

Pied Wagtail

Motacilla alba Category A

Breeding resident and passage migrant.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds throughout Europe and Asia except the Indian sub-continent and south-east Asia. Most northern and eastern populations in the west Palearctic migrate south to the Mediterranean area, tropics and subtropics of Africa. Some more southern and western populations are mostly resident. The main form that occurs in Britain is *M. a. yarrellii* (Pied Wagtail), with the nominate form *M. a. alba* (White Wagtail) being a regular migrant and occasional breeding species.

Kent status (KOS 2021):

In Kent it is a widespread and increasing resident breeding species and a passage migrant.



Pied Wagtail at Botolph’s Bridge (Brian Harper)

The Pied Wagtail 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 “evenly distributed in single pairs over the whole county” 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.

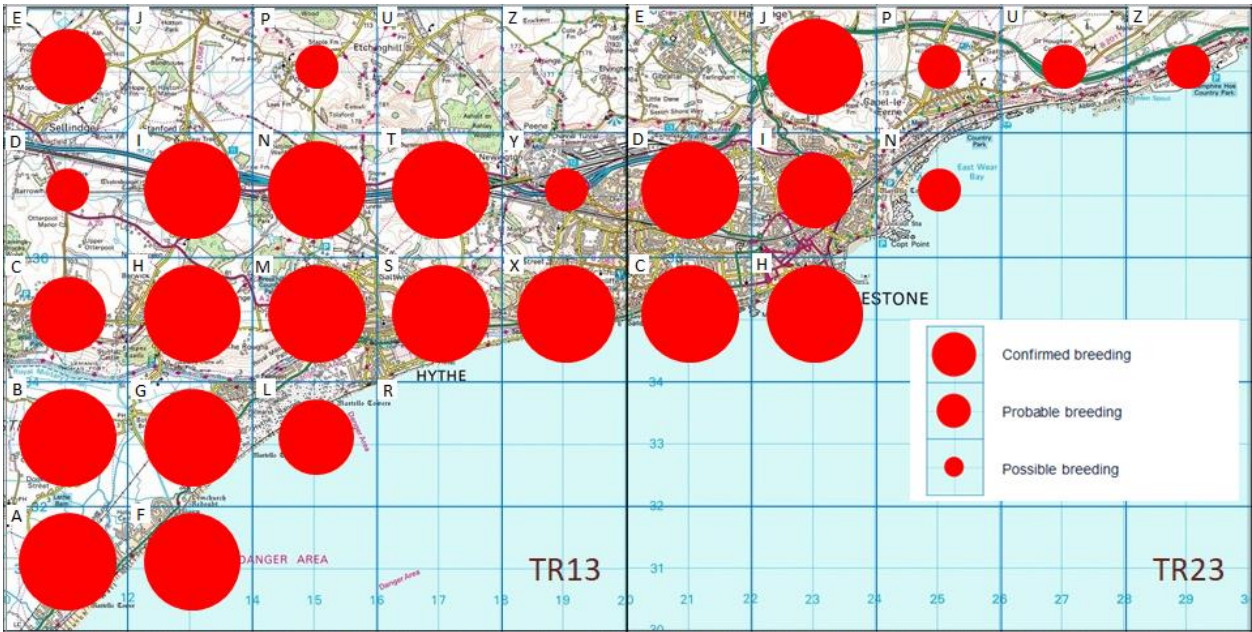


Figure 1: Breeding distribution of Pied Wagtail at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in 15 tetrads, with probable breeding in four more and possible breeding in seven 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	3	(10%)	10	(32%)	7	(23%)
Probable/Confirmed	6	(19%)	8	(26%)	19	(61%)
Total	9	(29%)	18	(58%)	26	(84%)
Change			+9	(+100%)	+8	(+44%)

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	+100%	+44%	+189%
Kent	+23%	+18%	+45%

Henderson & Hodge reported on an increase in occupied tetrads of 23% since the first atlas, whilst Clements *et al.* (2015) noted a further 18% increase since the second atlas. Locally there was an 100% increase since the first atlas, followed by a further 44%. Clements *et al* remarked that there was “a notable increase from the North Downs and south-east Kent, suggesting some expansion of range”.

As Clements *et al.* noted, Pied Wagtails are widespread in a range of habitats, typically recorded in towns, villages, around farms and along rivers. their conspicuous behaviour and close association with human habitation makes them likely to be recorded during survey work even if present at low density.

Overall distribution

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of Pied Wagtail by tetrad, with records in 30 tetrads (97%).

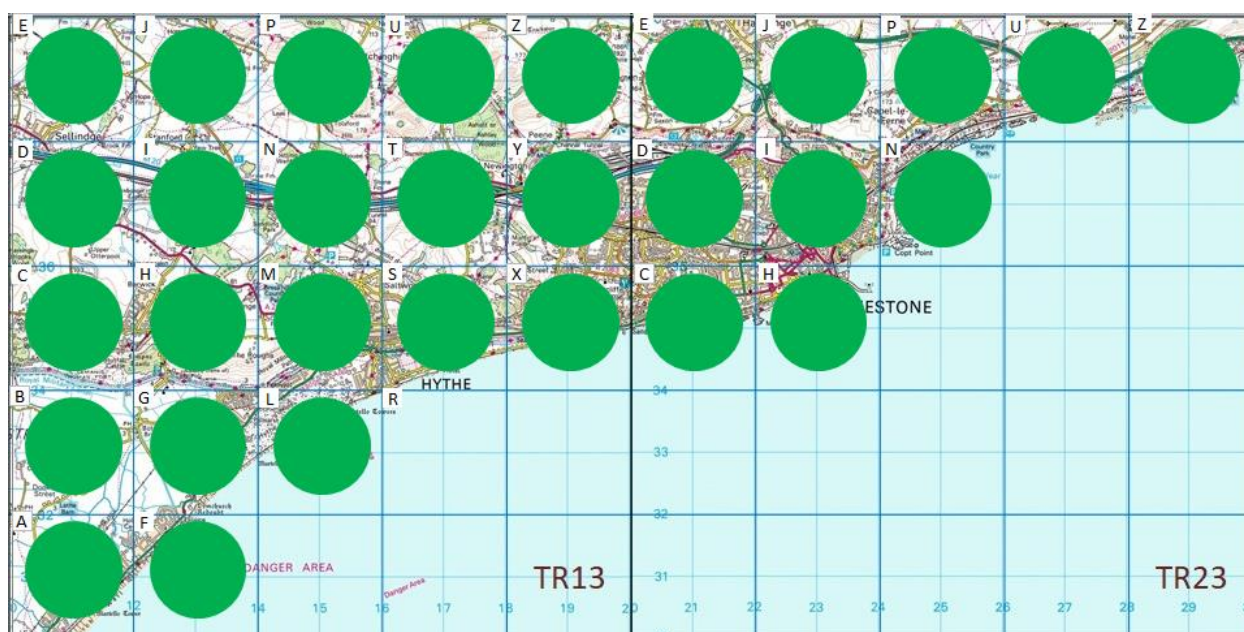


Figure 2: Distribution of all Pied Wagtail records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Autumn migrants may be noted in small numbers from late July but the main passage occurs in late September or through October, when counts of 20 or more have been logged on a number of occasions:

- 30 east at Abbotscliffe on the 27th September 1994
- 20 east at Abbotscliffe on the 8th October 1994
- 25 east at Abbotscliffe on the 11th October 1994
- 28 east at Abbotscliffe on the 23rd October 1997
- 33 east at Capel Battery on the 30th October 1997
- 30 west at Abbotscliffe on the 12th October 1998
- 33 east at Abbotscliffe on the 22nd October 2000
- 37 east at Abbotscliffe on the 13th October 2001

22 east at Capel-le-Ferne Café on the 21st October 2003
 26 in/east at Capel-le-Ferne Café on the 24th October 2003
 35 east at Samphire Hoe on the 8th October 2010
 24 west at Abbotscliffe on the 2nd October 2011
 31 east at Abbotscliffe on the 8th October 2012
 42 east at Abbotscliffe on the 10th October 2012
 52 east at Abbotscliffe on the 11th October 2012
 26 east at Hythe on the 5th October 2013
 54 east at Abbotscliffe on the 13th October 2015
 35 over at Beachborough Lakes on the 5th October 2016
 39 over at Beachborough Lakes on the 7th October 2016
 44 south at Beachborough Lakes on the 25th October 2016



Pied Wagtail at Beachborough Park (Steve Tomlinson)



Pied Wagtail at Westenhanger (Ian Roberts)

An autumn/winter reed-bed roost was found by Roger Norman in the Nickolls Quarry works area in 1994 which was also being used by Yellow Wagtails but disbanded in 2008 due to disturbance and removal of some of the reeds. It could be occupied between mid-July and mid-March. Peak numbers of Pied Wagtails using the roost were as follows:

1994: 125 on the 9th October
 1995: 155 on the 15th September and 180 on the 15th October
 1996: 102 on the 15th September
 1997: 163 on the 26th October and 140 on 1st November
 1998: roost not used
 1999: roost not used
 2000: 20 on the 21st October
 2001: 169 on the 31st December
 2002: 281 on the 21st November
 2003: 33 on the 22nd July
 2004: 9 on the 31st December
 2005: roost not used
 2006: 41 on the 24th December
 2007: 8 on the 25th October
 2008: roost disbanded

Roger noted that it was interesting to observe that Pied Wagtails started their protracted exodus from the roost after the Yellow Wagtails had left as a 'unit'. He also remarked that there were sightings at the site at dusk in the 1950s, when ten were seen on the 17th November 1957 and 20 on the 28th December 1959, whilst the species also "featured regularly in winter notes by other observers (especially in the late afternoon) between 1970 and 1984, although with no counts over 11, and it is tempting to think that a roost may have been established as early as the 1950s" (Norman 2007).

Elsewhere a winter roost of 20-30 birds was reported in Folkestone town centre during a period of cold weather in January 1997 but has not been noted subsequently. At least 20 birds were noted roosting at the Channel Tunnel complex in January 1999, whilst David Walker noted an exceptional 800+ roosting there on the 5th December 2001 but access restrictions make observations at this site difficult.



Pied Wagtail at Mill Point (Ian Roberts)



Pied Wagtail at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



Pied Wagtail at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)



Pied Wagtail at Hythe Imperial golf course (Brian Harper)



Pied Wagtail at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



Pied Wagtail at Botolph's Bridge (Ian Roberts)

A light spring passage may be evident, especially at the cliffs, where counts of five or more are noteworthy:

13 in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 20th March 1994
7 in/east at Abbotscliffe on the 2nd April 1999
5 in/east at Abbotscliffe on the 27th March 2012
8 in/east at Samphire Hoe on the 9th March 2013
16 at Abbotscliffe on the 14th March 2016
7 east at Abbotscliffe on the 31st March 2016
6 east at Abbotscliffe on the 21st March 2021

White Wagtail

Motacilla alba alba

As Taylor *et al.* noted, the White Wagtail (*M. a. alba*) is a regular passage migrant in Kent, which is most evident on spring passage, when it is more easily identified. They also made mention of a possible breeding occurrence, with a single adult seen with two flying young at Littlebourne in July 1975.

The first confirmed breeding record locally and in the county, involved a pair that nested successfully at Samphire Hoe in 2013, raising one juvenile, and there has been a further possible occurrence, with a male seen gathering food and “thought to presumably be feeding chicks” near Cock Ash Lake on the 6th June 2021 but unfortunately the female could not be located in order to ascertain if this was a pure or mixed pairing.

The peak passage in spring involved a total of 24 logged in 1997, whilst the annual average over the most recent two decades has been around four per spring, with larger totals of 11 in 1999 and 10 in 2021.



The pair of White Wagtails that bred successfully at Samphire Hoe in 2013, with the female on the left (Ian Roberts)



White Wagtail at Samphire Hoe (Martin Collins)



White Wagtail at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)

It is only rarely reported in autumn, for instance Roger Norman listed only one confirmed sighting at Nickolls Quarry (a single on the 24th September 2000).

References

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Acknowledgements

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