

# Rock Pipit

*Anthus petrosus*

Category A

Breeding resident, winter visitor and passage migrant.

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

Breeds along coasts of western and northern France, Britain and Ireland, Fenno-Scandia and European Russia. British birds are mainly resident with local dispersive movements. Northern populations move south or west to Britain, Iberia and the western Mediterranean.

*Kent status (KOS 2021):*

A small resident population breeds along the east coast of Kent, but it is essentially a coastal passage migrant and winter visitor in the county.



Rock Pipit at Folkestone Pier (Brian Harper)

The Rock Pipit 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, this species is almost exclusively coastal and so would most likely have been seen within the current recording area.

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

Breeding was confirmed in one tetrad, with probable breeding in one more and possible breeding in one other. 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%)	0	(0%)	1	(3%)
Probable/Confirmed	0	(0%)	0	(0%)	2	(6%)
Total	0	(0%)	0	(0%)	3	(10%)
Change			0	(--%)	3	(--%)

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	--%	--%	--%
Kent	--%	+33%	--%

Ticehurst (1909) and Harrison (1953) were able to trace just a single instance of nesting in the county, to the east of Dover in 1901, and considered it to only be a “tolerably common winter visitor”, being most numerous on the north Kent marshes, and “certainly less plentiful” in the south and south-east, and a passage migrant in March/April and September/October, although “always in greatest numbers in autumn”.

Taylor *et al.* provided details of several instances of breeding: at Dover in 1953 and between 1974 and 1976, and on Thanet between 1967 and 1968, and from 1973 to 1976. As a breeding species in Kent they occupy caves and rocky foreshores at the base of the chalk sea cliffs.

Henderson & Hodge reported on its presence within 12 tetrads in the second county atlas, with probable or confirmed breeding in five tetrads in the Dover area (TR34) and one on Thanet, but also referred to “possibly two pairs between Dover and Folkestone” based upon “recent records”. They estimated the Kent population at around nine or ten pairs.

Survey work undertaken in 2001 found evidence of between 35 and 45 nest sites between Margate and Folkestone Warren (Hodgson 2004), with between seven and nine pairs along a 3.4km stretch of coast between Shakespeare Beach and Abbotscliffe. Whilst Hodgson considered that there may have been some previous underestimation of the population, he suggested that the Rock Pipit had become established in the county as a regular breeding species since the Second World War and shown a notable expansion in the 1990s. Clements *et al.* (2015) found it to be present in 16 tetrads in Kent in the most recent atlas, giving an estimate of 30-50 pairs present.



Rock Pipit at Samphire Hoe (Mike Linklater)



Rock Pipit at Folkestone Warren (Tony Poole)

In recent years at least six pairs have bred regularly, with two at the eastern end of Samphire Hoe, two at the western end, a pair below Abbotscliffe and at least one pair at Folkestone Warren, but the population tends to be underestimated unless specifically surveyed.



## Overall distribution

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of Rock Pipit by tetrad, with records in 15 tetrads (48%).

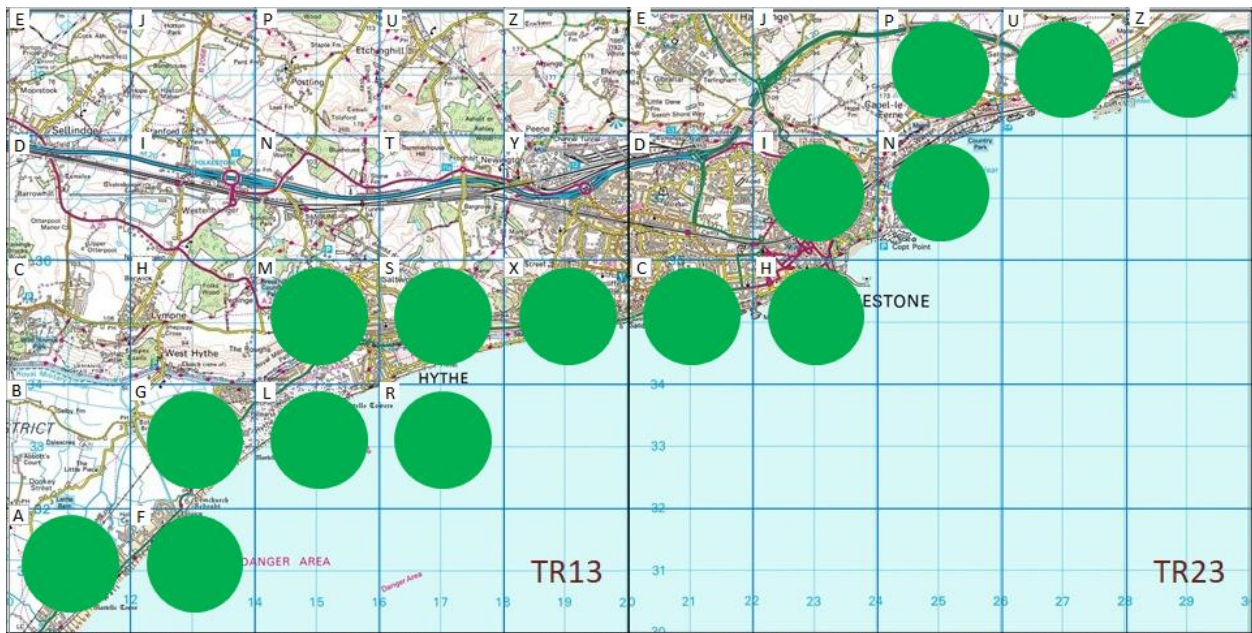


Figure 2: Distribution of all Rock Pipit records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Post-breeding numbers regularly reach double-figures at Samphire Hoe, with a peak of 23 there on the 25<sup>th</sup> August 2015.



Rock Pipit at Samphire Hoe (Martin Collins)



Rock Pipit at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)

Apart from early singles at Hythe on the 16<sup>th</sup> August 2016 and Nickolls Quarry on the 4<sup>th</sup> September 2003, autumn arrivals/passage may be noted from mid-September. Ones and twos may be seen almost anywhere along the coast, or at Nickolls Quarry, whilst movements of three or more have been noted as follows:

- 3 west at Abbotscliffe on the 12<sup>th</sup> October 1997
- 5 in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 13<sup>th</sup> October 1997
- 3 west at Abbotscliffe on the 12<sup>th</sup> October 1998
- 3 west at Abbotscliffe on the 18<sup>th</sup> October 1998
- 3 west at Abbotscliffe on the 19<sup>th</sup> October 1998
- 3 in/west at Abbotscliffe on the 28<sup>th</sup> October 2001
- 3 east at Hythe on the 30<sup>th</sup> September 2015
- 3 over at Hythe on the 13<sup>th</sup> October 2017

Numbers at Samphire Hoe are increased by migrants, when counts of up to 25 have been noted on the 13<sup>th</sup> October 2005 and 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2014, with 26 there on the 5<sup>th</sup> November 2014 and 35 reported on the 16<sup>th</sup> December 2015, most of which remain to overwinter. Elsewhere, the breeding birds between Samphire Hoe and Folkestone Warren are also joined by migrants, with a peak count below Abbotscliffe of 15 on the 14<sup>th</sup> January 2003.



Rock Pipit at Folkestone Sunny Sands (Brian Harper)



Rock Pipit at the Willop Outfall (Brian Harper)

Other favoured wintering areas include Copt Point (where there was a peak of 10 in December 1996) and the Folkestone Harbour/Pier area (with a peak of five in January 1989), whilst smaller numbers may be noted anywhere along the coast between Folkestone and Dymchurch.



Rock Pipit at Hythe (Glenn Tutton)



Rock Pipit at Folkestone Warren (David Featherbe)

As Taylor *et al.* noted, wintering birds disperse during March, with some remaining into April, but the occurrence of returning migrants is difficult to detect around the coast.

**Scandinavian Rock Pipit**  
*Anthus petrosus littoralis*

Most of the winter increase probably involves birds of the Scandinavian race *A. p. littoralis* (KOS 2020) but it can only be identified when it begins to assume its summer plumage so is only reported in March or April.



## References

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*littoralis* Rock Pipit at Dymchurch Redoubt (Brian Harper)



*littoralis* Rock Pipit at Samphire Hoe (Paul Holt)

## Acknowledgements

The tetrad map images were produced from the Ordnance Survey [Get-a-map service](http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/get-a-map) and are reproduced with kind permission of [Ordnance Survey](http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk).

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