

Greenfinch

Chloris chloris

Category A

Breeding resident, winter visitor and passage migrant, having declined in recent years.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds across most of Europe, except the extreme north, eastwards across Russia, Iran, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan to 75°E. Partially migratory in most of its range but some southern populations are apparently resident and dispersive. Introduced in Australia.

Kent status (KOS 2021):

In Kent it is a widespread resident that has been subject to a recent severe decline. It is also a passage migrant and winter visitor in variable numbers.



Greenfinch at Seabrook (Louise Gower)

The Greenfinch 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 was "numerous and increasing". He remarked that "it breeds in many of the gardens, orchards, hedgerows and copses in every district", 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.

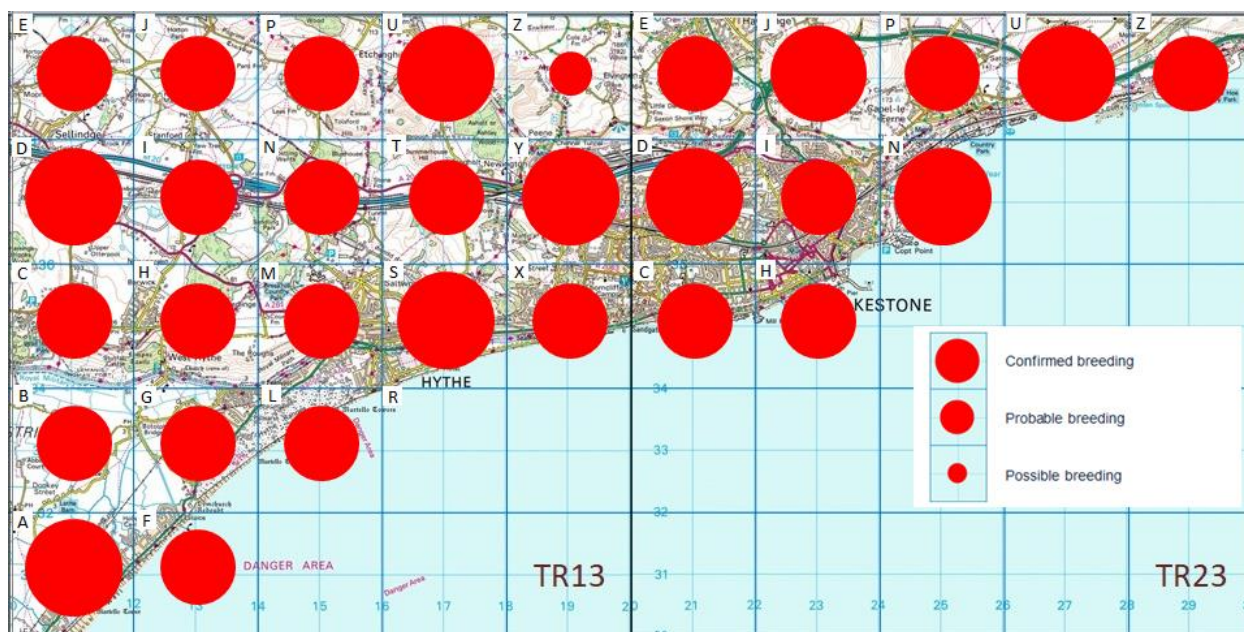


Figure 1: Breeding distribution of Greenfinch at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in nine tetrads, with probable breeding in 20 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	1	(3%)	0	(0%)	1	(3%)
Probable/Confirmed	26	(84%)	30	(97%)	29	(94%)
Total	27	(87%)	30	(97%)	30	(97%)
Change			+3	(+11%)	0	(0%)

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	+11%	0%	+11%
Kent	+17%	+0%	+17%

Henderson & Hodge described the Greenfinch as an abundant species on farmland and in villages, which had spread into suburban areas and town parks. They considered that the infilling of gaps between the first and second county atlases was “undoubtedly due to increased coverage”. Clements *et al.* (2015) reported that numbers had fallen since the second atlas but that it remained widespread throughout the county with no reduction in occupied tetrads.

A recent decline in the Greenfinch population has been well-documented. Clements *et al* referred to 35% decrease in the BTO Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) trend across south-east England between 1995 and 2012, whilst by 2017 this has worsened to a 64% decrease (KOS 2019). This has generally been attributed to the effects of the *trichomonosis* disease that first became apparent in 2005 (e.g. Balmer *et al.* 2013; Clements *et al.*) but KOS (2020) identified a longer-term decline, reporting that the annual peak counts in Kent had been falling steadily since the early 1980s.

There have been few estimates made of breeding populations locally but Neil Frampton considered that there were “probably in excess of 30 pairs” breeding along the canal between the Aldergate Bridge and Hythe in the early 1980s, but Roger Norman was unable to locate any singing males at Hythe Roughts by 2000. At Hythe Ranges, Roger recorded between 13 and 16 pairs on annual censuses in the early 1990s, noting a decline to seven pairs by 1999 (Norman 2006), whilst Ian Roberts noted four pairs nesting there in 2018.

Overall distribution

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

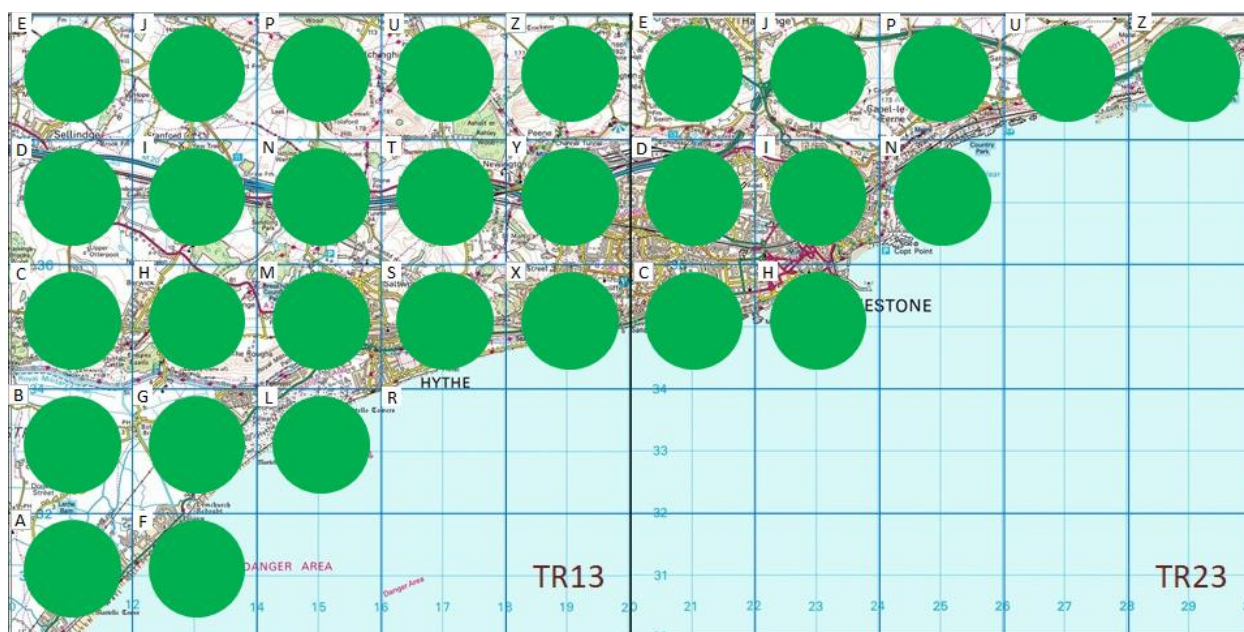


Figure 2: Distribution of all Greenfinch records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

KOS (2020) noted that peak counts in Kent were frequently in the thousands in the 1970s, with a maximum of 4,000 in 1981, but were only able to report a peak of 60 in 2018.

Locally, post-breeding flocks could become apparent from August, with counts of 200 at Church Hougham on the 26th August 2007, 120 there on the 28th August 1999 and 120 at Capel-le-Ferne on the 29th August 1998, whilst September saw a peak count of 200 at Capel-le-Ferne on the 30th September 1991.

Counts in October or November (excluding visual migration) have included 150 at Capel-le-Ferne on the 20th October 2001, 80 at Mill Point on the 18th October and 1st November 1989, up to 110 along the seawall at Hythe Ranges in October/November 1992, 60 at Folkestone Harbour on the 11th November 2001 and 100 at Nickolls Quarry on the 17th November 1993.

Wintering flocks included 150 at Hythe in January 1997, 60 at the Hotel Imperial Golf Course in December 1997, 90 at Mill Point in December 1988 and 60 at Palmarsh in December 2003.

Although there was a count of 200 in 2007, the only counts of 20 or more (again excluding visual migration) since have involved 20 at Oathill Cottages near Lympne on the 21st December 2009, 22 at Nickolls Quarry on the 22nd October 2015 and 22 at Beachborough Park on the 5th November 2018, whilst the most recent double-figure count was 10 at the latter site on the 23rd November 2018.



Greenfinch at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)



Greenfinch at Saltwood Castle (Brian Harper)

KOS (2020) also noted that “visible movements, which used to be substantial, are now scarcely evident”. Locally, autumn movements of 50 or more have been noted on several occasions:

- 74 west at Copt Point on the 30th September 1988
- 80 west at Mill Point on the 10th October 1988
- 86 west at Mill Point on the 17th October 1989
- 120 west at Mill Point on the 18th October 1989
- 120 west at Mill Point on the 1st November 1989
- 100 west at Abbotscliffe on the 10th October 1998
- 150 west at Capel-le-Ferne on the 12th October 1998
- 76 east at Capel-le-Ferne Café on the 17th October 2001
- 83 east at Capel-le-Ferne Café on the 21st October 2003
- 335 in/east at Capel-le-Ferne Café on the 24th October 2003
- 50 west at Abbotscliffe on the 27th October 2005
- 53 (32 east, 21 west) at Abbotscliffe on the 11th October 2006
- 60 west at Abbotscliffe on the 23rd October 2006

The only double figure movements since 2006 have comprised 27 flying over at Capel Battery on the 29th September 2007, 22 flying east at Capel-le-Ferne on the 19th October 2007, 17 flying east at Abbotscliffe on the 10th October, with 11 east there on the 11 October 2010 and 29 east there the following day.

Passage in spring is much lighter, with a peak count of 50 flying east at Mill Point on the 29th March 1991. The only other double figure counts have involved 16 flying east at Abbotscliffe on the 19th March 1992, 21 east there on the 10th April 1992, 12 in off the sea at Capel Battery on the 25th March 1997, 30 west at Capel-le-Ferne on the 9th April 2006 and ten east at Abbotscliffe on the 20th March 2021.

There have been three local ringing recoveries. Singles found dead at Folkestone on the 12th March 1957 and 31st May 1957 had both been ringed at Dungeness on the 19th November 1956, whilst one found dead at Hythe on the 25th April 1970 had been ringed at Haslemere in Surrey (75 miles to the west) on the 19th December 1967.



Greenfinch at West Hythe (Brian Harper)



Greenfinch at West Hythe (Brian Harper)

Click [here](#) to listen to a local audio recording of one singing at Mill Point on the 29th March 2022 (Ian Roberts).

References

Balmer, D., Gillings, S., Caffrey, B., Swann, B., Downie, I & Fuller, R. 2013. *Bird Atlas 2007-11: The Breeding and Wintering Birds of Britain and Ireland*. British Trust for Ornithology.

Clements, R., Orchard, M., McCanch, N. & Wood, S. 2015. *Kent Breeding Bird Atlas 2008-13*. Kent Ornithological Society.

Henderson, A. & Hodge, T. 1998. The Kent Breeding Bird Atlas 1988-94. *Kent Bird Report 1996*: 134-272.

Kent Ornithological Society (KOS). 1953-2021. *Kent Bird Reports*. Kent Ornithological Society.

Knight, V. & Tolputt, F. 1871. List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood. *Fourth Annual Report of the Folkestone Natural History Society*. Available at: www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/46103

Norman, R. K. 2006. Some observations of birds on Hythe Ranges since 1950. <https://folkestonebirds.com/where-to-watch> (see "Further Information" section).

Snow, D. & Perrins, C.M. 1998. *The Birds of the Western Palearctic*. Oxford University Press.

Taylor, D., Davenport, D. & Flegg, J. 1981. *Birds of Kent*. Kent Ornithological Society.

Ticehurst, N. F. 1909. *A History of the Birds of Kent*. Witherby, London.

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.