

## Tree Pipit

*Anthus trivialis*

Category A

Scarce passage migrant, mainly in autumn.

*World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):*

A widespread summer visitor across most of Europe and Asia eastwards to 140°E, south to northern Iran and the Himalayas. Winters in Afro-tropics and Indian subcontinent.

*Kent status (KOS 2021):*

It is a declining summer visitor to Kent and now a rare breeder, also a passage migrant that is more frequent in autumn.



Tree Pipit at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)

The Tree Pipit 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. Ticehurst (1909) considered it to be "local" in its distribution in the county and neither he nor Harrison (1953) made specific mention of any local records, so the first known occurrence related to an autumn migrant seen by Roger Norman in bushes at Hythe Ranges on the 26<sup>th</sup> September 1957 (Norman 2006) whilst the Kent Bird Report for 1965 refers to four at Saltwood on the 26<sup>th</sup> March.



Tree Pipit at Crete Road East (Brian Harper)



Tree Pipit at Capel Battery (Ian Roberts)

Taylor *et al.* (1981) showed a record of probable or confirmed breeding in TR13 T (north-west of Saltwood) in the results of the first county breeding atlas (1967-1973) but it is not known if this was in the same area as the sighting in 1965. Tree Pipits favour areas of coppiced woodland and it is tempting to speculate that Asholt Wood in TR13 T may have been occupied as this has a history of coppicing.

Henderson & Hodge (1998) showed a record of possible breeding in TR13 E in the second county atlas (presumably in the Gibbin's Brook area) and commented that "the Tree Pipit is in steep decline in Britain, most acutely in the south-east. Nationally there was a 15% contraction in range between the first and second atlases, but this was closer to 30-40% in Kent".

Clements *et al.* (2015) reported on a further decline by the time of the third county atlas, with an 80% reduction in occupied tetrads compared to the first atlas; across the county just 34 tetrads were still occupied and only a few of these held confirmed breeding birds. Clements *et al* remarked on a BBS trend of a 48% decrease across south-east England between 1995 and 2012, which they considered was probable due to a loss of suitable habitat in southern England and problems on migration or in their African wintering grounds.

Breeding was not suspected in any tetrads locally in the third atlas and the table below confirms how this compares to previous atlases. 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%)	0	(0%)
Probable/Confirmed	1	(3%)	0	(0%)	0	(0%)
Total	1	(3%)	1	(3%)	0	(0%)

It has been noted regularly on passage since 1988, when four were recorded at Mill Point in autumn, and with singles there in May and August 1989, then annually since 1991 (when systematic coverage at the cliffs commenced).

### Overall distribution

Figure 1 shows the distribution of all records of Tree Pipit by tetrad, with records in 14 tetrads (45%).

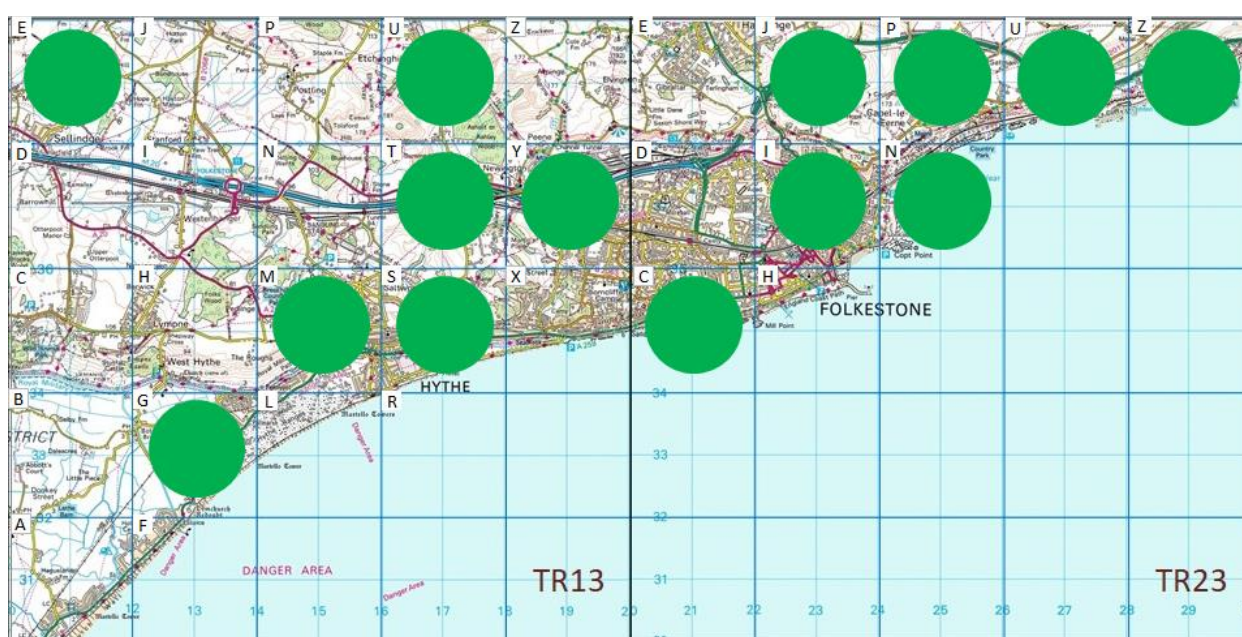


Figure 1: Distribution of all Tree Pipit records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The record from 1965 continues to be the only sighting in March and the next earliest arrival involved two seen arriving in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1999, with another in off at Capel Battery two days later. The only other records in the first week of April have comprised singles at Abbotscliffe on the 7<sup>th</sup> April 1998 and at Nickolls Quarry on the 7<sup>th</sup> April 2018.

Spring passage is light and usually occurs between mid-April and mid-May. There were spring records in all but one of the 15 years between 1993 and 2006, but in only eight of the 16 years since, whilst the average number of spring records per annum has fallen from 3.0 in the 1990s, to 2.4 in the 2000s, to 1.0 in the 2010s. The only spring to have produced a double-figure total was 2004, when 12 were logged. All spring records related to ones or twos apart from three arriving in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1992 and four in off the sea at Capel Battery on the 9<sup>th</sup> May 2004.

There have only been three sightings of migrants later than mid-May: singles flying west at Mill Point on the 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1989, east at Crete Road East on the 25<sup>th</sup> May 2009 and in off the sea at Capel Battery on the 28<sup>th</sup> May 1998.

Autumn passage may be noted between early August and mid-October, with the earliest returning bird at Mill Point on the 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1989. Regular coverage at the cliffs revealed a significant passage, with an annual average of 63 per annum in the 1990s and an exceptional day count of at least 109 (but possibly as many as 130) flying west at Abbotscliffe on the 15<sup>th</sup> September 1993.

Other counts of 20 or more involved 36 flying west at Abbotscliffe on the 10<sup>th</sup> September 1995, whilst in 1996 there were five such movements at Capel Battery: 30 west on the 21<sup>st</sup> September, 23 west on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, 51 west on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, 56 west on the 24<sup>th</sup> and 20 west on the 26<sup>th</sup> September, part of a record autumn total of 242 bird/days. The last double-figure count occurred on the 1<sup>st</sup> October 2000, when 12 flew over Abbotscliffe.

Numbers decreased significantly in the 2000s, with an average of 14 bird/days per autumn and a peak of 43 in 2002, whilst in the 2010s the average dropped further to just under 7.

The only sightings later than mid-October have involved singles at Abbotscliffe on the 16<sup>th</sup> October 2010, and at Capel Battery on the 19<sup>th</sup> October 2000 and the 20<sup>th</sup> October 2001.



Tree Pipit at Abbotscliffe (Ian Roberts)



Tree Pipit at Nickolls Quarry (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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