

Great Crested Grebe

Podiceps cristatus

Category A

Breeding resident and winter visitor.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Widespread across Europe, Asia, Africa and Australasia. In Europe it is migratory and dispersive and it is considered unlikely that any population is truly sedentary, although some individuals may be. It vacates the more northern and eastern parts of its European range in winter, moving south and west to inland lakes and sea coasts.

Kent status (KOS 2021):

It is a widespread breeding species and common winter visitor to coasts in Kent.



Great Crested Grebe at Folk. Harbour (Brian Harper)

The Great Crested Grebe was not included in Knight and Tolputt's "List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood" (1871) and Ticehurst (1909) considered it to be "solely an autumn and winter visitor to Kent, and though it occurs regularly every winter it is never numerous".

Harrison (1953) described the first breeding record in Kent, at Hever in 1911, and by 1933 there were 29 pairs in the county. Taylor *et al.* (1981) reported on summer surveys in 1965 and 1975 that found populations of 102 adults and 202 adults respectively, with man-made reservoirs, gravel pits, and clay and sand workings providing the majority of the breeding sites.

The first documented local record was on the 11th March 1950 when Roger Norman saw 20 off Hythe Ranges, with further counts of 14 there on the 27th January 1952 and on the 27th December 1954, whilst small numbers were regularly noted the beginning of December and mid-March (Norman 2006).

It was first noted at Nickolls Quarry on the 3rd February 1951 but was very scarce in its occurrence there with one "present for some time" in the winter of 1954/55, one on the 27th November 1957, singles on two dates in January 1958 and a pair on the 1st May 1960 (Norman 2007).

The Kent Bird Report for 1970 noted that seven oiled birds were picked up at Folkestone between the 1st and 7th January. Dave Weaver noted it occasionally at Nickolls Quarry in the late 1970s, with up to three present in January 1979 and two on the 10th March 1979, however R & S Philpott considered it to be "seasonally regular" there between 1984 and 1989.



Great Crested Grebe at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)



Great Crested Grebe at Nickolls Quarry (Ian Roberts)

Regular coverage from Copt Point and Mill Point from the late 1980s revealed it to be present in small numbers during the winter months, with a larger count of 12 off Copt Point during a period of cold weather on the 11th February 1991. There was a marked increase from the mid-1990s, with particularly large counts in February 1996, when 17 were at Copt Point on the 11th, 34 flew east there on the 15th and 65 were seen there on the 22nd, whilst 20 flew east there on the 3rd March 1996. Double-figure counts became regular thereafter, with notable counts of 27 off Copt Point on the 11th January 1997, 25 flying west there on the 13th February 1997 and 23 off Copt Point on the 25th February 1999.

At Hythe Ranges up to eight were intermittently recorded offshore in the 1990s, mostly between late November and mid-March, but a few records of up to six in April and early May, and 28 were counted off the Dymchurch Redoubt on the 2nd January 1999.

At Nickolls Quarry in the 1990s one or two were recorded in most months of the year, mostly on single dates or as very short stay visitors, with occasional longer visits. Larger numbers in 1996 included three to four in January, increasing to up to eight in February and March.

At least one pair was present there throughout 2001 when species bred for the first time. Since then one or two pairs have nested in most years but produced no more than two fledged young in any year. Henderson & Hodge (1998) noted that it is “relatively tolerant of disturbance and happy to use suitable waters in towns and cities”, so is one of the few species that has persisted to attempt to breed on the lake at Nickolls Quarry during the increased disturbance and housing development, although evidence of breeding success in recent years has been scant (however a pair did successfully raise three young there in 2021).

Breeding atlas distribution

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

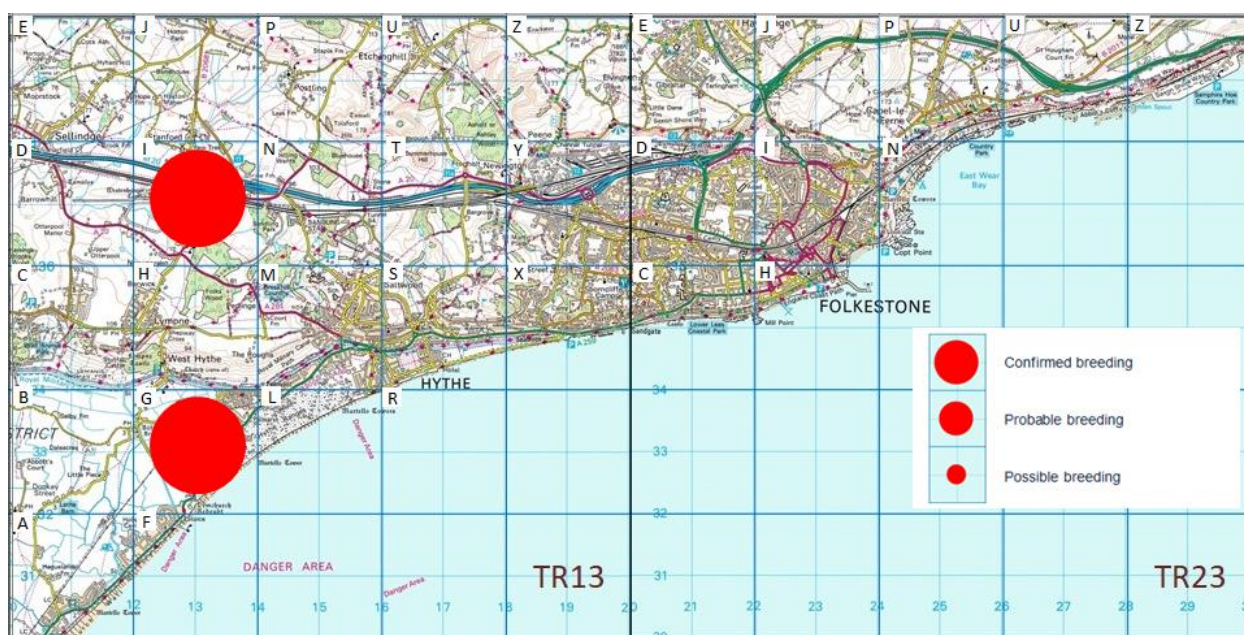


Figure 1: Breeding distribution of Great Crested Grebe at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in two tetrads. 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%)	2	(6%)	0	(0%)
Probable/Confirmed	0	(0%)	0	(0%)	2	(6%)
Total	0	(0%)	2	(6%)	2	(6%)
Change			+2	(--%)	0	(0%)

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%	--%
Kent	+98%	+26%	+149%

In the second atlas possible breeding was noted at TR13 C (presumably in the West Hythe area) and in TR13 T (Beachborough Lakes), whilst breeding was confirmed at the latter site between 2002 and 2005.

By the time of the third atlas, breeding had commenced at Nickolls Quarry (TR13 G) and was also confirmed at the lake at the former Folkestone Racecourse, near Westenhanger (TR13 I). Since then a pair have been noted at Cock Ash Lake (TR13 E) in summer 2020 though there were no indications of breeding.

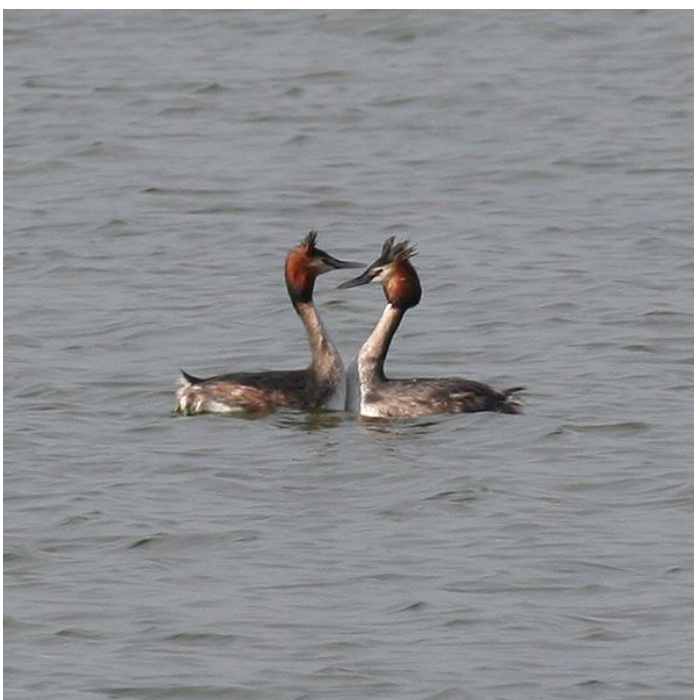
Henderson & Hodge commented that there was “little doubt that the species has increased markedly since first atlas, with perhaps a 30% increase in distribution once improved coverage is taken into account”. Whilst Clements *et al.* (2015) stated that survey work in 1998 had attempted to locate all Great Crested Grebes in the county and a minimum of 186 pairs were recorded, suggesting that the second Kent Atlas had under-estimated the population. The authors also remarked on a further 26% increase in occupied tetrads between the second and third atlases but considered that the population may have stabilised by the turn of the century, with some indication that Kent was reaching carrying capacity for species.



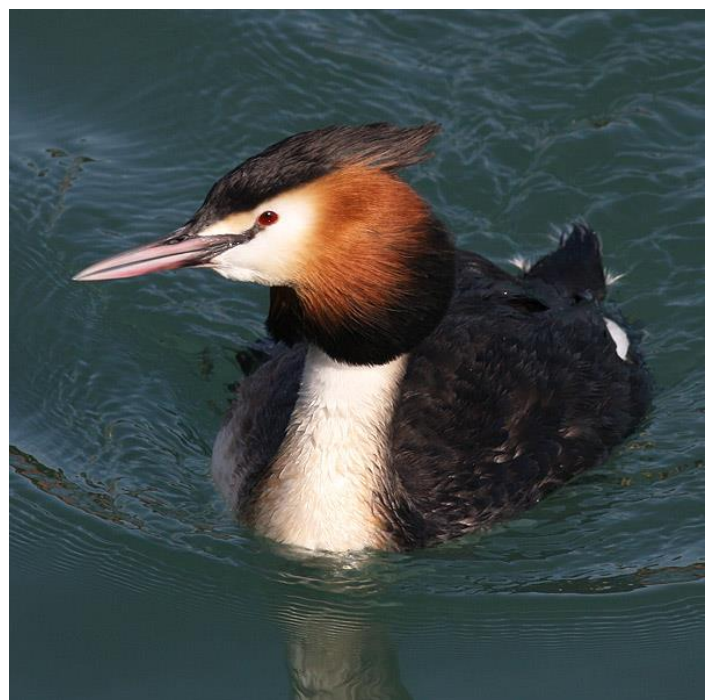
Great Crested Grebe at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



Great Crested Grebe at Beachborough (Steve Tomlinson)



Great Crested Grebe at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)



Great Crested Grebe at Folk. Harbour (Brian Harper)

Overall distribution

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of Great Crested Grebe by tetrad, with records in 17 tetrads (55%).

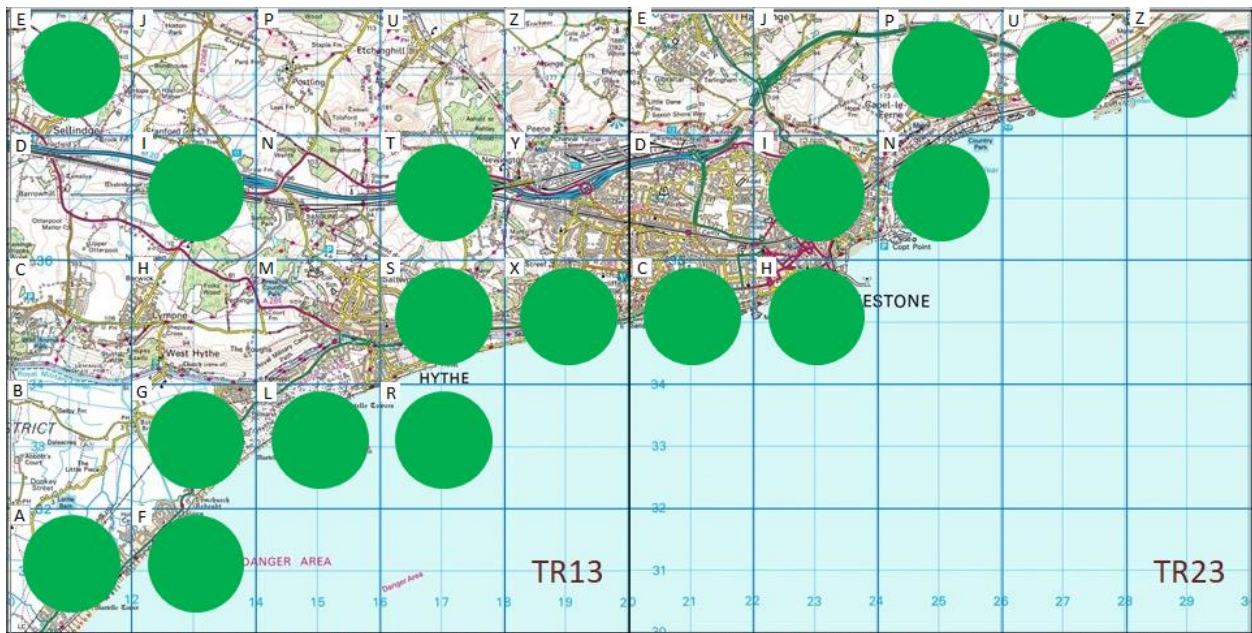


Figure 2: Distribution of all Great Crested Grebe records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

During the non-breeding season the Great Crested Grebe is a widespread visitor to coasts and to the larger inland waterbodies.

Numbers continued to increase during the 2000s, with the first ever three-figure count logged on the 5th February 2001, when 110 were noted on the sea off the Dymchurch Redoubt on the 5th February, whilst a remarkable total of 298 were counted offshore there on the 5th January 2002. Further counts of 200 or more have been noted on several occasions, including:

- 300 off the Dymchurch Redoubt on the 7th January 2009
- 230 off the Willop Outfall on the 5th January 2010
- 200 off the Willop Outfall on the 9th December 2014
- 239 off Seabrook on the 9th February 2015
- 238 off the Dymchurch Redoubt on the 8th January 2017
- 450 offshore (200 off the Willop Outfall and 250 off Hythe Ranges) on the 6th January 2019
- 350 off the Willop Outfall on the 11th January 2019
- 352 off Seabrook on the 20th January 2020
- 400 off the Willop Outfall on the 23rd January 2022



Great Crested Grebe at Folk. Harbour (Brian Harper)



Great Crested Grebe at Folkestone (Mick Vandoen)

Large numbers moving past offshore may relate to spring migrants, for example 98 flying east past Samphire Hoe on the 13th March 2013, 83 east past Seabrook on the 27th February 2016, 67 east past Samphire Hoe on the 3rd March 2018 and 144 east past Seabrook on the 11th March 2018, or be related to cold weather or birds relocating after stormy weather, for example 56 flying west past Samphire Hoe on the 24th December 2013 and 131 flying west past the Willop Outfall on the 27th January 2014.

Counts at inland localities are typically in single figures but there was a peak of 22 at Nickolls Quarry on the 27th July 2003 and several counts of 10 to 12 between 2004 and 2018, with 13 present on the 4th December 2016.

There are two unusual inland records that are worthy of note, although the first relates to an unidentified grebe (presumed to be of this species) that was seen flying high north over Seabrook on the 4th March 2016, whilst record was picked up dead outside a house in Browning Place, Folkestone on the 28th of the same month.



Great Crested Grebe at Nickolls Quarry (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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