

Red-legged Partridge

Alectoris rufa

Category C1

Breeding resident, possibly declining.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Native to France, Iberia and Italy, where it is declining, due chiefly to habitat change. It was introduced to Britain in the eighteenth century and other introductions have also been attempted. All populations are sedentary.

Kent status (KOS 2021):

In Kent it is a widespread resident, with numbers boosted by releases on shooting estates.



Red-legged Partridge at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)

The Red-legged Partridge was successfully introduced into Britain in 1790 but only reached Kent in around 1850. It first appeared as a resident in the north-west of the county and slowly spread south and east. The earliest local record was in about 1870, when Mr. B. Turner first saw them at Sandling and there is some evidence that a pair had bred there about then (Ticehurst 1909). This sighting was presumably the basis for its inclusion in Knight and Tolputt's "List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood" (1871).

Breeding atlas distribution

Figure 1 shows the breeding distribution by tetrad based on the results of the 2007-13 BTO/KOS atlas fieldwork.

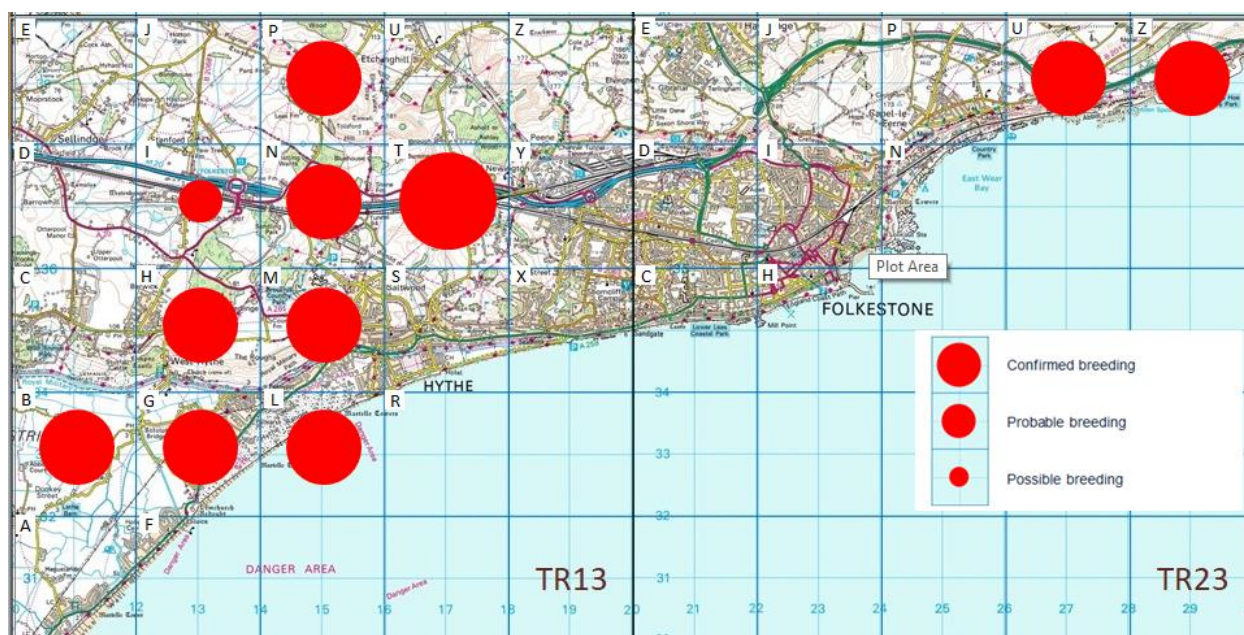


Figure 1: Breeding distribution of Red-legged Partridge at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in one tetrad, with probable breeding in nine more and possible breeding in one other. 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%)	5	(16%)	1	(3%)
Probable/Confirmed	1	(3%)	3	(10%)	10	(32%)
Total	1	(3%)	8	(26%)	11	(35%)
Change			+7	(+700%)	+4	(+38%)

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	+700%	+38%	+1,000%
Kent	+98%	+30%	+157%

Clements *et al.* (2015) considered that the first atlas “may have understated its status”, with the distribution having doubled by the time of the second atlas, and that “this rate of increase appears to have slowed somewhat” by the latest atlas. The 2018 Kent Bird Report (KOS 2020) however stated that “the large numbers of birds released for shooting make an appraisal of the true status of the introduced gamebird difficult to evaluate”.

The stronghold of this partridge locally is to the north and west of Hythe, with another population in the Abbotscliffe area. Taylor *et al.* observed that the “shingle wastes of Dungeness have for many years attracted a resident population” and the same is true locally on the shingle at Hythe Ranges where the species has been known since 1958 (Norman 2006).

There is some indication that it may have decreased in recent years. Double-figure counts were fairly frequent until the early 2000s but there has been only two since, when 12 were at Abbotscliffe in October 2009 and 15 were at Shrine Farm in November 2022. The apparent decline has perhaps been due to the agricultural intensification that is also thought to be driving the decline in the Grey Partridge population (Massimino *et al.* 2017).

Overall distribution

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of Red-legged Partridge by tetrad, with records in 19 tetrads (61%).



Figure 2: Distribution of all Red-legged Partridge records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Ticehurst was convinced that immigration from the Continent occurred, citing early records of birds in south-east Kent (though did not specify any local records) many years before introduced birds had spread as one form of evidence. He also referred to birds being seen or captured in a tired condition not only on the rocks by the shore and in seaside towns, but also at sea several miles from land. There has been no suggestion of immigration in recent years (e.g. Taylor *et al.*).

The species is chiefly sedentary so the overall distribution is very similar to the breeding distribution. Sightings away from likely breeding habitat are unusual and there are two of particular note: singles at Princes Parade (TR13 S) on the 26th September 2017 and in a garden in Laurel Close, Cheriton (TR23 D) on the 23rd March 2018. Occasional records from Samphire Hoe presumably originate from Abbotscliffe.

Clements *et al.* stated that “from the early 1970s, birds released in Britain included increasing proportions of hybrids between Red-legged Partridge and the Chukar, or in some cases pure Chukars. Observers have seldom discriminated between true Red-legs and Chukars, so the Kent Atlas map represents a mixed population”. There have been no specific reports of hybrids or Chukars locally but the same may be true of the local mapping.



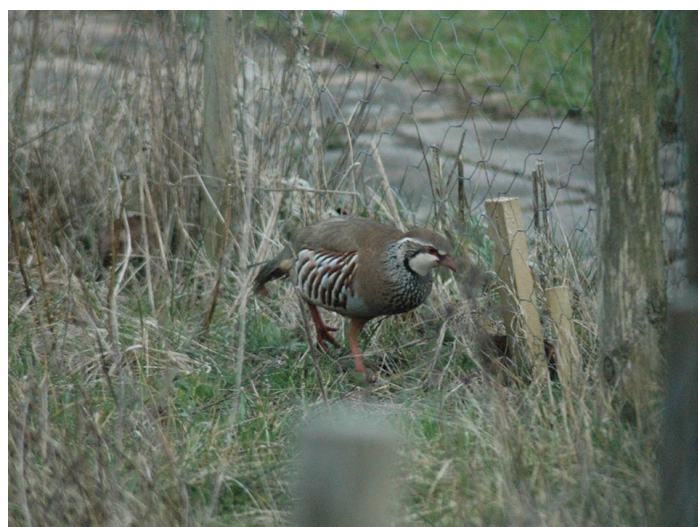
Red-legged Partridge at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)



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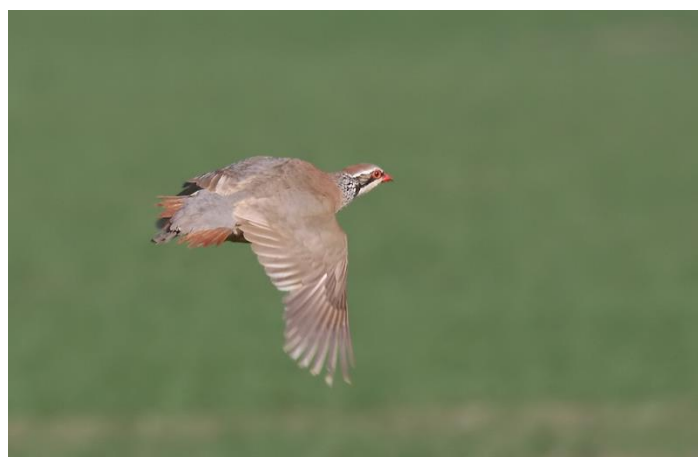
Red-legged Partridge at Princes Parade (Brian Harper)



Red-legged Partridge at Laurel Close (Vincent Lloyd)



Red-legged Partridge at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



Red-legged Partridge at Hythe Redoubt (Brian Harper)

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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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