

Firecrest

Regulus ignicapilla

Category A

Passage migrant and winter visitor, has bred on one occasion.

Breeds in warm temperate areas in Europe, from southern Britain south to North Africa and eastwards to the Baltic States and Turkey. Southern populations are mainly resident, whereas northern and eastern populations are chiefly migratory, wintering mainly in the Mediterranean area and the extreme west of Europe (Snow & Perrins, 1998). In Kent it is a scarce and local breeding species, and a regular passage migrant with small numbers overwintering (KOS, 2020).



Firecrest at Enbrook Park (Brian Harper)

The Firecrest was not included in Knight and Tolputt’s “list of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood” (1871), although Ticehurst (1909) regarded it as a regular autumn visitor to the east and south coasts, but rare in spring. Harrison (1953) considered it still to be infrequent in spring and cited a record seen by Miss A. V. Stone “near Folkestone” on the 27th and 30th March 1936.

Whilst this record was probably within the local area, the first certain occurrence involved one seen at Hythe by William Nevin on the 12th March 1960. It appears to have remained scarce during the 1960s and 1970s, although local coverage at this time was limited: there were three at Hythe on the 20th March 1964 and the 21st October 1967, one at Folkestone Warren on the 8th October 1972, singles at Sandling Park on the 2nd February and 30th March 1975, one at Lympe on the 31st March 1975 and two at Folkestone Warren on the 21st March 1976.

It has since been recorded almost annually since 1980 and Neil Frampton considered it to be regular on spring passage along the Royal Military Canal between the Aldergate Bridge and Hythe (usually in March), but rare in winter. Today it is a regular passage migrant and winter visitor, which has been confirmed as breeding for the first time.

Breeding 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 Firecrest at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in one tetrad, with possible breeding in one more. 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%)	1	(3%)	1	(3%)
Probable/Confirmed	0	(0%)	0	(0%)	1	(3%)
Total	0	(0%)	1	(3%)	2	(6%)

The instance of possible breeding in the second county atlas was in the tetrad TR23 H and was presumably at the Lower Leas Coastal Park but nothing further is known of this record. In the most recent atlas a male was seen carrying food and also heard singing at Sandling (TR13 N) Park in May 2012, whilst was one was present in suitable breeding habitat within Scene Wood (TR13 S) on the 7th April 2011, although could have been a migrant.

The only indications of breeding since have involved a pair seen displaying and copulating at Little Dibgate Wood (TR13 T) on the 27th March 2020 and a male singing at Port Lympne on the 23rd May 2021, however breeding birds can easily go undetected and it would certainly seem to be a potential future colonist.

Non-breeding distribution

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of Firecrest by tetrad, with records in 24 tetrads (77%).

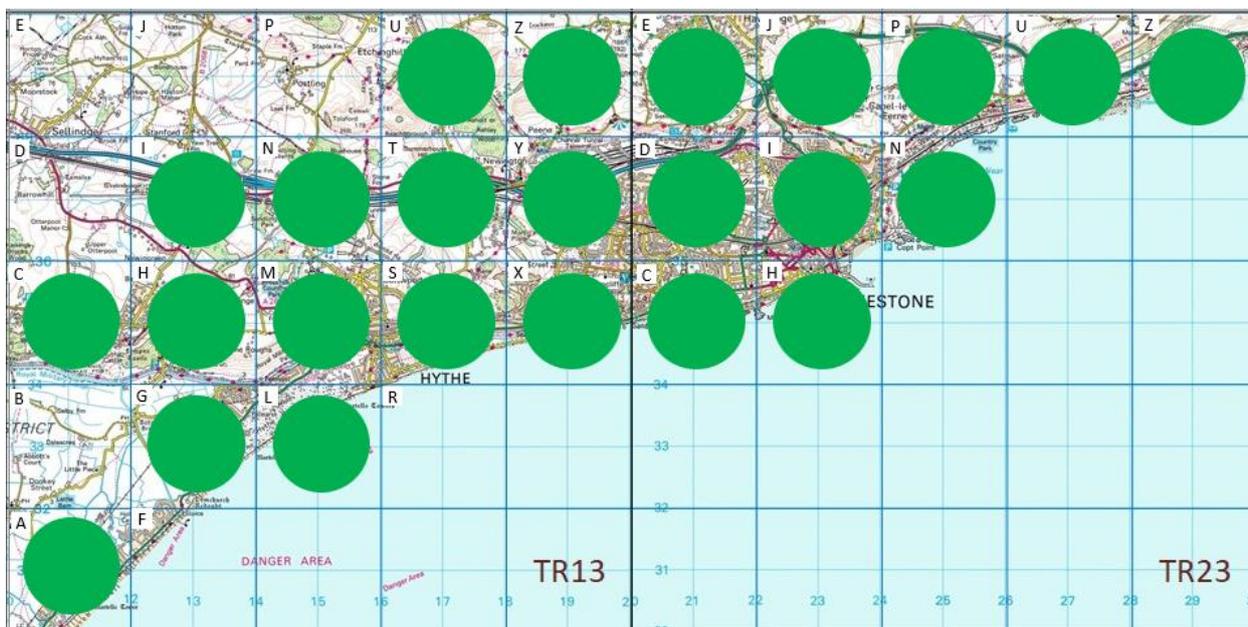


Figure 2: Distribution of all Firecrest records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

It has never been noted in June or July, whilst the only August record appeared to involve an early migrant at Hythe Roughts on the 31st August 2020, as there have been a number of sightings from the first week of September, with a peak in that week of six at Capel Battery on the 7th September 1993. Six were also noted there on the 29th October 1995, whilst there was an exceptional influx between the 17th and 22nd September 1996, which was thought to have involved at least 100, possibly as many as 150 individuals, with a peak off 44 across the area on the 18th. A similar number of Coal Tits of the continental form were also involved in this arrival. Further day totals in excess of five have been recorded in autumn as follows:

- 7 at Folkestone Warren on the 19th October 1999
- 15 across the area on the 16th October 2003
- 6 at Abbotscliffe on the 18th October 2003
- 6 at Mill Point on the 13th and 24th November 2003
- 12 at Samphire Hoe on the 12th October 2004, with 7 there the next day
- 10 at Folkestone Warren on the 23th October 2017
- 8 at West Hythe on the 18th November 2018

Small numbers overwinter in a range of habitats, with favoured sites including the banks of the Royal Military Canal between the Aldergate Bridge and Seabrook, woods in the Saltwood area, Enbrook Park, Mill Point and private gardens in Hythe and Folkestone. It is difficult to estimate the wintering population but in recent years at least ten have been present.

A light spring passage is noted in most years, between March and May, with counts usually of up to three, but four were seen at Samphire Hoe on the 30th March 2016 and Copt Point on the 21st March 2018, and five were at Folkestone Warren on the 31st March 1984 and Samphire Hoe on the 14th April 2013. Stragglers may linger into late May, with singles at Capel Battery on the 21st May 1996, 23rd May 1994 and 28th May 1993 being the latest.



Firecrest at West Hythe (Brian Harper)



Firecrest at Enbrook Park (Brian Harper)



Firecrest at Samphire Hoe (Paul Holt)



Firecrest at Mill Point (Ian Roberts)

Click [here](#) to listen to a local audio recording of one calling at Pond Hill Road (Cheriton) on the 30th December 2018 (Brian Harper).

References

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

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Acknowledgements

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Firecrest at Samphire Hoe (Ian Roberts)



Firecrest at Samphire Hoe (Ian Roberts)



Firecrest at Enbrook Park (Brian Harper)



Firecrest at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)