

Snipe

Gallinago gallinago

Category A

Winter visitor and passage migrant.

Breeds in middle and higher latitudes across Europe, eastwards across northern Asia. Largely migratory, but partially migratory to resident in western maritime countries of Europe. Main winter range extends from Britain and the Low Countries to Iberia and Maghreb, thence eastwards through the Mediterranean Basin, Middle East and southern Asia. Also winters in Africa south of the Sahara (Snow & Perrins, 1998).

In Kent it is an occasional breeding species and a widespread passage migrant and winter visitor (KOS, 2020).



Snipe at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)

Knight and Tolputt included the Snipe in their "list of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood" (1871), however this list covered an area of six mile radius from Folkestone town hall and extended further inland than the current Folkestone and Hythe area, so is not conclusive evidence of local occurrence.

The first documented record relates to a buff-coloured variant that Ticehurst (1909) cites as being shot at Coolinge near Folkestone on the 10th December 1902. Roger Norman found it to be numerous at Nickolls Quarry in the 1950s and mentioned counts of c.40 on the 27th August 1952, 50 on the 19th February 1950 and 18th October 1959, and 55 on the 30th November 1958 and 27th December 1958, whilst also noting a minimum of 50 at Uden's Farm (near Palmarsh) on the 8th November 1957.

Dave Weaver returned some impressive counts from the same site in the late 1970s/early 1980s, with c.200 present on the 11th January 1978 and a minimum of 150 noted on the 23rd January 1979 and 21st February 1982. He also noted a 'drumming' (displaying) bird on the 1st April 1981, with a pair still present in May of that year and speculated that "they may possibly have bred". Taylor *et al* (1981) also included an instance of "probable" breeding during the first county breeding bird atlas (1967 to 1973) in TR13 E but nothing further is known of this record.

Since the 1990s it has been a common winter visitor and passage migrant. Figure 1 shows the distribution of all records of Snipe by tetrad, with records in 28 tetrads (90%).

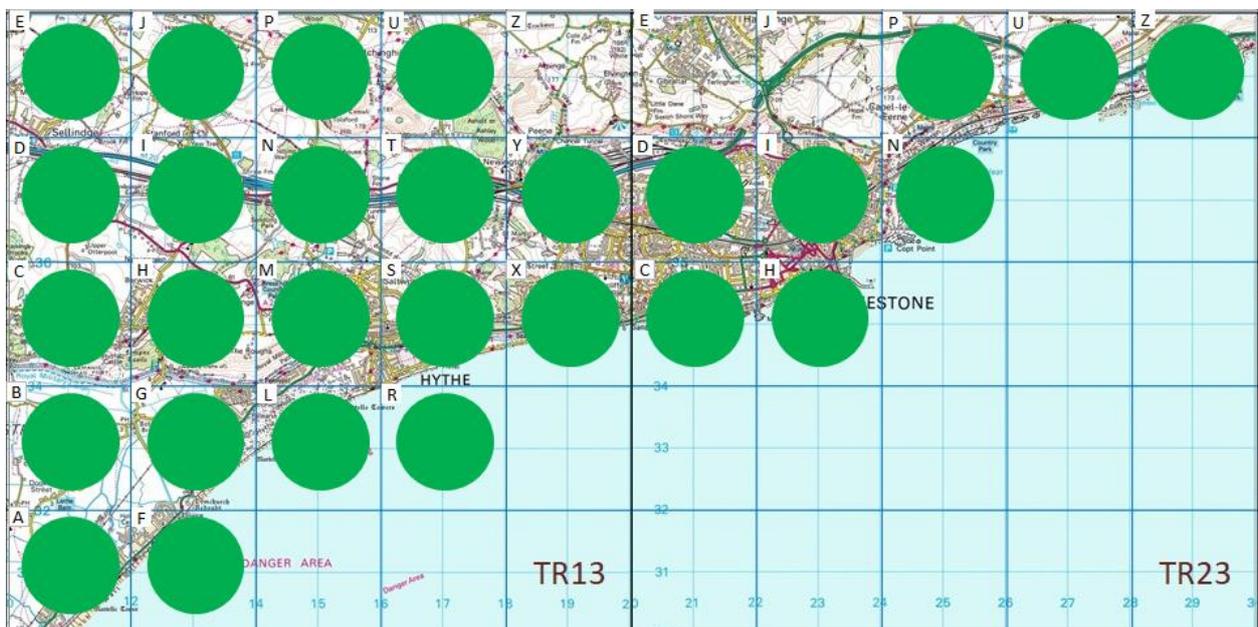


Figure 1: Distribution of all Snipe records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The earliest autumn arrival was seen at Nickolls Quarry on the 16th July 2001 and records in that month are scarce with just five other sightings, all at Nickolls Quarry: one on the 19th July 1999, two on the 21st July 2002, four on the 24th July 1951 (with six the next day), one on the 26th July 1999 and one on the 27th July 2004.

The first sighting is usually in August, or even September, and double-figure counts are unusual in autumn (excluding the counts from the 1950s detailed above): ten were at Nickolls Quarry on the 17th October 1999, 11 were at Botolph's Bridge on the 10th October 2015, 14 were at Nickolls Quarry on the 22nd October 2000, 17 were seen there on the 25th September 1994 and 37 were at Botolph's Bridge on the 3rd October 2015. Away from the marsh small numbers may be noted on autumn passage, with counts rarely exceeding five but six were at Abbotscliffe on the 29th October 2009 and seven were seen there on the 5th September 1991.

Winter peaks may exceed 50 in some years, with the following counts having been logged since 1990:

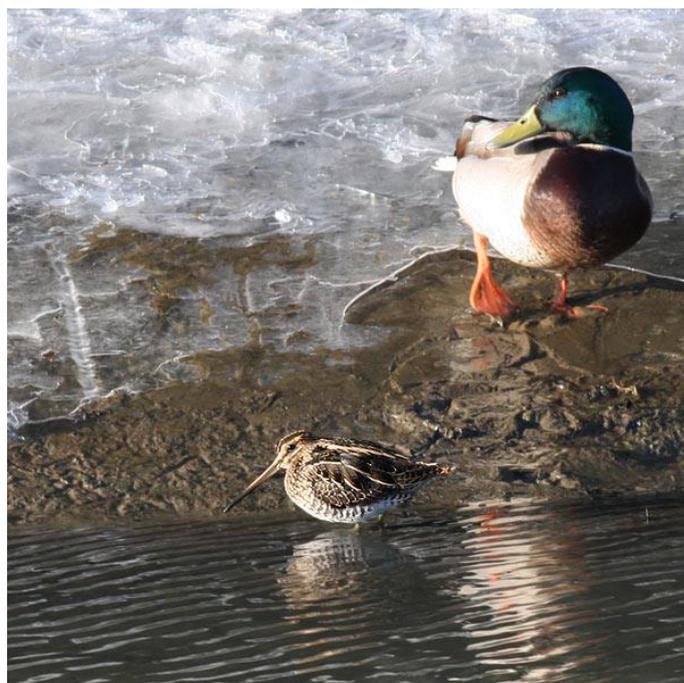
52 at Nickolls Quarry on the 21st November 1993
58 at Nickolls Quarry on the 12th December 1993
80 in fields behind New Beach holiday park on the 6th January 2010
55 at the Willop Basin on the 13th November 2016
62 in fields along the Aldington Road on the 18th February 2017
52 at the Willop Basin on the 12th January 2018
71 at the Willop Basin on the 1st January 2019
65 at the Willop Basin on the 7th November 2020
67 at Donkey Street on the 10th February 2021
128 at the Willop Basin on the 12th February 2021
62 at the Willop Basin on the 6th March 2021

The largest modern count (in February 2021) occurred during a period of severe weather and in such conditions birds may turn up at a wide range of sites and can even venture into urban gardens.

Spring departure is typically during April but birds may linger into May in some years, with latest dates of 4th May 1997, 11th May 2002, 12th May 2021, 24th May 2018 and 25th May 2017, but apart from the behaviour noted by Dave Weaver in 1981 there have been no indications of breeding. Clements *et al* (2015) however noted that there had been a huge decline since the second county breeding bird atlas (1988 – 1994) and that the Snipe was on the verge of extinction as a regular breeding bird in Kent, so if had bred in the past it might be expected to have disappeared since.



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Click [here](#) to watch a video of one feeding at Holywell, Folkestone on the 12th February 2021 (Elliot Ranford).

References

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Knight, V. and Tolputt, F., 1871. List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood, *Folkestone Natural History Society Annual Report*, 1871

Snow, D. & Perrins, C.M., 1998. *The Birds of the Western Palearctic*. Oxford University Press.

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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](#).



Snipe at Botolph's Bridge (Nick Hollands)



Snipe at Cheriton (Phil Lightman)



Snipe at Beachborough Lakes (Steve Tomlinson)



Snipe at Donkey Street (Brian Harper)



Snipe at Holy Well (Elliott Ranford)