

# Common Gull

*Larus canus*

Category A

Winter visitor and passage migrant.

*World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998; Clements et al. 2015):*

Breeds across upper latitudes in Europe from Britain and Ireland eastwards across northern Europe and northern Asia to the north Pacific coast. The European breeding population winters on the western seaboard of Europe south to north-west France. In Britain it breeds mainly in Scotland, but there are small, isolated colonies in northern England, East Anglia, Hampshire and Kent. Breeding was first recorded in Kent in 1919, when four pairs nested at Dungeness. The population peaked at 34 pairs in 1939 but in recent years around 5 to 10 pairs have bred. The Kent colony is thought to have originated from continental birds, with breeding commencing in the Netherlands in 1908 and Belgium in 1924.



Common Gull at Seabrook (Brian Harper)

*Kent status (KOS 2021):*

In Kent it is a common passage migrant and winter visitor that breeds annually in small numbers.

The Common Gull 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) stated that it was "a chiefly a visitor to Kent during the spring and autumn migrations, but it is also found numerous as a winter resident, while immature birds in their marbled plumage are found on the coast throughout the year". He also mentioned that its distribution was practically the same as the Black-headed Gull's and there can be little doubt that it was to be found locally.

The Dutch population increased when the fox population declined following the myxomatosis-induced crash in rabbit numbers. As fox numbers increased again, Common Gulls took to roof-nesting, a habit as yet not recorded in Kent. Clements *et al.* stated that "it seems only a matter of time before Common Gulls take to roof-nesting in Kent, with a consequent increase in potential breeding numbers". If this were to occur then it could be a potential colonist of the local area, alongside the roof-nesting Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls.



Common Gull at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)

## Overall distribution

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

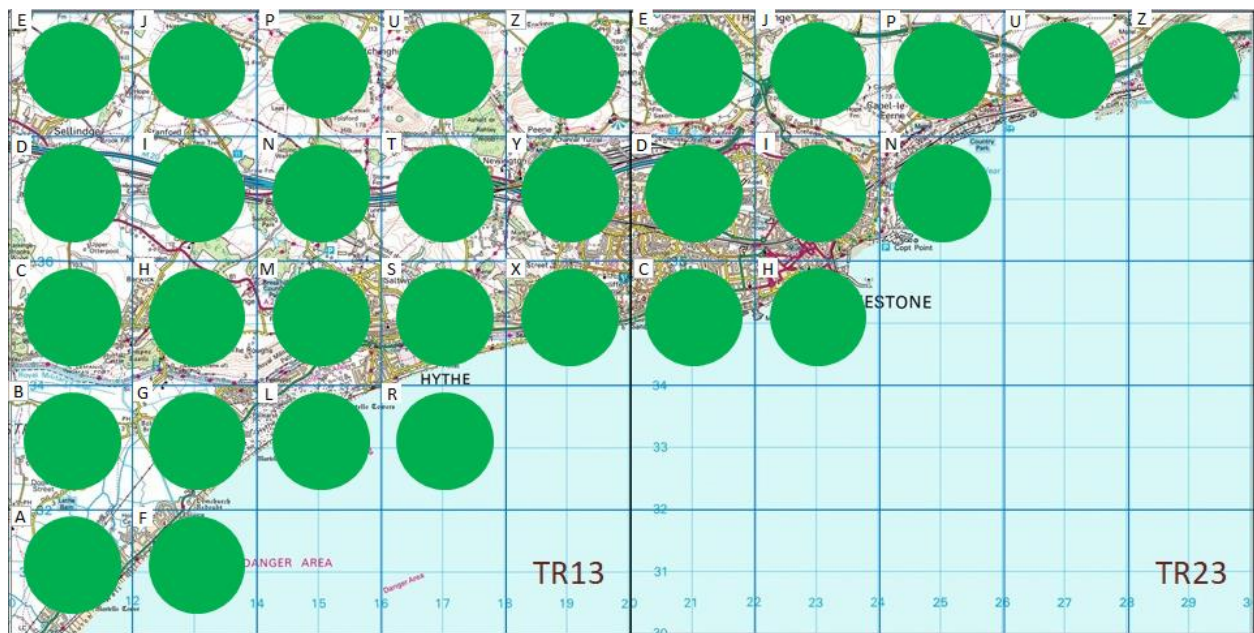


Figure 1: Distribution of all Common Gull records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

As Taylor *et al.* (1981) stated, small numbers of non-breeding birds remain around the coast during the summer, with a peak count locally in June of six at Nickolls Quarry on the 1<sup>st</sup> June 1991. Numbers increase from late July, with the earliest double-figure counts being 20 flying east past Folkestone on the 20<sup>th</sup> July 1997.

Taylor *et al.* also noted that the pastures and playing fields along the North Downs are particularly favoured by this species and that the largest numbers consistently occur around the coast between November and January. Three-figure counts from the North Downs have involved 145 at Church Hougham on the 15<sup>th</sup> January 2015, 125 at Hillhurst Farm on the 8<sup>th</sup> November 2015, up to 370 at Beachborough Park in November and December 2016, 296 near Saltwood Castle on the 9<sup>th</sup> March 2017, up to 165 at Beachborough Park in January 2018, 122 there in January 2019 and 254 there in March 2019, c.400 near Cock Ash Lake on the 7<sup>th</sup> December 2019, 230 in the Summerhouse Hill area on the 24<sup>th</sup> January 2020, 150 at Cock Ash Lake and Postling Wents on the 16<sup>th</sup> January 2022 and 150 at Pedlinge and 400 at Postling Wents on the 9<sup>th</sup> February 2022.

Coastal roost counts have included:

- Up to 300 at Nickolls Quarry in late December 1995/early January 1996
- 500 at Copt Point on the 10<sup>th</sup> December 1996
- 1,500 at Copt Point on the 28<sup>th</sup> January 1998
- 500 at Copt Point on the 16<sup>th</sup> January 1999
- 400 at Copt Point on the 15<sup>th</sup> March 1999
- 250 at Copt Point on the 29<sup>th</sup> January 2000
- 650 off Hythe on the 17<sup>th</sup> March 2000
- 200 at Nickolls Quarry on the 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2001
- 140 at Nickolls Quarry on the 5<sup>th</sup> January 2002
- 1,280 off Hythe on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2004
- 400 off Hythe on the 20<sup>th</sup> March 2016

Up-channel spring passage is noted between March and May, when three-figure counts have involved 100 flying east past Mill Point on the 25<sup>th</sup> April 1990, 260 flying east past Mill Point on the 8<sup>th</sup> May 1991, 109 flying east past Copt Point on the 15<sup>th</sup> April 2003 and 141 flying east past Samphire Hoe on the 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2005.



Taylor *et al* refer to a number of ringing recoveries that “give an indication of the wide area of origin of Kentish wintering birds, including nestlings ringed in the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Russia”.

Harrison (1953) gave details of one ringed near Heilingenhafen in northern Germany on the 20<sup>th</sup> July 1925 that was recovered at Folkestone on the 14<sup>th</sup> December of that year, and a colour-ringed bird seen at Princes Parade on the 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2016 had been ringed as a juvenile at Karmøy in south-west Norway on the 10<sup>th</sup> July 2013.



Common Gull at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



Common Gull at Seabrook (Brian Harper)



Common Gull at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



Common Gull at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



Common Gulls in typical feeding habitat near Cock Ash Lake (Ian Roberts)



Common Gull at Seabrook (Brian Harper)



Common Gull at Seabrook (Brian Harper)

### ***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.