

Fulmar

Fulmarus glacialis

Category A

Breeding visitor and passage migrant.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds along coasts of western Europe, from north-west France northwards to the islands in the Arctic Ocean, also on islands and adjacent coasts of the northern Pacific to Alaska, in north-east Canada and Greenland. Breeding adults remain at sea within feeding range of colonies for most of the year, although inshore waters are deserted during the moulting period (August to October), whereas juveniles disperse over great distances.



Fulmar at the Dymchurch Redoubt (Brian Harper)

Kent status (KOS 2021):

In Kent it is a passage migrant and breeding species that is very rare inland.

The Fulmar was not included in Knight and Tolputt's "List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood" (1871) and it is a relatively recent colonist in Kent. Harrison (1953) listed only ten records of birds found dead between 1878 and 1947, with the first sight record in May 1948. In 1952 W. G. Fluke found the first local record: a dead individual at Hythe in the autumn, whilst the following year saw the first prospecting birds on the cliffs at Kingsdown and St. Margaret's Bay.

John Hollyer saw two at Abbotscliffe on the 24th and 27th May 1955 and noted singles between Folkestone and Dover on five dates between the 24th April and 22nd June 1957, whilst Dave Musson saw singles at Folkestone between the 11th May and 21st June 1960. Prospecting was recorded at Folkestone Warren in 1966, the year that breeding was first confirmed in the county (at Dover and St. Margaret's Bay). Prospecting was again noted at Folkestone Warren in 1967 and 1968 but it is not known when local breeding first occurred, although by 1973 up to ten pairs were present in May between Abbotscliffe and Shakespeare Cliff.

At Folkestone Warren eight pairs bred in 1981, increasing to a peak of 11 pairs in 1986, with six or seven pairs still present by the mid-1990s, but only three or four pairs in recent years. At Shakespeare Cliff (only a relatively small section of which is within the local boundary), there were 19 pairs in 1981, ten pairs in the late 1990s and around three pairs in recent years.



Fulmar at the Dymchurch Redoubt (Brian Harper)



Fulmar at Folkestone Pier (Brian Harper)

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 Fulmar at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in one tetrad with possible breeding in six 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	1	(3%)	0	(0%)	6	(19%)
Probable/Confirmed	3	(10%)	4	(13%)	1	(3%)
Total	4	(13%)	4	(13%)	7	(23%)
Change			0	(0%)	+3	(+75%)

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	0%	+75%	+75%
Kent	+50%	+8%	+63%



Fulmars at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



Fulmar at Folkestone Warren (Ian Roberts)

Henderson & Hodge described a significant increase between the first and second atlases, estimating the county population to be between 115 and 300 pairs in the late 1980s and commenting that accurate assessment of numbers was difficult as “many prospecting birds do not breed every year, and it is thought that less than half of the occupied sites actually involve breeding birds”.

Clements *et al.* (2015) provided a reduced figure of between 100 and 200 pairs by the time of the third atlas, speculating that the Kent population was “possibly in decline”, which would correlate with the numbers locally.

Currently it regularly breeds at Folkestone Warren (TR23 P) and on to the east of Samphire Hoe (TR23 Z), whilst in the third county atlas there were possible breeding records from TR23 N and TR23 U (where confirmed or probable breeding was noted in the second atlas), and from TR13 G, TR23 H and TR23 I. These latter records are likely to have just related to prospecting birds. Henderson & Hodge stated that pairs had been noted “prospecting nest sites in close proximity to human activity”, considering it “quite likely” to be “able to adapt to buildings and other man-made structures”, but there has been no indication of successful colonisation.



Fulmar at Samphire Hoe (Paul Holt)



Fulmars at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of Fulmar by tetrad, with records in 18 tetrads (58%).

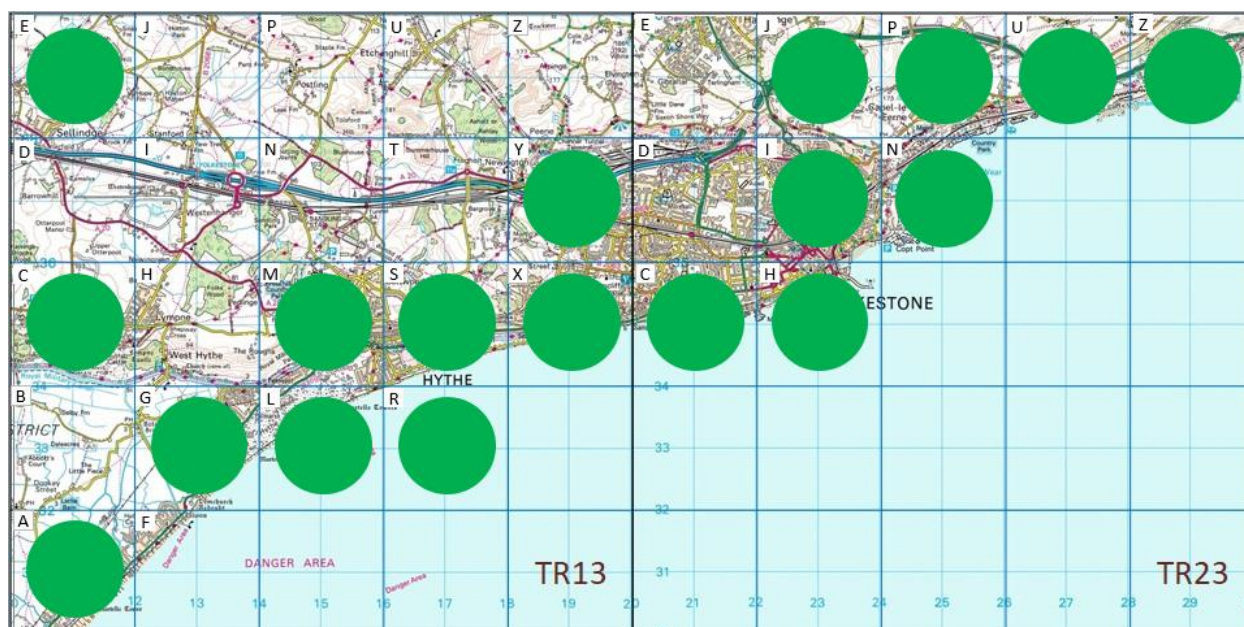


Figure 2: Distribution of all Fulmar records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The breeding colonies are usually deserted by late August/early September and departing birds may be seen moving down-channel, with double-figure counts of 10 flying west past Mill Point on the 1st September 1988, 15 west past Copt Point on the 21st August 1998, 30 west past Copt Point on the 3rd August 1998 and 31 west past Copt Point on the 30th August 1997.

It is generally uncommon, with no counts in excess of five, between mid-September and late November, when breeding birds begin to return. The earliest record of prospecting was on the 27th November 2015 when two were at Folkestone Warren, whilst three were prospecting at Samphire Hoe on the 29th November 2008 and 14 were present at Folkestone Warren by the end of November 1982.

Numbers tend to increase during December as birds move back to their colonies. Counts have included 12 off Folkestone on the 29th December 1983, 44 flying east past Folkestone Beach on the 14th December 2012 and 21 flying west past Samphire Hoe on the 31st December 2013, whilst early January has seen movements of 65 east past Samphire Hoe on the 7th January 2018, with 25 east there the next day.



Fulmar at the Dymchurch Redoubt (Brian Harper)



Fulmar at Folkestone Pier (Brian Harper)

Offshore movements usually peak between mid-February and early May, when counts of 40 or more have been logged as follows:

49 east past Copt Point on the 17th February 1986
44 east past Copt Point on the 8th March 1993
70 east past Copt Point on the 16th April 1994
44 east past Copt Point on the 3rd May 1998
110 east past Copt Point on the 22nd April 2001
50 east past Copt Point on the 15th Mar 2002
111 east past Copt Point on the 20th April 2003
54 east past Samphire Hoe on the 25th March 2007
47 east past Samphire Hoe on the 20th February 2013
111 east past Mill Point on the 24th March 2017



Fulmar at sea, south of Folkestone (David Featherbe)



Fulmar at sea, south of Folkestone (David Featherbe)

Movements may continue in early June, when there have been counts of 31 flying east past Copt Point on the 1st June 1997, with 18 east there the following day. It is scarce away from the coast but there have been several sightings as follows:

- one over Sellindge on the 23rd May 1971
- one west over Stutfall Castle (West Hythe) on the 19th June 1981
- one over Nickolls Quarry on the 3rd June 1994
- two east along the canal at Hythe on the 12th August 1997
- one over Nickolls Quarry on the 22nd August 2000
- two east the canal at Seabrook on the 4th April 2009
- one over Park Farm (Folkestone) on the 9th April 2009
- one over Sene Wood on the 5th May 2009
- one over canal at Seabrook on the 18th May 2010
- one over Saltwood on the 5th June 2012
- one over Pond Hill Road (Cheriton) on the 25th January 2014
- one west along canal at Hythe on the 14th April 2016
- one over along canal at Seabrook on the 6th June 2016
- one over Lympne Castle on the 4th August 2016
- one east Encliffe Farm (Hawkinge) on the 23rd May 2021



Fulmar at Dymchurch Redoubt (Brian Harper)

Southern breeding populations are overwhelmingly light plumaged but dark morphs constitute the great majority of high-arctic breeding populations (Snow & Perrins). Dark morph birds (also known as “Blue Fulmars”) have been noted locally on five occasions, all in March or April:

- one west past on the Copt Point 31st March 2001
- one west past on the Copt Point 18th April 2004
- one west past on the Copt Point 25th April 2012
- one east past Mill Point on the 9th March 2016
- one east past Samphire Hoe on the 25th March 2018



Fulmar at sea, south of Folkestone (David Featherbe)



Fulmar at sea, south of Folkestone (David Featherbe)



Fulmar at Folkestone Pier (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](#).

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