

# Mallard

*Anas platyrhynchos*

Category A

Breeding resident and winter visitor.

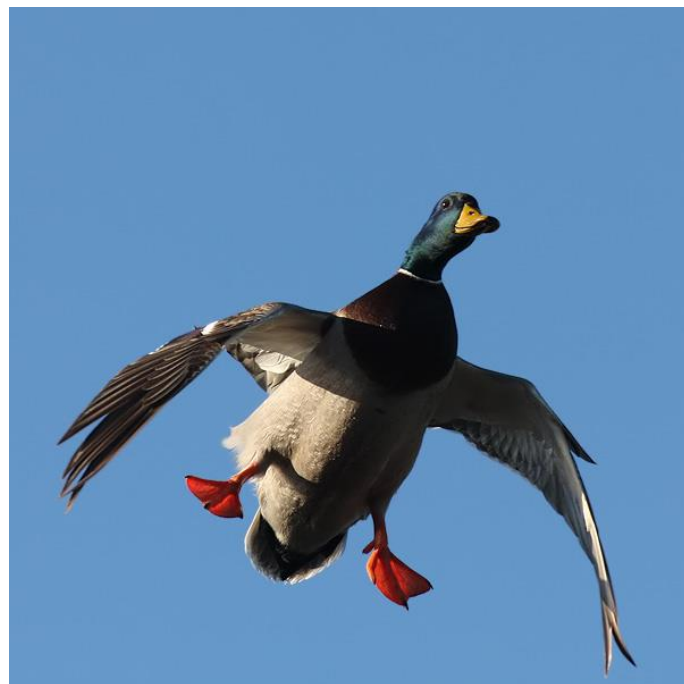
*World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):*

It is widespread across Europe, Asia and North America. In southern and western Europe it is mainly resident; even in occasional severe winter, there is movement only to nearest open water, usually coasts, and hardly any emigration.

Many Icelandic birds winter in Britain, and those from northern and eastern Europe move south-west to winter in Britain and the Low Countries, with a slight onwards passage as far as northern Spain.

*Kent status (KOS 2021):*

In Kent it is a widespread and common breeding species and winter visitor.



Mallard at the Willop Basin (Brian Harper)

The Mallard 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 "well distributed throughout the county" and although "while naturally more numerous in the marshes, it is found quite commonly throughout the wooded districts", so there can be little doubt that it was to be found locally.

Harrison (1953) considered it to be an abundant species in Kent both as a resident and as an immigrant and little has changed today, with Clements *et al.* (2015) providing an estimate of around 4,000 breeding pairs in the county.

## Breeding atlas distribution

It is currently a common and widespread breeding species, as demonstrated by figure 1 which shows the breeding distribution by tetrad based on the results of the 2007-13 BTO/KOS atlas fieldwork.

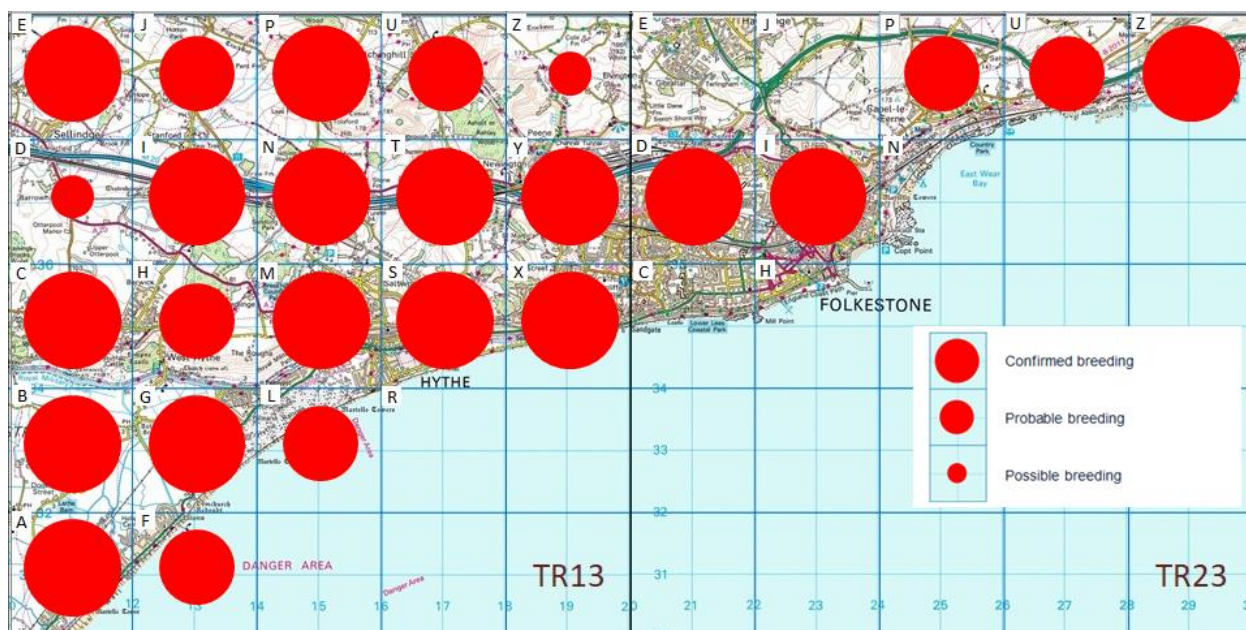


Figure 1: Breeding distribution of Mallard at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in 16 tetrads, with probable breeding in seven more and possible breeding in two others. 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%)	4	(13%)	2	(6%)
Probable/Confirmed	11	(35%)	11	(35%)	23	(74%)
Total	11	(35%)	15	(48%)	25	(81%)
Change			+4	(+36%)	+10	(+67%)

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	+36%	+67%	+127%
Kent	+28%	+20%	+55%

The apparent spread across the three atlas periods is reflected to some extent in the county position, and Clements *et al.* suggested that it may have increased in numbers and spread into more marginal habitat, but improved observer coverage may also possibly be a factor. Locally, as is the case in Kent generally, it is only really absent from the drier areas of the North Downs.

No attempt has yet been made to quantify the breeding population locally but Clements *et al.* suggested a likely density of 2-4 pairs for a typical tetrad, from which a total of 60 to 120 breeding pairs could be derived.

### Overall distribution

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of Mallard by tetrad, with records in 30 tetrads (97%). To date the only tetrad it has not been recorded from is TR23 J.

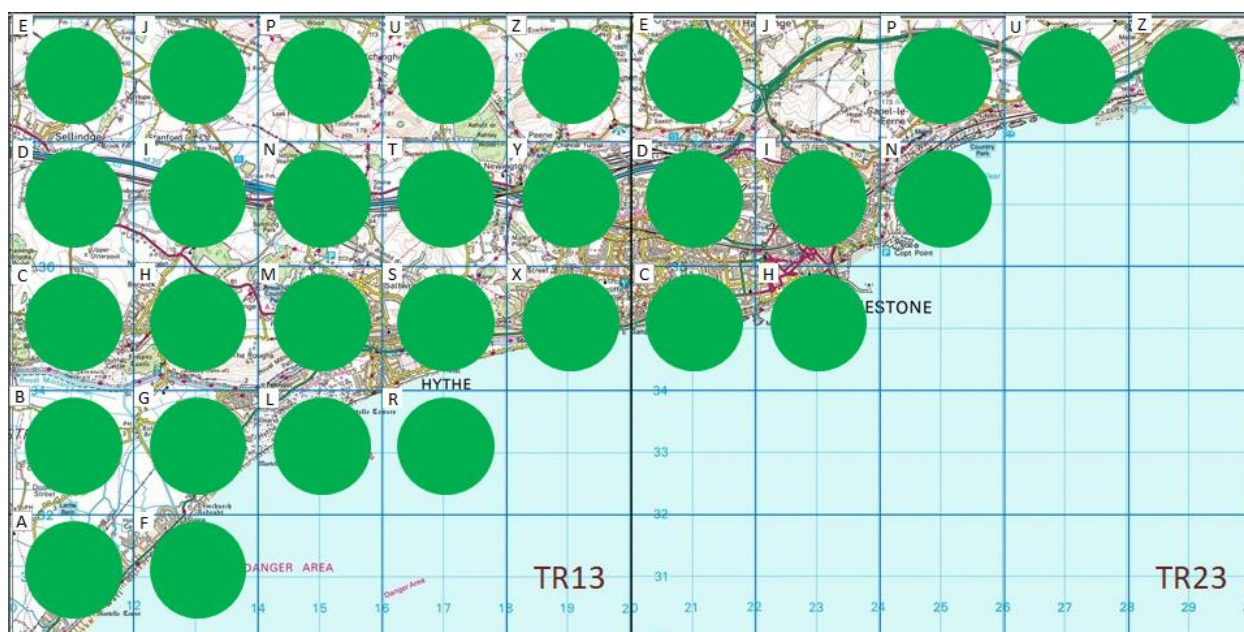


Figure 2: Distribution of all Mallard records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

When Roger Norman began watching from the Hythe Redoubt in the 1950s he occasionally saw “groups of up to 30 in loose association with Scoters” offshore “in the winter months”, with larger counts of 100 there on the 16<sup>th</sup> January 1951 and 130 on the 27<sup>th</sup> January 1952 (Norman 2006). Later in the same decade, H. G. Forsaith recorded 100 on the Hythe Canal on the 31<sup>st</sup> December 1959, whilst on the 15<sup>th</sup> September 1960 H. Schreiber noted 400 at Sandling Park (which is still the largest count to date) and a further count of 300 there in the first week of September 1966.

In modern times, post-breeding flocks have been seen to accumulate between August and October, exceeding 100 on five occasions:

106 at Nickolls Quarry on the 24<sup>th</sup> August 1992  
109 at Nickolls Quarry on the 27<sup>th</sup> August 1995  
135 at the Willop Basin on the 24<sup>th</sup> September 2012, increasing to 148 on the 28<sup>th</sup> September  
285 at the Willop Basin on the 13<sup>th</sup> October 2014  
123 at Botolph's Bridge on the 12<sup>th</sup> September 2018

Nickolls Quarry attracted large numbers of wintering birds until 2001 when increased disturbance due to the formation of a new leisure club at the site and commencement of habitat degradation associated with development works saw these reduce. Figure 3 shows the winter maxima between the 1990/91 and 2000/01 (from Norman 2007).

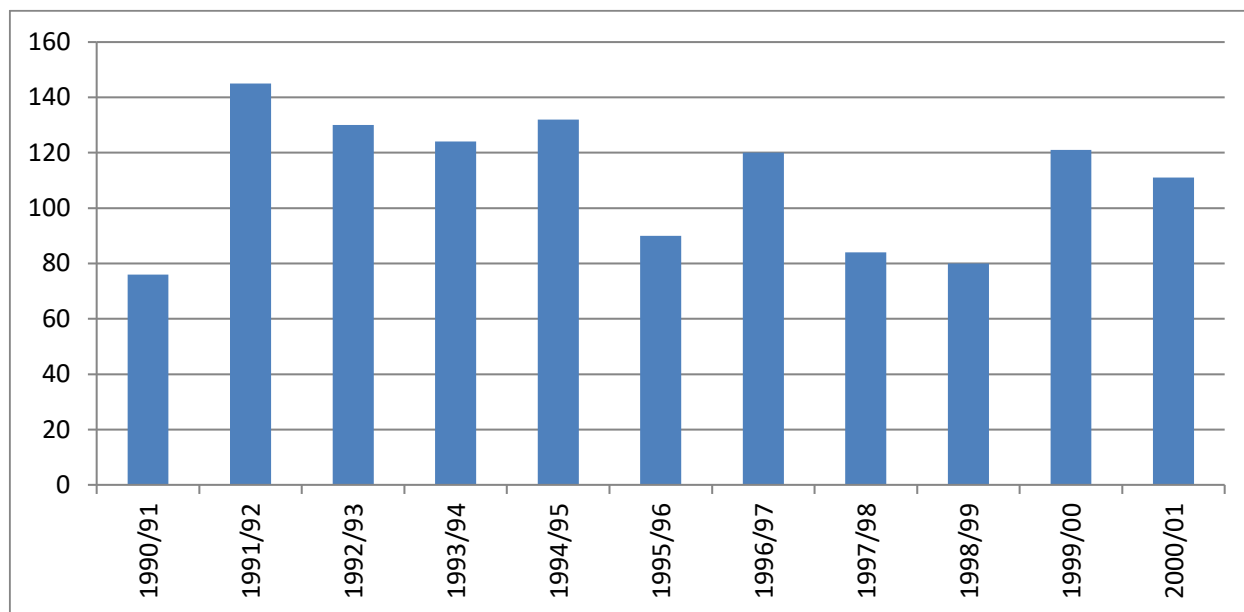
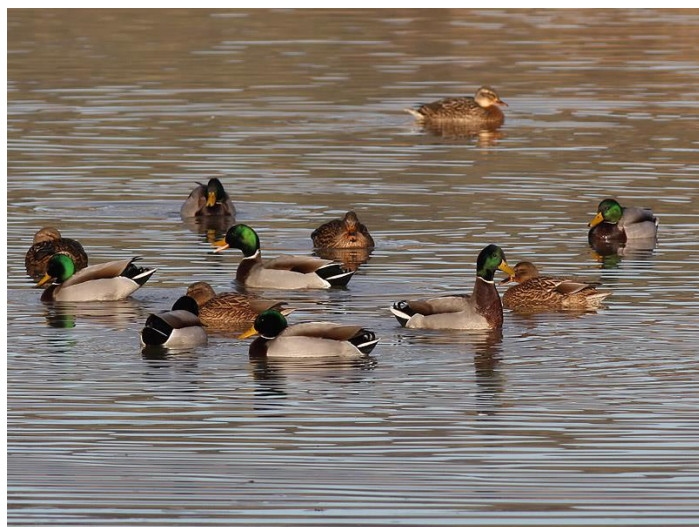


Figure 3: Winter maxima of Mallard at Nickolls Quarry between 1990/91 and 2000/01

Counts of 100 were exceeded in seven of these seasons but there have not been any since and the only three figure elsewhere relate to 106 on the canal in Hythe on the 7<sup>th</sup> December 2011, 122 at Botolph's Bridge on the 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2016, 100 at Donkey Street on the 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2018, 100 at Botolph's Bridge on the 24<sup>th</sup> November 2018 and 100 there on the 17<sup>th</sup> January 2019.



Mallards at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)



Mallard at the Willop Basin (Brian Harper)



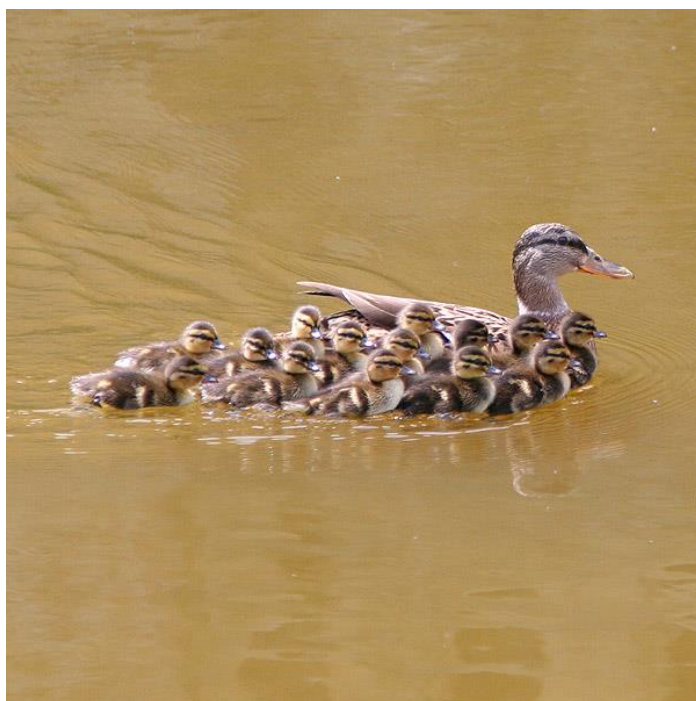
The wintering population is now more widely more dispersed across marsh, with smaller numbers at other sites, and collation of counts over four recent winter periods suggests a current wintering population in excess of 300 birds (however not all sites were covered in all samples and there may also be small numbers at sites that were not counted at all):

<b>Tetrad</b>	<b>Site</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>2022/23</b>
TR13 A/B	Willop Basin/Donkey Street area	60	92	57	60
TR13 C	Port Lymgne/West Hythe dam	38	-	9	6
TR13 E	Cock Ash Lake/Horton Priory	-	-	11	12
TR13 G	Botolph's Bridge (New Cut)	122	81	18	94
TR13 G	Nickolls Quarry	10	-	12	7
TR13 H	Folks' Wood	-	-	-	12
TR13 H	Oxenden Farm (Pedlinge)	-	-	6	3
TR13 H	West Hythe (Royal Military Canal)	-	-	-	4
TR13 I	Folkestone Racecourse (Westenhanger)	4	-	4	-
TR13 J	Hayton Lake/Horton Park Lakes	-	-	4	21
TR13 N	Chesterfield Wood	17	60	105	26
TR13 S	Hythe (Royal Military Canal)	40	34	60	59
TR13 T	Beachborough Lakes	-	21	4	6
TR13 X	Seabrook (Royal Military Canal)	15	-	-	22
TR23 D	Broadmead Village	14	-	8	15
TR23 I	Radnor Park	21	21	31	21
TR23 Z	Samphire Hoe	12	6	6	13
<b>Total wintering population</b>		<b>353</b>	<b>315</b>	<b>335</b>	<b>381</b>

There is little evidence of any coastal passage though cold weather migration does sometimes occur and an exceptional movement of wildfowl off the Willop Outfall on the 8<sup>th</sup> December 2012 included up to 30 Mallard (10 west and 20 east).



Mallard nest at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)



Mallards at Saltwood Castle (Brian Harper)

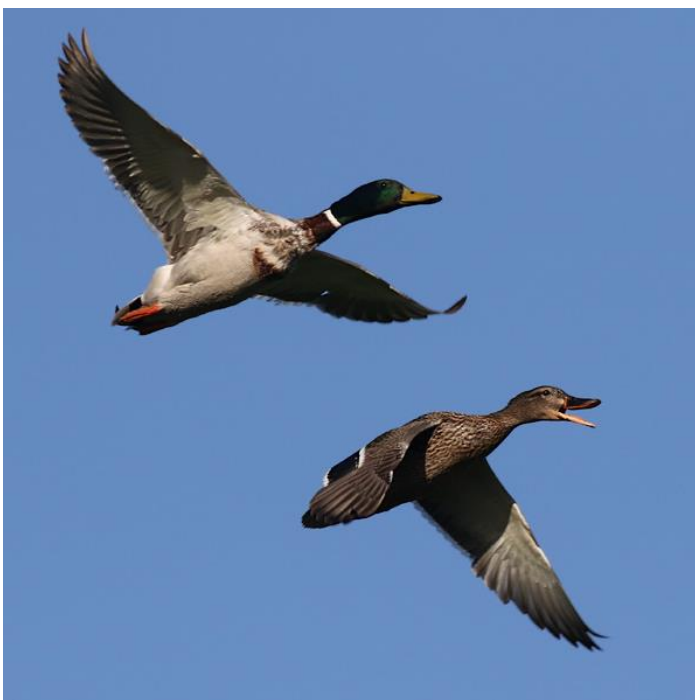
## References

- Clements, R., Orchard, M., McCanch, N. & Wood, S. 2015. *Kent Breeding Bird Atlas 2008-13*. Kent Ornithological Society.
- Harrison, J. M. 1953. *The Birds of Kent*. Witherby, London.
- Henderson, A. & Hodge, T. 1998. The Kent Breeding Bird Atlas 1988-94. *Kent Bird Report 1996*: 134-272.
- Kent Ornithological Society (KOS). 1953-2021. *Kent Bird Reports*. Kent Ornithological Society.
- Knight, V. & Tolputt, F. 1871. List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood. *Fourth Annual Report of the Folkestone Natural History Society*. Available at: [www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/46103](http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/46103)
- Norman, R. K. 2006. Some observations of birds on Hythe Ranges since 1950. <https://folkestonebirds.com/where-to-watch> (see "Further Information" section).
- Norman, R. K. 2007. The Birds of Palmarsh Gravel Pit. <https://folkestonebirds.com/where-to-watch> (see "Further Information" section).
- Snow, D. & Perrins, C.M. 1998. *The Birds of the Western Palearctic*. Oxford University Press.
- Taylor, D., Davenport, D. & Flegg, J. 1981. *Birds of Kent*. Kent Ornithological Society.
- Ticehurst, N. F. 1909. *A History of the Birds of Kent*. Witherby, London.

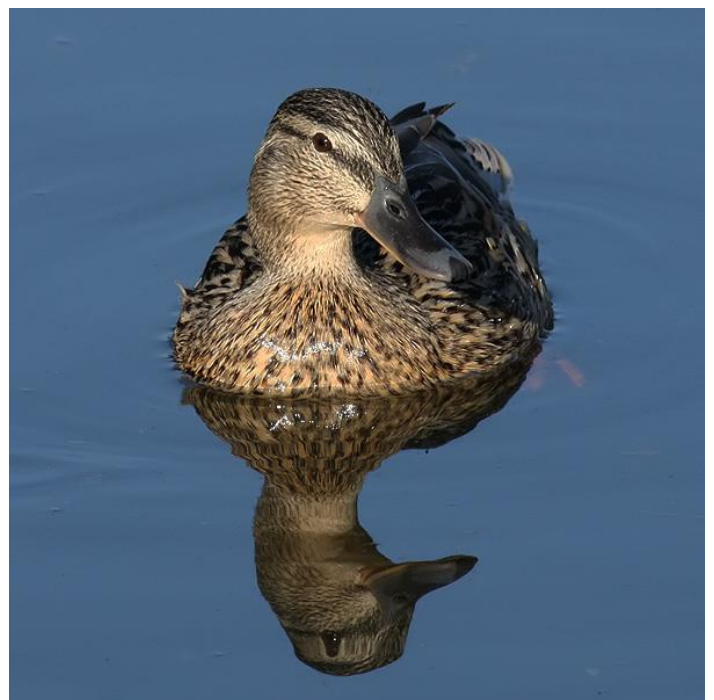
## Acknowledgements

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.



Mallards at Saltwood Castle (Brian Harper)



Mallard at Seabrook (Brian Harper)