

Great Spotted Woodpecker

Dendrocopos major

Category A

Breeding resident and passage migrant.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Widespread throughout Europe and eastwards across central and southern Siberia to Kamchatka, Sakhalin Island and Japan, and thence south to northern south-east Asia. All populations are basically resident, southern ones particularly so, but it is subject to eruptions in northern coniferous habitats.

Kent status (KOS 2021):

It is a widespread resident in Kent as well as a passage migrant, particularly in autumn.



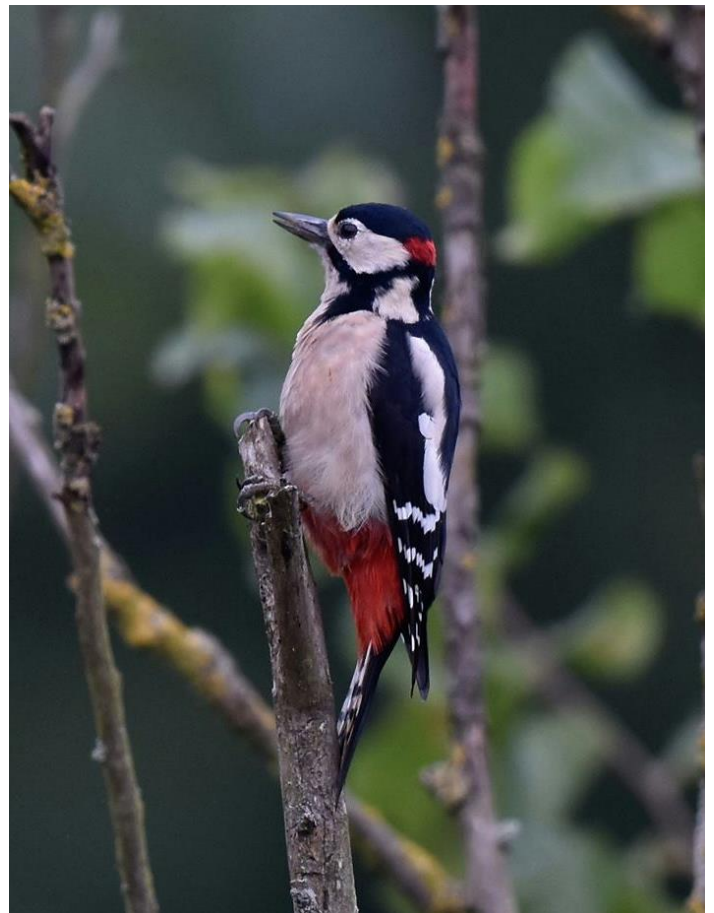
Great Spotted Woodpecker at Saltwood (Brian Harper)

The Great Spotted Woodpecker 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 "evenly distributed in small numbers throughout the wooded districts of the county", so there can be little doubt that it was to be found locally.

Harrison (1953) stated that there would seem to be very little doubt that this bird has increased in numbers and extended its range towards the east and south-east of the county, where, if not plentiful, it is at any rate established in scattered pairs. He also recorded that in 1934 "Miss A. V. Stone noted its presence around Sandling Park, near Folkestone", which would appear to be the first documented local sighting.



Great Spotted Woodpecker at Saltwood Castle
(Brian Harper)



Great Spotted Woodpecker at Princes Parade
(Nigel Webster)

There were regular records along the canal between West Hythe and Hythe in the 1950s, whilst William Nevin provided an unusual record of a “young Greater Spotted Woodpecker, just out of the nest, seen in the High Street in Hythe” on the 22nd February 1957. There were also two records of migrants: one seen flying east at Hythe Ranges by Roger Norman during a movement of passerines on the 30th March 1958 (Norman 2006) and one arriving in off the sea at Folkestone on the 29th October 1959 (included in the Kent Bird Report for that year). It is a widespread resident today.

Breeding atlas distribution

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

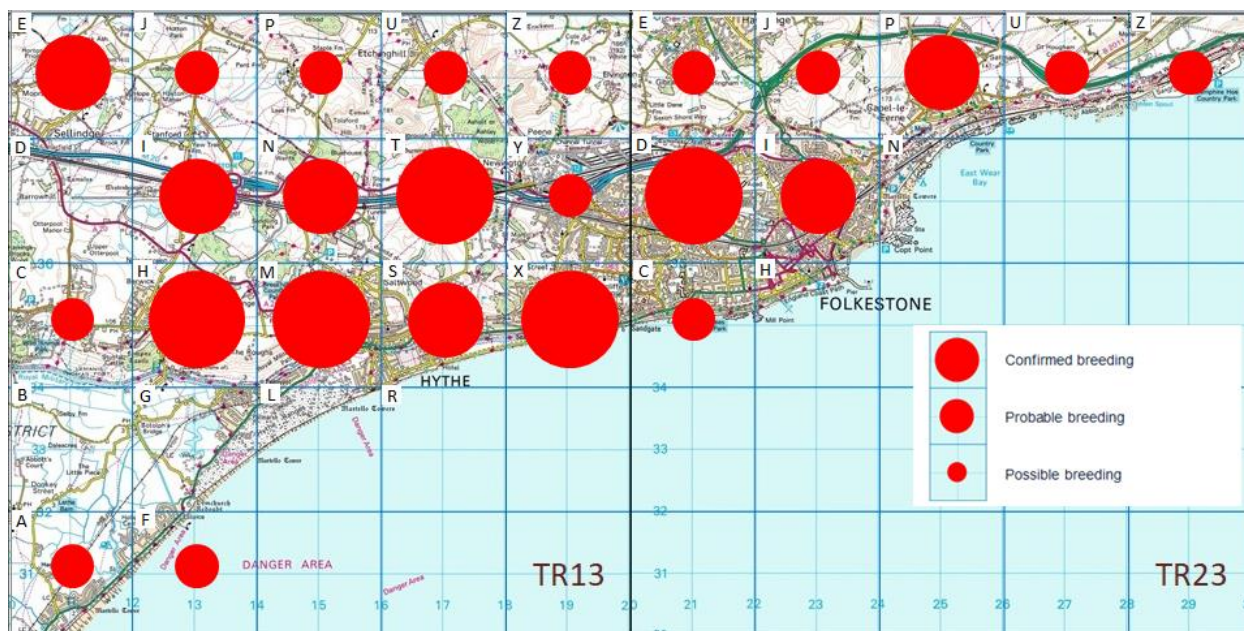


Figure 1: Breeding distribution of Great Spotted Woodpecker at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in five tetrads, with probable breeding in five more and possible breeding in 14 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	0	(0%)	3	(10%)	13	(42%)
Probable/Confirmed	3	(10%)	9	(29%)	11	(35%)
Total	3	(10%)	12	(39%)	24	(77%)
Change			+9	(+300%)	+12	(+100%)

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	+300%	+100%	+400%
Kent	+82%	+58%	+187%

Records from the first atlas were in the more wooded tetrads of TR13 H, TR13 M and TR13 N (covering West Hythe and the woods around Saltwood) but by the second atlas it had spread into 11 tetrads within TR13, plus TR23 P. The most recent atlas found that it has now colonised just about all tetrads with suitable habitat, being absent only from some treeless parts of the Romney Marsh, the open shingle of Hythe Ranges and some of the smaller coastal tetrads.

Clements *et al* (2015) reported on an increase of 108% in South-east England over the period 1995 to 2012 (from BTO Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data) and considered that this level of increase was almost certainly mirrored in Kent. They also concluded that evidence from the increased numbers of occupied tetrads in the county supported the likelihood of a large increase in numbers (occupied tetrads in Kent increased by 82% between the first and second atlases, and by a further 58% by the third atlas; an overall increase of 187%). The reduction in coppicing has affected many other bird species, but has probably helped Great Spotted Woodpeckers by providing a greater stock of mature timber.

Overall distribution

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of Great Spotted Woodpecker by tetrad, with records in 30 tetrads (97%). There have been records from all tetrads except TR13 R which is a tiny section of shingle beach.

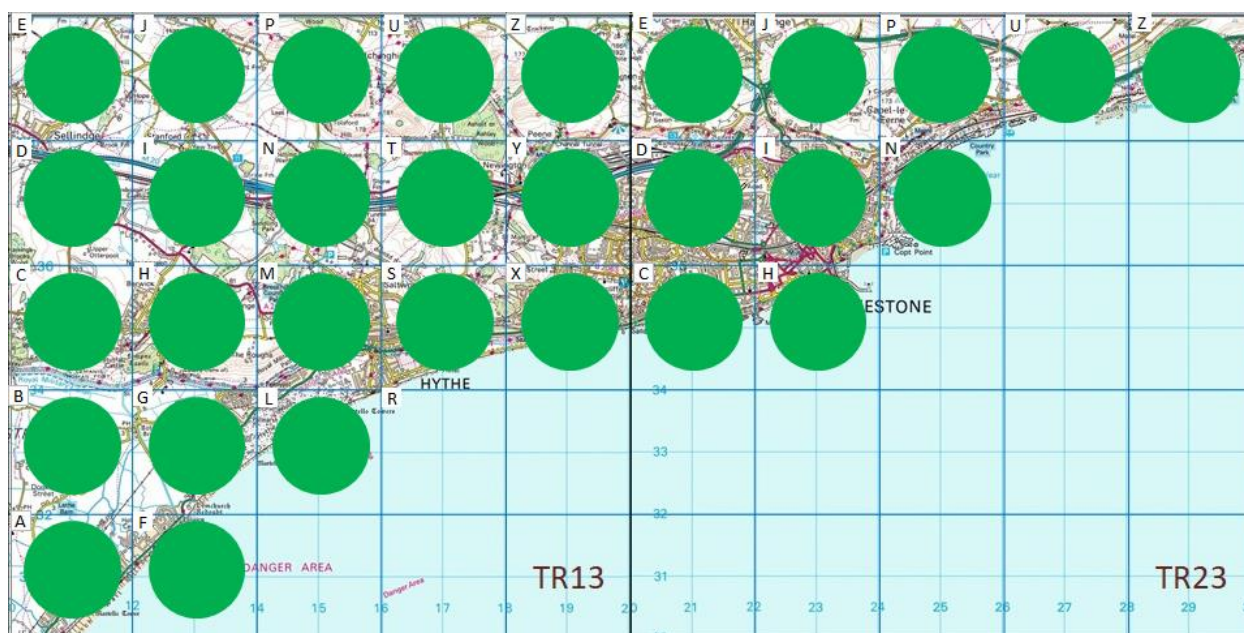


Figure 2: Distribution of all Great Spotted Woodpecker records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Spring migrants are scarce and Taylor *et al* (1981) noted that there were just two at Dungeness over a 25-year period. Locally there have been just two spring records at Abbotscliffe in 30 years of recording: one flying east on the 30th March 1997 and one flying west on the 15th April 2022.

Autumn passage is more pronounced with a mean of 15 suspected migrants per annum over the last 20 years. Most records involve one or two birds but larger counts can occur, and day totals of five at Capel Battery on the 2nd October 1997, five at Abbotscliffe on the 1st October 2002 and seven at Abbotscliffe on the 2nd October 2010 have been recorded.

The majority of coastal records are thought to involve dispersing Kentish birds, although a few are likely to be continental immigrants of the nominate form *D. m. major* (Taylor *et al.*; Wernham *et al.* 2002).

References

- Clements, R., Orchard, M., McCanch, N. & Wood, S. 2015. *Kent Breeding Bird Atlas 2008-13*. Kent Ornithological Society.
- Harrison, J. M. 1953. *The Birds of Kent*. Witherby, London.
- Henderson, A. & Hodge, T. 1998. The Kent Breeding Bird Atlas 1988-94. *Kent Bird Report* 1996: 134-272.
- Kent Ornithological Society (KOS). 1953-2021. *Kent Bird Reports*. Kent Ornithological Society.

Knight, V. & Tolputt, F. 1871. List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood. *Fourth Annual Report of the Folkestone Natural History Society*. Available at: www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/46103

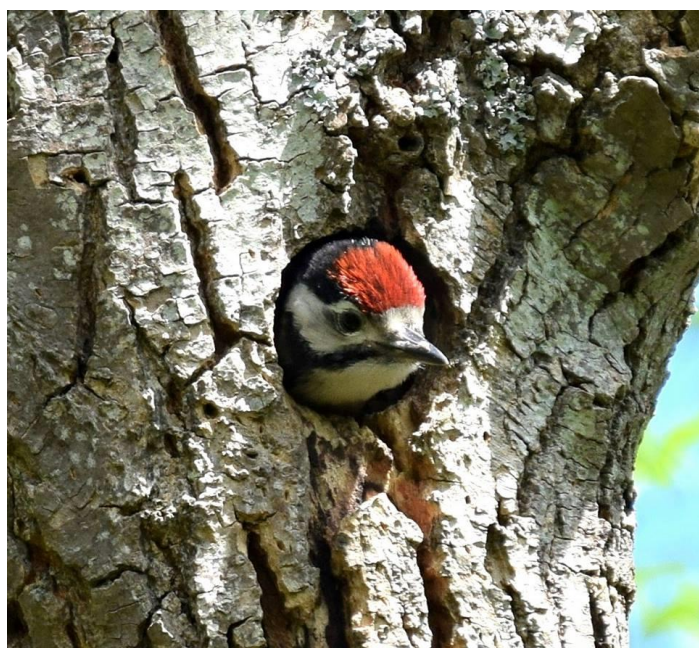
Norman, R. K. 2006. Some observations of birds on Hythe Ranges since 1950. <https://folkestonebirds.com/where-to-watch> (see "Further Information" section).

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

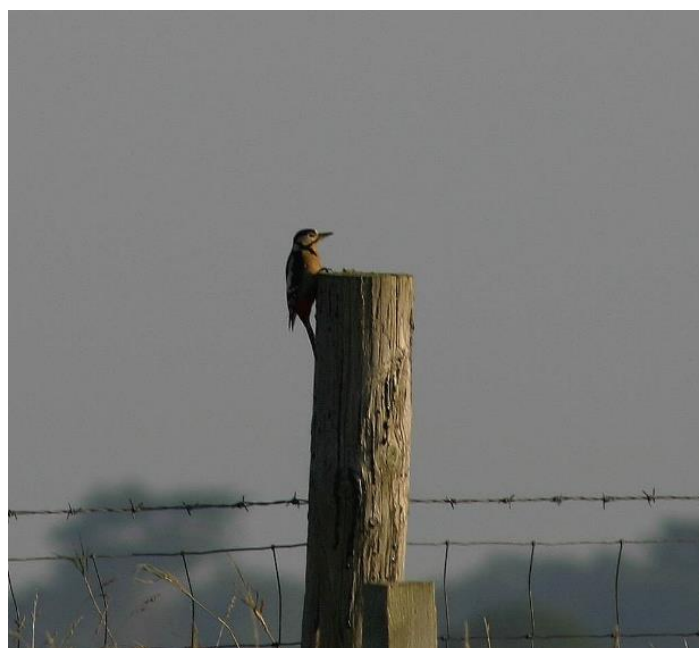
Taylor, D., Davenport, D. & Flegg, J. 1981. *Birds of Kent*. Kent Ornithological Society.

Ticehurst, N. F. 1909. *A History of the Birds of Kent*. Witherby, London.

Wernham, C. V., Toms, M. P., Marchant, J. H., Clark, J. A., Sitiwardena, G. M. & Baillie, S. R. (eds). 2002. *The Migration Atlas: movements of the birds of Britain and Ireland*. T. & A. D. Poyser, London.



Great Spotted Woodpecker at Saltwood Castle
(Nigel Webster)



Great Spotted Woodpecker at Abbotscliffe
(Ian Roberts)

Acknowledgements

The tetrad map images were produced from the Ordnance Survey [Get-a-map service](http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/get-a-map) and are reproduced with kind permission of [Ordnance Survey](http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk).

I am indebted to Andrew Henderson and Tim Hodge for providing access to the Kent Ornithological Society archives.