

Little Egret

Egretta garzetta

Category A

Non-breeding visitor at any time of year, now regular in winter and on passage.

The Little Egret bred in Britain until the end of medieval times and was then probably quite common. It was widely hunted and probably also affected by drainage of marshland habitats but seems likely to have become extinct as a consequence of the onset of the Little Ice Age in the fourteenth century. The species retreated to southern Europe, becoming a rare vagrant to Britain until the late twentieth century, but is currently increasing northwards again presumably due to a warming climate (Bourne, 2003).



Little Egret at Donkey Street (Brian Harper)

The first modern Kent record was in 1957 and there were a further 11 sightings during the Birds of Kent review period (to 1976) Taylor *et al* (1981). The first local record involved one seen flying low over Folkestone town on the 12th December 1980 which was the fifteenth county and one of only seven recorded in Britain in that year. Sightings continued to be assessed by the British Birds Rarities Committee until 1991 when it was removed from their list following totals of over 100 records in the two preceding years (BBRC, 2020).

Further local sightings involved one flying west over Nickolls Quarry on the 13th July 1993, one flying east at Abbotscliffe on the 15th October 1993 and one at Nickolls Quarry in mid-August 1994. The first confirmed breeding record in Britain was in Dorset in 1996 and there have been local records annually since then.

In 1996 one was present at Nickolls Quarry on the 18th August and a flock of six flew east at Seabrook on the 6th October, in 1997 one flew east at Nickolls Quarry on the 18th May and three flew west at Copt Point on the 20th May and in 1998 two were at Nickolls Quarry on the 28th July and one was at Botolph's Bridge on the 28th December. In 1999 one that flew west at Capel-le-Ferne on the 22nd June was seen to land in a garden near Radnor Park, where it remained for 30 minutes, whilst a flock of five flew south-east over Cheriton on the 24th August, on which date singles flew east over Hythe Ranges and south-east over Nickolls Quarry.

Breeding was first confirmed in Kent in 2000, at Northward Hill, and there were at least nine local records in that year, between April and October, including a flock of six flying over Nickolls Quarry on the 1st August and one seen on the shoreline between Abbotscliffe and Copt Point on four dates between the 10th and 23rd September (the first to be recorded on more than a single date).. At least five were noted in 2001, and there were at least 13 in 2002.

In 2003 it was noted regularly, with 44 sightings and a total of 57 bird/days, with records in all months except April. Nickolls Quarry hosted the majority of these (36) including some birds that appeared to stay for prolonged periods. There were also several records from Samphire Hoe in the late winter period. This pattern of records has continued, with the most sightings at Nickolls Quarry or other sites on the Romney Marsh, or along the coastline between Copt Point and Samphire, though it has occurred from 26 tetrads (84%) as demonstrated in figure 2, and frequently appears in gardens with ponds in built up areas.

Most sightings involve one or two birds but counts of more than five (in addition to those given above) have occurred as follows:

- 6 at Abbotscliffe on the 29th October 2006
- 6 at West Hythe dam on 30th December 2014
- 6 at Botolph's Bridge on 7th November 2015
- 12 flying west at Abbotscliffe on the 5th July 2017
- 7 flying west at Hythe seafront on the 13th October 2017
- 8 at Donkey Street on the 23rd June 2018
- 7 flying east at Samphire Hoe on the 14th October 2018

Breeding distribution

Almost all records during the 2007-13 BTO/KOS atlas fieldwork period involved birds at coastal sites or flying over but there were three inland sightings from the Fairmead Farm area, near Westenhanger in TR13 I (in April 2010, May 2011 and June 2012), with another at Barrowhill in adjacent TR13 D in June 2009. There was no apparent evidence of nesting but these records qualified as possible breeding under the BTO definitions. Figure 1 confirms the results of the breeding atlas by tetrad.

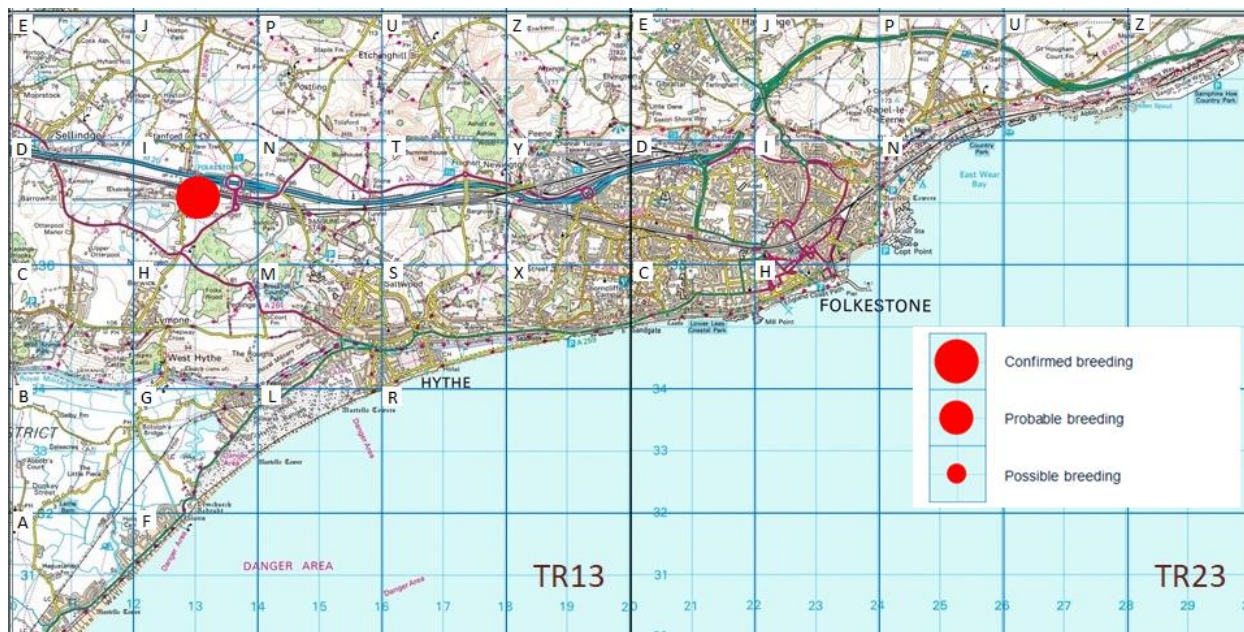


Figure 1: Breeding distribution of Little Egret at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

The table below shows how this compares to previous atlases (Taylor *et al* 1981, Henderson & Hodge 1998).

Breeding atlases	1967 - 1973		1988 - 1994		2007 – 2013	
Possible	0	(0%)	0	(0%)	1	(3%)
Probable/Confirmed	0	(0%)	0	(0%)	0	(0%)
Total	0	(0%)	0	(0%)	1	(3%)

One was seen in the heronry at Lypne Park Wood on a single date in April 2013 but there have been no further sightings there or any other indications of local breeding.



Little Egret at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)



Little Egret at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)

Non-breeding distribution

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of Little Egret by tetrad.

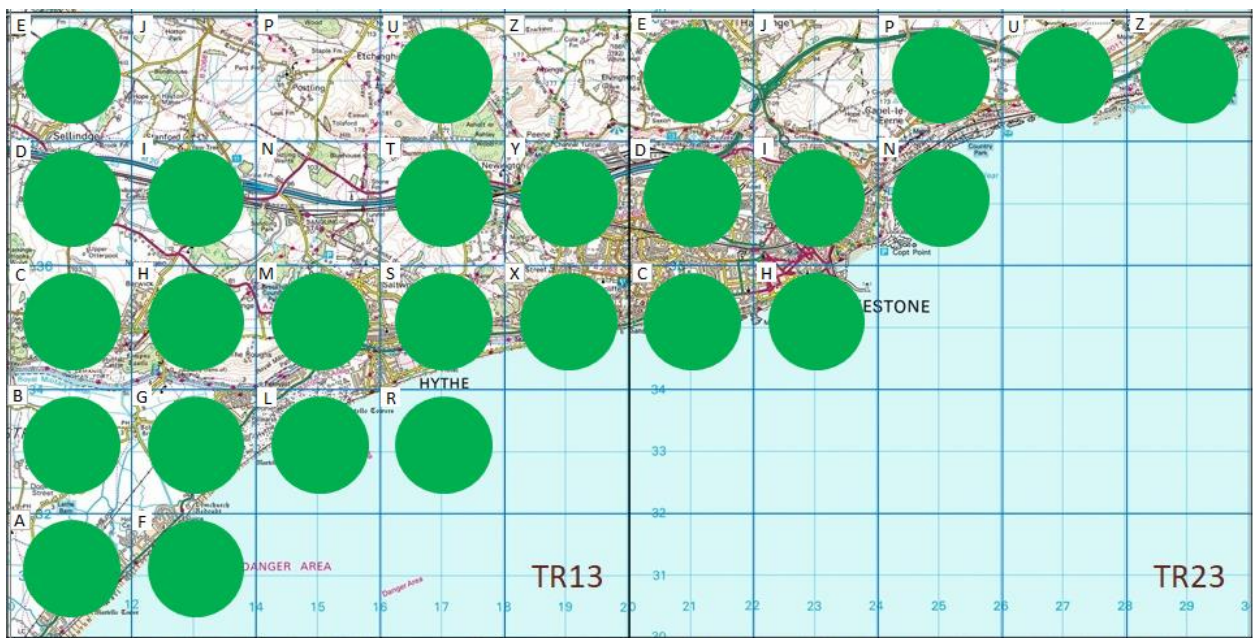


Figure 2: Distribution of all Little Egret records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad



Little Egret in a garden in Cheriton (Vincent Lloyd)



Little Egret at Saltwood Castle (Nigel Webster)



Little Egret at Folkestone Harbour (David Featherbe)



Little Egret at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)

References

BBRC statistics: <https://www.bbrc.org.uk/main-information/statistics> (accessed 2020)

Bourne, W. R. P., 2003. Fred Stubbs, Egrets, Brewes and climatic change. *British Birds*: 96: 332-339

Henderson, A. & Hodge, T. 1998. The Kent Breeding Bird Atlas 1988-94. *Kent Bird Report* 1996: 134-272.

Kent Bird Reports. Kent Ornithological Society

Taylor, D., Davenport, D. & Flegg, J. 1981. *Birds of Kent*. Kent Ornithological Society

Acknowledgements

The tetrad map images were produced from the Ordnance Survey [Get-a-map service](#) and are reproduced with kind permission of [Ordnance Survey](#).



Little Egret at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)



Little Egret at Donkey Street (Brian Harper)