

Hawfinch

<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	Category A
Rare migrant and winter visitor.	23 records, 27 birds

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Well-distributed across Europe, only really being absent from Ireland and more northern areas such as northern Scotland, northern Fenno-Scandia and northern Russia. The northern populations migrate more than the southern ones which are largely sedentary. Juveniles migrate more than adults, and females more than males. Many birds move south-west across Europe, and winter chiefly in southern France, north-east Spain, northern and central Italy and the Balkans. Some cross the Mediterranean Sea to the Balearic Islands, Sardinia and Corsica.



Hawfinch at Burmarsh (Brian Harper)

Kent status (KOS 2022, Taylor et al. 1981):

It is a thinly distributed resident in suitable woodlands in the county primarily on the North Downs, favouring mature deciduous woodland, with hornbeam, beech, sycamore and similar species, and shows a preference for cherry and damson orchards in the winter months. It is also an occasional coastal migrant. The Hawfinch has been in steep decline across Britain in recent years and the Rare Breeding Birds Panel has been monitoring the species since 2006 (Holling et al. 2009).

Ticehurst (1909) considered that it was “apparent that it breeds annually over the whole [of Kent], except in the marshes and perhaps also in Thanet”, but “in the eastern half [of the county] it is decidedly less numerous and more sparsely distributed”. He also thought that “throughout the whole county it is steadily on the increase”. It was noted in the proceedings of the Folkestone Natural History Society that, on the 11th March 1884 at Folkestone Town Hall, “the Secretary [Henry Ulyett] placed on the table a fine specimen of the Hawfinch, shot lately at Newington”. Whilst proving that the species could be obtained locally it also suggested that it was notable enough to be exhibited.



Hawfinch at Folkestone (John Tomlinson)

The next documented sighting did occur until 1956 when, on the 27th October, F. R. Wise saw one “flying in from the direction of the sea during a big immigration of starlings, finches etc. It was following a party of Chaffinches and passed within six feet of the observer, flying close to the ground”. He had “excellent views of it and also heard the flight call”. Another was noted on the 13th November 1965 when Geoffrey Munns saw one at “New Inn Green [Newingreen], near Hythe”.

In 1989 two were seen at Brockhill Country Park on the 31st January, and three were reported there in February, and there have been 17 subsequent records, all since 1990, as shown by year in figure 1.

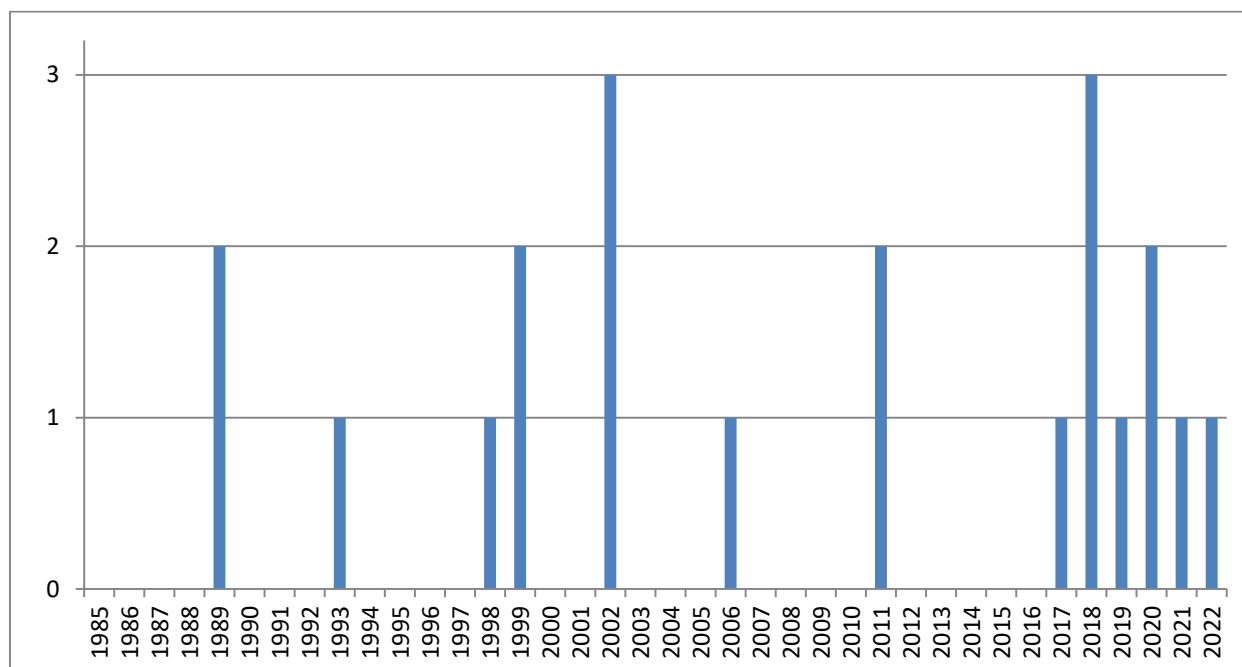


Figure 1: Hawfinch records at Folkestone and Hythe

The records by week are given in figure 2. Records have been well distributed by month with records in all months except July and August.

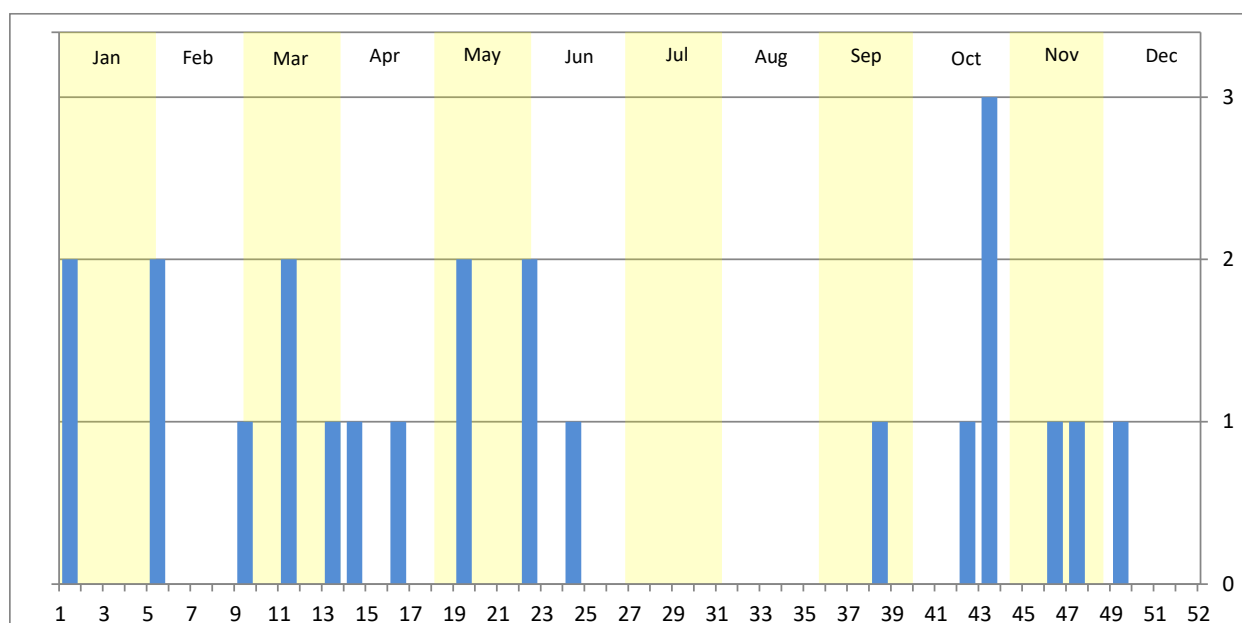


Figure 2: Hawfinch records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

Since 1990 there have been five records from Capel-le-Ferne, with others at nearby Creteway Down and Copt Point, and four records from the marsh, with three at Nickolls Quarry and one at Burmarsh, plus one seen flying along the top of the Roughs. There were three records during a national irruption in 2018, with one in a garden in Saltwood and two in a garden in central Folkestone in March, and two at Horn Street in October.

The two most recent records were also in gardens: in Saltwood in March 2021 and central Folkestone in April 2022. Figure 3 shows the location of records by tetrad.



Figure 3: Distribution of all Hawfinch records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The full list of records is as follows:

- c.1884** Newington, one shot (per H. Ulyett)
- 1956** Folkestone, one flew in off sea, 27th October (F. R. Wise)
- 1965** Newingreen, one at "New Inn Green, near Hythe" 13th November (G. F. A. Munns)
- 1989** Brockhill CP, two, 31st January (I. A. Roberts), with three reported in February
- 1993** Capel-le-Ferne Café, one flew east, 16th June (D. A. Gibson)
- 1998** Capel-le-Ferne Gun Site, one flew east, 10th May (D. A. Gibson)
- 1999** Capel-le-Ferne Gun Site, one flew in/east, 1st June (I. A. Roberts), presumed same flew east again there the following day (D. A. Gibson)
- 2002** Capel-le-Ferne, one, 11th May (D. A. Gibson)
- 2002** Nickolls Quarry, one flew north, 25th November (I. A. Roberts)
- 2002** Nickolls Quarry, one, 5th December (R. K. Norman), possibly same as above
- 2006** Capel-le-Ferne Gun Site, two, then flew east, 2nd April (I. A. Roberts)
- 2011** Hythe Roughs, one flew east, 13th January (I. A. Roberts)
- 2017** Creteway Down, three flew over, 27th October (B. Harper)
- 2018** Saltwood, one, 12th March (G. Cooke)
- 2018** Folkestone, two, 17th March (C. & J. Tomlinson)
- 2018** Horn Street, pair, 18th October (P. Howe)
- 2019** Nickolls Quarry, one, 22nd October (R. K. Norman)
- 2020** Burmarsh Churchyard, one, 3rd March, photographed (B. Harper)
- 2020** Copt Point, one, 22nd September (D. A. Gibson)
- 2021** Saltwood, one then flew north, 30th March (S. Clancy)
- 2022** Folkestone, one, 17th April (C. & J. Tomlinson)

References

- Folkestone Natural History Society 1884. *Proceedings of the Folkestone Natural History Society* October 1883-August 1884: 24. J. English, Folkestone.
- Holling, M. & the Rare Breeding Birds Panel 2009. Rare breeding birds in the UK in 2006. *British Birds* 102: 158-202.
- Kent Ornithological Society (KOS). 1953-2021. Kent Bird Reports. Kent Ornithological Society.

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.