

Woodcock

Scolopax rusticola

Category A

Winter visitor and passage migrant.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds across middle and upper middle latitudes across Europe eastwards across central and southern Siberia to Sakhalin and Japan. Mainly migratory, although many are resident in western maritime countries (Britain, Ireland and France) which also receive influxes of winter visitors. Winter range extends south to the Mediterranean region and North Africa.



Woodcock in a garden in Folkestone (David Featherbe)

Kent status (KOS 2021):

In Kent it is a local and declining resident breeding species as well as a passage migrant and widespread winter visitor.

Knight and Tolputt included the Woodcock in their “list of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood” (1871), however this list covered an area of six mile radius from Folkestone town hall and extended further inland than the current Folkestone and Hythe area, so is not conclusive evidence of local occurrence. However, Ticehurst (1909) stated it had “nested in most parts of the county” and mentioned that “from east Kent there is an old bird, with a young one in down, in the Canterbury Museum, obtained by Hammond, in 1890, and St. Albans Court, and a similar group in the Deedes collection at Folkestone comes from the neighbourhood of Hythe. I can find no other records from the east of the Stour valley, so that in this part of the county the bird would appear to be quite rare as a breeding species”. Ticehurst also knew it as a regular passage migrant, whilst “during the winter months Woodcocks are generally distributed throughout the wooded portions of the county”.

The first fully documented record relates to three seen by Roger Norman at Hythe Ranges on the 14th February 1956, with a further single there on the 9th April 1958 (Norman 2006). However, it appears that it was present in some abundance at this time as H Schreiber noted ten at Sandling Park “in the first quarter of 1959” and 20 there “in the last quarter of 1959”, whilst an exceptional total of 40 were recorded there in December 1960 (a count which has been unsurpassed since).



Woodcock at Folkestone (Mick Vandoen)



Woodcock remains at Princes Parade (Ian Roberts)

There were very few records in the 1960s or 1970s which seems very likely to reflect a lack of coverage, as Peter Wells considered it to be regular at Biggin’s Wood in the 1980s and there have been annual records since 1990.

Overall distribution

Figure 1 shows the distribution of all records of Woodcock by tetrad, with records in 25 tetrads (81%).

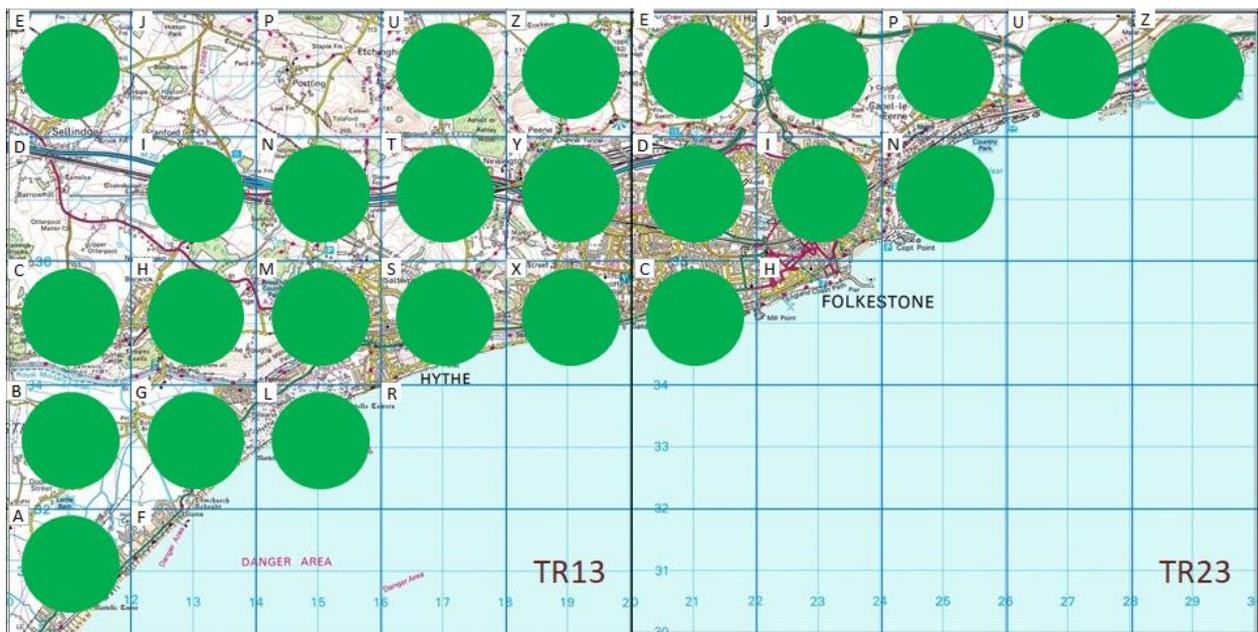


Figure 1: Distribution of all Woodcock records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

There have been just three records in the first three weeks of the October: singles at Creteway Down on the 8th October 2016, at Folks' Wood on the 13th October 2019 and at Church Hougham on the 18th October 1996, and the first arrival is typically noted in the last week of the month or in the first half of November. Coastal migrants are noted in most years, usually singletons but with two at Samphire Hoe on the 17th November 2005 and three at Abbotscliffe on the 28th October 2012.

Favoured wintering sites include a number of woods in the Saltwood area, including Kiln Wood (TR13 I), Chesterfield Wood (TR13N) and Cowtye Wood (TR13 N), with smaller numbers at Folks' Wood (TR13 H), and Thorn Wood (TR13 N), whilst Casebourne Wood near Seabrook (TR13 X) is another traditional haunt. Peak counts at these sites have been as follows:

| Site | Count | Date |
|-------------------|-------|--------------------------------|
| Kiln Wood | 12 | 23 rd December 2009 |
| Chesterfield Wood | 9 | 2 nd February 2014 |
| Cowtye Wood | 8 | 24 th February 2013 |
| Casebourne Wood | 7 | 19 th January 2010 |

Woodcocks can turn up at a wide range of sites however, as figure one demonstrates, particularly during cold weather when they can even venture into urban gardens. Counts during hard weather have included six at Cheriton on the 17th January 1987, four at Bargrove Wood on the 19th January 2010, and five at Abbotscliffe and six at Church Hougham in February 2012, whilst after a prolonged cold spell in 2021 a total of nine were found dead along 1.7km of tideline at Princes Parade on the 15th February.

Birds usually depart during March but seven were still at Cowtye Wood on the 7th April 2013, whilst passage migrants may be encountered during March and April. Sightings later than the first week of April have comprised one at Hythe Ranges on the 9th April 1958, three at Copt Point on the 9th April 1996, one at Botolph's Bridge on the 12th April 1990 and singles at Capel-le-Ferne on the 14th April 2013 and 22nd April 2003.

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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Woodcock at Folkestone (David Featherbe)