

Black Redstart

Phoenicurus ochruros

Category A

Breeding resident, winter visitor and passage migrant.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds across mid and lower latitudes in Europe eastwards to central Asia and central China. It has undergone a long-term expansion of its range to the north and north-west, having colonised Britain (where it has bred annually since 1939), Fenno-Scandia and the Baltic States during the twentieth century. It is resident, partially migratory or fully migratory in different parts of its range. The main wintering area for European breeders in the Mediterranean basin, with a few on the west coast of Europe, including Britain.

Kent status (KOS 2021):

In Kent it is a scarce breeder and winter visitor, also a regular passage migrant. The county supports more than 10% of the national population

The Black Redstart was not included in Knight and Tolputt's "List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood" (1871) and Ticehurst (1909) wrote that "fifty or sixty years ago the Black Redstart was considered a very rare bird in the county", whereas in "recent years the bird has become of more frequent occurrence", which he considered to be more likely to be due to "an increase in the numbers and ability of observers", rather than an actual increase in the Black Redstart population.

Ticehurst remarked that it "is undoubtedly a bird that requires looking for at the right time of year and in certain definite localities", which he went on to describe as "the rocky parts of the south coast, where, according to Mr. Webb, the bird is a regular autumn visitor in the neighbourhood of Folkestone and Dover".

Harrison (1953) considered that "the remarkable alteration in the status of this species in England, particularly in the southern half, is one of the most outstanding ornithological events of the past hundred years". It first bred in Kent in 1930 (at Ringwould, north of Dover) and after 1940 was known to breed almost annually in the county, with an early peak of about 15 pairs in 1948.

The first observed case of potential breeding locally was noted by Geoffrey Manser, who watched a male and two females in a bomb-damaged building in Tontine Street, near Folkestone Harbour, during April 1947. Two birds remained during May, but no nest was discovered. The first confirmed breeding was noted in 1949. A singing bird was heard by D. C. Pegram at Folkestone Harbour on the 5th June and a pair were later observed by G. B. Warboys as feeding two young between the 16th and 23rd July.



Black Redstart at Samphire Hoe (Steve Ashton)



Black Redstart at Samphire Hoe (Ian Roberts)



Black Redstart at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)

Harrison concluded that it had, from being a somewhat rare passage migrant and winter visitor, “changed its status in a remarkable manner and is now to be classified as a common passage migrant, as a moderately abundant winter visitor and as a recently established breeding species”.

Taylor *et al.* (1981) stated that the county population fluctuated between two and 15 pairs during 1952-1976 and mentioned that the most regular sites included the coast “between Deal and Folkestone”. During this period Kent Bird Reports indicate that between one and four pairs bred between Dover and Folkestone, although one or two of these were often just outside of the local area at Shakespeare Cliff. Another favoured locality along this stretch of coasts appears to be below Abbotscliffe.



Black Redstart at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



Black Redstart at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)

When Samphire Hoe opened to the public in July 1997 it had already been colonised, and a pair with two juveniles were noted there in August. In the same year a pair also bred below Abbotscliffe, with two young also present in August. One or two pairs have bred at Samphire Hoe in every year since, with a peak of three pairs in 2005, and breeding success can be high, with pairs often raising two broods and sometimes three. Abbotscliffe has also continued to attract a breeding pair in some years and possible breeding was noted during the most recent atlas.

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 Black Redstart at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in one tetrad, with probable breeding in three more and possible breeding in one other. 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	Not stated	2	(6%)	1	(3%)
Probable/Confirmed		0	(0%)	4	(13%)
Total		2	(6%)	5	(16%)
Change		--	(--%)	+3	(+150%)

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	--%	+150%	--%
Kent	--%	-41%	--%

As mentioned above, during the atlas period breeding was confirmed at Samphire Hoe, with possible breeding at Abbotscliffe. The other occupied sites involved Folkestone Racecourse at Westenhanger (TR13 I), where a singing male was present in May 2011 and June 2012 at least, Fisherman’s Beach at Hythe (TR13 L), where a singing male held territory in April and May 2011, and Folkestone Pier (TR23 H), where a singing male was present in April 2011 and a pair were thought to have nested in the footbridge by the former station in 2012.

There have been no subsequent signs of breeding at Folkestone Racecourse, but a singing male was again holding territory in the Fisherman’s Beach area in April 2015 and a territorial male was again in the Folkestone Pier area in several years to at least 2017.

Elsewhere a pair bred successfully at Copt Point in 2002 and were seen feeding recently fledged juveniles. In more recent years a male was singing in the Burgoyne/Risborough Barracks complex (TR13 X/TR13 Y) in April 2014, with a pair present there on the 1st June 2019 and one was seen collecting moss at nearby Cheriton Court Road on the 11th March 2021, suggesting that breeding may have also occurred at this site. In 2022 a male was heard singing at Dollands Moor (TR13 T) in June, which suggests that it was at least holding territory (at this inaccessible site).

Overall distribution

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of Black Redstart by tetrad, with records in 20 tetrads (65%).

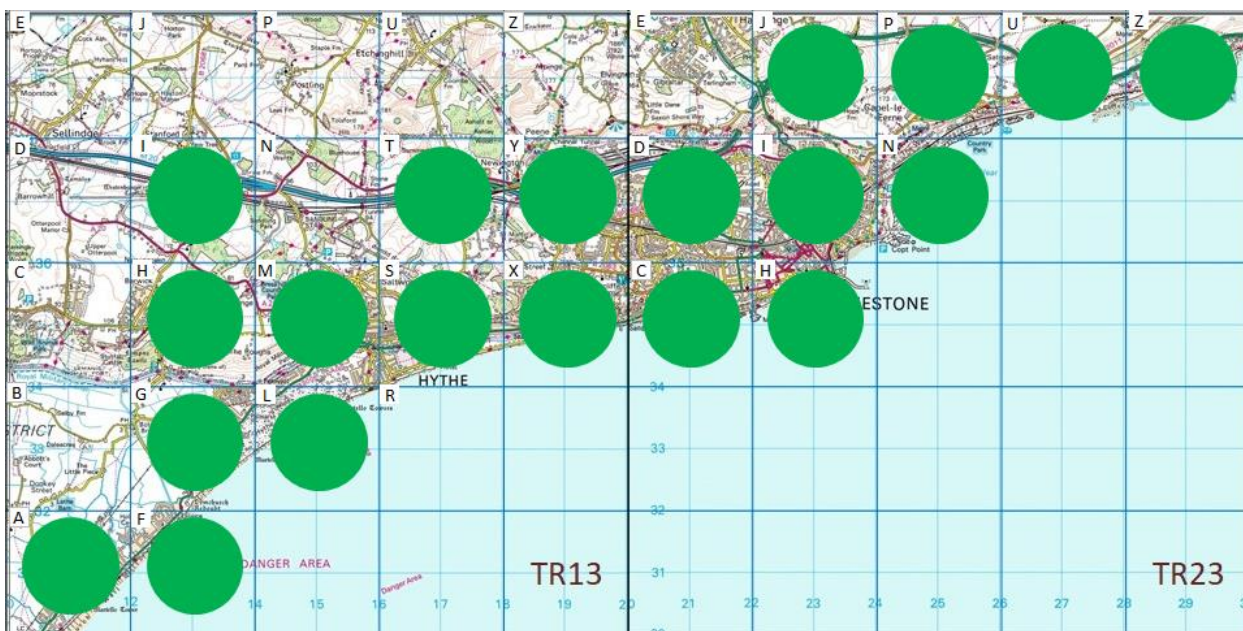


Figure 2: Distribution of all Black Redstart records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The largest counts in autumn are usually at Samphire Hoe and mainly involve post-breeding birds, with up to 12 present in some years (depending on breeding success) and it is difficult to distinguish migrants from local birds.

Elsewhere, ones and twos have been noted at a wide range of sites on autumn passage although, as figure 2 demonstrates, the Black Redstart tends to prefer coastal or urban areas, including private gardens. Passage occurs mainly in October, with larger counts as follows: three at Nickolls Quarry on the 30th October 1981, an exceptional total of 13 logged by Neil Frampton between Palmars and West Hythe on the 29th October 1984 (part of a huge arrival along the Kentish coast, with an estimated 100 at Dungeness), four at Church Hougham and four at the Hotel Imperial golf course (Hythe) on the 17th October 1990, and three at Church Hougham in October and early November 1994. At Abbotscliffe birds on the cliff-top usually appear to be migrants and up to three have been noted there on numerous occasions, with four on the 20th November 2010 and six on the 6th October 1998 and 9th October 2008.

A small number of birds over-winter and may also be widely distributed, again most often in coastal or urban areas, and favoured sites include the breeding localities where they may be resident. On average about three or four have wintered in the most recent decade, with a peak of around seven present over the 2017/2018 winter.



Black Redstart in a garden in Cheriton (Vincent Lloyd)



Black Redstart at the Willop Outfall (Brian Harper)

Spring passage may be evident from early March to mid-April and the largest counts are usually at the breeding sites, where local breeders are joined by migrant birds. There have been peak counts of six at Abbotscliffe on the 29th March 1998 and five at Samphire Hoe on the 30th March 2010 and 4th April 2012. Ones and twos may appear at widely distributed sites, with counts of three at Copt Point on the 14th April 1983, Capel Battery on the 21st March 1993, Church Hougham on the 17th March 1996, Hythe Ranges on the 24th March 2001 and Capel Battery on the 1st April 2012.

References

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Black Redstart at the Willop Sewage Works (Ian Roberts)



Black Redstart at Samphire Hoe (Mike Linklater)

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).

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Black Redstart at Dymchurch Redoubt (Brian Harper)



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