

Redwing

Turdus iliacus

Category A

Winter visitor and passage migrant.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998; Holling et al. 2019):

Breeds in Iceland and Fenno-Scandia, eastwards through Siberia to the Kolyma river and Lake Baikal. Winters in western and southern Europe. It is a very rare breeding species in Britain, mainly in Highland, the Outer Hebrides and Shetland, with around 25 pairs on average.

Kent status (KOS 2021):

In Kent it is a common winter visitor and passage migrant, with occasional summer records and has bred.



Redwing at Botolph's Bridge Road (Brian Harper)

The Redwing 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 "a common autumn visitor to Kent, where it usually arrives about the beginning of October", noting that "from that month onwards it is numerous throughout the county" and there can be little doubt that it was to be found locally.

Overall distribution

Figure 1 shows the distribution of all records of Redwing by tetrad, with records in 30 tetrads (97%).



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

The earliest ever arrival was exceptional in terms of the date and the number involved: a flock of between 15 and 20 seen flying over Shorncliffe Road, Cheriton on the 7th September 2016. The next earliest comprised a single at Beachborough Lakes on the 19th September 2016, with one at Folkestone on the 20th September 1981 and three records on the 22nd September: one at Folkestone in 1966, three at Hythe in 1968 and one at Samphire Hoe in 2008. Arrivals in the last week of September or first week of October are more usual and the mean arrival date over the most recent decade has been the 3rd October. The only other double-figure counts in September have involved ten at Samphire Hoe on the 29th September 2007 and at least 20 heard on nocturnal migration over Cheriton on the 29th and 30th September 2004.

Arrival can be rapid and counts into four figures may occur as early as the first week of October, such as on the 5th October, when 3,055 arrived in off the sea at Abbotscliffe in 1999 and 1,695 arrived in off the sea at the cliffs in 2003. The largest ever arrival was witnessed by Ade Jupp on the 11th October 2013, when “a conservative estimate of 30-40,000, possibly 2 or 3 times that” passed west over Seabrook, with a passage “of up to 12,000 per hour at its peak”.

Other counts in October in excess of 1,000 have been as follows:

6,000 in/west at Abbotscliffe on the 14th October 1993

2,184 in off the sea at Abbotscliffe (with 750 at other sites) on the 12th October 1997

2,500 at Crete Road East on the 12th October 2013

2,835 in/north (including 1,100 at Abbotscliffe and 1,250 at Copt Point) on the 11th October 2020



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Redwings are often noted on nocturnal passage when their calls are one of the most evocative sounds of this time of year, and large movements at night are unquantifiable. Arrival can continue well into November but diurnal passage at least involves small numbers and movements of 200 or more are noteworthy: 200 grounded at Capel Battery on the 8th November 2003, 200 in off the sea at Samphire Hoe on the 6th November 2011 and 500 flying over Beachborough Park on the 10th November 2016.

Counts of 200 or more are also of note during the winter period, sometimes associated with cold weather:

200 flew south over Cheriton on the 6th January 1967
2,500 at Folkestone on the 11th January 1968
1,000 at Hythe on the 12th February 1969
500 at Tolsford Hill on the 24th February 1983
200 at Botolph's Bridge on the 16th December 1990
500 at Nickolls Quarry on the 5th January 1996
210 at Church Hougham on the 7th January 1996
1,000+ in the Beachborough Park area on the 9th December 2016
300 at Blackhouse Shaw on the 29th January 2017, with 400 there on the 15th February 2017
Up to 400 at Beachborough Park in January 2018
Up to 1,200 at Beachborough Park in late November/early December 2018



Redwing at Princes Parade (Nigel Webster)



Redwing at Botolph's Bridge Road (Brian Harper)



Redwing at Folkestone (David Featherbe)



Redwing at Sellindge (Derek Smith)

As Taylor *et al.* (1981) observed, spring passage is most evident in March and is largely nocturnal, so the highest totals tend to involve estimates of nocturnal passage or counts of birds that have been grounded by the onset of bad weather during the night and located in the following morning. The first documented event was witnessed by Roger Norman on the rather late of the 17th April 1958, when he noted “hundreds moving at night”, followed by “a minimum of 700 grounded birds at first light” at Hythe Ranges, with a further c.200 at Palmarsh (Norman 2006).

Other noteworthy occurrences have included:

- 708 flying west at Capel Battery on the morning of the 8th April 1996, with 655 flying west there the next day
- “Several hundred” heard overnight at Capel-le-Ferne on 27th March 1998, with a total of 993 flying east at the cliffs the following morning
- 920 grounded along the seafront by the Hotel Imperial, Hythe on the morning of the 20th March 2002, with “several hundreds, probably thousands” moving over Hythe between dusk and 23:30 the following evening, and birds still passing over just before dawn
- 270 mainly heading west over Beachborough Park on the 12th March 2018, with 465 west there the next day and 300 west there on the 28th March 2018
- A “huge movement” over Hythe on the night of the 11th March 2020, with “constant calls” and an estimated c.2,000 heard in a one hour period, but the passage ceased as drizzle cleared



Redwing at Botolph's Bridge Road (Brian Harper)

The mean departure date over the most recent decade has been the 6th April and (aside from the large movement in 1958) sightings in the second half of April are unusual and have only involved one at Nickolls Quarry on the 16th April 2016, one at Abbotscliffe on the 17th April 2005, one at Beachborough Lakes on the 18th April 2019 and an intriguing record of one heard singing by Dave Weaver at West Hythe on the 4th May 1981. There have been no further indications of any local breeding.



Redwing at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



Redwing at Samphire Hoe (Ian Roberts)



Redwing at Botolph's Bridge Road (Brian Harper)



Redwing at Botolph's Bridge Road (Brian Harper)



Redwing at Beachborough (Steve Tomlinson)



Redwing at Hythe (Glenn Tutton)

References

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Acknowledgements

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