

## Pheasant

*Phasianus colchicus*

Category C1

Breeding resident.

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

Native to the Caucasus and the Balkans, eastwards across middle latitudes of Asia to eastern China. Introduced widely into Europe, for example into Italy in Roman times, into Britain probably in the late eleventh century and into Scandinavia in the eighteenth century. Also introduced into North America and parts of Australasia. It has a complex history of introductions and extinctions. Indigenous and introduced populations are resident or sedentary. Numbers fluctuate markedly due to the scale of releases, hunting pressures etc.



### Pheasants at Hotel Imperial Golf Course (Brian Harper)

*Kent status (KOS 2021):*

In Kent it is a common, widespread and possibly increasing resident species, with numbers boosted each autumn by birds released for shooting.

The Pheasant 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 "throughout the wooded parts of the county it exists in a wild state numerously", 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.

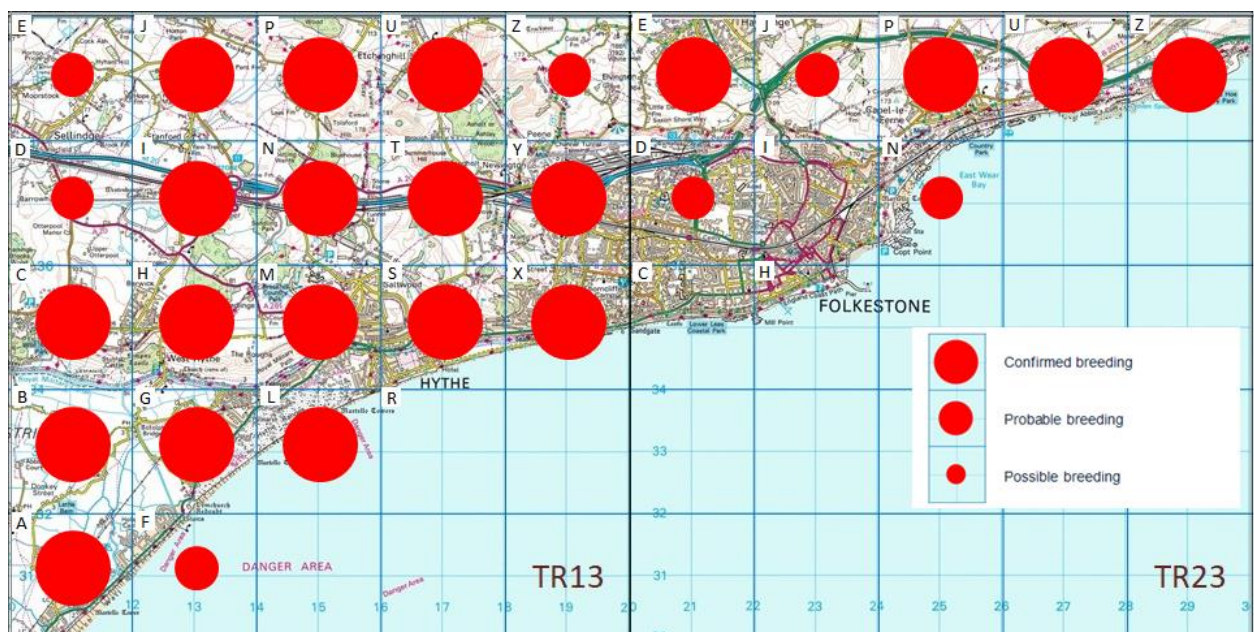


Figure 1: Breeding distribution of Pheasant at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

It would seem surprising for such a common and widespread bird that breeding was not confirmed in any tetrads, however adults with chicks are far more frequently encountered between August and October, rather than the atlas fieldwork period (April to July). There was however probable breeding in 20 tetrads and possible breeding in seven others. It was only absent as a breeding species from the more built-up parts of Folkestone town.

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%)	5	(16%)	7	(23%)
Probable/Confirmed	12	(39%)	13	(42%)	20	(65%)
Total	14	(45%)	18	(58%)	27	(87%)
Change			+4	(+29%)	+9	(+50%)

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	+29%	+50%	+93%
Kent	+31%	+17%	+53%

Ticehurst stated that: “since there is hardly any doubt that the Pheasant was introduced into England by the Romans it is not improbable that in the forests of Kent it became naturalised at an earlier date than in any other county”. However, Taylor *et al.* considered that the species was probably first introduced into Britain by the Normans in the late eleventh century which is now the more widely accepted position (e.g. Snow & Perrins; Balmer *et al.* 2013).



Pheasant at Lower Wall Road (Brian Harper)

It is believed that the race of the Pheasant that was introduced was the nominate form from south-eastern Europe, which was familiarly known as the Black-necked Pheasant from the absence of the white-ring which characterises many of the other forms.



Up until the end of the eighteenth century this was the only Pheasant inhabiting our woodlands. Early in the nineteenth century the Chinese Ring-necked Pheasant *P. c. torquatus* was introduced and in subsequent years a number of other forms were also imported (Harrison 1953). All of these forms hybridise freely but the white neck ring of *torquatus* is now a feature of most feral males in Kent.

Clements *et al.* (2015) reported that there had been little change in its status over the past century, with all authors describing it as widespread and abundant in Kent. They did note however that there had been an apparently recent colonisation of the coastal fringe between Dungeness and Deal.

Numbers across Britain are augmented annually by large numbers of hand-reared birds which are released for shooting. Balmer *et al.* stated that releases had increased approximately fivefold since the early 1960s, to around 35 million birds annually across Britain, which may have led to some of the increases in range noted in the most recent atlas.

Locally, large numbers were being reared at Folks' Wood from at least 1980 with pens also present in the 1990s at Kiln Wood and Sandling Park, and the largest counts recorded in this area would have included a significant proportion of released birds, with 120 seen near Folks' Wood in September 1997 and 160 (50 at Folks' Wood and 110 at Kiln Wood) in September 2000. This practice then ceased and counts only reached 40 in the Pedlinge area in September 2007 and 20 at Folks' Wood in May 2009, but there are indications that rearing has recommenced since 2021, so large numbers may again be encountered in the future.

Counts from elsewhere have included 42 (37 males) in one field north of Hythe in December 1968, 19 at Botolph's Bridge in November 1999 and 20 at Beachborough Park in February 2019. The report from Hythe also noted that there was a strong melanistic strain (estimated at 5% of birds) in this area.

### Overall distribution

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

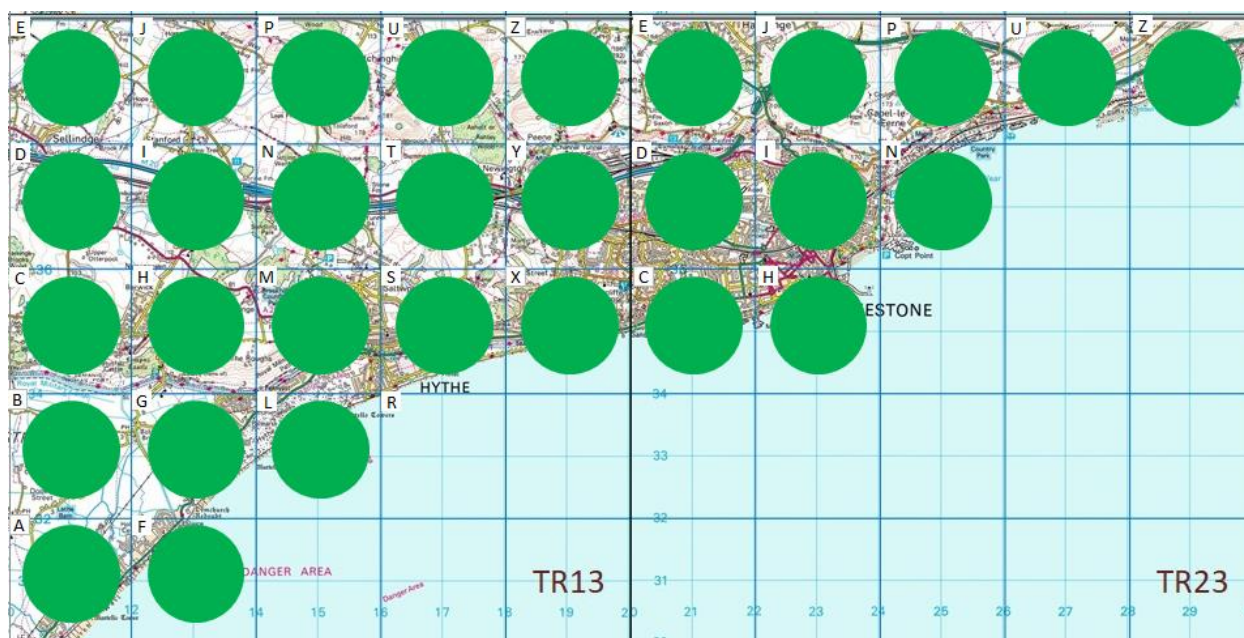


Figure 2: Distribution of all Pheasant records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Though principally a bird of wooded agricultural land, the Pheasant occurs on wasteland with bramble or scrub cover, on marshes with small reed beds, and even overgrown gardens and allotments. Locally it is only absent from TR13 R which is a tiny stretch of shingle beach.

As Clements *et al.* reported, there may have been some colonisation of coastal sites in recent years and one seen on the grassed area of Folkestone Leas on the 15<sup>th</sup> October 1997 constituted the first record for the site (which had been watched regularly since 1988), and there have been at least four sightings there since.

Non-breeding birds are prone to wandering and may turn up even in small urban gardens.



Pheasants at Saltwood Castle (Brian Harper)



Pheasant at Princes Parade (Brian Harper)



Pheasant at Saltwood Castle (Brian Harper)



Pheasant at the Aldington Road (Brian Harper)

Click [here](#) to listen to a local audio recording of one calling at Lympe on the 28<sup>th</sup> April 2022 (Ian Roberts).

### **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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Pheasant at Saltwood Castle (Brian Harper)