

# Crossbill

*Loxia curvirostra*

Category A

Passage migrant, with occasional summer irruptions, rare in winter.

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

A widespread breeder in coniferous forests across Europe and Asia east to the southern Sea of Okhotsk, with isolated breeding areas in the eastern Himalayas, south-west China, Vietnam and the Philippines. In North America, found from south-east Alaska east to Newfoundland and north-east USA, south in mountains to Nicaragua. Resident and dispersive, also notable irruptive, with irruptions probably resulting from high population levels coinciding with poor or moderate seed harvests.

*Kent status (KOS 2021):*

In Kent it is a scarce breeding species, passage migrant and winter visitor, and occasionally irruptive.



Crossbill at Capel-le-Ferne (Ian Roberts)

The Crossbill was not included in Knight and Tolputt's "List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood" (1871), however Ticehurst (1909) provided details of two birds contained within the Deedes collection at Folkestone that were shot in the 1859/60 winter at Sandling. A further individual was obtained "at Hougham, near Dover" in 1888, although it is not known whether this was within the local boundaries, whilst "others were obtained at Hythe" in February 1899.

The next documented record occurred in 1953, which Rowland (1954) stated had "been remarkable for a widespread invasion of Crossbills. In Kent they have been seen at Kingsdown, St. Margaret's Bay and Hythe".

Further area records soon followed in 1956, part of another wider irruption into the county: on the 28<sup>th</sup> June 1956 H. Schreiber found one at Sandling Park, with 12 there on the 6<sup>th</sup> July, whilst "from this date until the end of October many were seen", with a "last flock of 36 birds on the 26<sup>th</sup> October" and just one in November, on the 16<sup>th</sup>. The same observer also noted several at Sandling Park the following year, with "from 3 to 7 birds on many days in April", two on the 2<sup>nd</sup> June and three on the 15<sup>th</sup> August 1957.

A further irruption into the county occurred in autumn 1958, when H. Schreiber again noted birds at Sandling Park, where it was "present in a few flocks from mid-July onwards", with the "biggest flock of 16 on the 1<sup>st</sup> August". In 1959 he recorded that it was "present throughout the year in varying numbers, with a maximum of six birds on the 15<sup>th</sup> January". In the same year F. R. Wise noted one at Hythe from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> March.

It does appear possible that breeding may have occurred at Sandling Park in 1957 and 1959, as birds were present in suitable habitat during the nesting season. It would seem that H. Schreiber suspected that this may have occurred in the latter year at least as he noted that there was "no definite proof of breeding". Taylor *et al.* (1981) wrote that it was quite a regular occurrence in Kent for a "breeding year" to follow an autumn irruption, with nesting in 1954, 1957, 1960, 1963, 1967, 1968 and 1973, all following years of large arrivals. They also commented that to obtain confirmation of breeding is "often difficult and thus rare", and that even after major irruptions only two or three pairs have been proved to breed. Clements *et al.* (2015) also commented upon "evidence both of autumn influxes, and of subsequent breeding attempts in many areas of conifer woodland in the county".

There were no further local records until the 1990s, which seems likely to be a result of a lack of coverage as further irruptions were noted into the county during this time.

The first modern records were noted in 1994 and it has been recorded in 23 of the 28 years since, with the annual totals shown in figure 1, which clearly shows some major irruption years, with totals of over 100 recorded in 1997, 2003 and 2011, whilst 2012 produced a record total of 343 and in 2020 there were at least 260 logged.

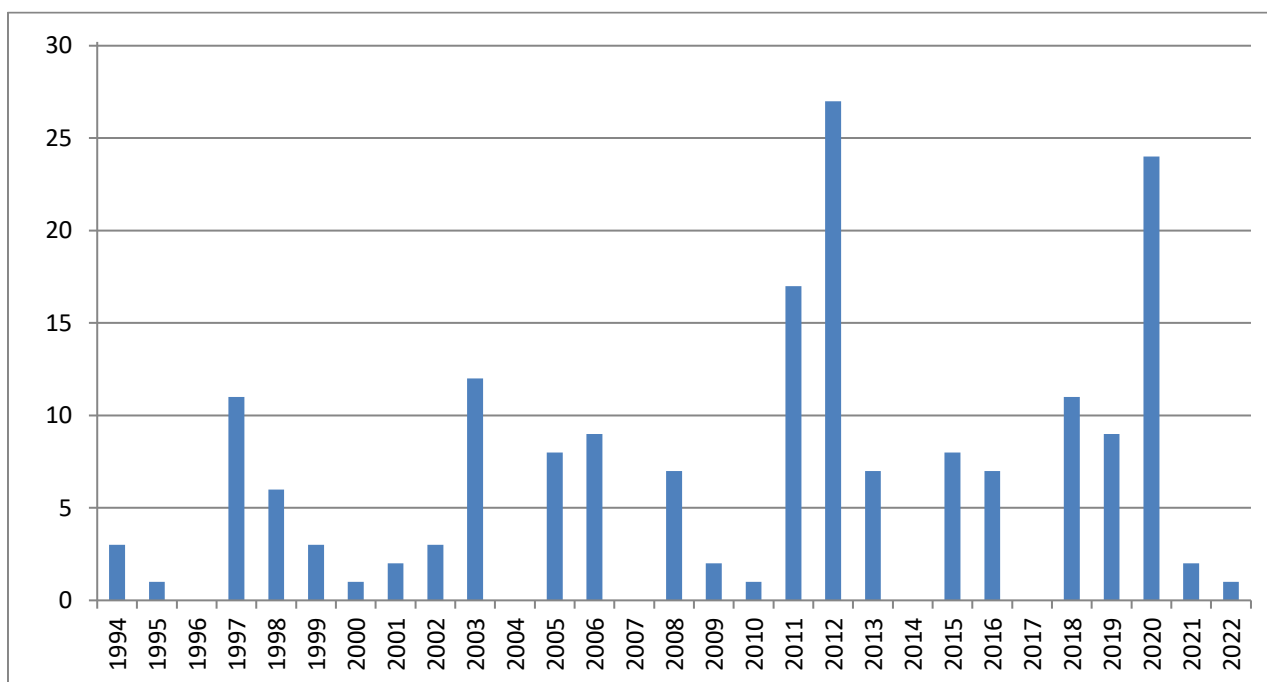


Figure 1: Annual totals of Crossbills at Folkestone and Hythe since 1994

The monthly distribution shown by figure 2.

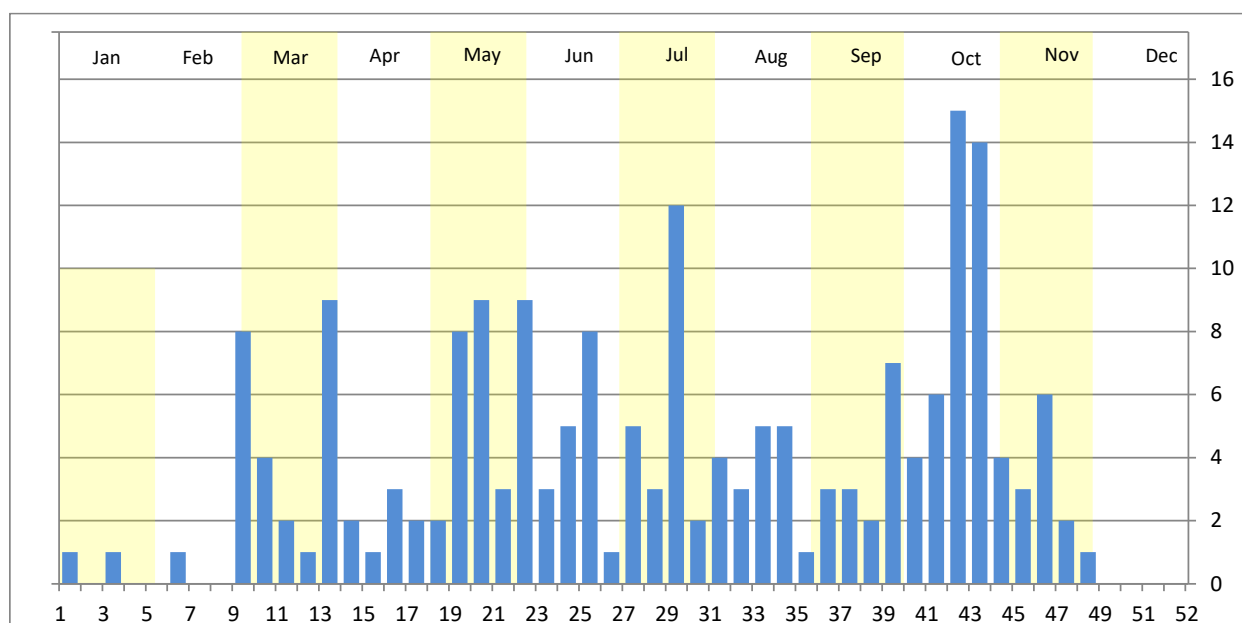


Figure 2: Crossbill records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

As Taylor *et al.* noted, breeding behaviour can be expected to be seen between February and May, so “autumn” dispersal can be rather early. They remarked that most irruptions consisted of two waves, the first in June/July, followed by a second which normally reaches a peak in October. A similar pattern has been noted locally, though with an earlier first wave, in May/June, which may reflect a trend towards even earlier nesting, with Clements *et al.* noting that “Crossbills may breed as early as January and February”.

Counts of 25 or more have been noted on a number of occasions:

48 north-west at Capel Battery on the 24<sup>th</sup> June 1997  
41 east at Capel-le-Ferne Café on the 24<sup>th</sup> October 1997  
25 east at Capel Battery on the 5<sup>th</sup> April 2003  
30 east at Capel Battery on the 18<sup>th</sup> April 2003  
37 east at Capel-le-Ferne Café on the 12<sup>th</sup> May 2012  
47 east at Capel Battery on the 25<sup>th</sup> May 2012  
45 east at Capel-le-Ferne Café on the 27<sup>th</sup> May 2012  
40 east at Capel-le-Ferne Café on the 28<sup>th</sup> May 2012  
28 east at Capel-le-Ferne Café on the 13<sup>th</sup> June 2012  
26 east at Church Hougham and 32 north-east at Church Road (Cheriton) on the 18<sup>th</sup> June 2012  
53 east at Abbotscliffe on the 28<sup>th</sup> September 2020  
35 east at Abbotscliffe on the 14<sup>th</sup> October 2020  
25 east at Abbotscliffe on the 17<sup>th</sup> October 2020

### Overall distribution

Figure 3 shows the distribution of all records of Crossbill by tetrad, with records in 15 tetrads (48%).

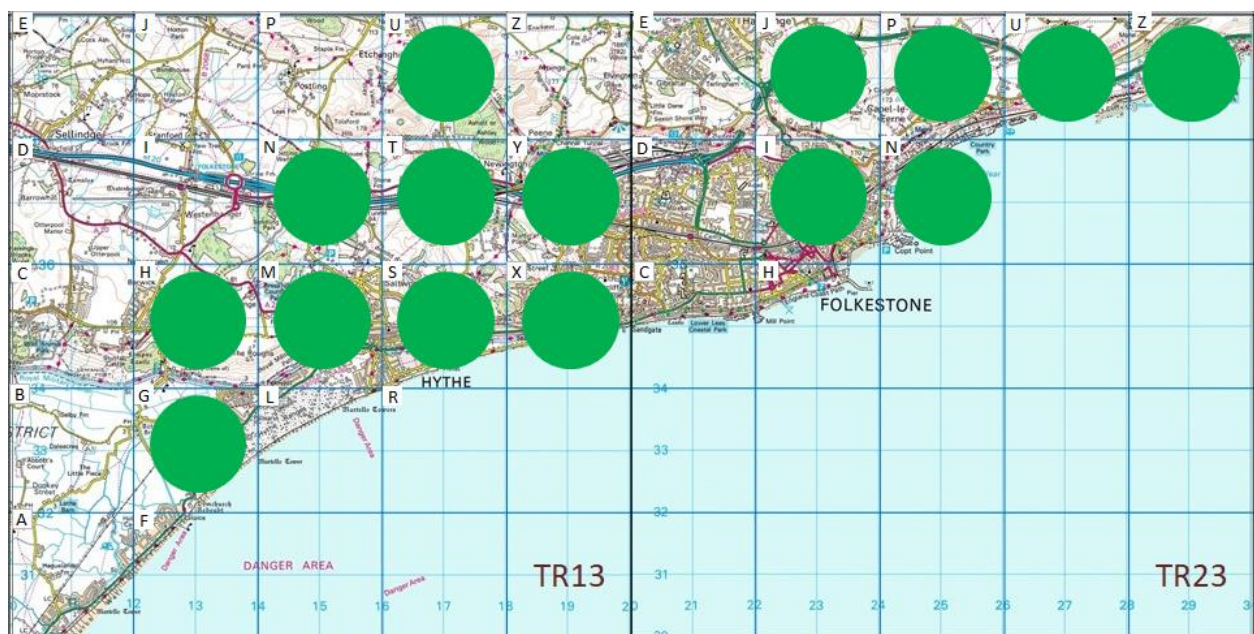


Figure 3: Distribution of all Crossbill records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

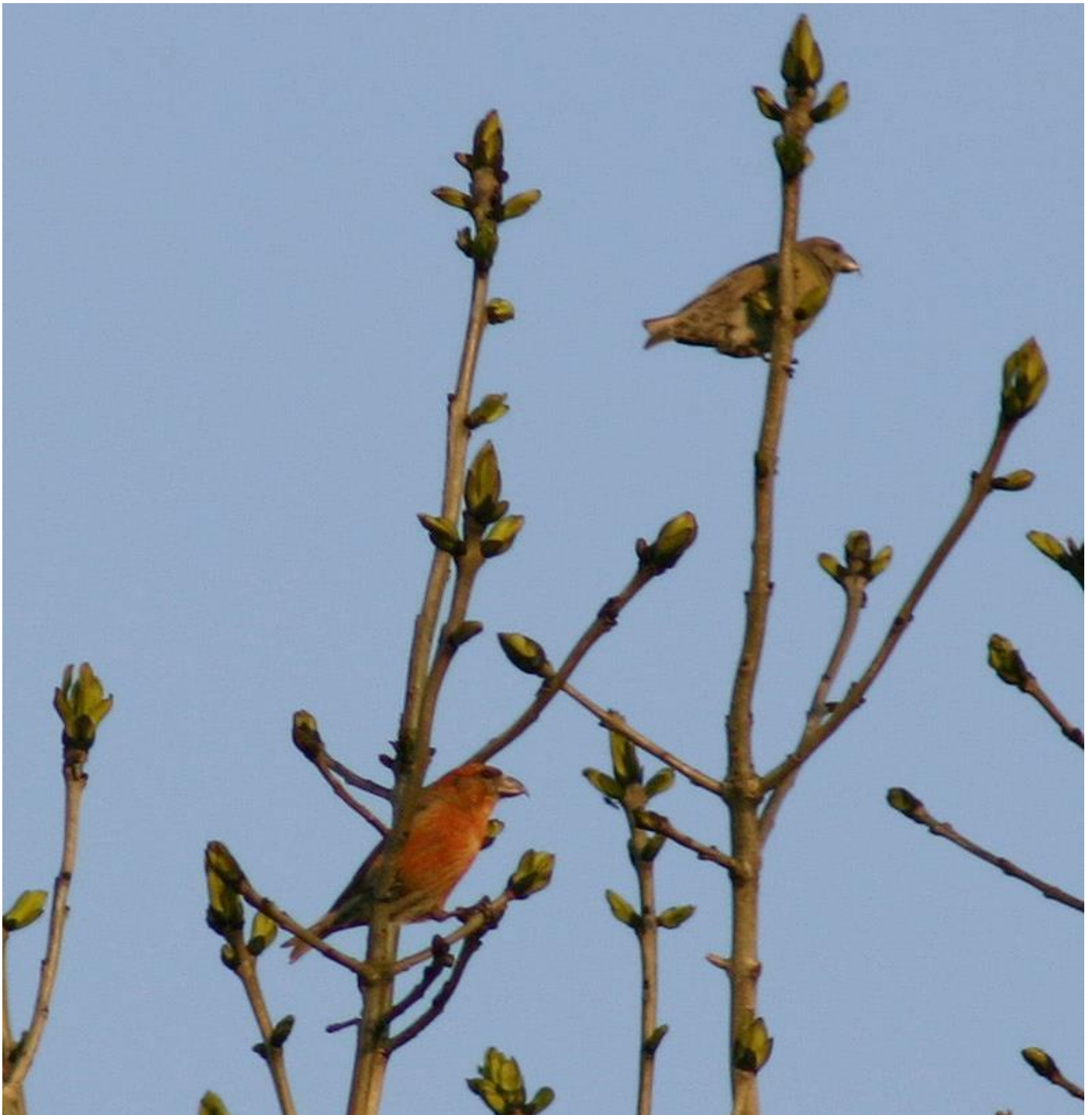
### References

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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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Crossbills at Capel-le-Ferne (Ian Roberts)