymchurch Redoubt on the 1st November 1998
- 2,000 at Copt Point on the 16th January 1999
- 1,500 between Pedlinge and Lympne on the 12th March 2000
- 2,800 at Palmarsh on the 10th February 2001
- 2,710 off Hythe on the 17th January 2004
- 1,500 at Nickolls Quarry on the 1st December 2010

Spring passage can be quite pronounced between mid-March and mid-May, with movements of 200 or more logged on several occasions:

- 520 east past Mill Point on the 25th April 1990
- 230 east past Mill Point on the 4th May 1990
- 260 east past Mill Point on the 5th May 1990
- 200 east past Mill Point on the 18th March 1991
- 200 east past Mill Point on the 29th March 1991
- 650 east past Mill Point on the 10th May 1991
- 300 east past Abbotscliffe on the 19th March 1992
- 373 east past Mill Point on the 21st March 2016
- 290 east past Samphire Hoe on the 22nd April 2019
- 603 east past Hythe Ranges on the 27th March 2020
- 460 east past Samphire Hoe on the 21st March 2021

Figure 1 shows the distribution of all records of Black-headed Gull by tetrad, with records in 31 tetrads (100%).

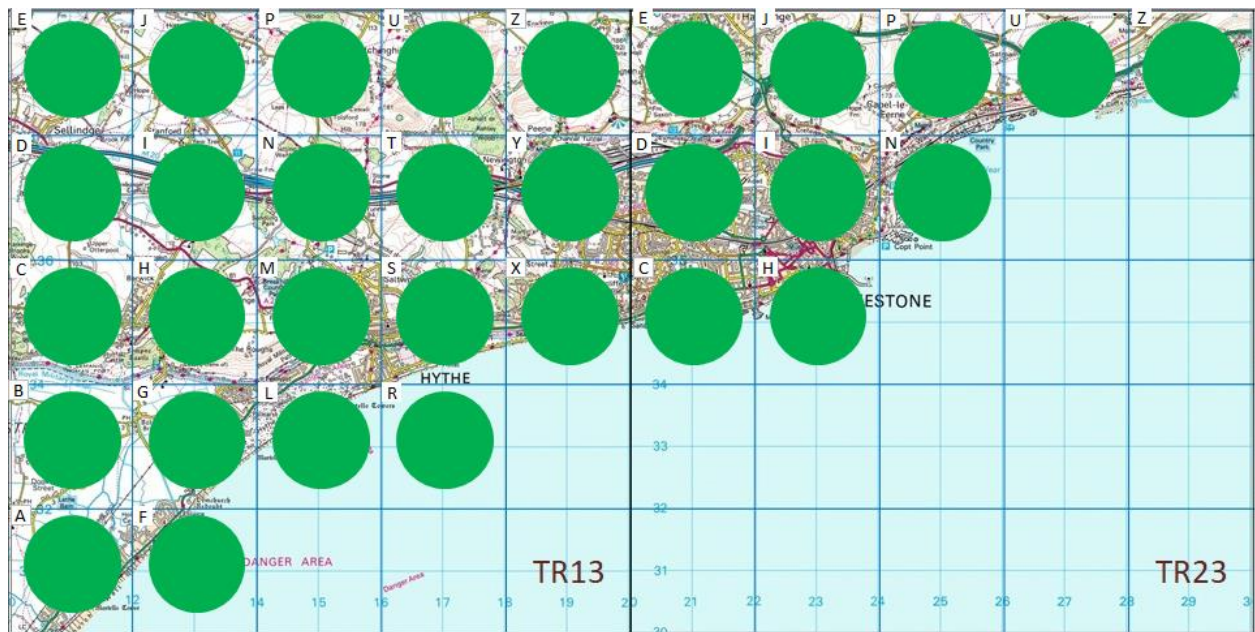


Figure 1: Distribution of all Black-headed Gull records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Ringed recoveries have included birds from the Czech Republic and Lithuania.



Black-headed Gull at Seabrook (Brian Harper)



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References

Clements, R., Orchard, M., McCanch, N. & Wood, S. 2015. *Kent Breeding Bird Atlas 2008-13*. Kent Ornithological Society

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Snow, D. & Perrins, C.M., 1998. *The Birds of the Western Palearctic*. Oxford University Press.

Acknowledgements

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Black-headed Gull at Folkestone Warren (Brian Harper)