

Moorhen

Gallinula chloropus

Category A

Breeding resident.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds across much of Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas. Birds nesting in Britain and western Europe are largely sedentary but those from more northern and eastern areas move south or west in winter, with some even reaching sub-Saharan Africa.

Kent status (KOS 2021):

A common and widespread resident breeding species in Kent.



Moorhen at Saltwood Castle (Brian Harper)

The Moorhen 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 "a common resident species" and "generally distributed throughout the county". He continued to remark that "in all the marshes, even to within a few yards of the sea, it nests in the ditches and fleets wherever there are reeds or flags to afford it shelter. Along the streams and rivers it occurs even up to the edge of the towns and villages, while most of the ponds and lakes throughout the county contain one or more pairs", so there can be little doubt that it was to be found locally.

Furthermore, Henry Ulyett (1880) recounted how upon visiting Rakemere Pond in Folkestone Warren on the 30th July 1879: "I went down to the pond itself and spent a quarter of an hour watching, and listening to the many curious and strange sounds that broke the stillness. Among the odd sounds which kept coming from the reeds I heard a short sharp barking noise such as a young dog might make. For some time I tried in vain to discover whence and from what it came, but it ceased when I made a slight noise. I passed out of sight round a bush, and presently heard it afresh and on working cautiously round got full view of a Moorhen swimming quickly and unconcernedly across the open water.

It paddled about with quick short jerks of its white-edged pert-looking tail, constantly uttering its peculiar cry, then it went into the reeds again. Just as I was preparing to start a second came in sight following the track of the former, and differing from its partner only in being more soberly coloured. For five or six minutes I watched them swimming about and listened to their monotonous duet; the cry of the female is not quite so canine in character as that of the male, but slightly more musical, a crinking sound, putting one in mind of that made by the frog, only much louder".



Moorhen at Seabrook (Brian Harper)



Moorhen at Seabrook (Brian Harper)



Moorhen at Saltwood Castle (Brian Harper)



Moorhen at Seabrook (Brian Harper)

Breeding atlas distribution

Figure 1 shows the breeding distribution by tetrad based on the results of the 2007-13 BTO/KOS atlas fieldwork.

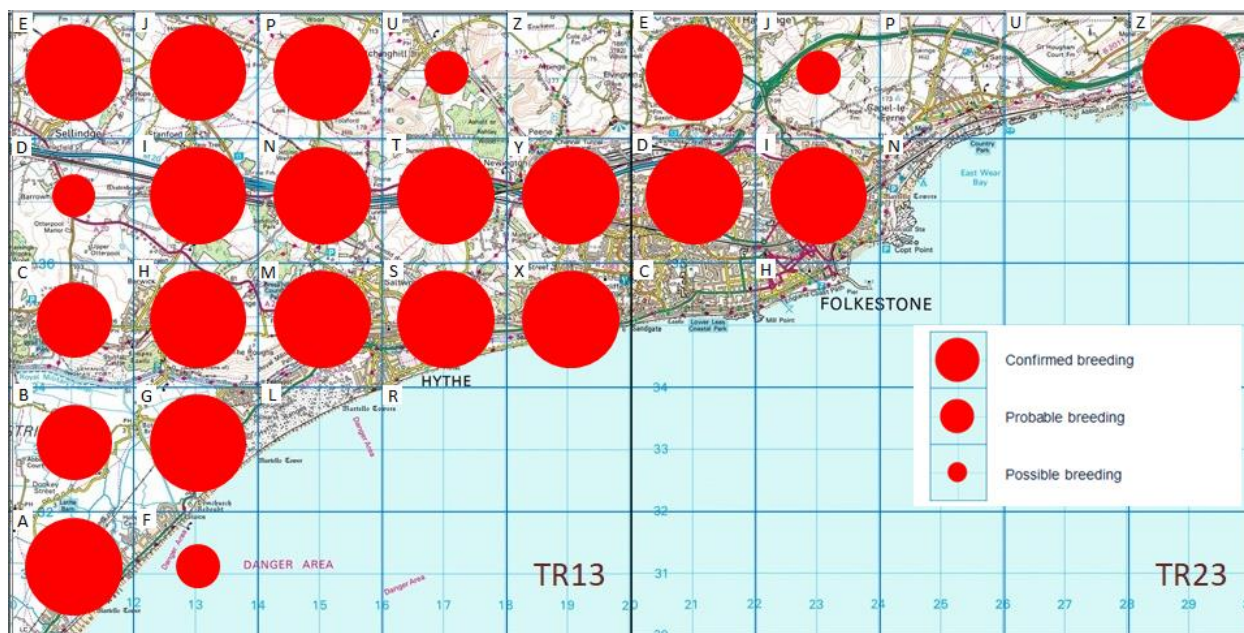


Figure 1: Breeding distribution of Moorhen at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in 17 tetrads, with probable breeding in two more and possible breeding in four 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	1	(3%)	4	(14%)	4	(14%)
Probable/Confirmed	17	(55%)	14	(45%)	19	(61%)
Total	18	(58%)	18	(58%)	23	(74%)
Change			0	(0%)	+5	(+28%)

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	0%	28%	28%
Kent	0%	17%	18%

The local increase between the second and third atlases was also reflected at the county level, with Clements *et al* (2015) reporting on a 17% increase in occupied tetrads across Kent, which they found puzzling in light of a fall in numbers of 20% shown by the BTO Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) trend for south-east England between 1995 and 2012.

Locally it is a common and widespread breeding resident, found almost everywhere where there is water.

Overall distribution

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of Moorhen by tetrad, with records in 29 tetrads (94%).

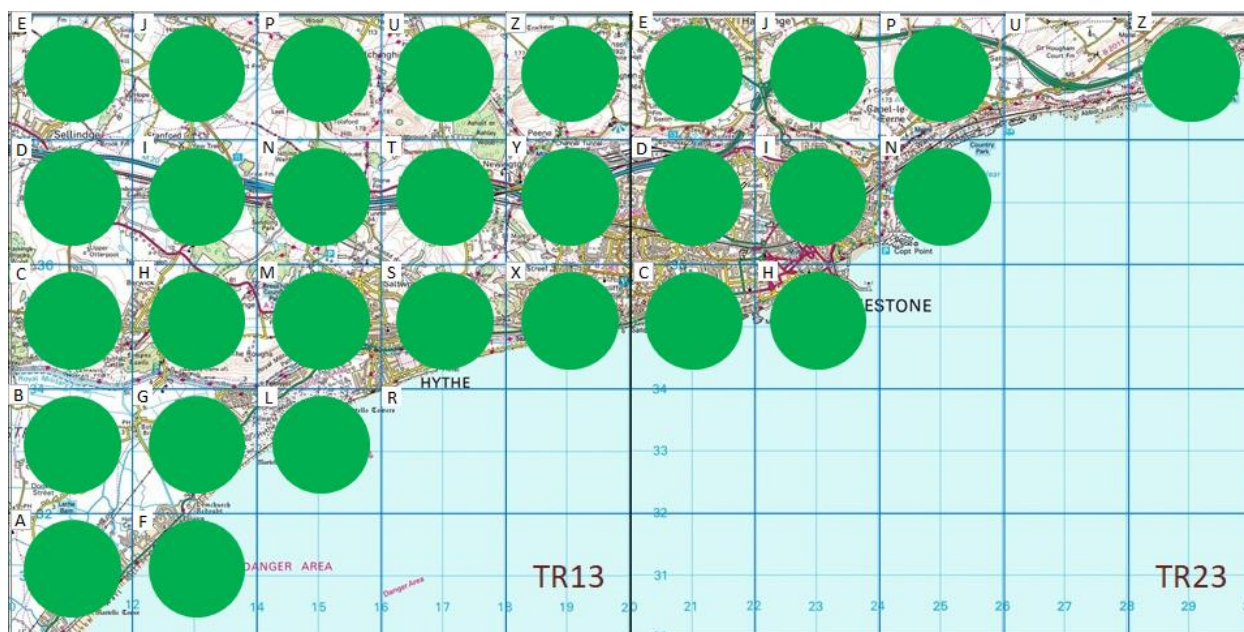


Figure 2: Distribution of all Moorhen records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Apart from a count of 30 at Cheriton on the 14th January 1967 the largest numbers have been recorded from sites on the Romney Marsh.

The highest count dates from January/February 1970, when up to 80 were at West Hythe, whilst there were “usually over 50 birds present” along the Royal Military Canal west of Hythe during the winter months between 1980 and 1985. Further counts of 30 or more have involved 32 at Botolph’s Bridge in December 1997, 36 there in December 2000, 31 there in January 2001, 55 at Nickolls Quarry in March 2001, 31 there in October 2002, 33 at Botolph’s Bridge in August 2005 and 30 at West Hythe in November 2009.

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](#).

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Moorhen at Beachborough Lakes (Steve Tomlinson)



Moorhen at Saltwood Castle (Brian Harper)