

# Raven

*Corvus corax*

Category A

Formerly a rare vagrant but now a scarce resident, with breeding recommencing in 2016 after an absence of 125 years.

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

Widespread across much of Europe and northern and central Asia, also in North America. A decline in range during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has largely been reversed since. It is essentially sedentary, but some immatures can make extensive movements.

*Kent status (KOS 2021):*

It was once a rare visitor to Kent but is now occurring more frequently and breeding recommenced in 2009.



Raven at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)

The Raven 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 one of the two former sites that existed on the chalk cliffs was "between Dover and Folkestone" (with the other at South Foreland). He continued to remark that "they were probably both tenanted from time immemorial", but the first reference to either dated from 1841, whilst he noted that "Mr. Gordon of Folkestone informs me that the pair still bred on the cliffs between that town and Dover up till about twenty years ago" (i.e. around 1890), but from this time onwards it would seem the species was rapidly becoming a dwindling one in Kent with just a few single birds obtained in the eastern or south-eastern part the county, mostly in the autumn, until 1907.

Harrison (1953) mentioned that Mr A. C. Kay informed him that "Chatwin ... always said that he had taken a pair, many years previously, at Abbot's Cliff, near to the Warren, a dead goat being used as bait", though thought it "not possible in any way to support this statement".

Harrison also noted that "in 1905 J. H. Allchin, the Curator of the Maidstone Museum, reported that his cousin, who lived near Hythe, remembered a pair of Ravens nesting in the Saltwood Park, about 1855".



Raven at Samphire Hoe (Nigel Webster)



Raven at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)

In the years that followed it became very rare in the county and Taylor *et al.* (1981) were able to locate only 13 records in their review period (1952-1976), whilst some of these "probably refer to the same individuals, and in some cases they may possibly refer to escapes".

There were no local records for over a century, until two were noted in 1997. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> April of that year Dale Gibson watched one flying north-west over Creteway Down and on the 2<sup>nd</sup> May Roger Norman saw one flying south over the line of the Botolph's Bridge road hedge, on the western boundary of the Nickolls Quarry site, being mobbed by Crows and Jackdaws (Norman 2007).

Clements *et al.* (2015) stated that "Ravens had been steadily spreading eastward from their stronghold in western Britain over the past 20 years. By 2006, when Ravens were well established in neighbouring Sussex, there were several records from coastal cliffs around Dover". These included two seen at Samphire Hoe on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> April, Capel-le-Ferne on the 5<sup>th</sup> May and Samphire Hoe on the 6<sup>th</sup> May, with presumably the same birds being involved.

In 2007 two were noted again at the cliffs between Capel Battery and Samphire Hoe on several dates between the 26<sup>th</sup> March and 19<sup>th</sup> April, whilst two were again present along the cliffs on various dates between the 4<sup>th</sup> February and 25<sup>th</sup> April 2008, and four flew west at Samphire Hoe on the 8<sup>th</sup> March. In that year two were also noted at Samphire Hoe between the 19<sup>th</sup> September and 2<sup>nd</sup> December, whilst two flew west over Beachborough Lakes on the 14<sup>th</sup> September.

Two were again present at cliffs in 2009, with records between the 15<sup>th</sup> March and 22<sup>nd</sup> April, and from the 19<sup>th</sup> August until the end of December. It that year breeding was first confirmed again in the county, at a site to the east of Dover, when one pair fledged four young.

### 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 Raven at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed not confirmed in any tetrads but there was probable breeding in one tetrad and possible breeding in two more. The table below shows how this compares to previous atlases (Taylor *et al.*; 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	0	(0%)	0	(0%)	1	(3%)
Probable/Confirmed	0	(0%)	0	(0%)	2	(6%)
Total	0	(0%)	0	(0%)	3	(10%)
Change			0	(0%)	+3	(--%)

At the time of the most recent atlas the presence of a pair in suitable breeding habitat at Capel-le-Ferne gave rise, under the BTO definitions, to a status of 'probable' breeding. Ravens continued to become an increasingly regular sight along the cliffs and breeding was suspected at Capel-le-Ferne in 2015, and then finally confirmed in 2016, when a pair fledged two young at Samphire Hoe, whilst a pair appeared to be feeding chicks at Capel-le-Ferne, although no fledglings were observed. These sites have continued to be occupied since and breeding confirmed at both in recent years.



Ravens at nest at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



Raven family at Capel-le-Ferne (Ian Roberts)



Raven at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



Raven at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)

Away from the cliffs two flew north over Botolph's Bridge on the 11<sup>th</sup> January 2010 and one flew over Saltwood Castle on the 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2012, whilst in 2013 one was seen over Lympe churchyard on the 21<sup>st</sup> August, one flew over Botolph's Bridge on the 21<sup>st</sup> September, six were seen over Port Lympe on the 7<sup>th</sup> October and singles were seen over Eaton Lands (Saltwood) on the 24<sup>th</sup> October and Chesterfield Wood on the 1<sup>st</sup> December.

Records became increasing regular from 2014 and there were sightings in 2018 of family groups, perhaps locally bred, at Lympe and Beachborough Park, then in 2020 breeding was confirmed at Lympe (where a pair nested in a large conifer near the church and hatched five young, with four surviving) and near Beachborough Park (where a pair raised three young).

Clements *et al.* had predicted that this species was likely to start using mature conifers in woodland and parkland as nest sites in the county and commented that Ravens are particularly attracted to sheep-farming areas where they scavenge after-births and carrion for their nestlings.

## Overall distribution

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of Raven by tetrad.

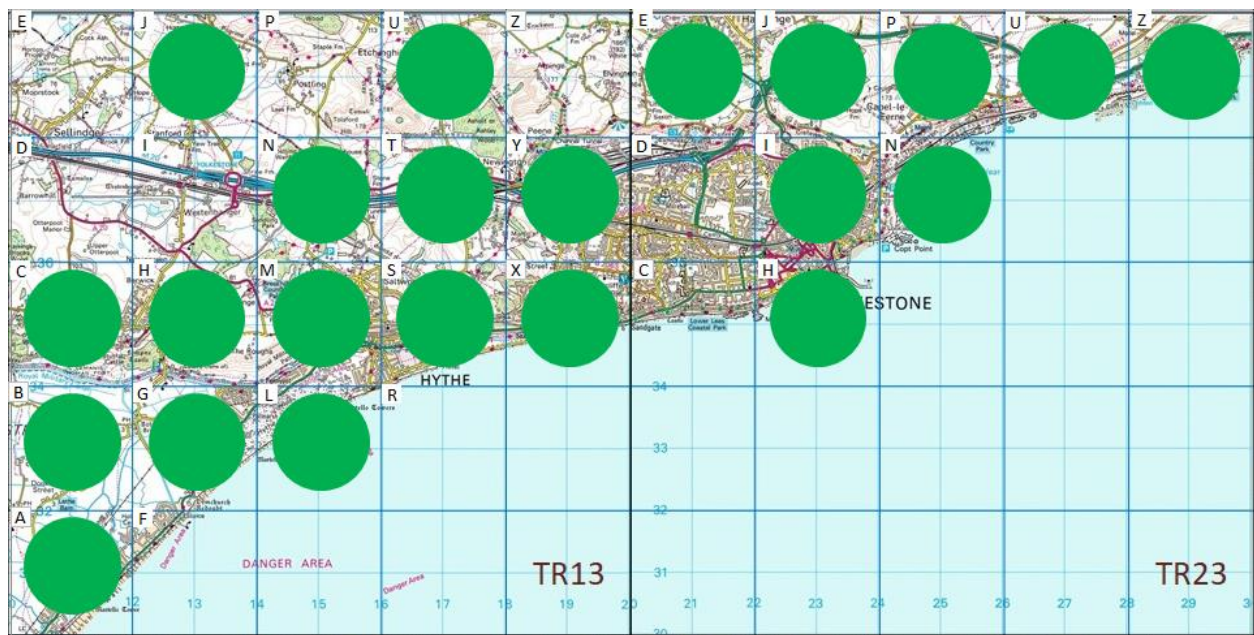


Figure 2: Distribution of all Raven records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Adult Ravens may travel considerable distances to forage for food and some immatures can make extensive movements, leading to records in 22 (71%) tetrads, which may be far from the nearest nesting site. It seems likely that the local population will continue to grow and the distribution of sightings will become ever more widespread.

Most records involve single birds, a pair or a family group (which usually comprises five or six birds) but there have been larger counts of seven at Creteway Down in August 2019, eight at Samphire Hoe in March 2018 and Beachborough Park in June 2018, and nine at Samphire Hoe in January 2016.

Click [here](#) to watch to a local video recording of one at Lympe on the 12<sup>th</sup> April 2020 (Nick Hollands) and [here](#) to listen to an audio recording of one at Lympe on the 28<sup>th</sup> April 2022 (Ian Roberts).



Raven at Lympe (Nick Hollands)



Ravens at Lympe (Phil Sharp)

## 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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Raven nest at Lypne (Phil Sharp)