

Redstart

Phoenicurus phoenicurus

Category A

Passage migrant, mainly in autumn.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998; Balmer et al. 2013):

Breeds across most of Europe and Asia eastwards to Lake Baikal. Winters across the Afrotropics, north of the Equator, and in Arabia. It has been in long-term decline, probably mainly due to the loss of old forests. In Britain it typically prefers upland areas and is mostly found in the north and west, but it had undergone a 31% contraction in range since the 1968-1972 atlas, with losses being most apparent in the English lowlands. However, the national population has increased by 20% between 1995 and 2012 due to growth within the core areas, which has offset decreases in the range margins.



Redstart at Casebourne Wood (Brian Harper)

Kent status (KOS 2021):

In Kent it formerly bred but is now just a regular passage migrant.

Breeding birds in Kent typically occupied parkland and open woodland with mature deciduous trees. Clements *et al.* (2015) considered that “their continued persistence in Kent [was] remarkable, considering that the population [had] not risen above 15 pairs since 1965”. They reported that it had ceased to breed in the Blean Woods area in 1998 and had been lost from most of the sites in west Kent by the time of the third county atlas (2007-2013), with only Knole Park still occupied every year, although it ceased to breed there after 2013.

The Redstart 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 migrants were “noted throughout the county”, so it is likely that it was to be found locally on passage, although there is no suggestion that it has ever bred locally.



Redstart at Princes Parade (Nigel Webster)



Redstart at Princes Parade (Nigel Webster)

The first documented records locally involve singles at Saltwood and Seabrook “in September” 1956, as reported in the Kent Bird Report for that year. Two further records followed the following year, when Roger Norman found single birds at Hythe Ranges and Nickolls Quarry on the 25th September 1957 (Norman 2006; 2007).

An exceptionally early individual was seen by William Nevin at Hythe on the 12th March 1960, and was the earliest to be recorded in Kent during the review period (1952-1976) of Taylor *et al.* (1981).

Roger Norman saw further singles at Nickolls Quarry on the 1st May 1960, Hythe Ranges on the 10th September 1961 and Nickolls Quarry on the 10th October 1966, whilst one was reported at Hythe on another early date of 24th March 1968.

There were no records in the 1970s, presumably due to a lack of coverage as Dave Weaver noted three at Nickolls Quarry on the 7th May 1980 and it has been recorded almost annually since.

Overall distribution

Figure 1 shows the distribution of all records of Redstart by tetrad, with records in 18 tetrads (58%).

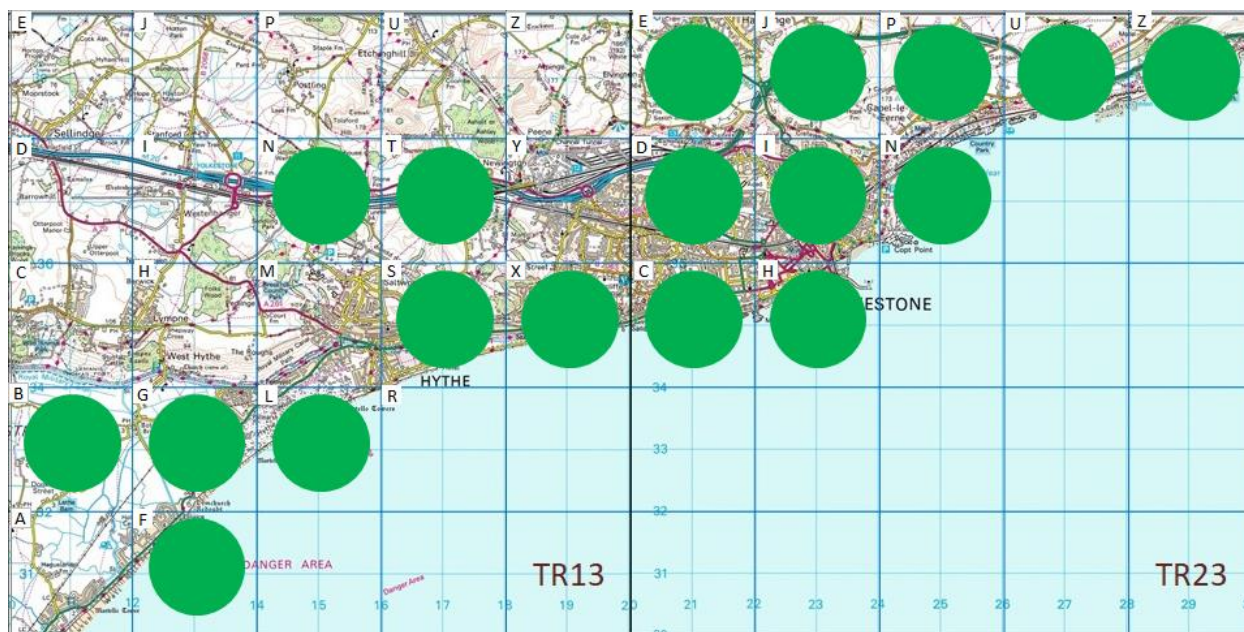


Figure 1: Distribution of all Redstart records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Despite the two sightings in the 1960s, there has only been one subsequent record in March, when a pair were seen at Samphire Hoe on the 28th March 1999. It remains scarce in the first week of April, with singles at Capel Battery on the 2nd April 1998, Abbotscliffe on the 4th April 2009, Samphire Hoe on the 5th April 2005 and Hythe on the 5th April 2008, and two at Samphire Hoe on the 7th April 2011, and sightings typically occur between the second week of April and the third week of May.



Redstart at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



Redstart at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)

Spring passage is always light with an average of 1.6 bird/days per annum over the last two decades, and annual variability is high, with four bird/days noted in five of those 20 years, but none in eight others. Most spring records have involved single birds apart from (in addition to those mentioned above), two at Abbotscliffe on the 10th April 1996, Samphire Hoe on the 7th April 2011 and Samphire Hoe on the 18th April 2017. The latest arrivals have involved two sightings in the last week of May: a male at Hythe Ranges on the 27th May 1996 and a female at Abbotscliffe on the 31st May 1998.

The earliest returning birds were seen at Crete Road West on the 7th August 2017, Copt Point on the 9th August 1988 and Abbotscliffe on the 10th August 2011. Small numbers may be then encountered through August, usually singles but with two on a few occasions, and passage usually peaks in September, when counts or more than two have been noted as follows:

- 4 at Capel Battery on the 19th September 1992
- 4 at Church Hougham on the 21st September 1996, with 3 the next day
- 3 at Abbotscliffe on the 25th September 1997
- 3 at Capel Battery on the 27th September 1998
- 5 at Church Hougham on the 5th September 2000
- 4 at Samphire Hoe on the 20th September 2001
- 3 at Abbotscliffe on the 1st September 2014
- 3 at Capel Battery on the 1st September 2015
- 4 in the Paraker Wood area on the 2nd September 2018
- 4 at Samphire Hoe on the 5th September 2007

Passage may continue until mid-October, but always involving single birds with the exception of two at Abbotscliffe on the 2nd October 2000. Later stragglers have comprised singles at Folkestone on the 16th October 1993, Abbotscliffe on the 16th October 2004, Samphire Hoe on the 18th October 2012, Samphire Hoe on the 20th October 2004 and Capel Battery on the 27th October 1999.



Redstart at Abbotscliffe (Ian Roberts)



Redstart at Abbotscliffe (Ian Roberts)

Although it has been noted in every autumn since 1988, annual variability is also high in this season. The last two decades have seen an average of around 9 bird/days per annum, but just a single bird was noted in 2006, whilst 2010 produced a total of 19 bird/days.

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Acknowledgements

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Redstart at Creteway Down (Brian Harper)



Redstart at Casebourne Wood (Brian Harper)