

# Skylark

*Alauda arvensis* Category A

Breeding resident, winter visitor and passage migrant.

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

A widespread breeding species across much of Europe and northern Asia. Northern and central Europe are largely vacated in winter, with movements south-west on a broad front, reaching the Atlantic coast and Mediterranean area. Large-scale cold-weather movements can occur at any time during winter.

*Kent status (KOS 2021):*

It is a widespread, common but declining resident species in Kent, also a common passage migrant and winter visitor.



Skylark at Donkey Street (Brian Harper)

The Skylark 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 “generally distributed and abundant throughout the county, and is found right up to the outskirts of the towns and in every field, even in the most thickly-wooded districts”, 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.

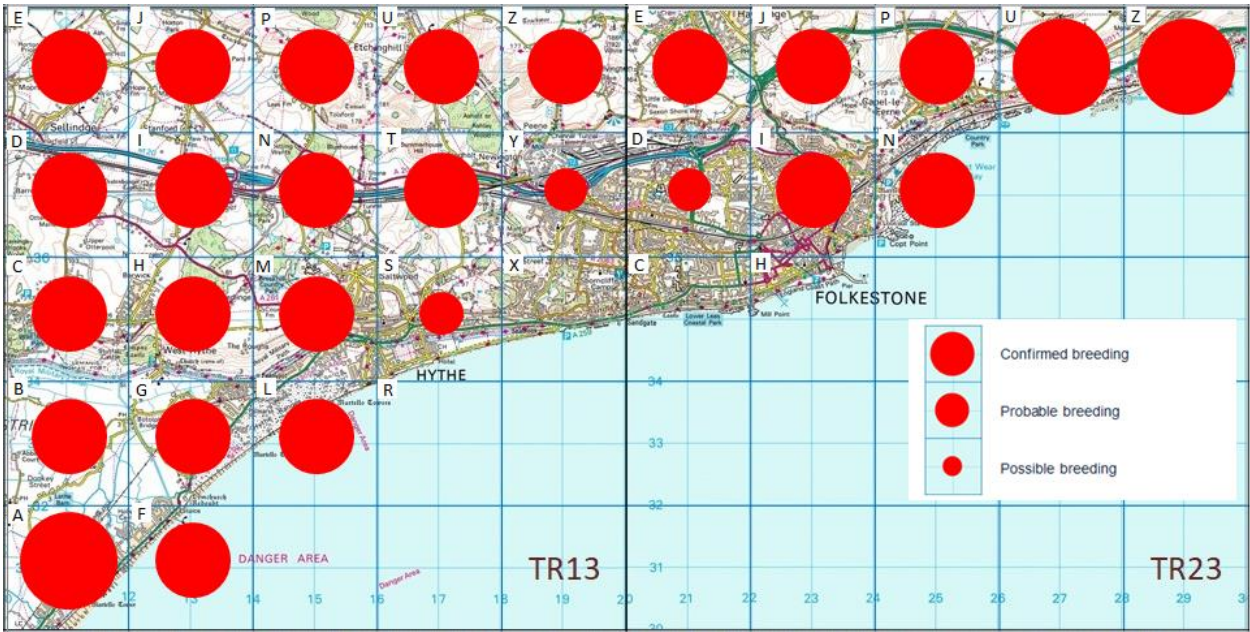


Figure 1: Breeding distribution of Skylark at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in three tetrads, with probable breeding in 21 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	1	(3%)	0	(0%)	3	(10%)
Probable/Confirmed	22	(71%)	26	(84%)	24	(77%)
Total	23	(74%)	26	(84%)	27	(87%)
Change			+3	(+13%)	+1	(+4%)

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%	+4%	+17%
Kent	+9%	-7%	+1%

Clements *et al.* (2015) stated that “Skylarks are birds of open country that use low vegetation, including agricultural crops, for feeding and nesting. Changes in farming practice, especially the move from spring to autumn cereal sowing, has had a very damaging effect on the species by reducing its food supply in winter and preventing birds from nesting in spring. This has led to a continuing national decline that is mirrored in Kent”.

The BTO Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) trend for 1995 to 2012 was a 29% decline in south-east England, but the decrease in occupied tetrads in Kent between second and third atlases was just 7%, suggesting that so far the reduction in numbers is more significant than the reduction in range. Locally the range is yet to show any sign of contraction.



Skylark at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



Skylark at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



Skylark at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)



Skylark at Donkey Street (Brian Harper)

## Overall distribution

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of Skylark by tetrad, with records in 31 tetrads (100%).

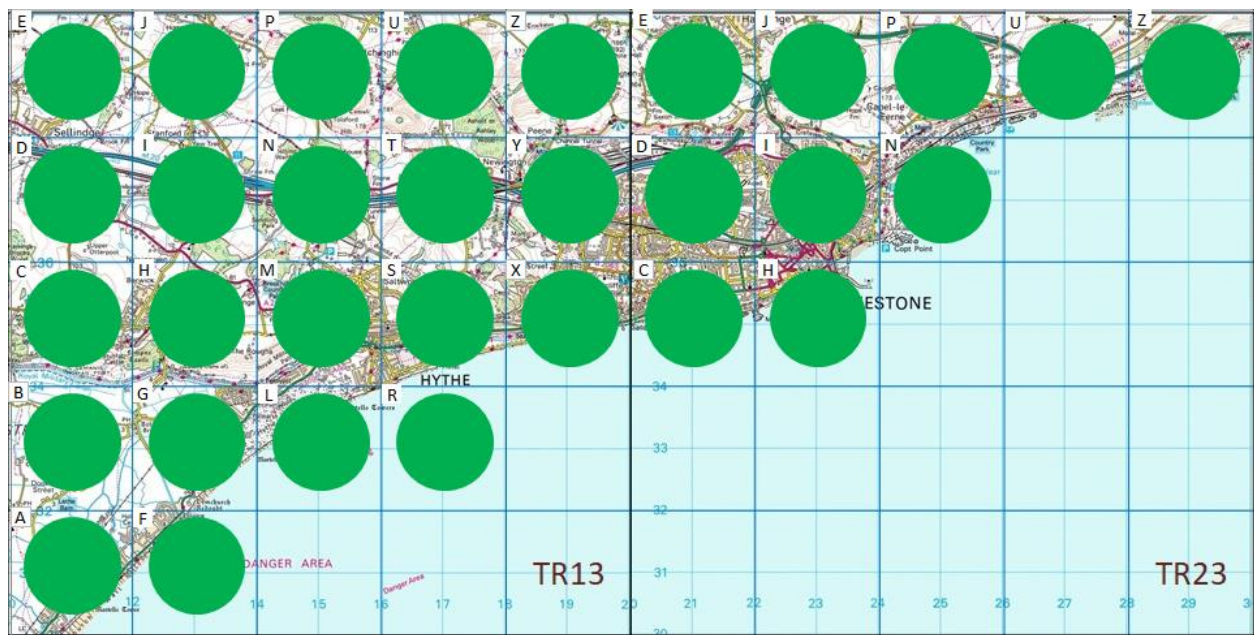


Figure 2: Distribution of all Skylark records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Autumn passage may be noted between late September and late November, when flocks may accumulate in fields or be seen arriving in off the sea or heading west along the coast. Three-figure accumulations or movements have comprised:

- 194 in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 20<sup>th</sup> October 1991
- 243 in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 15<sup>th</sup> October 1993
- 120 flying west at Abbotscliffe on the 14<sup>th</sup> October 1996
- 100 at Abbotscliffe on the 19<sup>th</sup> October 1996
- 200 at Capel-le-Ferne on the 10<sup>th</sup> November 1996
- 200 at Abbotscliffe on the 16<sup>th</sup> November 1996
- 100 at Abbotscliffe on the 10<sup>th</sup> October 1997
- 133 in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 12<sup>th</sup> October 1997
- 150 in/west at Abbotscliffe on the 10<sup>th</sup> October 1998
- 135 at Abbotscliffe on the 20<sup>th</sup> October 1998
- 110 at Abbotscliffe on the 18<sup>th</sup> November 1998
- 100 at Abbotscliffe on the 24<sup>th</sup> October 2003
- 118 at Abbotscliffe on the 24<sup>th</sup> October 2010
- 110 at Abbotscliffe on the 18<sup>th</sup> November 2016

The largest counts in the winter months are typically associated with the onset of cold weather. Early records included c.100 at Palmarsh on the 29<sup>th</sup> December 1957, 650 flying north-west over Folkestone on the 27<sup>th</sup> December 1964, a “very heavy hard weather movement to the north-west” over Folkestone on the 10<sup>th</sup> December 1967 and a “constant stream moving NNW” over Folkestone on the 30<sup>th</sup> December 1968. In more recent years the following three-figure counts have been noted:

- 783 off the sea at Copt Point on the 5<sup>th</sup> January 1985
- 120 at Nickolls Quarry on the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1993
- 128 at Abbotscliffe on the 8<sup>th</sup> January 1993
- c.200 at Capel-le-Ferne on the 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1995
- c.100 at Nickolls Quarry on the 29<sup>th</sup> December 1996
- c.200 at Nickolls Quarry on the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1997
- 326 at Botolph's Bridge on the 26<sup>th</sup> December 2010
- 545 in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 16<sup>th</sup> January 2013



There has been little evidence of spring passage, with the only double-figure count involving 22 arriving in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1997.



Skylark at Copt Point (David Featherbe)



Skylark at Hythe Roughs (Brian Harper)



Skylark at Hythe Roughs (Brian Harper)



Skylark at Hythe Roughs (Brian Harper)

### **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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Skylark at Hythe Roughs (Brian Harper)