

# Woodpigeon

*Columba palumbus* Category A  
Breeding resident and passage migrant.

*World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):*  
Breeds throughout Europe, eastwards into Asia. Western populations are largely resident but northern and eastern breeders move south and west to winter in south-west France and Iberia.

*Kent status (KOS 2021):*  
It is an abundant resident breeding species in Kent, also a passage migrant, occasionally in large numbers in the autumn.



Woodpigeon at West Hythe (Brian Harper)

The Woodpigeon 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 “generally distributed as a breeding species throughout the wooded districts of the county”, having “increased steadily in numbers during recent years in every district. It is not, however, wholly confined to the woods and plantations, but has shown a tendency of late to take up its residence wherever there are suitable trees, even in the gardens and squares of our towns”, 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.

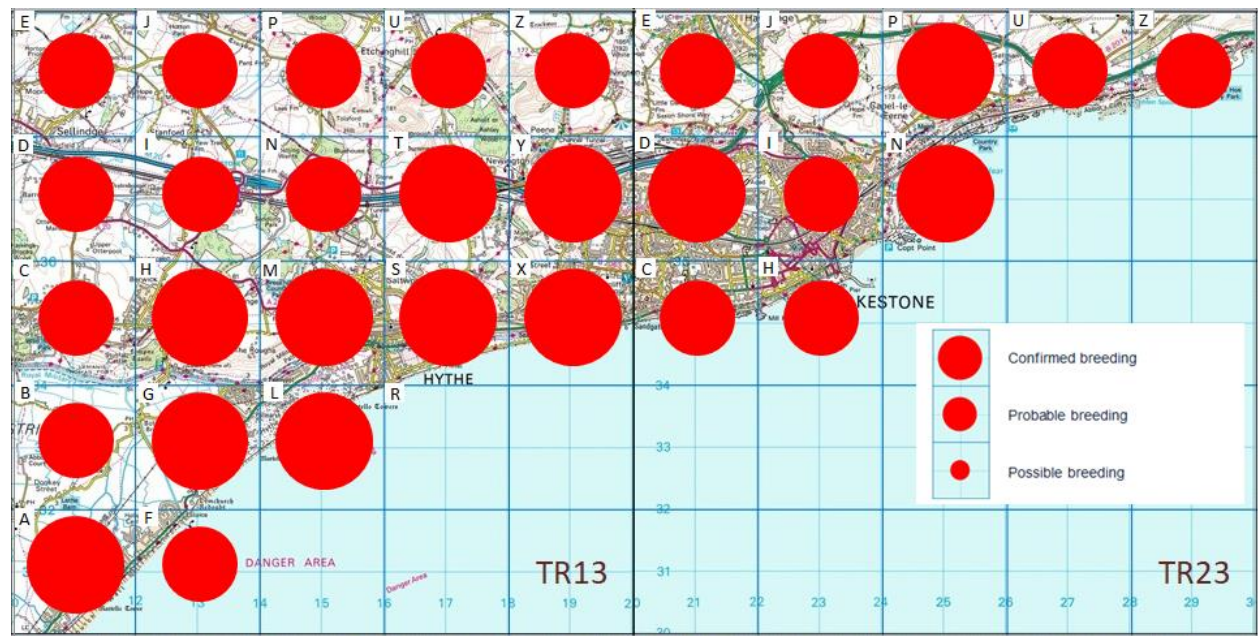


Figure 1: Breeding distribution of Woodpigeon at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in 12 tetrads, with probable breeding in 18 more. 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	1	(3%)	0	(0%)	0	(0%)
Probable/Confirmed	24	(77%)	30	(97%)	30	(97%)
Total	25	(81%)	30	(97%)	30	(97%)
Change			+5	(+20%)	+0	(+Y%)

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	+20%	+0%	+20%
Kent	+18%	+2%	+21%

The ubiquitous Woodpigeon is one of the most widespread and abundant birds in the county. Henderson & Hodge felt that the few gaps in the first atlas were artificial and that the infilling of these by the time of the second atlas were due to better and more even coverage. However, Clements *et al.* (2015) reported that the national population has increased steadily since the 1970s, with some evidence linking this to autumn cereal growing, especially of oilseed rape, so the expansion could be genuine.

Traditionally a woodland species, it has become particularly abundant over farmland, nesting in small copses and isolated trees and bushes, having also spread into parks and gardens.

### Overall distribution

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of Woodpigeon by tetrad, with records in 30 tetrads (97%).

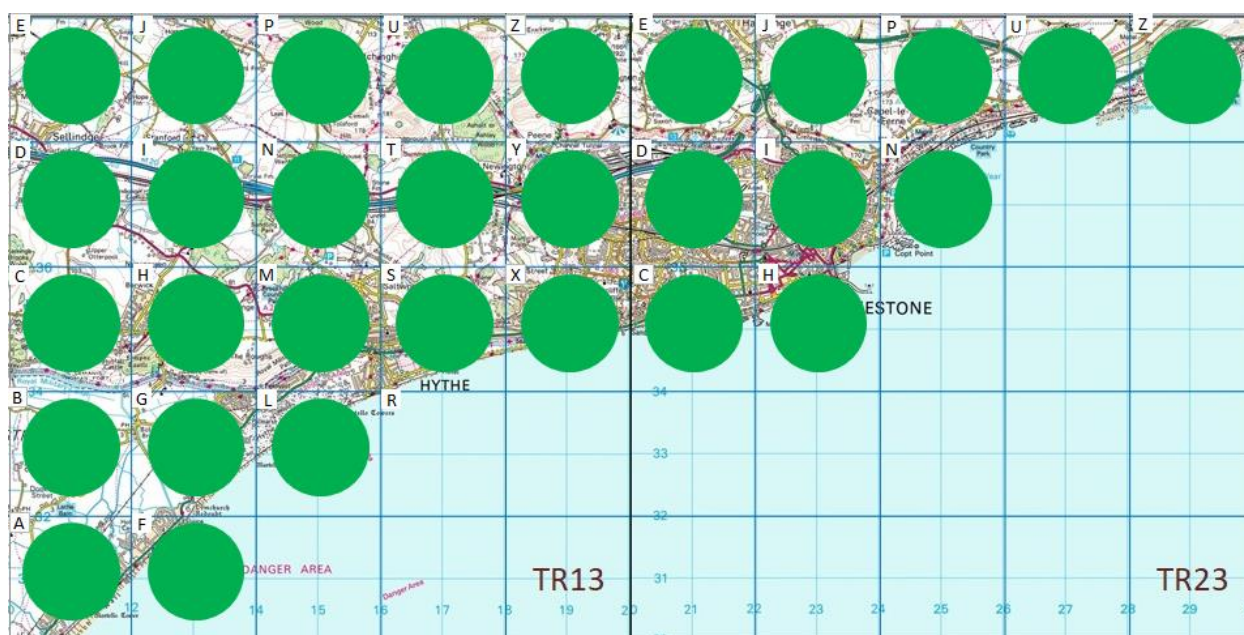


Figure 2: Distribution of all Woodpigeon records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The post-breeding population gathers into large flocks, which increase in size during the autumn, and woodland roosts also increase from early November. The largest numbers to date were present in November 2015, when thousands of birds were feeding in fields in the Botolph's Bridge area and appeared to be roosting on the wooded slopes to the north of the canal. From first light on the 28<sup>th</sup> November 2015, an estimated 10,000 flew from the roost to feeding areas on the marsh. At least 5,000 remained into early January 2016.

Other four-figure counts have involved 1,000 at West Hythe in February 1980, at Church Hougham in December 1996, at Crete Road West in February 2012 and Kiln Wood in January 2019, 1,150 at Barrowhill (Sellindge) in December 2010, 1,900 at Nickolls Quarry in February 1995, 2,000 at West Hythe in January 1984, 2,500 at Botolph's Bridge in January 2015, 3,000 at Abbotscliffe in February 1997 and 3,500 at Lympne on the 15<sup>th</sup> November 2022.



Although Woodpigeons breeding locally are essentially sedentary, migrants from elsewhere occur regularly and peak movements are usually in late October or November. Counts have included 1,165 flying west at Folkestone on the 28<sup>th</sup> October 1994, 1,040 west at Copt Point on the 8<sup>th</sup> November 1996, 1,770 west at Nickolls Quarry on the 4<sup>th</sup> November 2002, 1,160 west at Abbotscliffe on the 26<sup>th</sup> October 2004, 1,855 west at Abbotscliffe on the 5<sup>th</sup> November 2005 and 1,300 west at Samphire Hoe on the 12<sup>th</sup> November 2008.



Woodpigeon at Seabrook (Brian Harper)



Woodpigeons at West Hythe (Brian Harper)



Woodpigeons at Abbotscliffe (Ian Roberts) – autumn migrants in November 2019



Spring passage is far less regular and marked, but has been recorded occasionally in March and April, with counts including 1,280 flying west at Capel Battery on the 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2006, 1,750 west there on the 9<sup>th</sup> April 2006 and 1,500 flying north at Botolph's Bridge on the 8<sup>th</sup> April 2008.



Woodpigeon at West Hythe (Brian Harper)



Woodpigeon at Seabrook (Brian Harper)



Woodpigeons at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper) – part of the record flock present in November 2015

## **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](#).

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