

Garden Warbler

Sylvia borin

Category A

A scarce and declining breeding summer visitor and passage migrant.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds across much of Europe and Asia eastwards through western Siberia to the Yenisey river. Winters extensively in Africa, south to South Africa.

Kent status (KOS 2021):

It is a widespread summer visitor and passage migrant in Kent.



Garden Warbler at Princes Parade (Ian Roberts)

The Garden Warbler 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 well-distributed species in the wooded and fruit-growing districts of the county" 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 Garden Warbler at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was not confirmed in any tetrads but there was probable breeding in one tetrad 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	0	(0%)	6	(19%)	1	(3%)
Probable/Confirmed	12	(39%)	14	(45%)	1	(3%)
Total	12	(39%)	20	(65%)	2	(6%)
Change			+8	(+67%)	-18	(-90%)

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	+67%	-90%	-83%
Kent	+42%	-20%	+14%

Garden Warblers favour scrub, young woodland and woodland edge, seldom being found in closed canopy woodland. The national population undergoes significant short-term fluctuations in abundance, but the long-term picture is of a shallow decline since the 1980s. In Kent there has been a 20% reduction in occupied tetrads since the second atlas and a 32% decline in the BTO Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) trend for south-east England. Most losses have been from high ground on the eastern part of the North Downs (Clements *et al.* 2015). Balmer *et al.* (2013) noted evidence of a recent decline, with a 16% reduction in numbers across England between 1995 and 2010, although abundance had increased in parts of Wales and Scotland, suggesting a possible influence of climatic change.

In contrast to the Blackcap, the Garden Warbler is a long-distance migrant and is part of a group of birds that are undergoing long-term decline, where changes to the wintering and migration grounds are thought to be having a negative impact (Harris *et al.* 2020).

As the distribution map reproduced as figure 2 from Henderson & Hodge demonstrates, it was formerly well distributed across the local area (highlighted by the red box), particularly across the northern part, being largely absent from lower-lying areas.

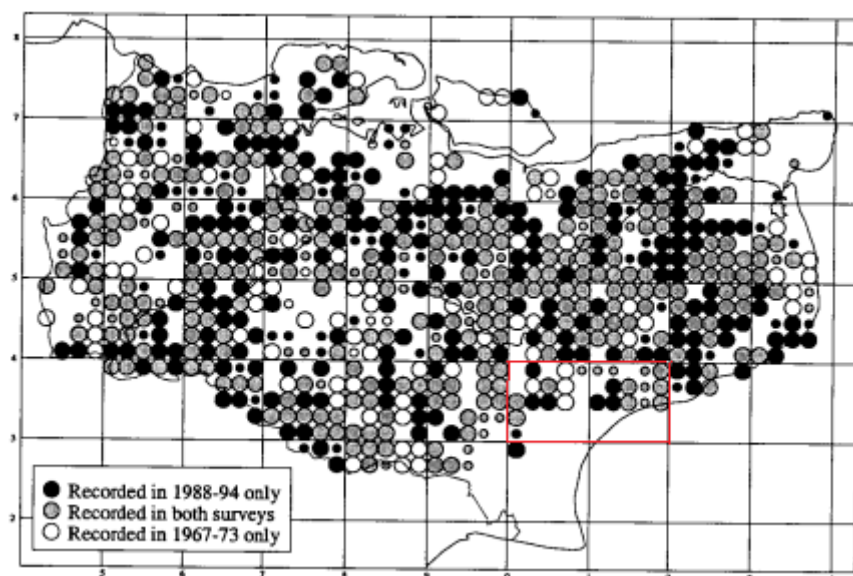


Figure 2: Breeding distribution of Garden Warbler in Kent in the 1998-94 BTO/KOS Atlas

In the most recent atlas breeding was confined to TR13 N but pairs were present at three sites in this tetrad: at Bluehouse Wood, Cowtye Wood and Heane Wood. The possible breeding record related to a male that was singing at Cheriton on the 1st May 2020 but was probably a passage migrant.

The last likely breeding record occurred at Heane Wood in 2015 but singing males have been noted in suitable breeding habitat since at Beachborough Lakes (TR13 T) in 2018, Oak Banks (TR13 T) in 2019, Folks' Wood (TR13 H) and Westenhanger (TR13 I) in 2020, and Princes Parade (TR13 X) in 2020 and 2021, and breeding may have occurred at some of these sites as it can be unobtrusive.

Clements *et al.* note that Garden Warblers are seldom found in closed canopy woodland, so the reduction in coppicing of Kentish woodland might have been expected to reduce their numbers, whilst well-managed woodland still attracts them at high density. It is possible that recent coppicing activity locally may lead to an upturn in the fortunes of this species.

Overall distribution

Figure 3 shows the distribution of all records of Garden Warbler by tetrad, with records in 24 tetrads (77%).

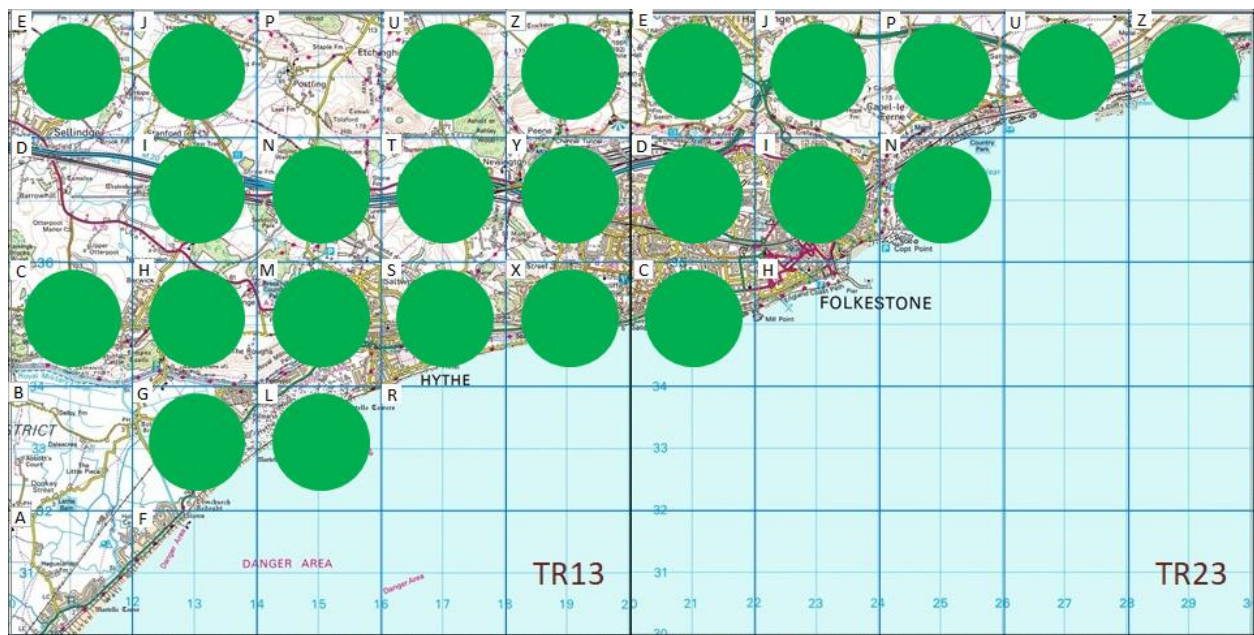


Figure 3: Distribution of all Garden Warbler records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The earliest ever arrival involved one at Nickolls Quarry on the 10th April 2001, whilst other early dates have included singles at Saltwood on the 13th April 1975, Nickolls Quarry on the 14th April 2018 and 16th April 2014, Folkestone Warren on the 17th April 1988, Enbrook Park (Sandgate) on the 17th April 2020 and Nickolls Quarry on the 19th April 2007. The mean first date over the last decade has been the 27th April and arrivals can continue well into May.

Spring migrants typically involve single birds and the only multiple counts away from breeding sites have comprised two at Nickolls Quarry on the 21st April 1951 and four at Capel Battery on the 27th April 1997.



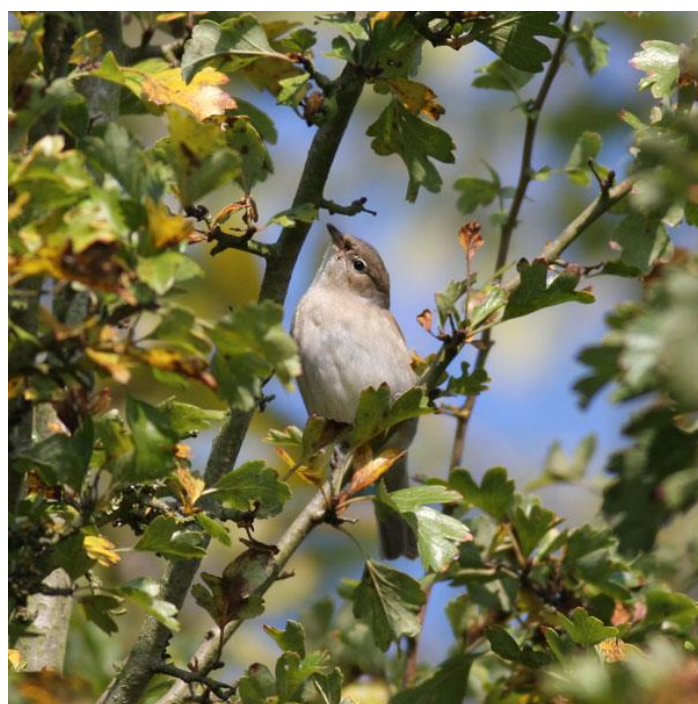
Garden Warbler at Heane Wood (Brian Harper)

Autumn passage can begin from mid-July, with the earliest sighting at Samphire Hoe on the 16th July 2018, but records in this month are scarce with further singles at Capel Battery on the 24th July 1998, Samphire Hoe on the 24th July 2018 and Mill Point on the 26th July 1988. The majority of birds pass through in August and September, mostly in ones and twos but with counts of three or more (all in August) as follows:

- 3 at Abbotscliffe on the 13th August 1992
- 4 at Capel Battery on the 18th August 1992
- 3 at Capel Battery on the 16th to 17th August 1996
- 6 at Capel Battery on the 7th August 1997
- 3 at Capel Battery on the 8th August 1997
- 3 at Abbotscliffe on the 23rd August 1998
- 3 at Nickolls Quarry (TR13 G) on the 26th August 2005

October records are rare, having been noted in just two years; in 2002 (when there were singles at Nickolls Quarry on the 1st, Abbotscliffe on the 5th and Nickolls Quarry on the 10th) and in 2018 (when one was at Beachborough Lakes on the 3rd to 4th) but, remarkably, there have been two November records (at Samphire Hoe on the 2nd November 2004 and at Palmarsh on the 6th November 1981).

Click [here](#) to listen to a local audio recording of one singing at Princes Parade on the 20th May 2021 (Ian Roberts).



Garden Warbler at West Hythe (Brian Harper)

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Acknowledgements

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