

# Kingfisher

*Alcedo atthis*

Category A

Breeding resident, with dispersal to coasts and non-breeding areas in autumn and winter.

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

Widespread across mid-latitude and southern Europe and Asia. Western populations are largely resident or partially dispersive but eastern birds move south or west to avoid winter ice. Immatures tend to move more often, and on average further, than adults.

*Kent status (KOS 2021):*

It is a widespread resident breeding species in Kent with autumn/winter dispersal to coasts and non-breeding areas.



Kingfisher at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)

The Kingfisher 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", being "found on all the rivers and many of the smallest streams, ponds and ballast holes in every district in the county", so there can be little doubt that it was to be found locally. Furthermore, writing about autumn dispersal to the coasts, he stated that "so long ago as 1845 this autumn movement was noted by Thompson who states that he had seen them in the harbour at Dover, on the beach near Folkestone and in the marshes near Rye".

Harrison (1953) also remarked on this dispersal, noting that "from observations it is clear that in autumn Kingfishers tend to move towards the coast, "and their presence in winter has been remarked upon by Mr. H. R. Allen ... along the Royal Military Canal near Hythe", although it seems likely instead that breeding here may have been overlooked.

## 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 Kingfisher at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in one tetrad with possible breeding in three others. 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	0	(0%)	2	(6%)	3	(10%)
Probable/Confirmed	1	(3%)	1	(3%)	1	(3%)
Total	1	(3%)	3	(10%)	4	(13%)
Change			+2	(+200%)	+1	(+33%)

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	+200%	+33%	+300%
Kent	+51%	-24%	+15%

The population fluctuates significantly in Britain as it is particularly susceptible to cold winters. Numbers in the first Kent atlas were low as the species was still recovering from the severe weather in 1962/63. After this recovery breeding numbers in Britain fell sharply through the late 1970s to a low point in the mid-1980s, before again recovering. However, a further downward trend has been evident from around 2005 onwards (Balmer *et al.* 2013).

Clements *et al.* (2015) considered that recent mild winters and improved water quality should have helped this species, so found that a reduction in occupied tetrads between the second and third atlases to be surprising. They speculated that the presence of feral American Minks in many of our rivers and wetlands may be a factor limiting the Kingfisher population, which they thought likely to be stable at an estimated 75-100 pairs. There is local evidence that nests along the Royal Military Canal have been predated by Mink (*Neovison vison*).

The stronghold locally is the canal between the Aldergate Bridge and Seabrook, and the canal cutting between West Hythe dam and the Dymchurch Redoubt, with about three pairs thought to nest annually. Birds have also been noted during the breeding season at Fairmead Farm near Westenhanger (TR13 I), Brockhill Country Park (TR13 S), Beachborough Lakes (TR13 T) and Casebourne Wood (TR13 X) and birds may nest at or near some of these sites on occasion.

### Overall distribution

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of Kingfisher by tetrad, with records in 20 tetrads (65%).

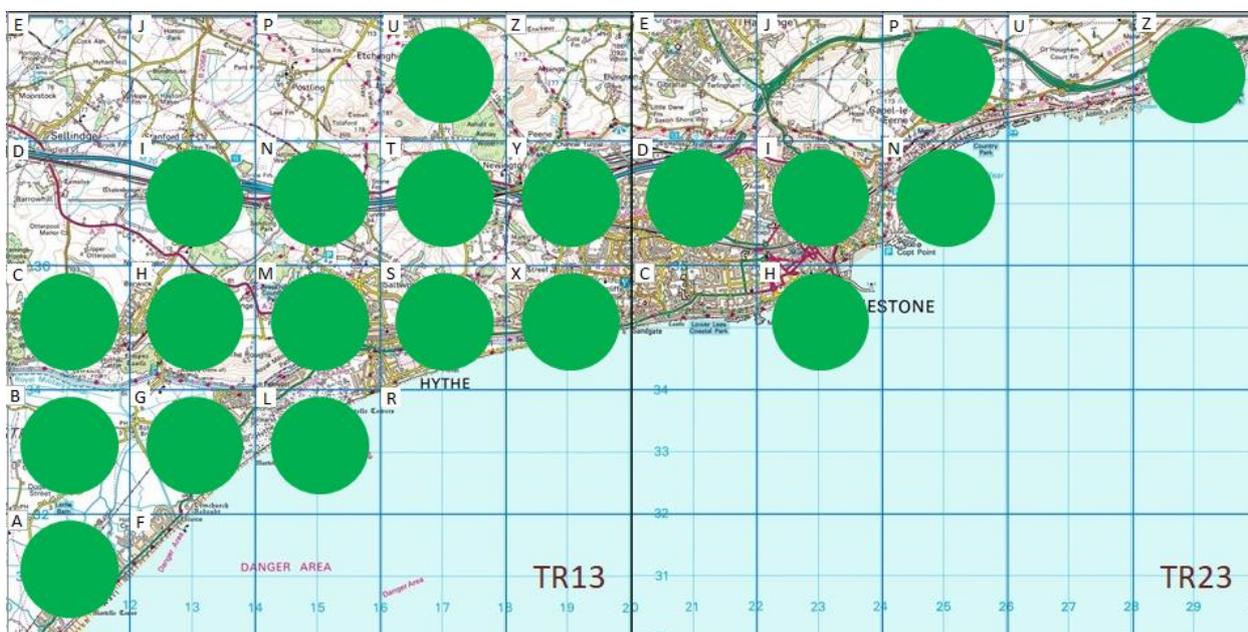
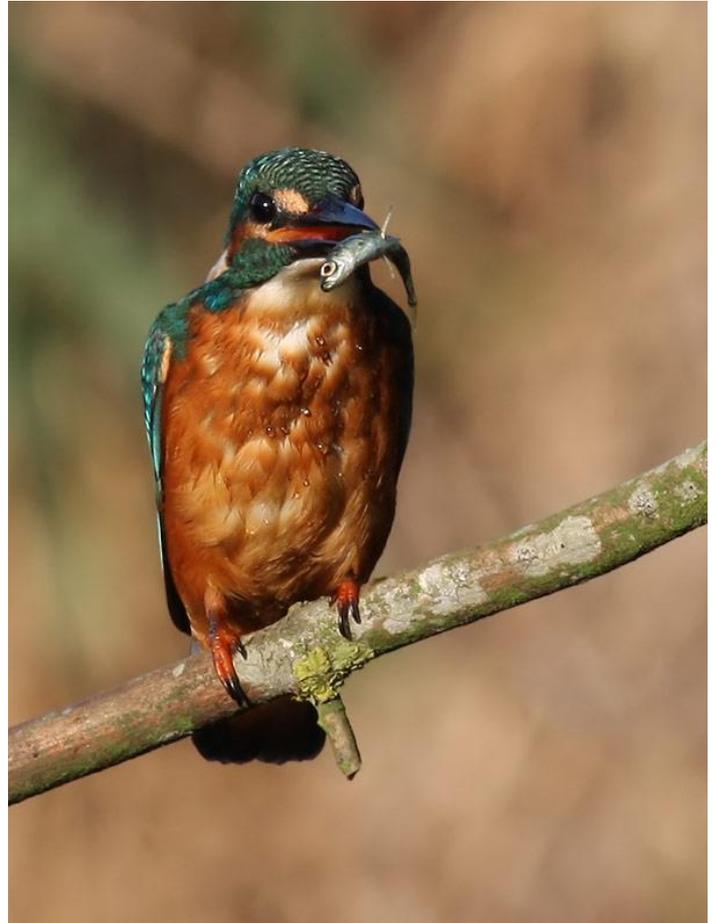


Figure 2: Distribution of all Kingfisher records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

There is some dispersal, mainly of juveniles, to coasts and other non-breeding areas (such as Nickolls Quarry and ditches on the Romney Marsh) in autumn and winter. Folkestone Harbour regular attracts a wintering individual (with two present in some years and three on the 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2022) and there are several records from the coast between Copt Point and Samphire Hoe. There have also been occasional records from the coast between Hythe Ranges and the Willop Outfall.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> January 2004 Ian Roberts watched one flying out to sea from Fisherman's Beach (Hythe) that was chased by Herring Gulls and finally killed. Kevin Harding observed a similar event on the 15<sup>th</sup> September 2016 when one was chased out to sea from Folkestone Pier by a Herring Gull, but the outcome was not observed.



Kingfisher at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)



Kingfishers at Hythe (Michael Stevens)



Kingfisher at Hythe (Nigel Webster)

Also of note is a record of one that collided with a window at East Cliff Gardens (in Folkestone), quite some distance from the nearest breeding site, on the 27<sup>th</sup> June 2015 and was picked up alive by David Featherbe and taken to a local vet.

Two instances of birds flushed from scrub are also worthy of mention: one seen by Roger Norman at Hythe Ranges on the 10<sup>th</sup> April 1958 (Norman 2006) and one seen by Dale Gibson at Capel-le-Ferne Gun Site on the 15<sup>th</sup> August 1992.



Kingfisher at Hythe (Nigel Webster)



Kingfisher at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)

### **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.

Harrison, J. M. 1953. *The Birds of Kent*. Witherby, London.

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](http://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.