

Siskin

Spinus spinus

Category A

Winter visitor and passage migrant.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds mainly in northern and middle latitudes across Europe, also at higher altitudes in southern Europe, extending eastwards Russia to Sakhalin Island and northern Japan. It is mostly migratory in northern breeding areas, but some southern populations may be resident. Most are nomadic during winter, but some exhibit site-fidelity. The numbers migrating vary greatly from year to year and it is prone to irruptions linked to the availability of seed crops.

Kent status (KOS 2021):

In Kent it is a widespread passage migrant and winter visitor, with a few pairs occasionally breeding.



Siskin at West Hythe (Brian Harper)

The Siskin 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 "an annual winter visitor to Kent" in varying numbers, noting that it "is to be found in pairs or small parties of half-a-dozen, though occasionally in larger flocks, along the alder-lined banks or rivers and streams", so it is likely to have been present locally in similar habitats to today.

Harrison (1953) also found it to be an annual winter visitor and a regular passage migrant, but considered it necessary to list many individual records, including the first documented local occurrence when "Miss A. V. Stone saw four by the Hythe Canal on the 18th January 1922 and nine or more at the same place on the 2nd January 1924".



Siskin at Princes Parade (Nigel Webster)



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Taylor *et al.* (1981) were able to report the first confirmed breeding in the county (in 1966) and suggested that regular breeding may become established in the county, but as a winter visitor and passage migrant numbers remained relatively small during their review period (1952-1976). They gave a winter peak of 160 and a highest

autumn day-total of about 100. Locally Rowland (1954) noted “Lesser Redpolls and Siskins feeding on thistles in a rough field bordering the Hythe Canal” on the 15th November 1952, whilst F. R. Wise saw five at Folkestone Warren on the 22nd September 1956.

The Royal Military Canal between West Hythe and Hythe was confirmed as a regular wintering site by Roger Norman from the late 1950s, with up to 34 present between the 4th November 1957 and 17th April 1958, up to 58 between the 18th October 1959 and 25th March 1960 and up to 13 in winter 1961/62, whilst in the early 1980s Neil Frampton noted that “a small flock of about 8 birds are present most winters feeding on alders which line the banks of the canal”, whilst there was a larger isolated report of 100 at West Hythe on the 18th October 1985.

Elsewhere H. Schreiber noted 80+ at “Hythe” on the 24th September 1960, which may have related to Sandling Park, from where he provided records of many other species, and there were further reports of a pair on the 5th May 1968, 34 in January 1973 and 40 in January 1982. Roger Norman also noted three passage migrants flying west at Hythe Ranges on the 22nd November 1959 (Norman 2006).

Overall distribution

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

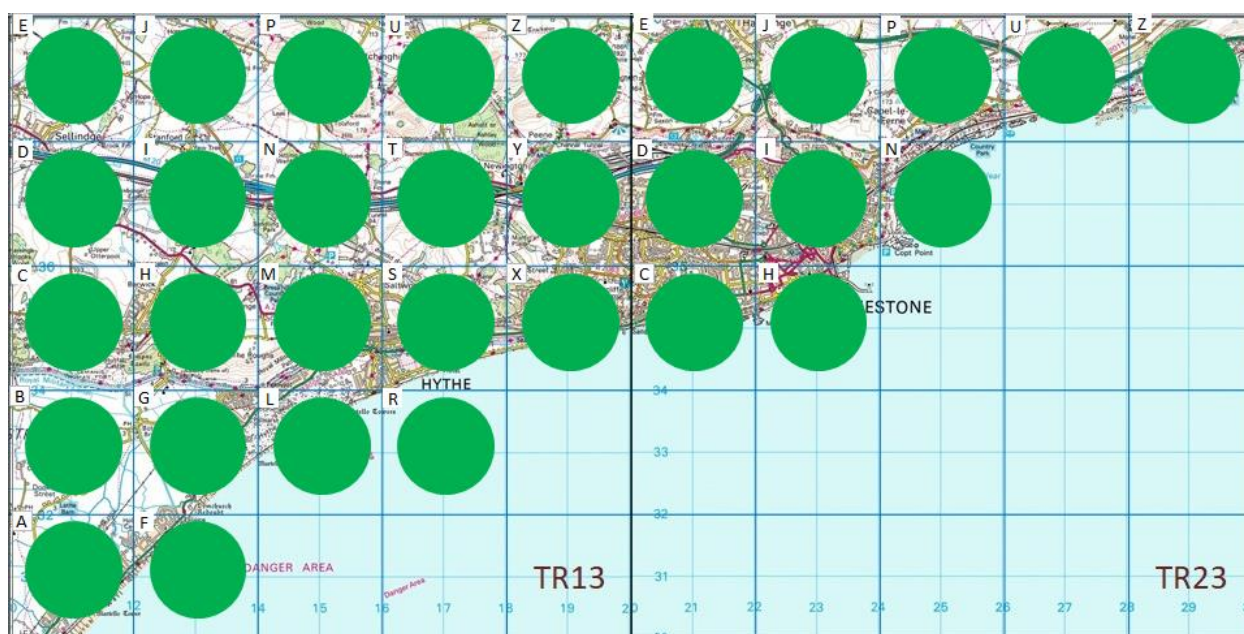


Figure 1: Distribution of all Siskin records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Clements *et al.* (2015) noted that Siskins had spread southwards from their stronghold in the pine forests of the Scottish Highlands since the 1950s, but in lowland Britain remain concentrated in the major conifer forests, with just a few pairs nesting annually in Kent. Across south-east England, breeding numbers have shown wide fluctuations, possibly linked to influxes from continental Europe, whilst the same high variability has been noted with wintering numbers and the volumes of passage migrants.

It has continued to be a regular winter visitor along the canal between West Hythe and Hythe, although numbers vary considerably and in some years none may be present. Peak numbers there have included 17 in February 1991, at least 60 in December 1993, 40 in January 1998, 40 in December 2005, up to 20 in February 2013 and 20 between October and December 2020.

The Brockhill Country Park/Chesterfield Wood/Sandling Park complex has hosted wintering flocks in a number of years, with counts there having included 40 at Sandling Park in February 2003, 40 at Brockhill Country Park in January 2006 and 79 in Chesterfield Wood in January 2022. Other sites that have attracted wintering birds have included the Casebourne Wood area (with peaks of 25 in February 1998, 50 in February 2009 and 20 in November 2010), Kiln Wood (with peaks of 50 in January 2018 and 20 in December 2020) and the Cock Ash Lake/Horton Priory area (with peaks of 15 in November 2020 and 39 in January 2022).

Ian Roberts noted 31 flying west at Mill Point on the 19th September 1988 and passage migrants have been noted annually since, with numbers increasing considerably when systematic coverage at the cliffs commenced in the early 1990s.

Autumn passage may be noted from early September, with the earliest record having involved seven flying east at Abbotscliffe on the 1st September 2020, whilst the earliest double-figure count was of 11 flying east at Capel Battery on the 2nd September 1997 and the earliest three-figure count was of 135 flying east at Samphire Hoe on the 14th September 2008. The numbers involved vary significantly, with just single figure totals in some years but several thousand in others, with a peak of over 4,700 bird/days in 2008. The mean autumn total over the last 20 years has been around 950. Counts of 250 or more have been logged on a number of occasions:

345 west at Abbotscliffe on the 15th October 1993
505 west at Abbotscliffe on the 23rd September 1996
776 east at Abbotscliffe on the 24th September 1996
275 east at Capel-le-Ferne Café on the 20th September 2001
255 east at Capel-le-Ferne Café on the 21st October 2003
275 east at Samphire Hoe on the 15th September 2008
850 east at Samphire Hoe on the 16th September 2008
275 east at Samphire Hoe on the 20th September 2008
420 east at Samphire Hoe on the 24th September 2008
600 east at Samphire Hoe on the 25th September 2008
320 east at Samphire Hoe on the 26th September 2008
375 east at Samphire Hoe on the 5th November 2008
250 east at Samphire Hoe on the 19th October 2012
325 east at Abbotscliffe on the 17th September 2015
300 east at Hythe on the 30th September 2015
260 east at Abbotscliffe on the 17th October 2015
517 east at Abbotscliffe on the 19th October 2018
3,175 east at Abbotscliffe on the 28th September 2020

The record count on the 28th September 2020 was a minimum day total as several hundred were noted at three other coastal sites.



Siskin at West Hythe (Brian Harper)



Siskin at West Hythe (Brian Harper)

Spring passage has been noted from late February and typically peaks between mid-March and early April, with the largest counts usually in the last week of March. It is significantly lighter than autumn but no less variable. In some years there are just single figure totals, with a peak of 536 bird/days in 2016 and a mean spring total over the last 20 years of 160. Counts of 50 or more have been logged on a number of occasions:

98 east at Copt Point on the 28th March 1991
87 east at Folkestone on the 26th March 1994
156 east at Capel-le-Ferne Café on the 26th March 2002
63 east at Capel Battery on the 18th March 2003
83 east at Samphire Hoe on the 5th April 2006
210 east at Samphire Hoe on the 5th April 2008
118 east at Abbotscliffe on the 19th March 2009
52 east at Samphire Hoe on the 31st March 2013
69 east at Abbotscliffe on the 20th March 2016
82 east at Abbotscliffe on the 21st March 2016
243 east at Abbotscliffe on the 31st March 2016
62 east at Abbotscliffe on the 13th March 2017
54 east at Abbotscliffe on the 25th March 2019
54 east at Abbotscliffe on the 30th March 2020
73 east at Abbotscliffe on the 20th March 2021
61 east at Abbotscliffe on the 21st March 2021
137 east at Seabrook on the 20th March 2022
56 east at Seabrook on the on the 25th March 2022
92 east at Seabrook on the on the 26th March 2022



Siskin at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



Siskin at Hythe (Glenn Tutton)

Stragglers may occur into late May in some years, with just one record in early June (of three at Seabrook on the 8th June 2017), but there have been summer records in four years, as follows:

in 1997 – one flying west at Church Hougham on the 19th July,

in 2010 – two flying east at Abbotscliffe on the 29th June and one at Bluehouse Wood on the 5th July,

in 2015 – three flying south-west over Saltwood on the 23rd June, seven flying east at Palmarsh on the 9th July, a total of 23 flying over Saltwood between the 13th and 18th July, and nine in a garden near Paraker Wood on the 19th July,

in 2020 – one flying over Samphire Hoe on the 12th July.

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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](#).

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Siskin at Cheriton (Brian Harper)



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