

Ringed Plover

Charadrius hiaticula

Category A

Occasional breeding species, also a winter visitor and passage migrant.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds mainly along sea coasts in Britain and northern Europe, and sometimes inland along rivers or at lakes or gravel-pits. Further north it nests extensively inland on arctic tundra from north-eastern Canada, eastwards through Greenland, Iceland and Fenno-Scandia, and across northern Siberia. The northernmost breeding populations winter farthest south (to the extreme south of Africa), with progressively shorter migrations by the more southerly breeding populations, so that the southernmost (British) breeders are almost resident and form the most northerly wintering population.

Kent status (KOS 2021):

It is a common passage migrant and winter visitor in Kent, with a local and declining coastal breeding population, and is scarce inland.



Ringed Plover at the Willop Outfall (Brian Harper)

The Ringed Plover 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 it would have been very likely to have been recorded at the coast and so within the modern boundary. Furthermore, Ticehurst (1909) wrote that "the Ringed Plover breeds in scattered pairs round the whole coastline of Kent..., wherever there is a stretch of shingle or sand above high-water mark wide enough to afford sufficient security from high tides. In the north of the county the nest is usually situated within a few yards of high-water mark. ... On the shingle flats between Hythe and Dymchurch and on Dungeness, however, the eggs are deposited at all distances from the shore, and there seems to be no rule governing their distribution".



Ringed Plover at the Dymchurch Redoubt (Brian Harper)



Ringed Plover at the Dymchurch Redoubt (Brian Harper)

Roger Norman noted up to five pairs breeding on Hythe Ranges in the 1950s, with at least three pairs there until regular coverage of the site ceased in 1965. When observations recommenced in 1990 a pair bred in every year to 1994 and has done so intermittently since (Norman 2006). Military activity on the ranges had increased in extent and frequency since the 1950s, so the reduction in the number of breeding pairs is likely to have reflected increased human disturbance, a factor that both Harrison (1953) and Clements *et al.* (2015) mentioned in relation to population decline in the county.

At Nickolls Quarry small numbers (maximum three) of presumed migrants were seen in four years from 1950 to 1957, between the 24th March and 12th May, whereas three of the four records there between 1959 and 1965 were logged in June or July and presumably originated from the breeding area at the nearby ranges.

Roger Norman speculated that it may have bred at Nickolls Quarry in the 1980s as Dave Weaver noted pairs there in May 1981 and in late March 1982 but he made no later visits in those years. Roger witnessed a displaying pair there during May 1993 and was able to confirm breeding in 1994, whilst a pair possibly bred again the following year, although there were no records after the 13th June. Occasional summer records in 2000 may also have involved breeding birds, whilst a pair were present throughout April 2001 but were seen very intermittently in May and June and were not thought to have nested, and there have been no indications of breeding at this site since (Norman 2007).

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 Ringed Plover at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was not confirmed but probable breeding was noted 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%)	0	(0%)	0	(0%)
Probable/Confirmed	2	(6%)	0	(0%)	2	(6%)
Total	2	(6%)	0	(0%)	2	(6%)
Change			-2	(-100%)	+2	(--%)

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%	--%	0%
Kent	+67%	-27%	+21%

A pair bred at Hythe Ranges in each year between 1990 and 1994, whilst breeding was confirmed at Nickolls Quarry in 1994, but these records were unfortunately not included in the second county atlas, so the apparent “loss of breeding birds ... at Palmarsh” noted by Henderson & Hodge was incorrect.

There has also been an isolated breeding occurrence from Folkestone Harbour, where Mick Vandoen found a pair nesting on the outer arm in 2014. Two chicks hatched but they “appeared later to have been predated by gulls”.



Ringed Plover at the Willop Outfall (Brian Harper)



Ringed Plover at the Dymchurch Redoubt (Brian Harper)

Overall distribution

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of Ringed Plover by tetrad, with records in 11 tetrads (35%).



Figure 2: Distribution of all Ringed Plover records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The first returning migrants can occur from July, with the earliest records (away from the breeding sites where it is difficult to distinguish between migrants and breeding birds) at Folkestone Beach on the 7th July 2012 and Copt Point on the 14th July 1999. The earliest double-figure count was 12 at Hythe Ranges on the 12th August 2000, with numbers increasing there to 24 by the end of the month, whilst other counts of 10 or more in August have comprised 25 at Folkestone Harbour on the 29th August 2016, 15 at the Willop Outfall on the 25th August 2020 and 10 at Folkestone Beach on the 30th August 2020.



Ringed Plovers at Hythe Ranges (Brian Harper)

Further double-figure counts in autumn have involved 26 at the Dymchurch Redoubt on the 7th September 1998, a flock of 20 flying west past Copt Point on the 1st September 2000, up to 30 at Hythe Ranges during September and October 2000, up to 14 at Folkestone Beach and 12 at Hythe Ranges in September 2016, 15 at Folkestone Beach in October 2017 and up to 17 there in October 2018. The largest wintering population is at Folkestone Beach, where there were counts of 36 on the 11th November 2007 and 39 on the 20th November 2009, whilst the winter maxima there since 2010/11 is shown in figure 3:

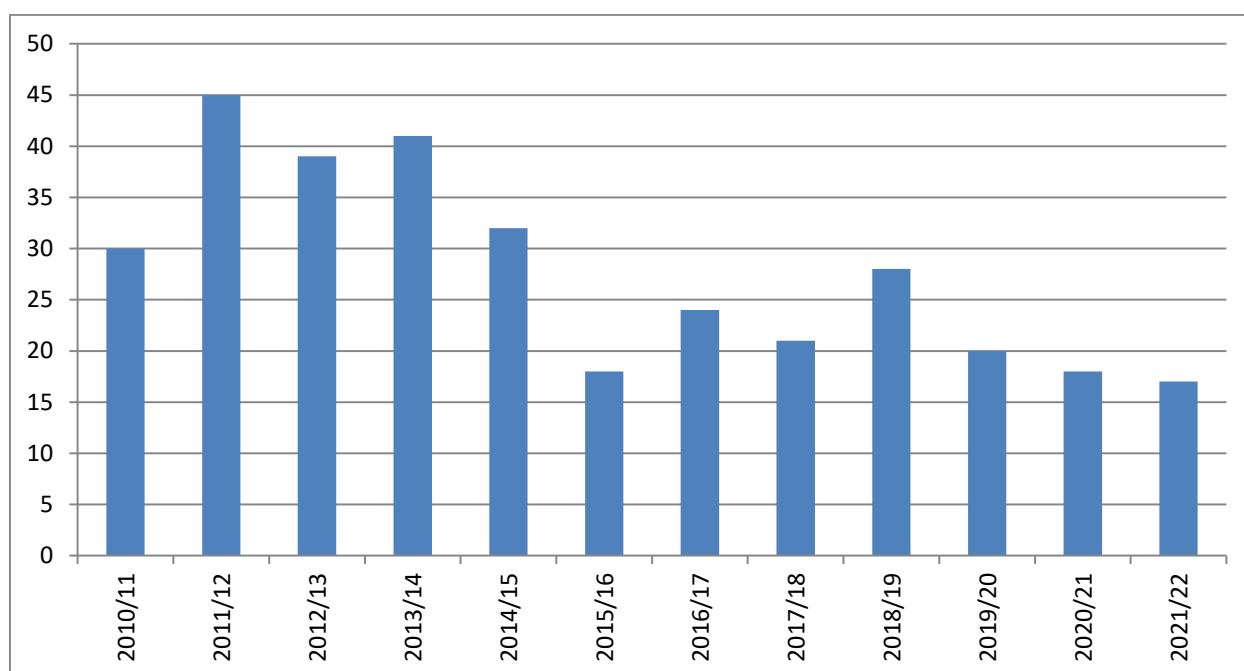


Figure 3: Winter maxima of Ringed Plover at Folkestone Beach since 2010/11

Double-figure counts in winter area unusual elsewhere and have comprised 15 at Copt Point on the 4th February 1996, up to 15 there in December 1996 to January 1997, 10 there on the 28th January 1998, 11 at the Dymchurch Redoubt on the 6th March 1999 and in February 2000, 20 at the Willop Outfall on the 4th March 2001, 22 at Princes Parade on the 29th November 2013, 23 at Hythe Ranges on the 13th November 2016, 15 there on the 9th December 2018 and 13 there on the 9th November 2020.

Up-channel passage in spring has been noted from late March in some years though with few records of only ones and twos recorded in March or April, with the exception of seven flying east past Copt Point on the 30th April 1998 and seven flying east past Mill Point on the 30th April 2017. Movement typically occurs during May but again numbers are generally small, with larger counts of five east past Copt Point on the 4th May 2001, 11 east there on the 9th May 2001, 7 east past Mill Point on the 12th May 2002, 5 east there on the 10th May 2016 and 29 east past Samphire Hoe on the 25th May 2018. Passage can continue in early June and five were seen at Folkestone Beach on the 3rd June 2020.



Ringed Plovers at Hythe Ranges (Brian Harper)

It can be difficult to distinguish between migrants and breeding birds in the Hythe Ranges/Nickolls Quarry area but Roger Norman considered that there was “some indication of passage birds (no more than four) between the 2nd and 21st May” at Nickolls Quarry in the 1990s (Norman 2007).

Taylor *et al.* attributed most of the migration that occurs in May to the race *C. h. tundrae* from the northernmost breeding populations.

References

Clements, R., Orchard, M., McCanch, N. & Wood, S. 2015. *Kent Breeding Bird Atlas 2008-13*. Kent Ornithological Society.

Harrison, J. M. 1953. *The Birds of Kent*. Witherby, London.

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

Kent Ornithological Society (KOS). 1953-2021. *Kent Bird Reports*. Kent Ornithological Society.

Knight, V. & Tolputt, F. 1871. List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood. *Fourth Annual Report of the Folkestone Natural History Society*. Available at: www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/46103

Norman, R. K. 2006. Some observations of birds on Hythe Ranges since 1950. <https://folkestonebirds.com/where-to-watch> (see "Further Information" section).

Norman, R. K. 2007. The Birds of Palmarsh Gravel Pit. <https://folkestonebirds.com/where-to-watch> (see "Further Information" section).

Snow, D. & Perrins, C.M. 1998. *The Birds of the Western Palearctic*. Oxford University Press.

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

Ticehurst, N. F. 1909. *A History of the Birds of Kent*. Witherby, London.

Acknowledgements

The tetrad map images were produced from the Ordnance Survey [Get-a-map service](#) and are reproduced with kind permission of [Ordnance Survey](#). I am indebted to Andrew Henderson and Tim Hodge for providing access to the Kent Ornithological Society archives.



Ringed Plovers at Folkestone Beach (Brian Harper)