

Linnet

Linaria cannabina

Category A

Breeding summer visitor and passage migrant, less common in winter.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

A widespread breeding species through much of Europe eastwards across west Siberia to about 90°E, thence south-west through the central Asian mountains to Afghanistan and Iran. It is only really absent in Europe from the northernmost parts, whilst the more northern and eastern populations vacate the breeding grounds in winter, moving south-west. Other populations are partially migratory, wintering within and slightly south of the breeding range, with concentrations in the Mediterranean region. Some more southerly populations are probably sedentary.



Linnet at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)

Kent status (KOS 2021):

In Kent it is a widespread summer visitor and passage migrant, with smaller numbers overwintering.

The Linnet 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 "abundant throughout the county, being in some localities the commonest of the finches", nesting "in hedges, both those of gardens and fields, and also in some of the larger gardens in our towns, but it is most numerous on gorse-covered commons and waste-lands", 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.

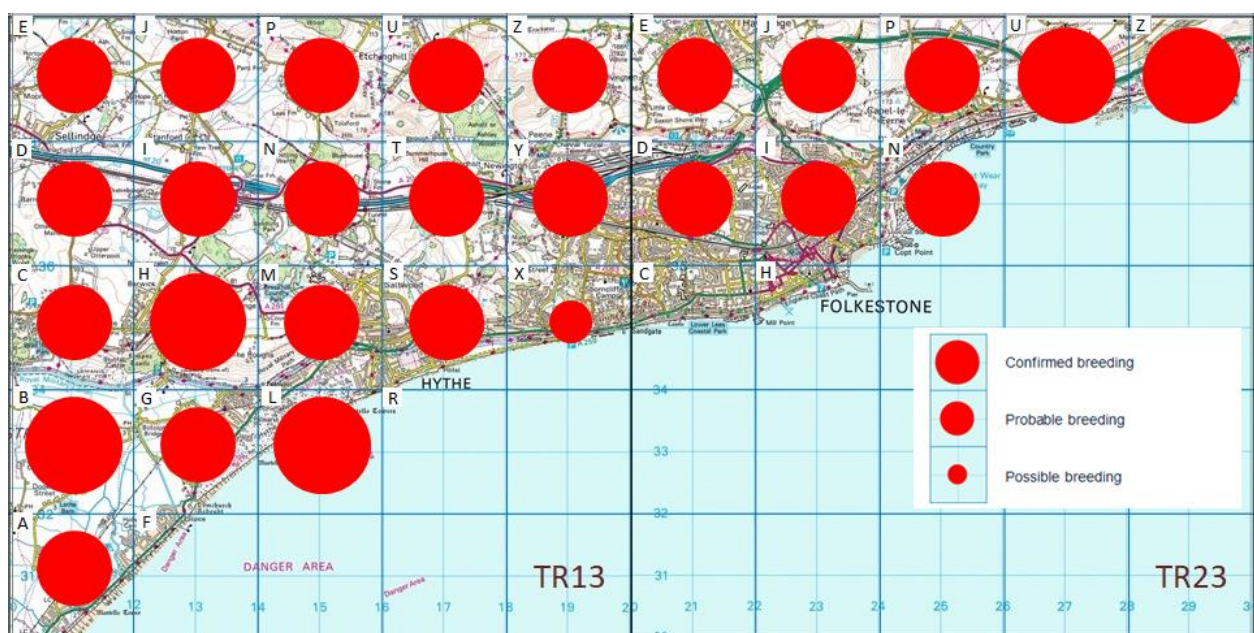


Figure 1: Breeding distribution of Linnet at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in five tetrads, with probable breeding in 21 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%)	2	(6%)	1	(3%)
Probable/Confirmed	22	(71%)	28	(90%)	26	(84%)
Total	23	(74%)	30	(97%)	27	(87%)
Change			+7	(+30%)	-3	(-10%)

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	+30%	-10%	+17%
Kent	+15%	-8%	+6%

Linnets are birds of open country, feeding almost entirely on weed seeds, and nesting in semi-colonial fashion in gorse, scrub and bushy hedgerows. Henderson & Hodge considered that gains between the first and second atlases (15% across the county, 30% locally) were probably related to improved coverage, as well as a spread of this species into suburbia, as abundance nationally has fallen sharply since the mid-1970s. Clements *et al.* (2015) reported that this decline had continued in south-east England, with a BTO Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) population trend of -43% between 1995 and 2012, whilst across Kent tetrad occupancy decreased by 8% (with a 10% decrease locally). The decline is thought to be linked to agricultural changes that have reduced nesting habitat and food resources.



Linnet at Donkey Street (Brian Harper)



Linnet at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)

Locally it has only disappeared from three marginal tetrads (TR13 F, TR23 C and TR23 H) since the second atlas but there is some evidence of population decline. At Nickolls Quarry Roger Norman noted 30 pairs in 1958, whilst by the 1990s only four to six pairs bred across the site (Norman 2007). At nearby Hythe Ranges there were 35 to 40 pairs in 1958, with around 30 pairs still present by the early 1990s, but only around 15 pairs since (Norman 2006). Neil Frampton considered it to be a common breeding species between the Aldergate Bridge and Hythe, with "probably in excess of 30 pairs", mostly on the Hythe Roughs, whilst Roger Norman could locate only five pairs on Hythe Roughs in the 1990s and two pairs by 2008. A further indication of former abundance was provided by Rowland (1968), who stated that on the Downs, "Linnets nest in any of the low gorse bushes".

Overall distribution

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

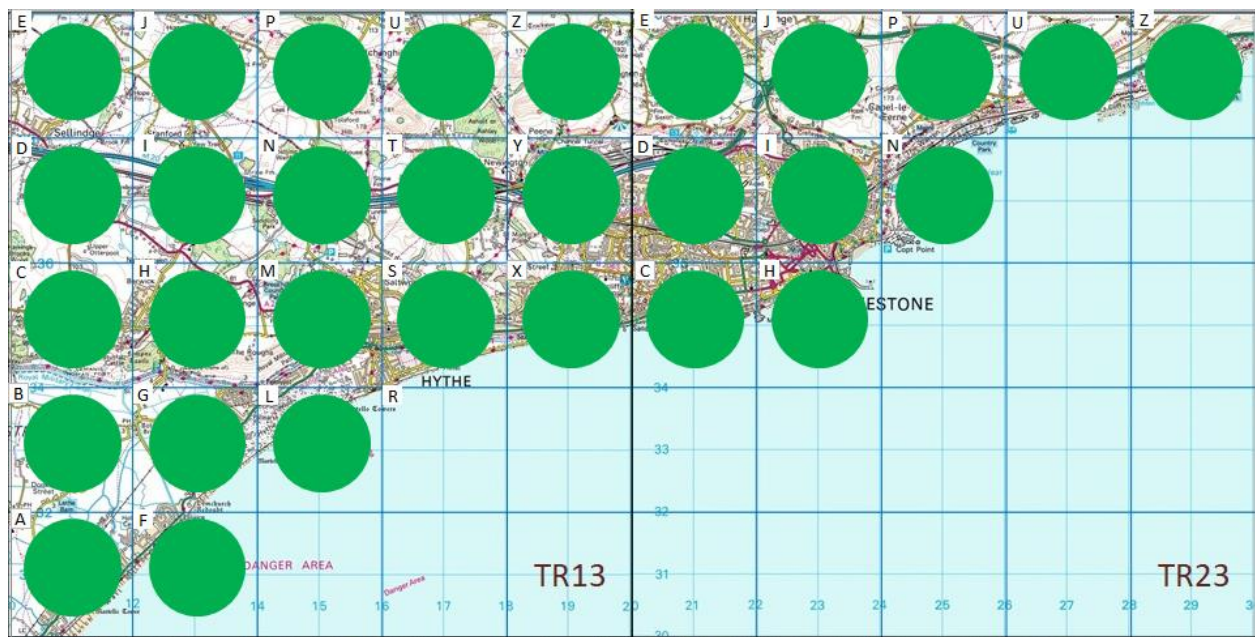


Figure 2: Distribution of all Linnet records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

As Taylor *et al.* noted that post-breeding flocks start to form in June and can be found throughout July and August, whilst autumn passage may be noted between late August and mid-November but usually reaches a peak in October.

The largest post-breeding counts in August date from the 1950s, when breeding abundance was higher. Roger Norman found 250 juveniles at Hythe Ranges in August 1956 and 1957, whilst he also noted between 300 and 400 at Nickolls Quarry in August 1957. More recently there were 200 at Abbotscliffe on the 26th August 1992, 100 at Church Hougham on the 30th August 1997 and 200 along Crete Road East on the 21st August 2001, but the last August count in excess of 50 was in 2005, when 61 were counted at Nickolls Quarry on the 10th August.

Numbers may be increased by migrants in autumn, when the largest counts have been noted. There were 550 at Folkestone on the 13th September 1968, 200 at Capel-le-Ferne on the 30th September 1991, 800 at Church Hougham on the 13th September 1992, 300 at Capel-le-Ferne on the 23rd September 1992, 650 at Abbotscliffe on the 8th October 1993, 200 there on the 9th October 1995, 350 at Church Hougham on the 5th September 2003 and up to 200 at Abbotscliffe between the 2nd and 10th October 2016.

Large numbers have also been logged passing over, when movements of 200 or more have been logged on ten occasions, usually in late September or October:

- 705 in off the sea at Copt Point on the 18th September 1984
- 295 west at Abbotscliffe on the 2nd October 1995
- 262 east at Abbotscliffe on the 24th September 1996
- 200 west at Abbotscliffe on the 6th October 1996
- 236 west at Abbotscliffe on the 11th October 1997
- 236 east at Abbotscliffe on the 13th October 1997
- 300 west at Abbotscliffe on the 10th October 1998
- 612 west at Abbotscliffe on the 12th October 1998
- 200 west at Abbotscliffe on the 10th October 2001
- 200 west at Princes Parade on the 11th October 2014

Early November has twice produced three-figure movements, with 100 flying west at Mill Point on the 1st November 1989 and 100 flying west at Abbotscliffe on the 6th November 1997, but numbers generally diminish during the winter months and counts of 100 or more are scarce, having occurred as follows: 100 at Abbotscliffe on the 12th November 1997 and on the 31st January 1998, 120 at Church Hougham in January/February 1999, 100 at Abbotscliffe on the 11th November 2016, 150 at Donkey Street in mid-November 2017 and 200 at Abbotscliffe in February 2018. It is interesting that, despite a general reduction in numbers, the highest ever winter count was made very recently, with up to 300 frequenting a crop field at Oathill Cottages, near Lympne from December 2020 into January 2021. A count of 150 flying west at Hythe on the 11th January 1968 was also worthy of note.



Linnet at Samphire Hoe (Mike Linklater)



Linnet at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



Linnets at Oathill Cottages, near Lympne (Phil Sharp)

Return passage may be noted in spring between late March and early May, when three figure counts or movements have occurred as follows:

100 in/east at Abbotscliffe on the 10th April 1992
200 in/west at Abbotscliffe on the 19th April 1992
225 west at Abbotscliffe on the 7th April 1993
640 in/west at Abbotscliffe on the 25th April 1993
109 west at Abbotscliffe on the 3rd April 1995
140 west at Abbotscliffe on the 10th April 1995
113 in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 15th April 1995
Up to 140 at Abbotscliffe between the 8th and 14th April 1996
100 at Abbotscliffe on the 4th April 1999
Up to 250 at Church Hougham in March and April 1999
132 (32 west, 100 east) at Capel-le-Ferne on the 8th Apr 2001

Click [here](#) to listen to a local audio recording of a flock calling at the Willop Sewage Works on the 28th March 2022 (Ian Roberts).



Linnets at Oathill Cottages, near Lympne (Phil Sharp)

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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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