

Turtle Dove

Scientific name

Category A

Rare summer visitor and passage migrant, formerly numerous. Very rare in winter.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

A widespread summer visitor across much of Europe eastwards to north-central China, wintering mainly in sub-Saharan Africa. A recent decline, especially in western Europe, has been linked to agricultural changes on the breeding grounds, hunting on migration and drought in the winter quarters.

Kent status (KOS 2021):

It is a declining summer visitor and passage migrant in Kent with very occasional winter records.



Turtle Dove at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)

The Turtle Dove 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 wherever there are woods, plantations, copses and rough, high hedges", 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 Turtle Dove at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was not confirmed in any tetrads, but there was probable breeding in four tetrads and possible breeding in seven. 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	9	(29%)	10	(32%)	7	(23%)
Probable/Confirmed	10	(32%)	14	(45%)	4	(13%)
Total	19	(61%)	24	(77%)	11	(35%)
Change			+5	(+26%)	-13	(-54%)

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	+26%	-54%	-42%
Kent	+28%	-40%	-23%

Harrison (1953) considered it to be an abundant summer visitor to the county and Taylor *et al.* (1981) regarded it as well-distributed. Henderson & Hodge (1998) found it throughout Kent, except in the most urban areas, commenting that even though their range in Britain has contracted south-eastward, "Turtle Doves are still relatively plentiful in the county".

Henderson & Hodge also described how evidence from two long-running census plots in the county suggested that the population had fallen since 1980 but that this was not yet reflected in distribution at the tetrad level. Clements *et al.* (2015) reported on a 40% reduction in occupied tetrads in the most recent atlas, with the decline appearing to have accelerated in the last few years, but still estimated the county population at 2,000-3,000 pairs. However, they added a footnote remarking how anecdotal evidence had since emerged that strongly suggested that this total may have fallen precipitously since, and that the species may be on its way to extinction in Kent.

Turtle Doves favour a mix of arable farmland with broad-leaved woodland. The seeds of arable weeds, especially fumitory, are essential to their diet. They have shown a steep decline across much of Europe, which in Britain started in the late 1970s and has since continued. Widespread shooting in Mediterranean countries, changing in farming practice resulting in fewer arable weeds, and possible climatic factors affecting the African wintering grounds have all been suggested as reasons for this decline.

Overall distribution

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of Turtle Dove by tetrad, with records in 28 tetrads (90%).

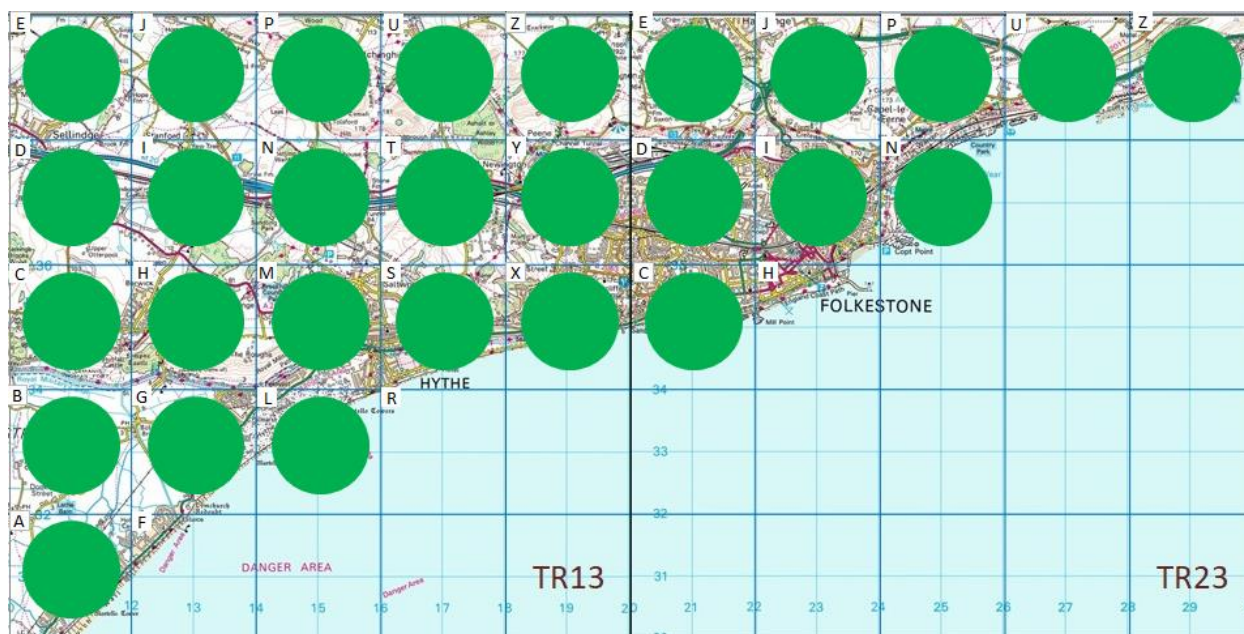


Figure 2: Distribution of all Turtle Dove records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The first arrival has occurred as early as the 10th April, when one was seen at Folkestone in 1993, but April records are few and subsequent sightings at on the 13th April (two at Hythe in 1969 and one at Copt Point in 1979), 18th April (one at Capel Battery in 2003), 20th April (one at West Hythe in 1983) and 22nd April (one at Abbotscliffe in 1992) are noteworthy.

There have been several records in the last week of April but the main arrival is usually not until the second half of May, when double-figure counts were recorded on six occasions: 25 flew in off the sea with Woodpigeons at Capel Battery on the 15th May 1992, 12 arrived in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 23rd May 1992, 19 flew in/west at Folkestone on the 19th May 1993, 19 flew east at Capel-le-Ferne on the 27th May 1997, 14 flew in/east at Capel-le-Ferne on the 19th May 1998 and 14 flew in/west at Capel-le-Ferne on the 21st May 1999.

Arrivals can continue well into June. The largest total spring passage was logged in 1992, when a total of 57 were recorded arriving in off the sea, with the next highest in 1998, when 39 were recorded.

Some idea of the former breeding numbers and their decline is provided by observations from Hythe Ranges, where Roger Norman noted at least five pairs breeding in the late 1950s. Up to four pairs still bred there in the 1990s, with three pairs in 2000 but only one in 2001 and one after 2005 (Norman 2006).



Turtle Dove at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)



Turtle Dove at Lymne (Phil Sharp)

Up to ten birds were frequently seen in the Folkestone Warren area in the 1990s but numbers steadily declined and the last purring bird was noted there in 2006. At Hythe Roughts at least three pairs bred in the early 1990s but were reduced to a single pair by 1996, which persisted until 2004, with territorial males in some years until 2010. It may have hung on a little longer in the Hope Farm area, inland of Creteway Down (where the last record was in June 2011), in the Hougham Valley (last recorded in June 2014) and along the canal between the Aldergate Bridge and West Hythe (with intermittent records until 2019).

Thirty flew south-west at Nickolls Quarry on the 18th July 1965, but autumn passage was normally noted from late August into September. Counts included 22 at Nickolls Quarry on the 29th August 1952, 30 at Copt Point on the 27th September 1981, 30 at Church Hougham on the 13th September 1992 and 17 at Abbotscliffe on the 6th September 1994. Only the odd straggler remained into October, with the latest ever on the 8th (at Hythe Ranges in 1961 and Folkestone in October 1995).

Winter sightings are rare and one present at Sandling Park from the 29th to 31st December 1960 was one of only three listed by Taylor *et al* in their review period (1952-76). A "probable" was also reported in the Grimston Gardens area in Folkestone on the 16th February 2011 but further details were not forthcoming.

It has now declined to such an extent that individual records are being documented since 2015, and the full list of these is as follows:

- 2015** Hythe Ranges, two, 4th July (S. P. Clancy)
2017 West Hythe, one, 16th June, with at least one, possibly two, on the 18th June (B. Harper, R. K. Norman)
2017 Botolph's Bridge, five, 28th August, photographed (B. Harper)
2017 Botolph's Bridge, two, 2nd September (B. Harper), possibly same as above
2018 Nickolls Quarry, one, 4th June (R. K. Norman)
2018 Beachborough Park, one flew south, 22nd August (S. Tomlinson)
2019 Bargrove Wood, three, 6th May (B. Harper)
2019 West Hythe, one, 25th May (reported, per B. Harper)
2020 Lower Cock Ash (near Monk's Horton), one, 27th April (I. A. Roberts)
2020 Hythe Roughts, one on several dates between 9th May and 3rd July (B. Harper)
2020 Lympe, one in garden, 13th May, photographed (P. Sharp)
2020 Hythe, one in garden on Cliff Road, 23rd May (G. Cooke)
2020 Botolph's Bridge, one flew south, 22nd June (B. Harper)
2021 Abbotscliffe, one arrived in off the sea, 5th May (I. A. Roberts)
2022 Hythe, one reported "at the Royal Military Canal", 22nd May (per RBA)
2022 Church Hougham, one, 22nd July (M. D. Kennett)



Turtle Doves at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)

References

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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](#).

I am indebted to Andrew Henderson and Tim Hodge for providing access to the Kent Ornithological Society archives.



Turtle Dove at Hythe Roughs (Ian Roberts)