

Brambling

Fringilla montifringilla

Category A

Winter visitor and passage migrant.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds from Fenno-Scandia eastwards across Russia to Kamchatka and the Sea of Okhotsk. Vacates breeding range entirely in winter. European birds head chiefly south-west and winter from Britain south to Morocco and south-east to Turkey.

Kent status (KOS 2021):

In Kent is a passage migrant and winter visitor, occasionally in large numbers.



Bramblings at Samphire Hoe (Paul Holt)

The Brambling 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) stated that "in winter Bramblings are distributed over the whole county, resorting with Chaffinches and other birds to the stubbles and woods", so there can be little doubt that it was to be found locally.

The first documented record involved a male seen by Roger Norman at Nickolls Quarry on the 4th November 1952, whilst Geoffrey Manser saw one in a garden in Hythe on the 11th February 1956 and another found in a garden in Hythe on the 20th February 1956 had been ringed in Belgium on the 30th October 1955.

Roger Norman then saw one with a large Chaffinch flock at Uden's farm, Palmarsh on the 13th January 1958, two flying east at Hythe Ranges on the 23rd March 1958 and singles at Palmarsh on the 20th and 23rd April 1958 (Norman 2006; 2007). Dave Musson noted 14 at Folkestone on the 13th October 1960 and 10 there on the 5th November 1960 but there were no further sightings until 12 were seen at Copt Point on the 12th October 1980. This was presumably due to a lack of coverage however it has been recorded in most years since and annually from 1991.

Overall distribution

Figure 1 shows the distribution of all records of Brambling by tetrad, with records in 20 tetrads (65%).

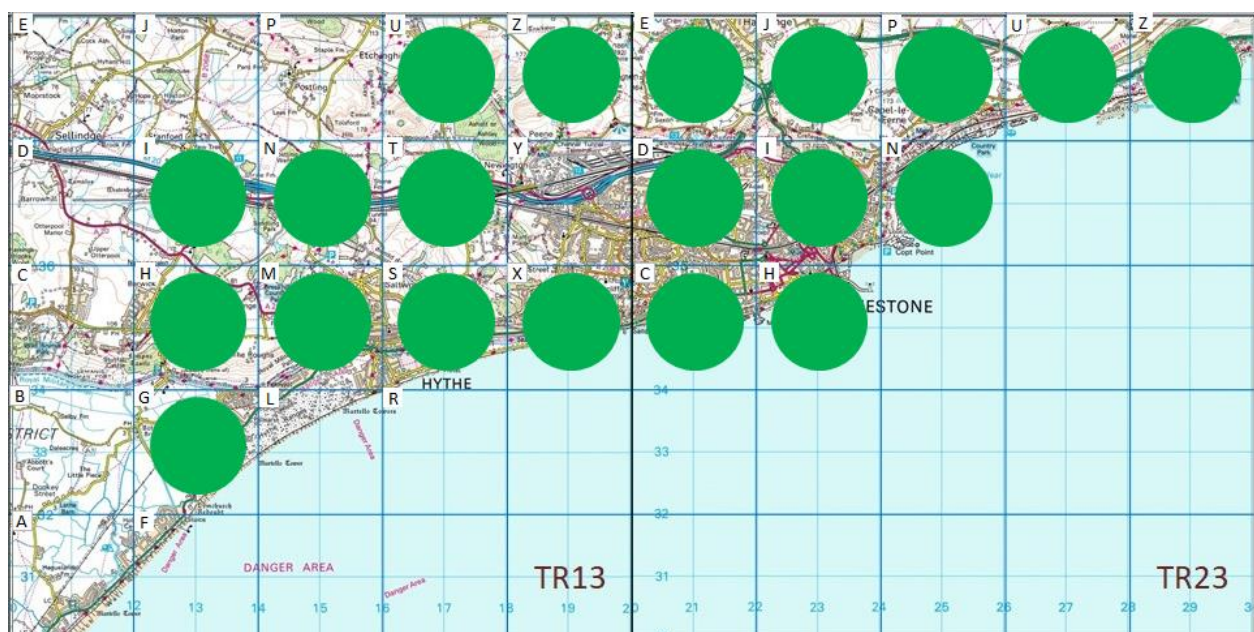


Figure 1: Distribution of all Brambling records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The earliest arrival involved two flying north-west at Abbotscliffe on the 21st September 1996 and there have been September records in nine years, with a peak of five flying west at Abbotscliffe on the 30th September 1996. Arrival dates vary considerably, with a mean over the most recent decade of the 16th October, and the annual autumn totals have also fluctuated largely: the mean over the last thirty years has been 69 bird/days per annum but some years have seen just single figures, whilst large movements or influxes have occurred in others. Ticehurst (1909), Harrison (1953) and Taylor *et al.* (1981) all commented on the marked variation in numbers from year to year.

In 1993 an exceptional total (and still a record count today) of 639 flew in/west at Abbotscliffe on the 14th October, with 20 flying west there the following day, whilst 34 flew west there on the 24th October 1994. 1997 produced movements of 43 in/west at Abbotscliffe on the 12th October, with 113 arriving in off the sea there on the 13th October 1997, whilst 28 flew west at Abbotscliffe on the 12th October 1998 and 38 flew in/west at Capel-le-Ferne Café on the 17th October 2002.



Brambling at Hythe (Nigel Webster)



Brambling at Samphire Hoe (Ian Roberts)

There was a notable influx of up to 370 in 2003, including counts of 79 arriving in off the sea at Capel-le-Ferne Café on the 20th October and 155 in off the sea there on the 24th October. A further count of 68 flying west at Abbotscliffe was noted on the 5th November 2005, but the only count in excess of 20 since involved 22 at Abbotscliffe on the 23rd October 2021.

Passage may continue well in November or even early December, but wintering birds are rare, with records in just nine of the last 21 winters. Sightings have occurred in wooded areas along the Royal Military Canal between West Hythe and Hythe, and at Saltwood Castle, Kiln Wood and Beachborough Park, also in set aside fields near Pedlinge and Kick Hill, and in private gardens in Lympne. Wintering singles associating with mixed finch flocks in wooded areas though may easily go undetected and it is perhaps more frequent at this season.



Brambling at Lympne (Nick Hollands)



Brambling at Lympne (Phil Sharp)

A light spring passage is observed in most years, often associated with movements of Chaffinches, with an average between four and five per annum over the last thirty years and annual peaks of 13 in 2019, 15 in 2002 and 19 in 2016. Most counts have involved ones and twos, with larger counts as follows:

4 east at Abbotscliffe on the 12th March 1995
11 east at Capel-le-Ferne Café on the 26th March 2002
5 east at Capel-le-Ferne Café on the 26th March 2003
3 east at Capel-le-Ferne Café on the 30th March 2003
15 east at Abbotscliffe on the 31st March 2016
9 east at Abbotscliffe on the 27th March 2019

Passage tends to peak in March, but has extended well into April in some years, with the latest at Palmarsh on the 23rd April 1958, and in more recent years at Saltwood on the 20th April 2013.



Brambling at Samphire Hoe (John Lees)



Brambling at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)

References

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Acknowledgements

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