

House Sparrow

Passer domesticus Category A

Declining breeding resident.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

A widespread breeding resident across Europe and Asia, east to the Amur valley and western Mongolia, and south to Arabia, Sri Lanka and Burma. It has also been introduced into the Americas, sub-Saharan Africa and Australasia. It spread north to northernmost Europe in from the second half of the nineteenth century in the wake of human settlements, also spreading east across Siberia to the Pacific coast.



House Sparrow at Botolph’s Bridge (Brian Harper)

Kent status (KOS 2021):

In Kent it is a common but declining resident, particularly associated with human habitation.

The House Sparrow 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 “abundant throughout the county, both in town and country” 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.

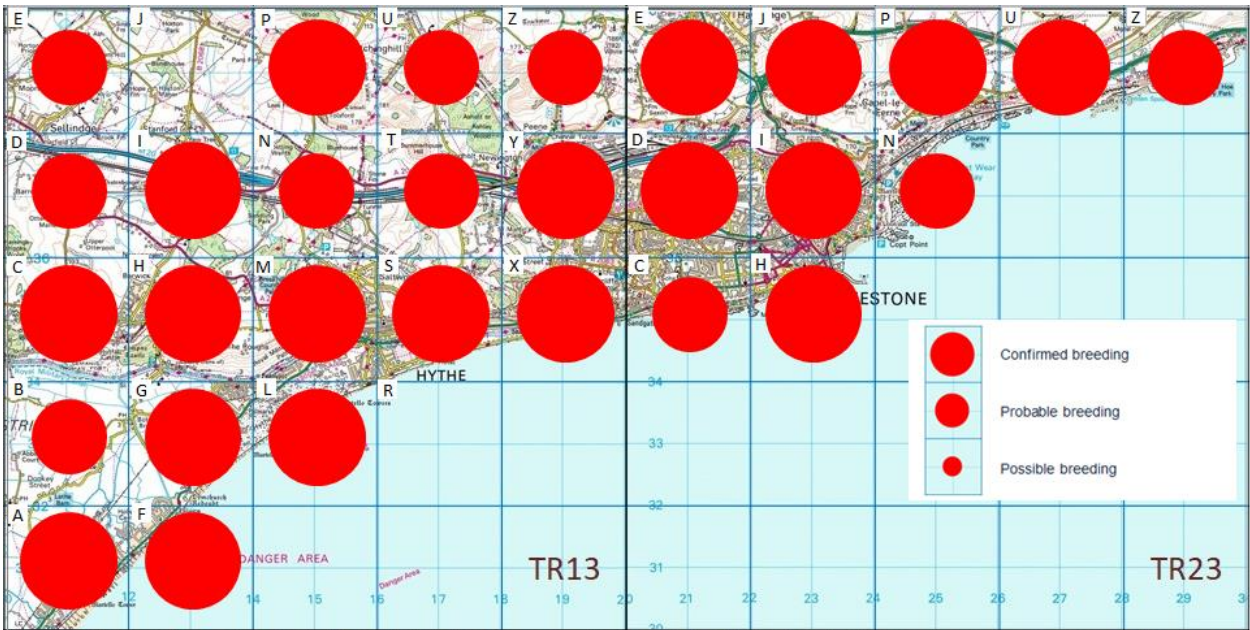


Figure 1: Breeding distribution of House Sparrow at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in 19 tetrads, with probable breeding in ten more. 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%)	0	(0%)
Probable/Confirmed	28	(90%)	30	(97%)	29	(94%)
Total	29	(94%)	30	(97%)	29	(94%)
Change			+1	(+3%)	-1	(-3%)

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	+3%	-3%	0%
Kent	+5%	-3%	+1%

As Balmer *et al.* (2013) reported, the House Sparrow is among the most widespread species in Britain. Overall there had been only a 3% range contraction since the first national breeding atlas (1968-1972), but these small range changes belie striking changes in population size. Monitoring data indicate a rapid decline of 69% in the UK breeding population during 1977 to 2010, with perhaps numbers stabilising in the last decade.

Extensive research has indicated different factors that are likely to be driving trends in rural and urban populations. The key factor affecting rural populations is probably a low first-year survival rate, connected with reduction in winter food supply caused by agricultural intensification, whilst in urban populations reduced breeding performance has probably been more important, potentially owing to reductions in invertebrate prey availability, air pollution and lack of nest sites.

Locally it was only absent as a breeding species in the most recent atlas from two tetrads, TR13 R (which contains just a small section of beach) and (TR13 J). The latter tetrad was occupied in both the previous atlases and its recent absence could have resulted from insufficient coverage, however Clements *et al.* (2015) considered that “losses in tetrads on the North Downs with little human habitation are probably real”.

Overall distribution

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of House Sparrow by tetrad, with records in 30 tetrads (97%).

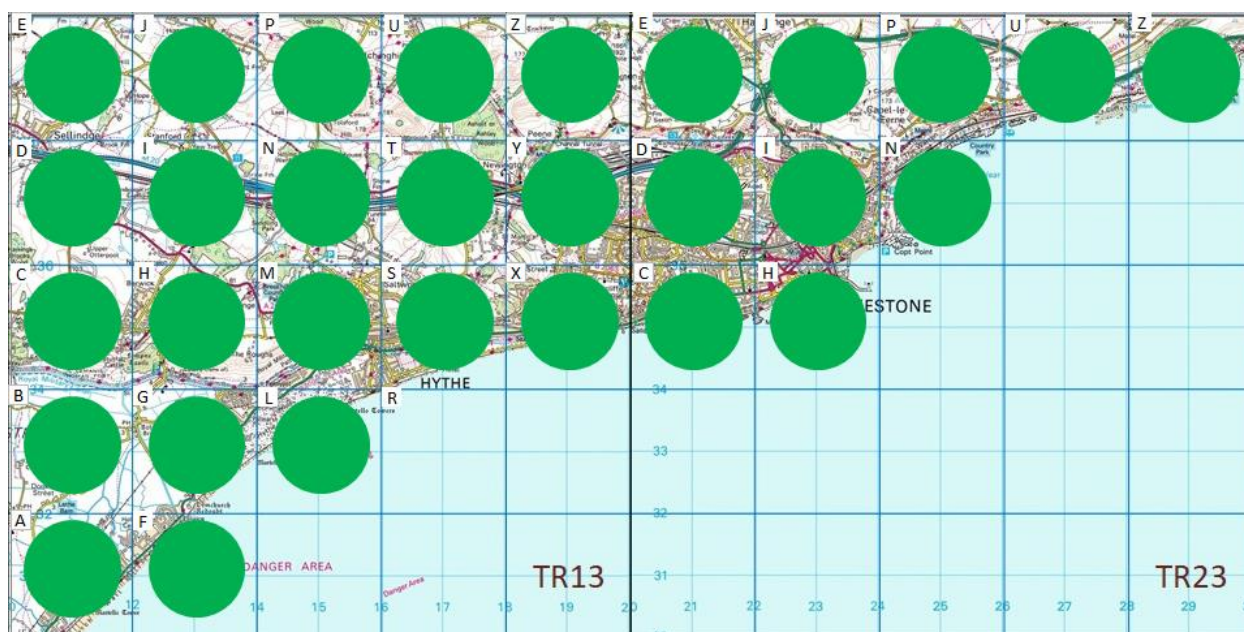


Figure 2: Distribution of all House Sparrow records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

As Balmer *et al.* noted, House Sparrows are highly sedentary so distribution patterns remain virtually unchanged from the breeding season to winter.

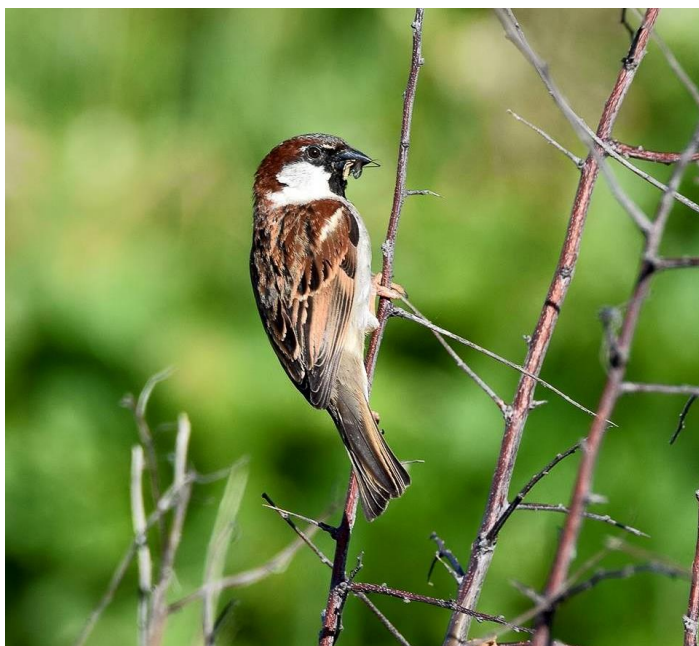
In the 1950s Roger Norman noted that there was “a roost of several hundred birds” at Hythe Ranges in scrub near the A259, whilst at nearby Nickolls Quarry he noted a peak of 150 juveniles on the 24th August 1958 (Norman 2006; 2007).



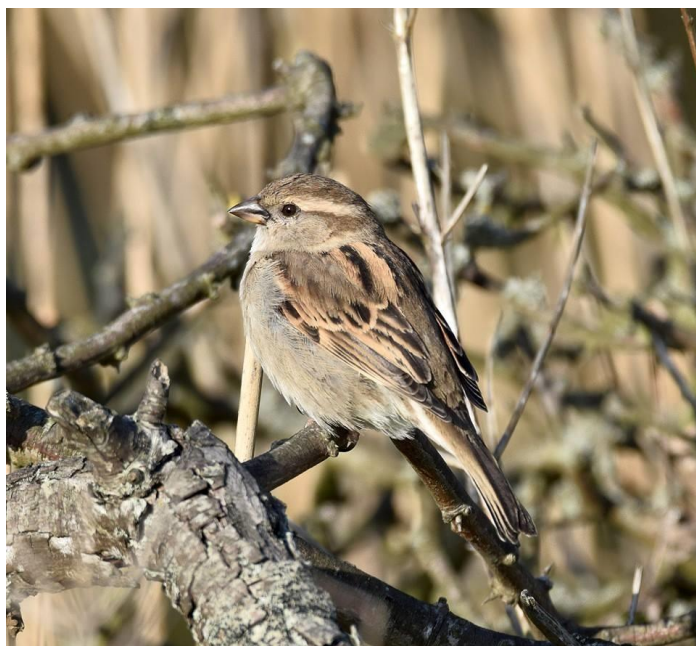
House Sparrow at Cheriton (Brian Harper)



House Sparrow at Seabrook (Brian Harper)



House Sparrow at Princes Parade (Nigel Webster)



House Sparrow at Princes Parade (Nigel Webster)

Large numbers were still being recorded in the 1990s, mainly post-breeding flocks in rural areas in late summer or early autumn. A total of 600 were present in the Abbotscliffe/Capel-le-Ferne area on the 9th September 1992, 230 were at Nickolls Quarry on the 24th August 1995, 250 were at Capel-le-Ferne on the 17th August 1997, 150 were at Church Hougham on the 25th August 1997, with 200 there on the 29th August 1998, and 150 were at Newingreen on the 17th September 2000.

Roger Norman noted a decline in flock sizes at Nickolls Quarry from the late 1990s, with a peak in the 2000s of 60 on the 7th September 2003. Elsewhere there also no three-figure counts reported in that decade, whilst congregations of 53 at Hougham Court on the 28th August 2006 and 50 at Botolph's Bridge on the 14th August 2008 were deemed to be notable.

A further count of 55 was noted in the Hougham Court on the 3rd October 2012, whilst around 200 were present in stubble fields there on the 10th September 2017 (the first three-figure tally for 17 years). The only count of 50 or more to have been noted since involved 50 at Nickolls Quarry on the 1st January 2019.



House Sparrow at Samphire Hoe (Ian Roberts)



House Sparrows at Abbotscliffe (Ian Roberts)

The House Sparrow is still taken for granted by many observers though and few counts are received, whilst roosts are also difficult to count as birds typically favour thick cover, so numbers may remain higher than are reported.

Ticehurst (1909) recorded large numbers arriving from overseas on the east and south-east coasts of Kent in autumn and cited that during the first six days of October 1887 an estimated 2,000 to 5,000 every morning passed the Varne lightship (seven miles south-east of Samphire Hoe). Harrison (1953) commented that the volume of autumn has shrunk out of all proportion to these earlier records and thought that its movements might constitute irruptions rather than regular migration.

Taylor et al (1981) confirmed that migration on this scale has not been noted since, but did mention small autumn movements (with occasional peaks of 200) at Dungeness in October. Locally double-figure movements were noted on several occasions in the late 1990s/early 2000s:

45 west at Abbotscliffe on the 12th October 1998
15 west at Abbotscliffe on the 13th October 1998
10 west at Abbotscliffe on the 3rd October 1999
12 west at Abbotscliffe on the 4th October 1999
35 west at Capel Battery on the 5th October 1999
30 west at Abbotscliffe on the 6th October 1999
12 west at Abbotscliffe on the 14th October 2000
10 west at Abbotscliffe on the 25th September 2004
11 west at Abbotscliffe on the 26th October 2004

At Samphire Hoe, where the species does not breed, small numbers have been noted in most years. There have been records in most months of the year, with peak counts of six on the 18th September 2005 and eight on the 7th October 2019.

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House Sparrow at Cheriton (Brian Harper)



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House Sparrow at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)



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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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