

Rook

Corvus frugilegus Category A
Breeding resident and passage migrant.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):
The Rook is a bird of open agricultural land with mature trees. It breeds across mid-latitude Europe, eastwards through Asia to central China. British birds are almost entirely resident, juveniles may disperse from their natal area in their first winter, but rarely move more than 100km. It is a partial migrant in the Low Countries, Germany and Fenno-Scandia and birds from more northern and eastern countries are chiefly migratory, moving south and west, so winter numbers are far higher than in summer in western Europe. Autumn migrants arrive in Britain between late September and November, departing again from mid-February to mid-April.

Kent status (KOS 2021):
[n Kent it is a widespread resident in rural areas and a passage migrant, usually in small numbers.



Rook at Botolph’s Bridge (Brian Harper)

The Rook 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) considered it to be “not only one of the most conspicuous but one of the commonest birds in the county, in which it is evenly distributed and increasing”, so there can be little doubt that it was to be found locally.

Breeding atlas distribution

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

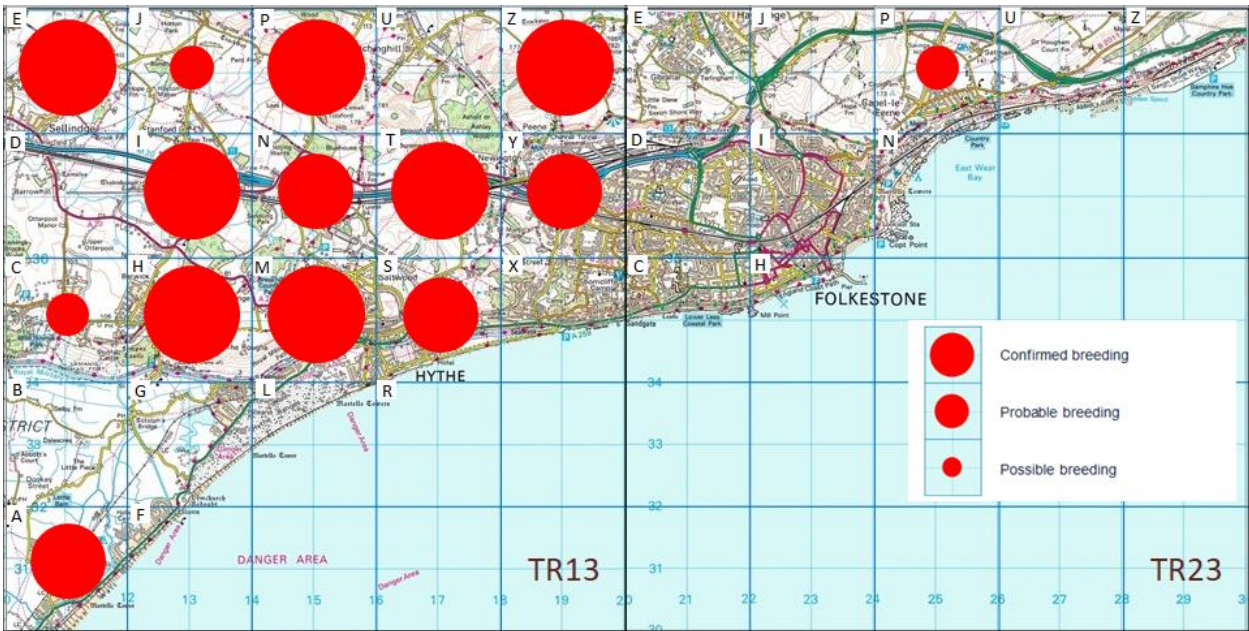


Figure 1: Breeding distribution of Rook at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in seven tetrads, with probable breeding in four more and possible breeding in three others. 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	2	(6%)	7	(23%)	3	(10%)
Probable/Confirmed	13	(42%)	10	(32%)	11	(35%)
Total	15	(48%)	17	(55%)	14	(45%)
Change			+2	(+13%)	-3	(-18%)

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	+13%	-18%	-7%
Kent	+31%	-35%	-14%

Harrison (1953) considered it to be a very abundant resident species in Kent and also a common winter immigrant, stating “that it has increased enormously in recent times is very apparent”, with a survey of rookeries in 1949 recording almost 40,000 nests in the county. Taylor *et al.* remarked on a distinct change in fortune, noting that “there is no doubt that the Rook has declined considerably in the last 25 years”. A comparative survey undertaken in 1975 indicated a decline in the number of nests of 68% since 1949.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of the rookeries located in the 1975 survey, with the number of nests present:

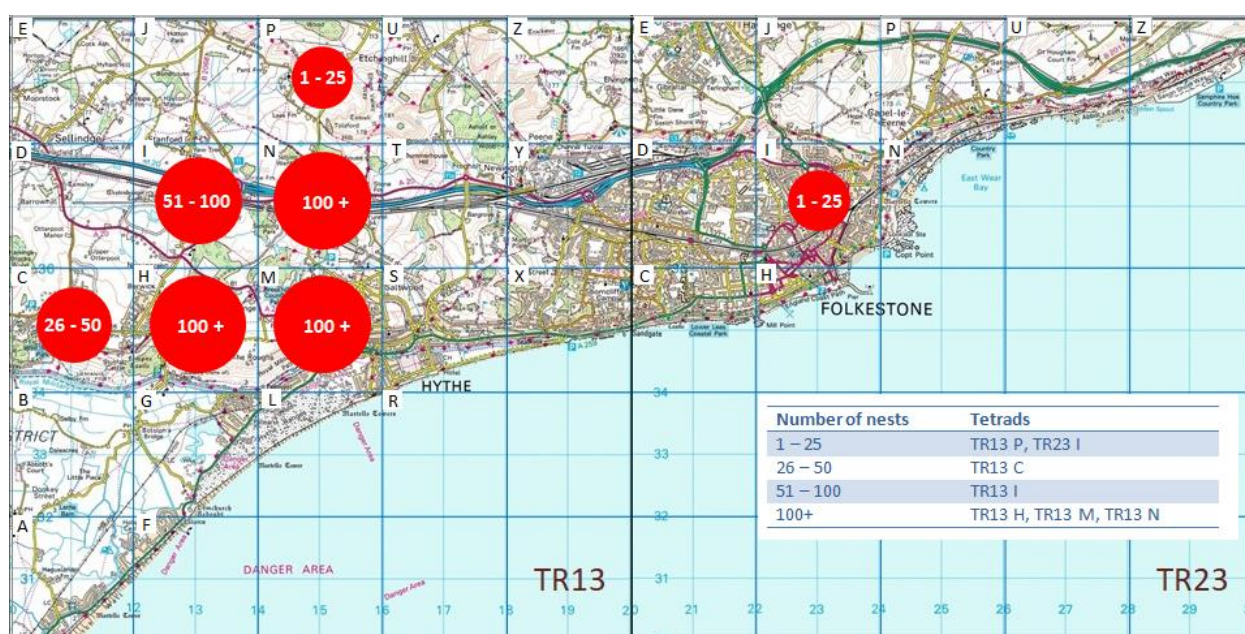


Figure 2: Distribution of rookeries in the 1975 survey

Clements *et al.* reported on a further survey in 1996 which found only 9,000 nests in Kent (a 78% decrease from the first census). They also noted a decrease of 14% in the number of probable or confirmed tetrads between the second and third county atlases, which is comparable with the local reduction of 18%. The actual number of rookeries in the county has shown less change than the number of nests, reflecting a trend towards smaller colonies of less than 25 nests.

The largest rookery locally had traditionally been at Lympne Park Wood, where there between 100 and 150 pairs in the early 1980s, with 110 pairs still present in 2003 but numbers then declined to just eight pairs in 2021 and none were present in 2022.

There has been an attempt in recent years to implement systematic censusing of rookeries in East Kent (Websper 2022) and the numbers of nests at the sites that have been found by the surveyors in TR13 and TR23 (supplemented by counts by local observers) are shown in the table below:

Tetrad	Grid Ref	Site	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020*	2021	2022
TR13 A	TR1131	Dymchurch (Marine Ave.)						75	67
TR13 E	TR1038	Sellindge							5
TR13 E	TR1039	Horton Priory						24	31
TR13 H	TR1234	Lympne Park Wood	82	83	70	44	-	8	0
TR13 H	TR1234	Lympne (Shepway Cross)			30	26	-	24	16
TR13 H	TR1235	Lympne (Berwick House)	30	23	18	20	-	35	56
TR13 I	TR1336	Sandling (House Wood)	35	46	25	38	-	22	24
TR13 I	TR1337	M20 Junction 11						29	30
TR13 M	TR1435	Hythe (London Road)							59
TR13 N	TR1436	Sandling Station		20	24	25	-	28	31
TR13 P	TR1438	Postling (Vicarage Farm)							13
TR13 U	TR1639	Etchinghill							16
TR13 Y	TR1837	Newington							15
TR13 TOTAL			147	172	167	153	-	245	363

*No surveying was undertaken in 2020 due to lockdown restrictions.

The apparent increase in total population in the last two years is thought to reflect an improvement in coverage, rather than a genuine increase.

Overall distribution

Figure 3 shows the distribution of all records of Rook by tetrad, with records in 27 tetrads (87%).

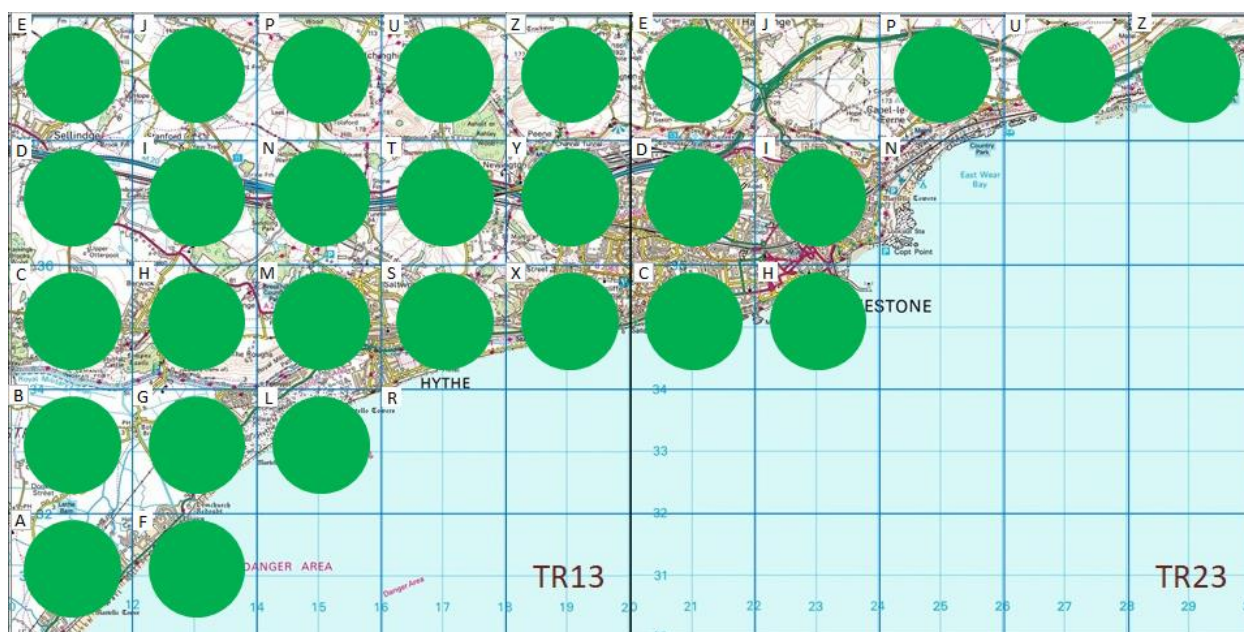


Figure 3: Distribution of all Rook records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Post-breeding flocks begin to accumulate in July and August, when counts have included 220 at Botolph's Bridge on the 5th August 2000 and 194 at Beachborough Park on the 9th August 2016, but the largest concentrations occur in winter, particularly at the roost at Chesterfield Wood. Winter counts have included around 1,250 at a pre-roost gathering at Pedlinge on the 25th February 2013, 950 flying into roost there on the 21st December 2017 and 435 flying south-west over Beachborough Park on the 14th December 2018.

Light spring movements are recorded in some years and counts have included six flying east at Mill Point on the 18th March 1991, ten flying west at Samphire Hoe on the 29th March 2008 and five flying west at Abbotscliffe on the 18th April 2016.

Evidence of diurnal migration has been witnessed in some autumns but again numbers are small, with peak counts of seven flying east at Abbotscliffe on the 18th October 2009, eight at Samphire Hoe on the 21st September 2010, nine at Abbotscliffe on the 11th September 2015 and eight flying in/west there on the 18th September 2015.



Rook at West Hythe (Brian Harper)



Rook at West Hythe (Brian Harper)

References

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Acknowledgements

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