

Blackbird

Turdus merula

Category A

Breeding resident, winter visitor and passage migrant.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds across most of Europe and northern Africa discontinuously eastwards to eastern China and south to Sri Lanka, also introduced to Australia and New Zealand. Northern and eastern populations migrate to winter in southern or western Europe.

Kent status (KOS 2021):

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



Blackbird at West Hythe (Brian Harper)

The Blackbird 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 "a numerous and generally distributed species throughout the county", nesting "in many of the gardens in our towns", 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.

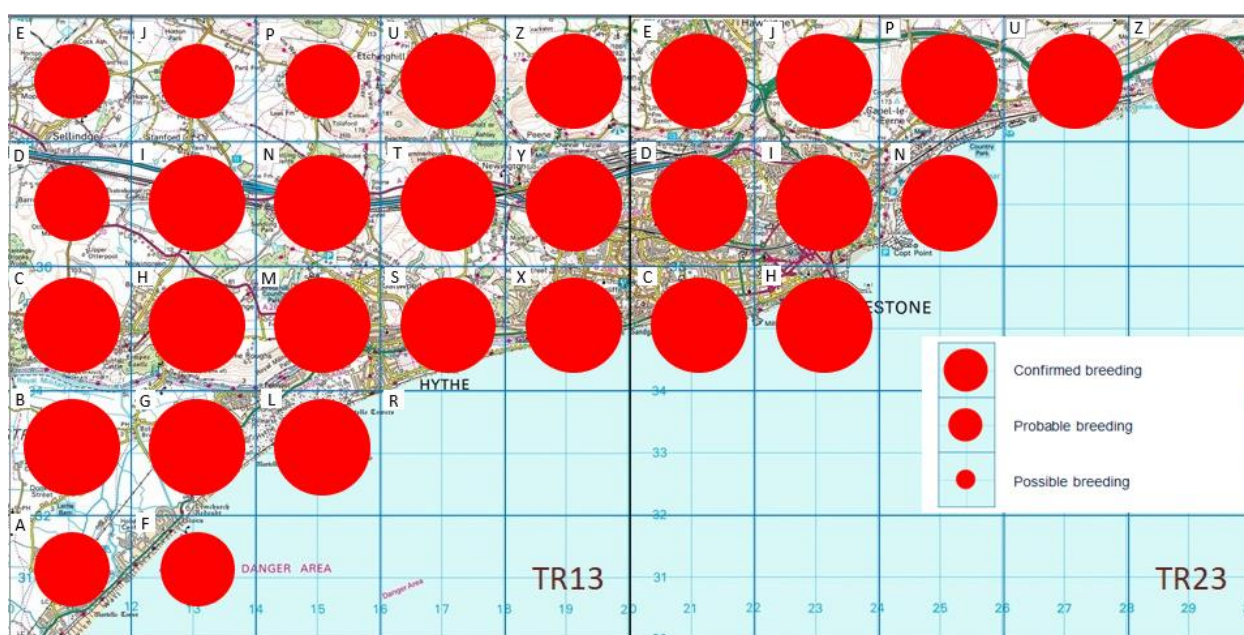


Figure 1: Breeding distribution of Blackbird at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in 24 tetrads, with probable breeding in six more. 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%) | 0 | (0%) |
| Probable/Confirmed | 30 | (97%) | 30 | (97%) | 30 | (97%) |
| Total | 30 | (97%) | 30 | (97%) | 30 | (97%) |
| Change | | | 0 | (0%) | 0 | (0%) |

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 | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| Kent | +3% | +1% | +4% |

Clements *et al.* (2013) remarked that Blackbird was originally a bird of woodland-edge habitats but is now as much at home in suburban garden and city parks as in the wider countryside. Evidence of breeding success is easily obtained, reflected in the high proportion of probable/confirmed breeding records in all atlas periods. Balmer *et al.* (2013) showed a 23% increase in Blackbird numbers in Britain during 1995 to 2010, with densities rising in all but south-east England (where the trend was 0% change).

Overall distribution

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

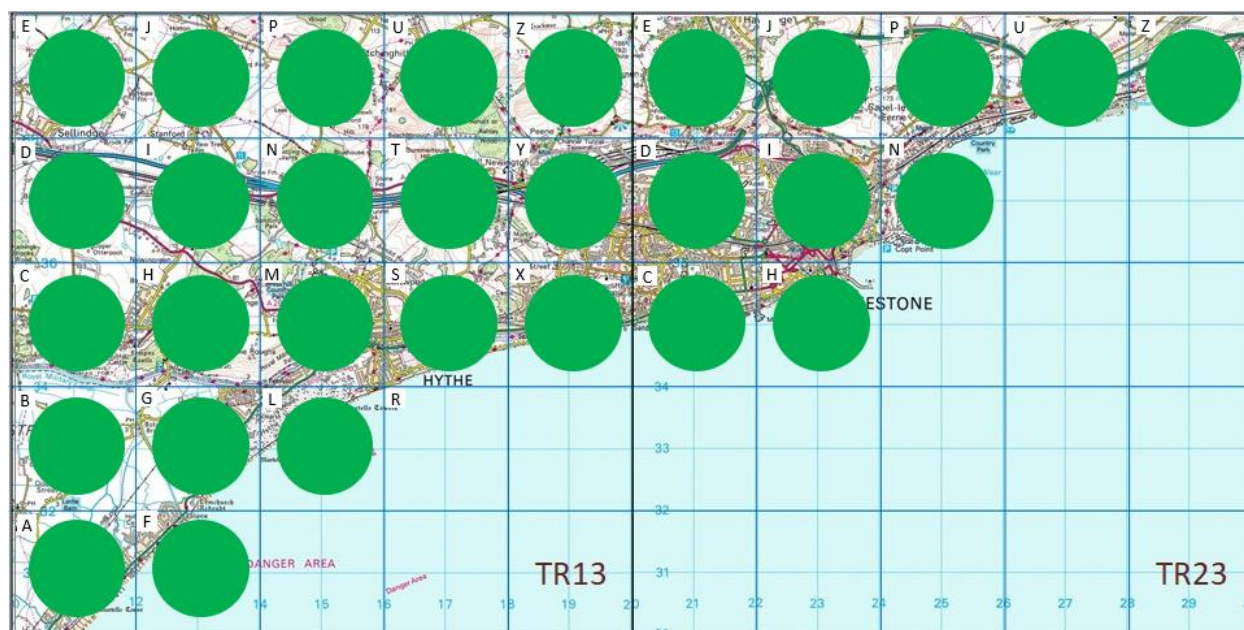


Figure 2: Distribution of all Blackbird records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The largest counts have tended to involve autumn migrants, with peaks between late September and November, when three-figure totals have been noted on a number of occasions:

- 100 at Folkestone Warren on the 30th September 1956
- 120 at Cheriton on the 21st and 22nd October 1967
- 300 at Folkestone Warren on the 13th October 1969
- 180 at Folkestone Warren on the 21st November 1971
- 350 at Folkestone Warren on the 8th October 1972
- 120 at Folkestone Warren on the 30th October 1980
- 230 arrived in off the sea at Samphire Hoe on the 17th November 2005
- 120 at Samphire Hoe on the 2nd November 2006
- 300 arrived in off the sea at Samphire Hoe on the 6th November 2011
- At least 100 at Princes Parade on the 29th October 2014
- 100 at Saltwood on the 23rd October 2015

Winter flocks are typically fairly small, with accumulations in excess of 30 being noteworthy: 35 were along the canal between Hythe and Palmarsh on the 26th February 1991, 50 were at Nickolls Quarry on the 8th December 2007, up to 40 were at Beachborough Park in February 2018 and 33 were counted there on the 3rd December 2018.

Spring passage is light, although some move at night when they may be heard calling. The only double-figure movement involved 24 flying east at Samphire Hoe on the 6th March 2018.



Blackbird at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



Blackbird at Donkey Street (Brian Harper)



Blackbird at West Hythe (Brian Harper)



Blackbird at West Hythe (Brian Harper)

References

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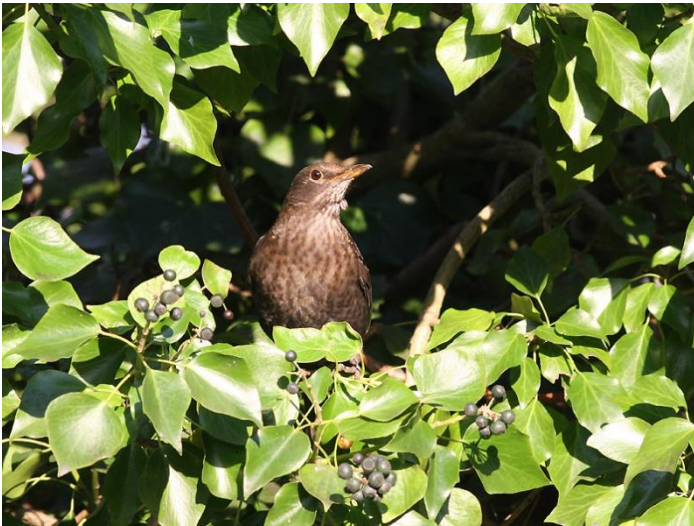
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Blackbird at Hythe (Brian Harper)



Blackbird at West Hythe (Brian Harper)



Blackbird at West Hythe (Brian Harper)

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.