

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker

Dryobates minor

Category A

Formerly bred, now a very rare
vagrant. 10 records (of 10
birds since 1990

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Resident throughout almost all wooded regions of Europe and northern Asia. In Britain it is absent from Ireland and Scotland.

Kent status (KOS 2022):

It is a widely but thinly distributed declining resident in the county, with some dispersal in autumn.

Knight & Tolputt (1871) included the species in a list of those recorded in the neighbourhood of Folkestone, within a radius of six miles from the town hall. Whilst this range extends further inland than the current Folkestone and Hythe area, so is not conclusive proof of occurrence here, it does, especially when considered alongside other evidence, suggest that the species had been long-established locally up until relatively recently.

Ticehurst (1909) wrote that there did “not seem to be a district where it is absent [in Kent], except in Thanet” and that it occurred “sparingly throughout all the wooded districts of the county”. Harrison (1953), however, stated that “as with the case of the Great Spotted Woodpecker, this bird’s extension of range appears to have been towards the east and south-east” and it was during this time that the first local record was documented, when Brian Uden saw one in trees on the north side of the canal at the Dukes Head bridge in Hythe in March 1949 (Norman *pers. comm.*).

Taylor *et al.* (1981) noted that there was “little evidence to indicate any marked change in status in recent years” during their review period (1952-76), and all three county avifaunae considered it to probably be the least common of the three resident woodpeckers but with little doubt that it was under-recorded due to its elusive habits. During this time Roger Norman noted the species occasionally along the Hythe Canal between West Hythe and Hythe in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and the owner of “Marsh View” on Burmarsh Road (Palmarsh) reported that both spotted woodpecker species visited their garden in the 1950s (Norman *pers. comm.*).

Rowland (1968) writing about the “lowlands” around Folkestone (“a countryside of woods, fields and villages lying between the chalk escarpment of the Downs and the Marsh”), stated that three kinds of woodpecker “were common until the severe winter of 1963-4 when their numbers were seriously reduced” but “they are slowly increasing now”.

D. E. Chittenden recorded confirmed breeding at Sandling Park in each of the three years between 1972 and 1974, which led to its inclusion in the tetrad TR13 M in the first county atlas (1967-73).

In the early 1980s Neil Frampton considered it to be resident in the West Hythe area, where there was at least one pair, with single birds often seen along the canal bank and in an old orchard there. He predicted however that the “removal of old and dead timber by the Council may cause the demise of this species”.

Since the early 1980s the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker has declined significantly and very rapidly, disappearing from many of its former localities across Britain. It became so rare that from 2000 annual monitoring of population trends through the Common Bird Census was unable to continue, having previously indicated a 60% loss since 1968. The Rare Breeding Birds Panel started to collate all breeding records from 2010, with an estimated 1,000+ territories across the country (Eaton *et al.* 2021).

A similar pattern has been witnessed across Europe, where it is one of the most strongly declining bird species. The causes of decline are not yet known: a loss of open woodland, competition with Great Spotted Woodpeckers and Grey Squirrels, shortage of food, and climate change have all been suggested (as has the removal of old and dead timber locally), but there is little evidence in support of any of these hypotheses.

In the 1990s there were records in the area to the west of Hythe in four of the five years to 1995 and it may have clung on as a breeding species here until the mid-1990s, but there have been no records from this area since.

There were no records in the 2007-2013 Atlas period and the table below shows how this compares to previous atlases (Taylor *et al.*; 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%)	4	(13%)	0	(0%)
Probable/Confirmed	1	(3%)	3	(10%)	0	(0%)
Total	1	(3%)	7	(23%)	0	(0%)

As noted above it was present in TR13 M in the first atlas, whilst the second atlas included probable or confirmed breeding in TR13 H, TR13 M and TR13 N, with possible breeding in TR13 J, TR13 T, TR13 U and TR23 P.

The only record in the almost 20-year period between 1996 and 2013 involved an apparent migrant seen at Capel-le-Ferne by Dale Gibson and Ian Roberts on the 7th May 1999, which flew in from the direction of the coast, landed briefly and called, then continued inland. The only previous record that had indicated a possible migrant origin was one seen at Folkestone Warren by Peter Wells on the 9th March 1984.

Whilst it seems very unlikely that it has persisted as a breeding bird locally there has been an intriguing series of records since 2014, with singles at Cheriton in July 2014 (TR13 Y), near Little Dibgate Wood in May 2016 and at Beachborough Lakes in January 2019 (both in TR13 T), and near Newingreen in May 2021 (TR13 I), with three of the four being seen by the same fortunate observer. The first three locations are not particularly far apart, perhaps the woods around the Seabrook Stream might just still hold this species, or maybe it is undergoing a slight recovery: Clements *et al.* (2015) speculated that dieback of the European Ash may perhaps lead to a temporary resurgence in Lesser Spotted Woodpecker numbers.

The records by year are shown in figure 1.

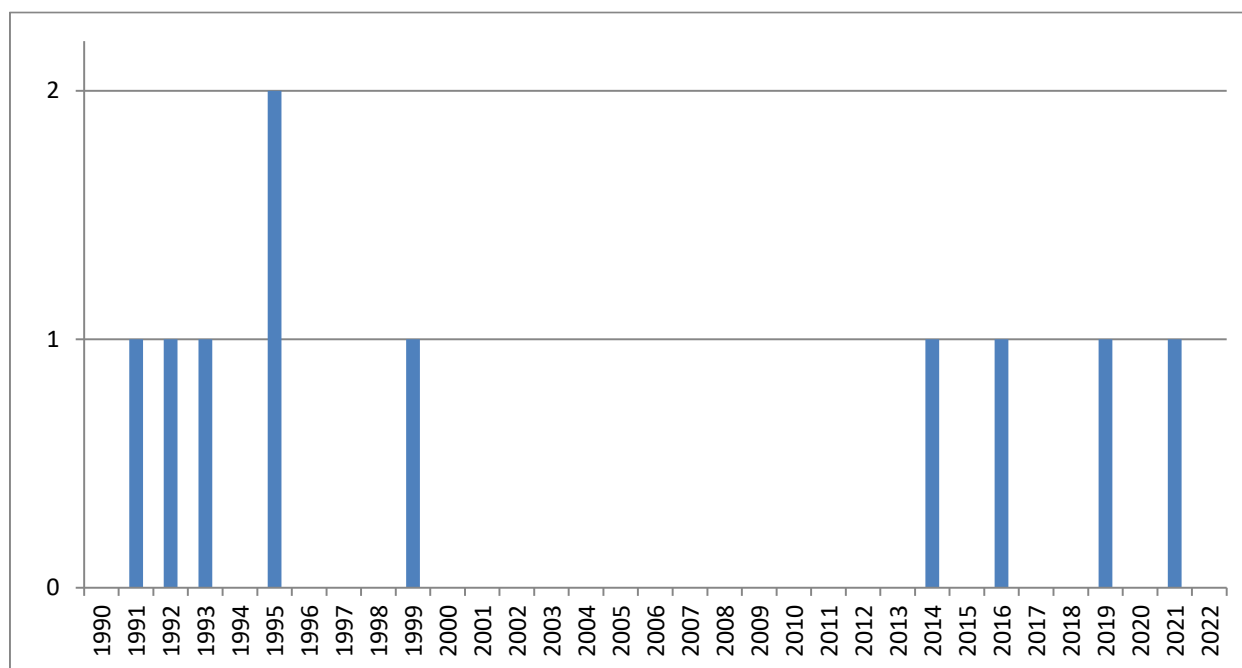


Figure 1: Lesser Spotted Woodpecker records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1990

The records by week since 1990 are given in figure 2.

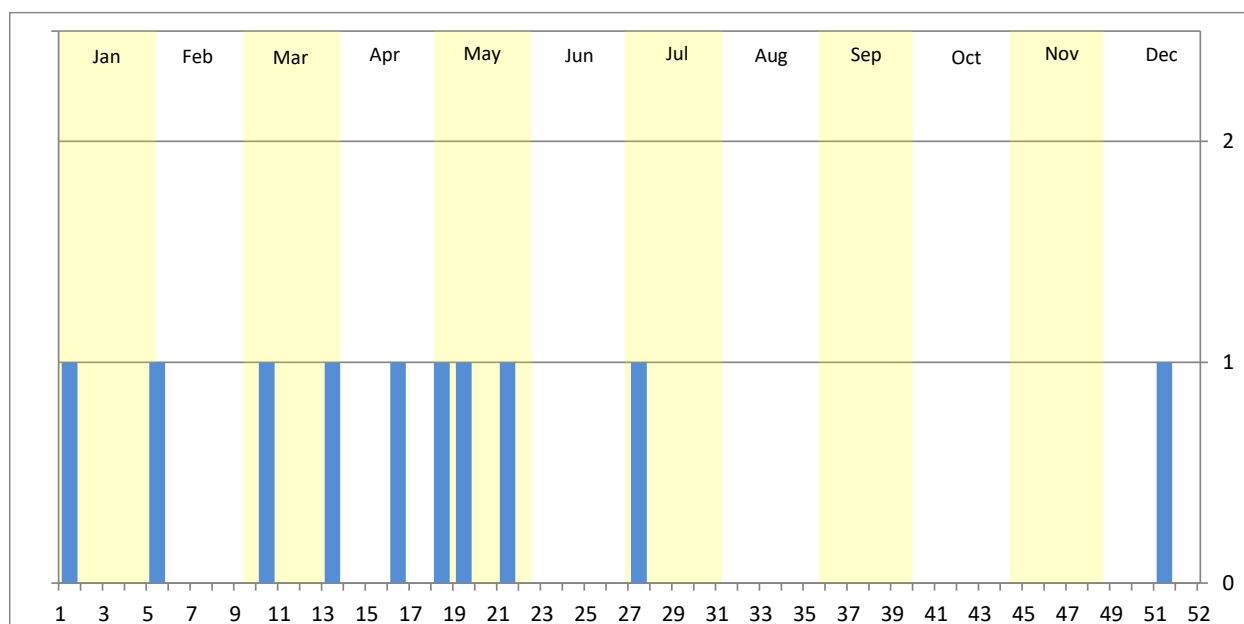


Figure 2: Lesser Spotted Woodpecker records at Folkestone and Hythe by week since 1990

Figure 3 shows the location of records by tetrad.

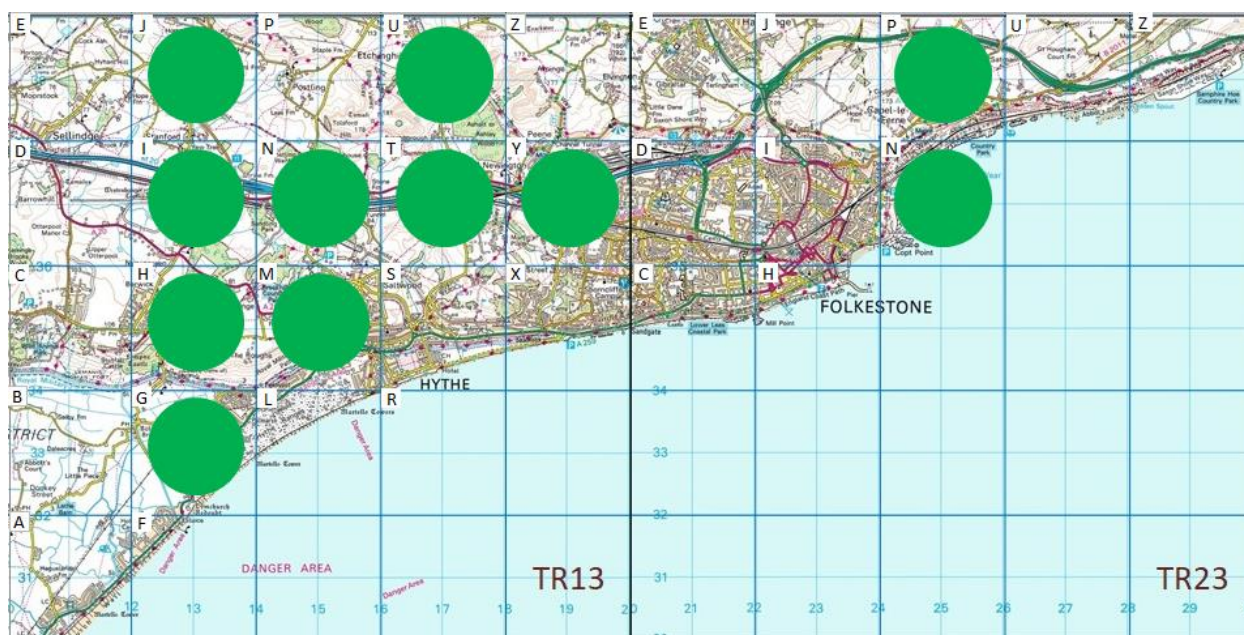


Figure 3: Distribution of all Lesser Spotted Woodpecker records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The list of records since 1990 is as follows:

- 1991** Nickolls Quarry, one, disturbed from rough ground flew into gardens, 3rd February (R. K. Norman)
- 1992** Hythe Ranges, one, 20th December, (R. K. Norman)
- 1993** West Hythe, one, 31st March (R. K. Norman)
- 1995** Hythe, two, 5th March (R. K. Norman)
- 1995** West Hythe, one, 21st April (R. K. Norman)
- 1999** Capel-le-Ferne Gun Site, one, flew inland, 7th May (D. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts)
- 2014** Cheriton, one, 2nd July (J. Tomsett)
- 2016** Near Little Dibgate Wood, one, 20th May (J. Tomsett)
- 2019** Beachborough Lakes, one, 7th January (S. Tomlinson)
- 2021** Newingreen (A20 Westenhanger junction), one, 5th May (J. Tomsett)

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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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