

# Lapwing

*Vanellus vanellus*

Category A

Formerly a widespread breeding species but now only nests occasionally, also a common winter visitor and passage migrant.

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

A widespread breeding species across much of Europe and Asia. Northern and eastern populations are migratory, moving south and west, whilst Britain and Ireland constitute the northernmost regular winter areas on account of their maritime climate. It is prone to extensive movements in response to cold weather.



Lapwing at Donkey Street (Brian Harper)

*Kent status (KOS 2021):*

It is a widespread but declining breeding species in Kent, also a common passage migrant and winter visitor.

The Lapwing 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 numerous and very generally distributed species throughout the county", so there can be little doubt that it was to be found locally.

Roger Norman recalled how it was "a numerous breeding species" at the beginning of the 1950s at the locality now known as Nickolls Quarry, with an estimated 18 pairs nesting in the area covered by the current site (and 13 in the "old pit area" alone) in 1950, but that "numbers dropped steadily to 1960". He considered that "part of this decline may have been due to the spread of human habitation up to the edge of the old pit by 1951", although ten pairs still bred in the "old pit area" in 1952. There were still one or two pairs at the old pit (with perhaps another four in the whole quarry area) in 1960, with five pairs were reported in the whole area in the following year (Norman 2007). At the nearby Hythe Ranges the same observer noted four breeding pairs in 1959 and 1960, with two or three pairs in 1961, one family present in 1964 and on the 20<sup>th</sup> June 1968 (which was the only visit of the year) four adults and 12 juveniles were present (Norman 2006).

As the distribution map reproduced from Henderson & Hodge (1998) demonstrates, the Lapwing was formerly well distributed across the area, particularly in TR13 where it was noted in all but one tetrad in the 1967-73 survey. The map however also shows that it was already in steep decline by the time of the 1988-94 atlas with the 12 white circles in the local area (highlighted by the red box) showing the tetrads where it had been lost.

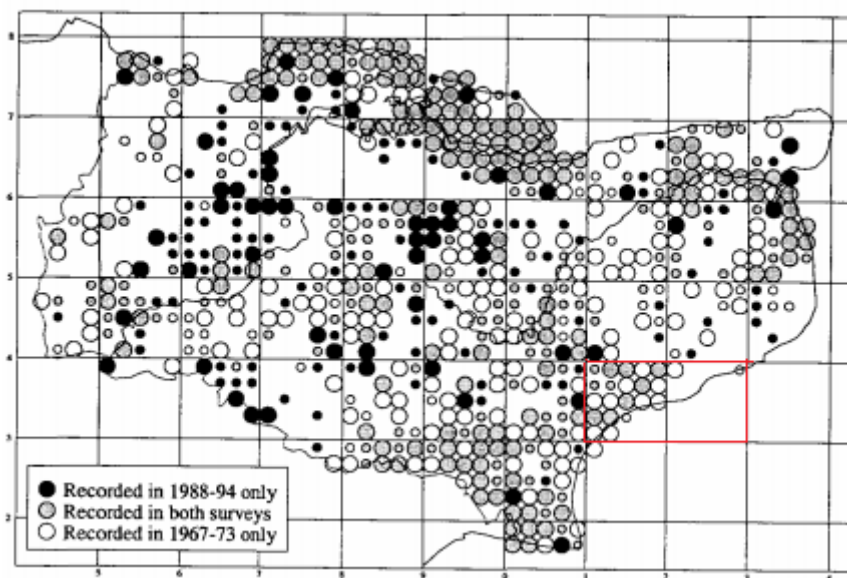


Figure 1: Breeding distribution of Lapwing in Kent in the 1998-94 BTO/KOS Atlas

Henderson & Hodge described how it had “been in long-term decline as a breeding species in the county, with the loss of mixed farming (the optimal breeding habitat), the drainage of damp meadows and replacement of spring sown crops by autumn tillage all leading to a loss of suitable breeding habitat. Productivity had also declined with an increase in livestock densities, leading to increased nest trampling, and an increase in the use of farm machinery”. They considered that “a combination of all these factors had probably been responsible for the widespread contraction in range of the species between the two surveys, with significant losses from ... Romney Marsh ... and the Downs”. It last successfully bred at Nickolls Quarry in 1992.

### Breeding atlas distribution

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

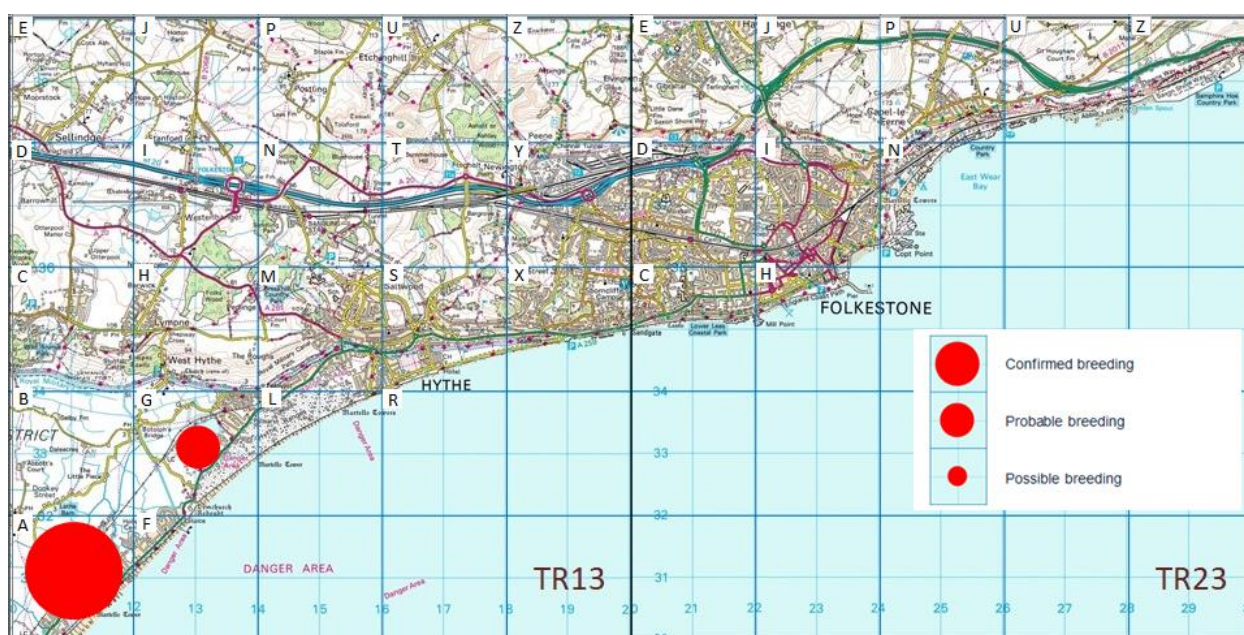


Figure 1: Breeding distribution of Lapwing at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in one tetrad, with 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	2	(6%)	3	(10%)	1	(3%)
Probable/Confirmed	20	(65%)	7	(23%)	1	(3%)
Total	22	(71%)	10	(32%)	2	(6%)
Change			-12	(-55%)	-10	(-80%)

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	-55%	-80%	-91%
Kent	-7%	-54%	-57%

The contraction in range has continued and the most recent survey found it only to be present in two tetrads locally. The number of tetrads with probable or confirmed breeding recorded locally has declined by 95% since the first atlas, which exceeds the decline across the county of 59%. As Clements *et al.* (2015) explained “the distribution has undergone a marked retreat from arable, downland and other open habitats in the wider countryside, but retained a stronghold on coastal wet grassland”. The BTO Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) trend in south-east England during 1995-2012 was -47%.



During the most recent atlas survey up to four pairs bred at the Willop Basin (TR13 A) in 2010 and two pairs nested there in 2011, whilst a single pair were present in 2012 but were not thought to have bred. A single bird was present in suitable habitat near Botolph's Bridge (TR13 G) on the 19<sup>th</sup> May 2012 but there were no indications of nesting. The only subsequent breeding record involved a pair that bred successfully at Donkey Street in 2018, raising three young.



Lapwing at Donkey Street (Brian Harper)



Lapwing chicks at Donkey Street (Ian Roberts)

### **Overall distribution**

Figure 3 shows the distribution of all records of Lapwing by tetrad, with records in 30 tetrads (97%).

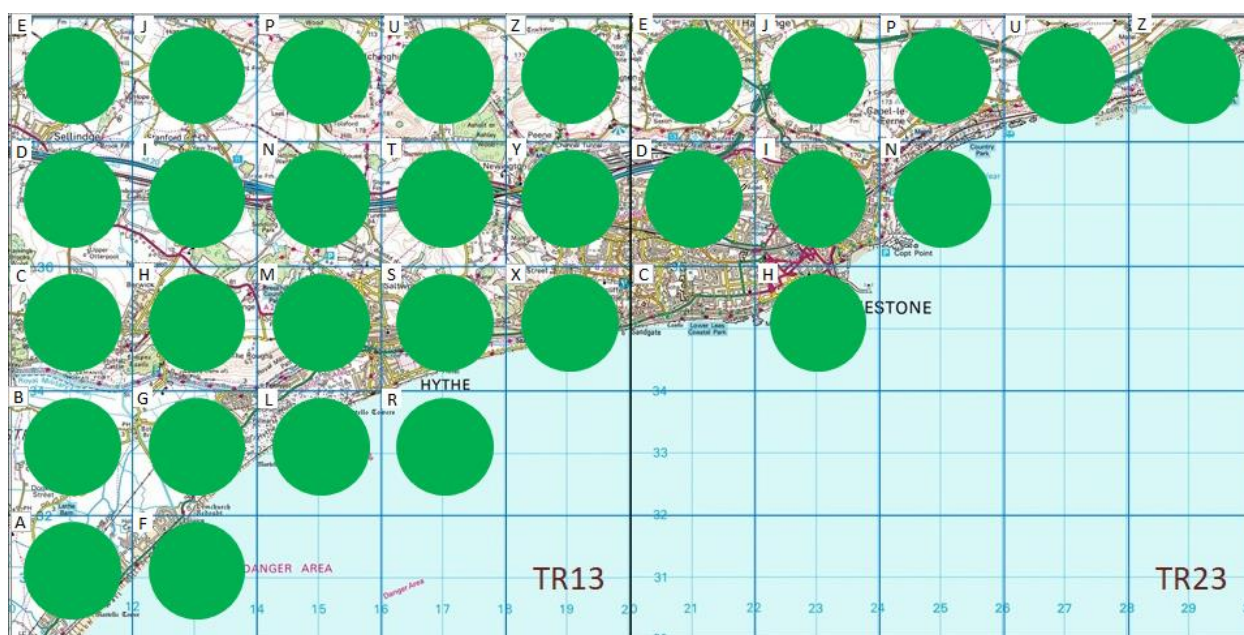


Figure 3: Distribution of all Lapwing records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Post-breeding dispersal has been noted from the 4<sup>th</sup> June and typically only single figure counts are noted during this month, except in 1997 when there was an exceptional count of at least 180 at Botolph's Bridge on the 13<sup>th</sup>, with 105 (presumably part of the same flock) at nearby Nickolls Quarry on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, and in 2005 when 16 flew in off the sea at Capel-le-Ferne on the 19<sup>th</sup>.

Numbers tend to increase during July (when there have been three-figure counts in three years: c.100 at Nickolls Quarry on the 17<sup>th</sup> July 2004, c.130 there on the 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1999 and c.600 there on the 4<sup>th</sup> July 2000) and August (when there have been peak counts of c.260 Nickolls Quarry on the 18<sup>th</sup> August 2005 and c.350 there at on the 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1999).

Further increases may be noted during September and October and there have been sightings of 400 or more on 11 occasions, all prior to 2002:

400 at Capel-le-Ferne on the 29<sup>th</sup> September 1992  
 400 at Nickolls Quarry on the 31<sup>st</sup> October 1993  
 400 at Nickolls Quarry on the 12<sup>th</sup> October 1997  
 400 at Church Hougham on the 25<sup>th</sup> October 1997  
 400 at Nickolls Quarry on the 31<sup>st</sup> October 1999  
 400 between Westenhangar and Newingreen on the 17<sup>th</sup> September 2000  
 600 at Botolph's Bridge on the 27<sup>th</sup> September 2001  
 600 at Nickolls Quarry on the 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2001  
 612 at Nickolls Quarry on the 4<sup>th</sup> October 2001  
 615 at Botolph's Bridge on the 26<sup>th</sup> September 1999  
 630 at Botolph's Bridge on the 19<sup>th</sup> October 2000

Numbers tend to peak between November and February. Neil Frampton recalled that in the early 1980s "large numbers wintered in fields south of the canal between Burmarsh Estate and the dam; over 1,000 will be feeding in the fields on a mild winter day".

Counts of at least 1,000 were noted in seven winters between 1990 and 2002, with counts of 1,500 or more as follows:

2,000 reported at West Hythe in "early 1990"  
 2,220 at West Hythe in November 1991, with 2,000 there in December 1991  
 3,500 at West Hythe in February 1992  
 1,500 at Nickolls Quarry on the 28<sup>th</sup> December 1992  
 1,500 at Botolph's Bridge/Nickolls Quarry on the 25<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> December 1993  
 1,500 at Nickolls Quarry on the 31<sup>st</sup> January 1994  
 3,000 at Nickolls Quarry on the 25<sup>th</sup> February 1994  
 3,000 at Nickolls Quarry on the 12<sup>th</sup> February 1995  
 2,000 at Botolph's Bridge on the 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2002

There have only been two counts in excess of 1,000 since 2002: large numbers frequented flooded fields at the Willop Outfall in February 2013, with a peak of at least 1,200 on the 16<sup>th</sup>, whilst severe weather in February 2021 produced a significant arrival, with a peak of between 2,500 and 3,000 across various sites on the marsh on the 8<sup>th</sup>. The long-term decline of the Lapwing as a breeding species in the county has led to significantly lower numbers occurring locally during the autumn and winter.



Lapwing at Donkey Street (Brian Harper)



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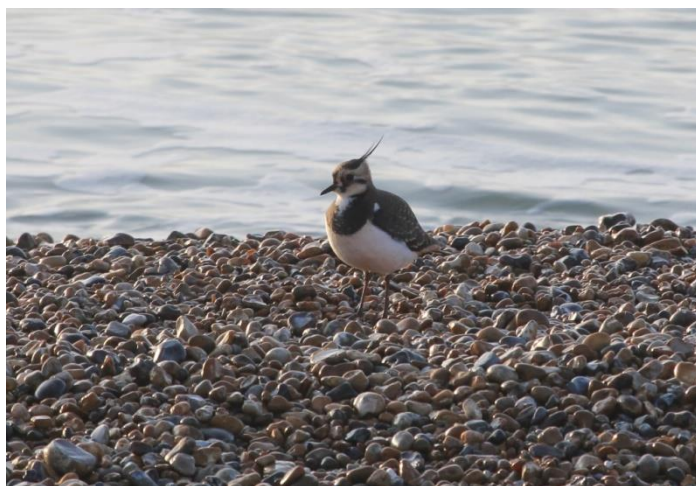
The Lapwing is particularly susceptible to cold weather movements when birds may appear in unusual locations. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2010 two were seen in a car park at Park Farm Industrial Estate and there have been several sightings on beaches, rock groynes and seawalls.



The majority of wintering birds have usually departed by the end of February and three figure counts in March are unusual, although 200 lingered at Nickolls Quarry into early March in 1982 and 2001. An exceptional event in March 2005, induced by the onset of particularly hard weather in the Netherlands, involved unprecedented numbers for the time of year, with c.300 seen arriving in off the sea at Folkestone on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 1,400 present in the Botolph's Bridge area on the 4<sup>th</sup>, whilst birds continued to arrive on the 5<sup>th</sup>, with four in off the sea at the Dymchurch Redoubt and one in off at Samphire Hoe, whilst 68 were seen on the golf course and playing fields in Hythe. Large numbers remained in the Botolph's Bridge area until the 7<sup>th</sup> March before dispersing as the weather improved and several flocks were seen departing, including 230 flying east past Hythe on the 8<sup>th</sup> and a total of 675 (in three flocks) flying high to the north over the Botolph's Bridge area on the 10<sup>th</sup>.



Lapwing at Hythe Imperial golf course (Nigel Webster)



Lapwing at Princes Parade (Ian Roberts)



Lapwings at the Willop Basin (Brian Harper)

There was a notably late movement in 1958, when a total of 716 in 14 flocks headed east at Hythe Ranges on the 28<sup>th</sup> March. The only double figure count in the second half of March in recent years involved 38 flying high west over Saltwood on the 25<sup>th</sup> March 2013, which also followed a period of cold weather.

Sightings in April and May typically involve breeding birds and so have become scarce in recent years. A record of two non-breeding birds at Abbotscliffe on the 30<sup>th</sup> April 2007 and one flying over Hythe at night on the 14<sup>th</sup> May 2017 are of note.



Lapwing at Donkey Street (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](#).

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Lapwings at the Willop Basin (Brian Harper)