

Yellowhammer

Emberiza citrinella

Category A

Breeding resident.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

A widespread resident throughout much of Europe and Asia, eastwards to 110°E. It is absent only from extreme northern areas and parts of the Mediterranean Basin. It has decreased in north-west Europe, apparently due to changing land use and farming practices. It is sedentary to migratory, with most populations being partial migrants and also dispersive.

Kent status (KOS 2021):

In Kent it is a common but declining resident, and also an occasional passage migrant.



Yellowhammer at the Aldington Road (Brian Harper)

The Yellowhammer 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 throughout the county” and “abundant and increasing”, nesting “in every district, both on high ground and low”, 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.

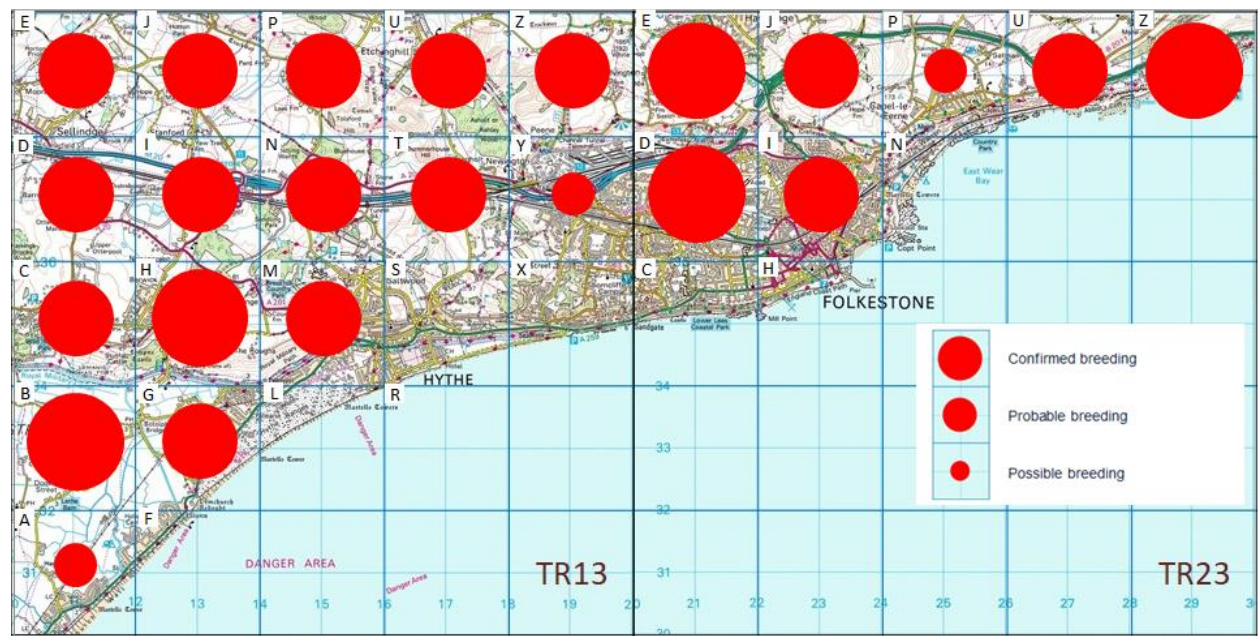


Figure 1: Breeding distribution of Yellowhammer at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in five tetrads, with probable breeding in 15 more and possible breeding in three 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%)	1	(3%)	3	(10%)
Probable/Confirmed	23	(74%)	24	(77%)	20	(65%)
Total	23	(74%)	25	(81%)	23	(74%)
Change			+2	(+9%)	-2	(-8%)

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	+9%	-8%	0%
Kent	+22%	-20%	-2%

Harrison (1953) considered that the Yellowhammer had increased and extended its range during the first half of the twentieth century as more land was given over to arable farming but Taylor *et al.* noted “little change in status” during their review period (1952-1976). Henderson & Hodge noted that this species was suffering from a scarcity of winter stubbles due to the practice of autumn cereal sowing and, “although initially not as badly affected as the smaller seed-eaters such as the Tree Sparrow, there was a 25% decrease in breeding numbers nationally during the seven year census period” (1988-1994).



Yellowhammer at Donkey Street (Brian Harper)



Yellowhammer at Donkey Street (Brian Harper)

Henderson & Hodge considered that the gains (an increase of 22% across the county, and 9% locally) in the change map between the first and second county atlases, “especially along the Downs, were almost certainly the result of better coverage”.

Clements *et al.* noted that a decline in population began during the 1980s and continued throughout the third atlas period, with a reduction of 20% in occupied tetrads across the county (8% locally) since the second atlas, noting that the change to autumn cereal sowing had decreased winter survival rates. The decline was most marked in the north and west of Kent. The BTO Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) trend for south-east England had shown a 32% decline between 1995 and 2012, which had continued to 42% by 2018 (KOS 2021).

It remains a widespread and reasonably common bird locally and there is as yet little data to evidence a significant decline. At Hythe Roughs however, Neil Frampton considered it to be a “common breeding bird” in the early 1980s, whilst Roger Norman found between four and eight pairs there during the 1990s, but only two pairs by the early 2000s.

Overall distribution

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

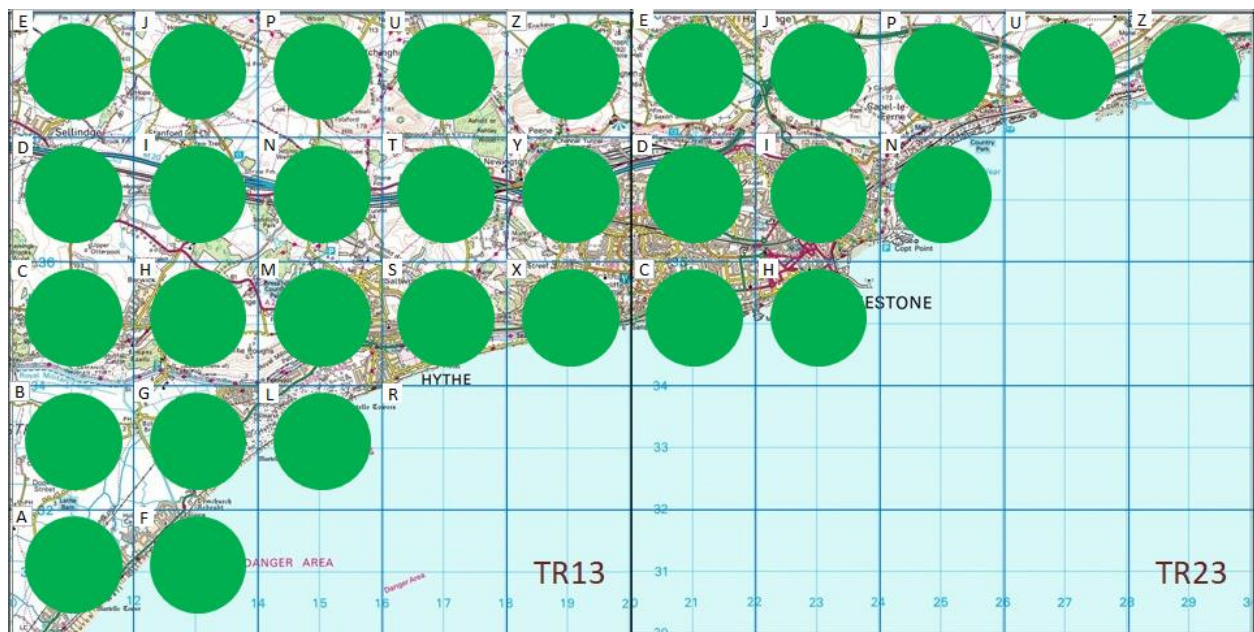


Figure 2: Distribution of all Yellowhammer records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad



Yellowhammer at Donkey Street (Brian Harper)



Yellowhammer at Donkey Street (Brian Harper)



Yellowhammer at Crete Road East (Brian Harper)



Yellowhammer at Creteway Down (Brian Harper)

As Taylor *et al* noted, like other bunting species in the winter months, it may sometimes form quite large feeding flocks and congregations in excess of 40 have been noted as follows:

Around 70 at Nickolls Quarry on the 12th January 1958
70 at Hythe on the in February 1969
Flocks of up to 70 outside the breeding season at Hythe Roughts in the early 1980s
A pre-roost flock of 120 at Capel-le-Ferne on the 16th January 1991
45 at Abbotscliffe on the 26th March 1993
46 at Capel-le-Ferne on the 1st December 1996
50 at Capel-le-Ferne on the 15th December 96
55 at Capel-le-Ferne on the 8th March 1997
46 at Abbotscliffe on the 19th December 2009
42 at Abbotscliffe on the 3rd January 2010
50 in the Summerhouse Hill area on the 21st January 2012
50 at Hillhurst Farm on the 2nd February 2014
45 at Donkey Street on the 18th January 2015
41 at Church Hougham on the 25th March 2021



Yellowhammer at Donkey Street (Brian Harper)



Yellowhammer at the Aldington Road (Brian Harper)

Taylor *et al.* also noted that “there seems to be little evidence of migration” and attributed coastal movements to the wandering of local birds, “with some perhaps getting caught up in the diurnal migration of other passerines”. The only apparent movements of four or more birds locally have occurred as follows:

7 west at Abbotscliffe on the 18th October 1998
4 west at Abbotscliffe on the 29th October 1998
4 west at Capel-le-Ferne Café on the 8th October 2004
4 east at Abbotscliffe on the 10th October 2010
4 west at Abbotscliffe on the 20th October 2018
9 east at Abbotscliffe on the 17th October 2020
5 west at Samphire Hoe on the 15th January 2000



Yellowhammer at Sellindge (Derek Smith)



Yellowhammer at Holy Well (Elliot Ranford)

Click [here](#) to listen to a local audio recording of one singing at Crete Road East on the 15th May 2022 (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.



Yellowhammer at Donkey Street (Brian Harper)