

Goldfinch

Carduelis carduelis

Category A

Breeding summer visitor and passage migrant, widespread but less common in winter.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds across most of Europe, except the most northern latitudes, eastwards through south-west Siberia and northern Kazakhstan to the Baikal region and north-west Mongolia, thence south-west to Iran and south to the western Himalayas. Introduced in Australia and New Zealand. Partially migratory, with European birds wintering almost entirely within the breeding range, with concentrations in the Mediterranean region.



Goldfinch at Abbotscliffe (Dale Gibson)

Kent status (KOS 2021):

In Kent it is a common and widespread resident and passage migrant.

The Goldfinch 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 distributed throughout the county in small numbers in the gardens and orchards" 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.

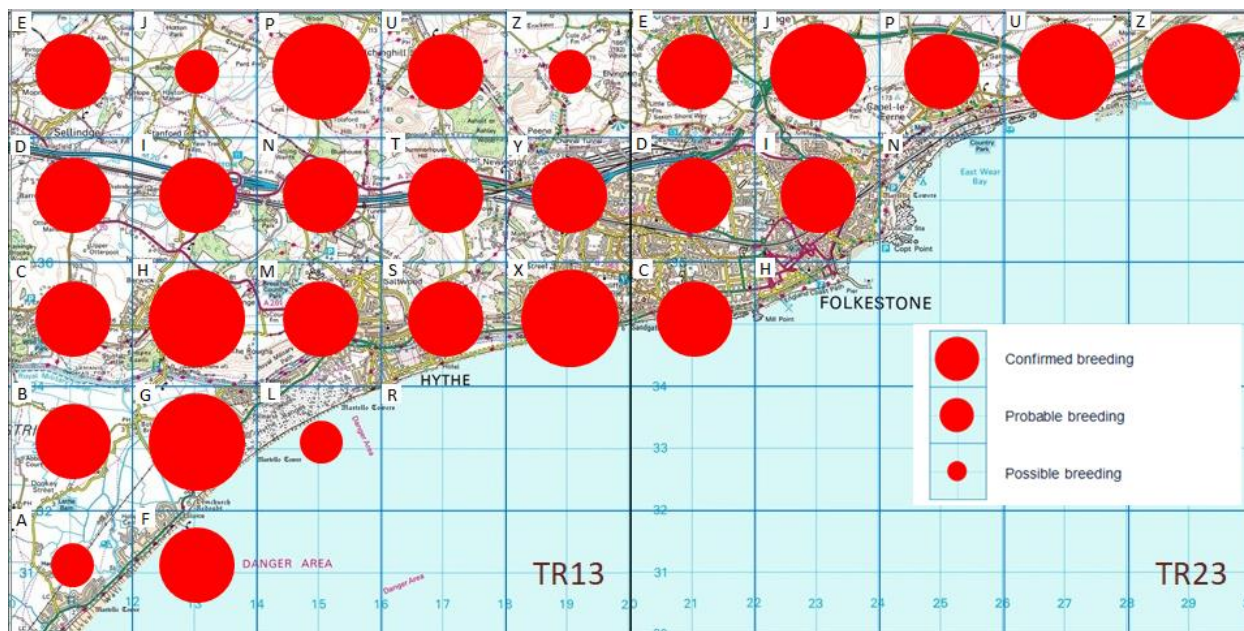


Figure 1: Breeding distribution of Goldfinch at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in seven tetrads, with probable breeding in 17 more and possible breeding in four 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	1	(3%)	0	(0%)	4	(13%)
Probable/Confirmed	25	(81%)	30	(97%)	24	(77%)
Total	26	(84%)	30	(97%)	28	(90%)
Change			+4	(+15%)	-2	(-7%)

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	+15%	-7%	+8%
Kent	+21%	+4%	+25%

Henderson & Hodge described how, following restrictions on commercial trapping, the Goldfinch population rose steadily during the first half of the twentieth century, continuing to increase until the late 1970s. There was a decline during the 1980s (which they thought was probably due to herbicide use and other agricultural changes), but since then the population had again been expanding. However Henderson & Hodge considered that increases in tetrad occupancy between the first and second atlases were due primarily to improved coverage.

Clements *et al.* (2015) remarked on the population increase since the late 1980s, with the BTO Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) trend for south-east England showing a 49% increase between 1995 and 2012, which they thought might have been linked to increased use of gardens for winter feeding. However they were able to suggest a reason behind a “puzzling picture” of tetrad gains in the west and south of the county and losses in the east and north. Locally there appears to have small been reductions in tetrad occupancy and the proportion of probable/confirmed cases since the second atlas.

Overall distribution

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

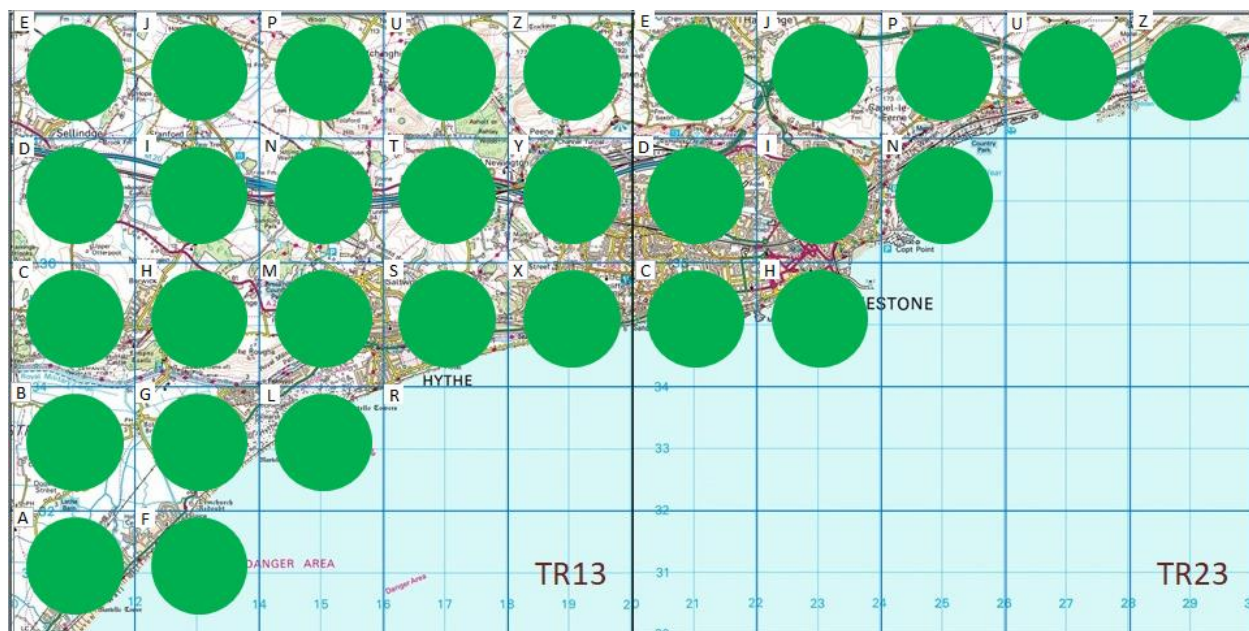


Figure 2: Distribution of all Goldfinch records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Taylor *et al.* noted that post-breeding flocks could be found throughout July and August, but locally large numbers have not been noted until the last week of August, with the earliest count in excess of 50 being 155 at Abbotscliffe on the 24th August 2017, with other three-figure counts in August of 110 at Abbotscliffe on the 30th August 2018, increasing to 150 the following day, and 200 at Abbotscliffe on the 31st August 1993.

Notable counts in September have included a peak of 240 at Abbotscliffe on the 9th September 1995, 340 at Capel-le-Ferne on the 17th September 1996 and a peak of 200 at Abbotscliffe on the 11th September 1999.

On the 17th September 2015 a total of 105 flew east at Abbotscliffe, but otherwise three-figure movements have not been noted until the last week of the month, when counts of 425 flying east at Abbotscliffe on the 28th September 1994 and 385 flying east there on the 24th September 1996 were of note. Passage typically peaks in October, when movements of 500 or more have been noted on a number of occasions:

586 west at Copt Point on the 6th October 1984
520 west at Abbotscliffe on the 11th October 1999
1550 east at Capel-le-Ferne Café on the 21st October 2003
500 east at Abbotscliffe on the 10th October 2010
650 east at Samphire Hoe on the 14th October 2010
1080 east at Abbotscliffe on the 17th October 2010
600 east at Abbotscliffe on the 6th October 2012
555 east at Abbotscliffe on the 10th October 2012
1100 east at Abbotscliffe on the 11th October 2012
1345 east at Abbotscliffe on the 27th October 2012
780 east at Abbotscliffe on the 12th October 2015
740 east at Abbotscliffe on the 13th October 2015
1200 east at Abbotscliffe on the 16th October 2015
645 east at Abbotscliffe and 650 east at Hythe Ranges on the 17th October 2015
600 east at Abbotscliffe on the 20th October 2015
2410 east at Abbotscliffe on the 14th October 2020
760 east at Abbotscliffe on the 15th October 2020
970 east at Abbotscliffe on the 16th October 2020
505 east at Abbotscliffe on the 17th October 2020

Migration may continue into early November, when counts of 250 flying east at Samphire Hoe on the 5th November 2008 and 270 east at Abbotscliffe on the 6th November 2011 were of note, but the only three-figure movement after the first week of the month involved 105 flying east at Samphire Hoe on the 21st November 2010.



Goldfinch at Saltwood Castle (Brian Harper)



Goldfinch at Cheriton (Brian Harper)

As Taylor *et al* noted, small numbers remain to winter in the county. Counts of 50 or more are unusual and have comprised 50 at Brockhill Country Park on the 3rd January 1993, 50 at Casebourne Wood on the 15th March 1997 and on the 18th January 2003, 63 at Beachborough Park on the 22nd February 2018, a peak of 200 at Beachborough Park on the 14th January 2019 and a peak of 100 at Cock Ash Lake on the 5th December 2019.

Spring passage commences in the second half of April and continues well into May, but the numbers involved are much smaller and counts in excess of 30 are noteworthy:

31 west at Mill Point on the 9th May 1989
52 in/west at Abbotscliffe on the 2nd May 1992
36 in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 30th April 1995
33 East at Capel Battery on the 5th May 2003
50 in off the sea at Samphire Hoe on the 4th April 2005
35 east at Capel-le-Ferne Café on the 6th May 2006
41 west at Samphire Hoe on the 13th April 2013
32 east at Samphire Hoe on the 11th April 2014
40 in/east at Abbotscliffe on the 19th Apr 2020
40 in off the sea at Folkestone Beach on the 1st April 2021

Taylor *et al* stated that ringing recoveries show that some Goldfinches ringed in this country may winter on the continent and there is a local example of one ringed at Hythe on the 15th June 1956 that was recovered in Belgium on the 7th November of that year.



Goldfinch at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



Goldfinch at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)

Click [here](#) to listen to a local audio recording of one singing at Hawkinge on the 15th May 2022 (Ian Roberts).

References

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Goldfinch at Princes Parade (Brian Harper)



Goldfinch at Samphire Hoe (Ian Roberts)



Goldfinch at Princes Parade (Brian Harper)

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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.