

# Golden Plover

*Pluvialis apricaria*

Category A

Winter visitor and passage migrant.

*World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):*

Breeds mainly at higher latitudes from eastern Greenland across Europe and Asia east to Siberia. The British population is partially migratory but elsewhere it is wholly migratory and winter populations mix, when the combined range comprises western Europe, the Mediterranean basin, and thence east and south-east from Turkey to the southern Caspian. The most important wintering areas are in western maritime regions, including Britain. In mild winters the majority stay in Europe but it is susceptible to cold weather movements.

*Kent status (KOS 2021):*

It is a widespread passage migrant and winter visitor to Kent.



Golden Plover at Hotel Imperial GC (Brian Harper)

The Golden Plover 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. Ticehurst (1909) and Harrison (1953) both found it to be less coastal than most waders, with the latter remarking that it "is more to be found on the drier uplands, seeming to find such terrain more congenial than the wetter marshland", so it is more difficult to assume local occurrence and neither author made any specific references to local sightings.

The first documented occurrence was on the 24<sup>th</sup> December 1957, when Roger Norman and Eric Pilcher saw one at Nickolls Quarry, but there were no further sightings there until the late 1970s, an absence which Roger noted as "surprising" (Norman 2007). There were however very few other early records, with Roger noting that it was heard overhead during the night at Hythe Ranges on the 27<sup>th</sup>/28<sup>th</sup> March 1958 and the 17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> April 1958, with two there during the day on the 20<sup>th</sup> April 1960 (Norman 2006).

The Kent Bird Report for 1964 stated that 120 flew north-west over Folkestone on the 27<sup>th</sup> December, part of a cold weather movement that also involved 800 Lapwings, but there were no further reports until 1979 when Dave Weaver noted it as "present" at Nickolls Quarry on the 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1979, with four at the same site on the 23<sup>rd</sup> December later the same year, and subsequent sightings of one there on the 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1982 and five there on the 19<sup>th</sup> February 1983.



Golden Plover at Copt Point (Paul Trodd)



Golden Plover at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)

Neil Frampton stated that between 1980 and 1985 in “most winters a small flock was present with Lapwings to the south of the canal between the Burmarsh Estate and the [West Hythe] dam”, and cited a peak count of 150 there on the 28<sup>th</sup> December 1983.

It has been recorded annually since 1988, whilst in the 1990s and early 2000s it was present in some abundance, making the scarcity in the early years seem curious, however recent years have seen it become uncommon once more.

### **Overall distribution**

Figure 1 shows the distribution of all records of Golden Plover by tetrad, with records in 18 tetrads (58%).

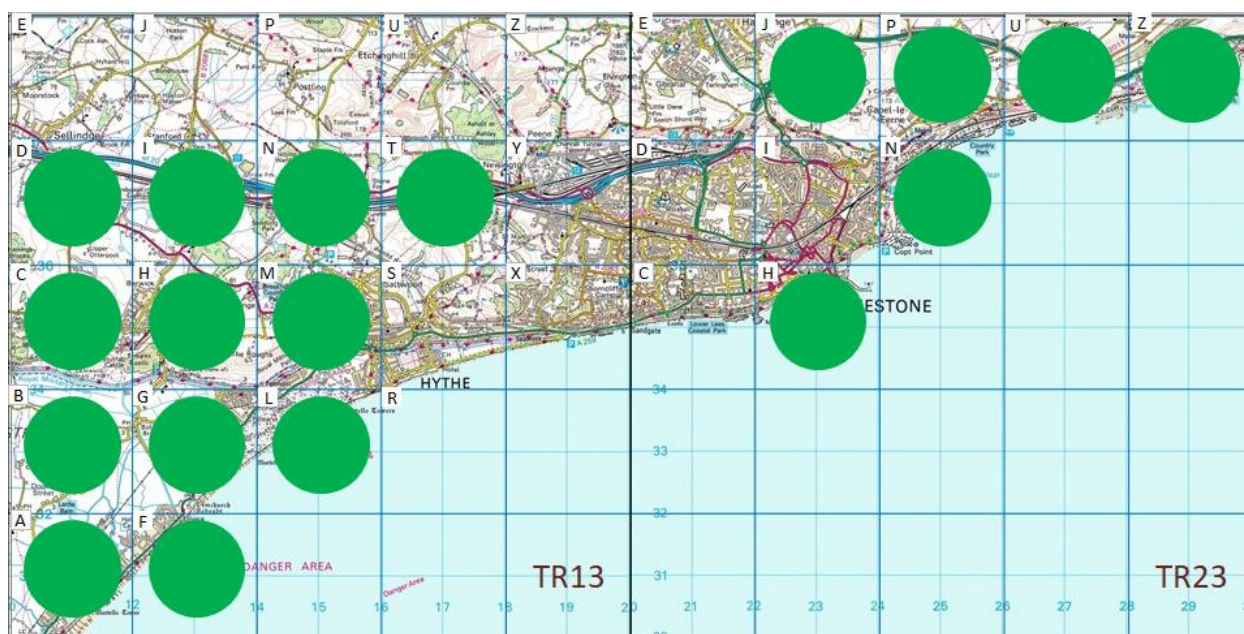


Figure 1: Distribution of all Golden Plover records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

A wintering flock was first noted in the Capel-le-Ferne area in November 1988, when 250 were present, and there were sightings there in five of the next eight winters, with peak counts of 700 on the 31<sup>st</sup> December 1992 and 31<sup>st</sup> December 1996.



Golden Plovers with Lapwings at Postling Wents (Ian Roberts)



There were also regular winter sightings on the Romney Marsh until 2004/05, where the peak counts were between 800 and 1,000 at Nickolls Quarry in November 1995 and 1,200 in the Botolph's Bridge area in November 2000.

Figure 2 shows the winter maxima at these two regular wintering areas.

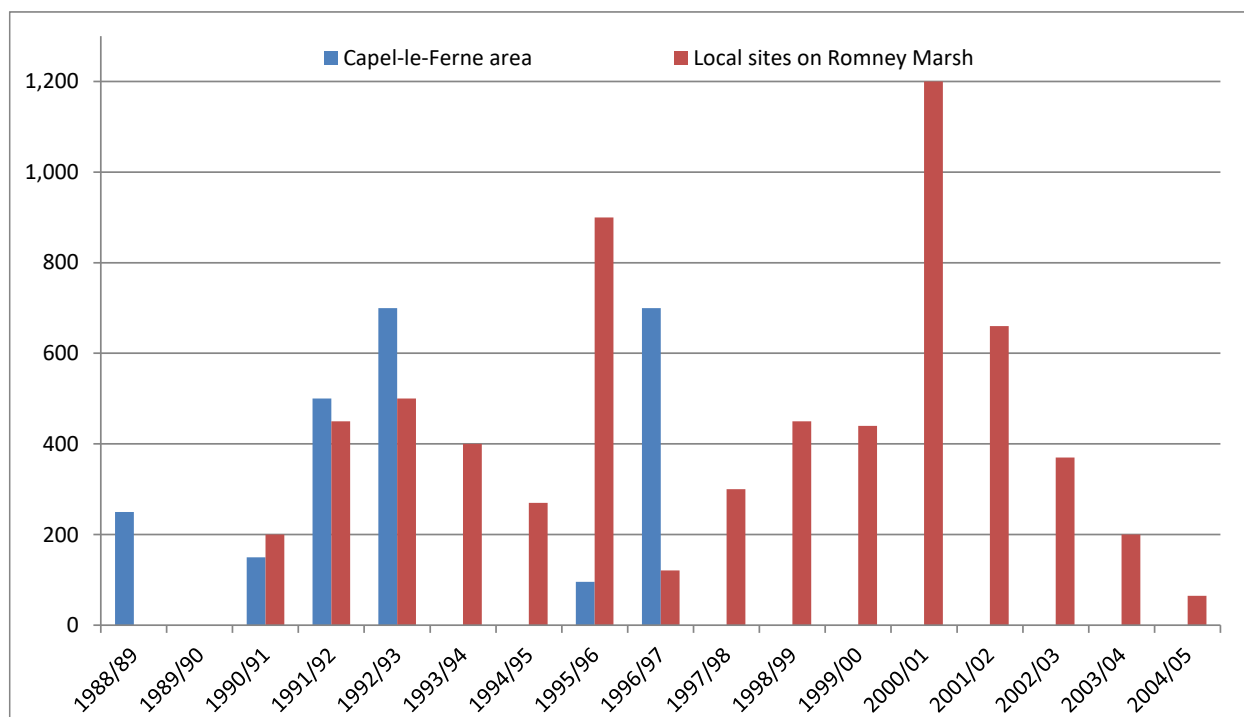


Figure 2: Winter maxima of Golden Plover at the two main wintering areas

In the 2005/06 winter there were counts of 125 at Abbotscliffe and 550 at Hillhurst Farm (Westenhanger) in November 2005, but it has not wintered regularly since and sightings have become sporadic. The only three-figure counts since have been associated with cold weather and involved 100 at the Willop Basin in early January 2010 and a peak of 409 in the Haguelands Farm/Willop sewage works area in early February 2021.

Sightings away from the Abbotscliffe/Capel-le-Ferne area or the marsh are infrequent and typically involve birds on passage or displaced by cold weather, but up to 66 were seen regularly in the Postling Wents area (TR13 I) from December 2016 to January 2017 and 39 were seen there in February 2018.



Golden Plover at Hythe Imperial Golf Course (Brian Harper)

Wintering birds had typically departed by mid-March, with occasional stragglers into early April. Later sightings have involved migrants, with one on the seawall at Samphire Hoe on the 13<sup>th</sup> April 2013, one heard over Hythe Ranges during the early hours of the 18<sup>th</sup> April 1958, two on pools there on the 20<sup>th</sup> April 1960, two flying in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2020, one at Abbotscliffe on the 9<sup>th</sup> May 2007 and one flying west there on the 29<sup>th</sup> May 2000.

Returning birds have been noted as early as the 17<sup>th</sup> June (2001), when one was seen at Nickolls Quarry, increasing to three there on the 25<sup>th</sup> June, with one also the 7<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> July 2001, but the only other sighting in July related to one at the same site on the 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1999. Wintering birds generally arrived from the second week of August and numbers could rapidly increase, with 160 in the Botolph's Bridge area on the 14<sup>th</sup> August 1998.



Golden Plovers with Lapwings at Donkey Street (Ian Roberts)

## References

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



Golden Plovers at Postling Wents (Ian Roberts)



Golden Plover at Hythe Imperial Golf Course (Brian Harper)