

Chaffinch

Fringilla coelebs Category A

Breeding resident, winter visitor and passage migrant.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds throughout Europe eastwards across Russia to the Irkutsk region, also in north Africa and introduced to New Zealand and South Africa. Northern and eastern populations migrate to winter within the breeding range in Europe but further south in Asia. Southern and western populations are largely sedentary, with British birds undertaking very little movement.

Kent status (KOS 2021):

In Kent it is a common and widespread resident, also a passage migrant and winter visitor.



Chaffinch at the Dymchurch Redoubt (Brian Harper)

The Chaffinch 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 “a well-distributed resident throughout the county”, that was “extremely abundant and increasing” 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.

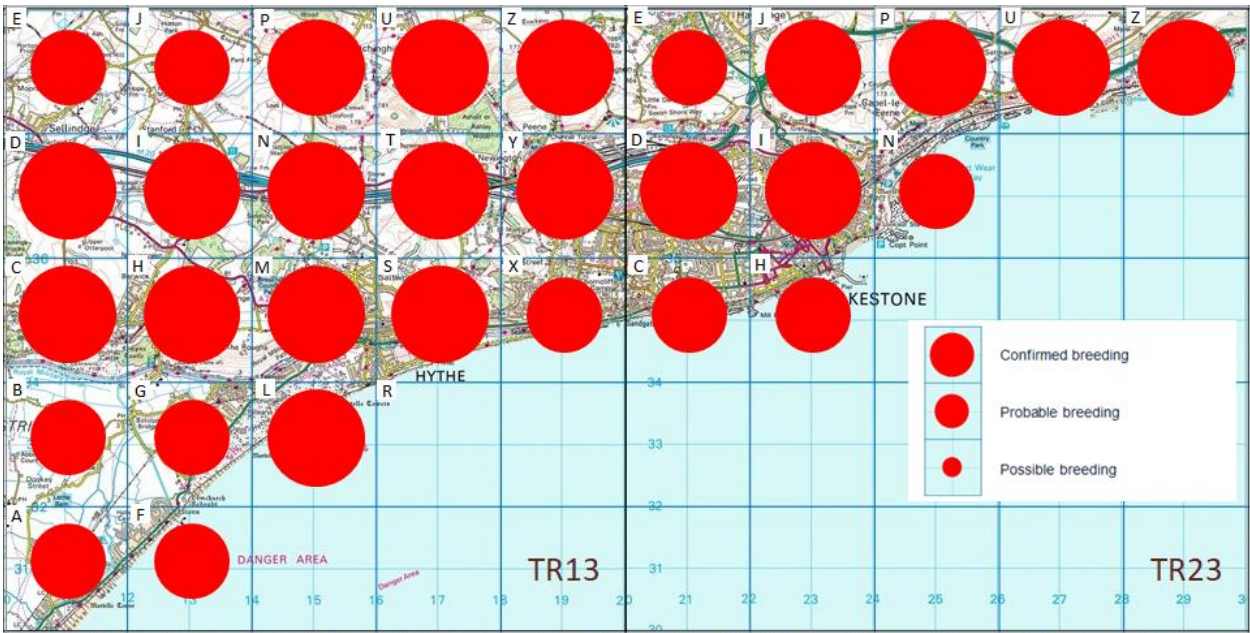


Figure 1: Breeding distribution of Chaffinch at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in 19 tetrads, with probable breeding in 11 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	3	(10%)	1	(3%)	0	(0%)
Probable/Confirmed	20	(65%)	27	(87%)	30	(97%)
Total	23	(74%)	28	(90%)	30	(97%)
Change			+5	(+22%)	+2	(+7%)

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	+22%	+7%	+30%
Kent	+14%	+6%	+21%

Chaffinches reach highest density in mature broad-leaved woodland but are equally at home on farmland and in suburban gardens. In consequence of this adaptability, they have been less affected by agricultural intensification than other finch species (Clements *et al.* 2015). Chaffinch abundance has seen a steady increase since the early 1970s, however the protozoan *Thrichomonas gallinae* appeared among garden-visiting Chaffinches in 2005, since when there have been signs of a decline and the BTO Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) trend for south-east England between 1995 and 2012 showed no net growth over this period.

Despite the population growth between the early 1970s and mid-2000s, Henderson & Hodge considered that the increase between the first and second atlases (14% across the county, 22% locally) was “largely the result of improved coverage”, whilst Clements *et al.* were uncertain whether further gains between the second and third atlases (6% across the county, 7% locally) reflected even better coverage or a real spread into more marginal habitat.

Overall distribution

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

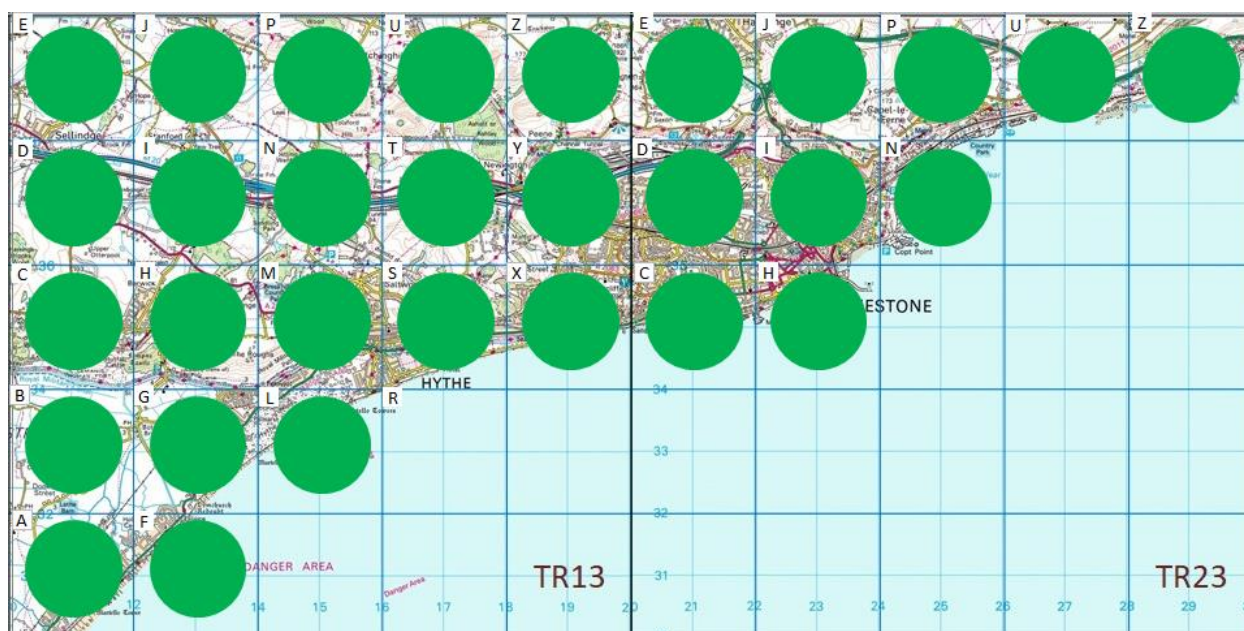


Figure 2: Distribution of all Chaffinch records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Autumn passage may be noted between late September and early November, typically peaking in October. Arrivals of 400 or more have been logged on a number of occasions:

412 in off the sea at Folkestone on the 28th October 1994
 4,189 in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 13th October 1997
 1,078 in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 15th October 1998
 4,333 in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 19th October 1998
 830 in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 20th October 1998
 1,580 in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 1st November 1998
 440 in off the sea at Folkestone Warren on the 5th November 1998
 410 in/west at Abbotscliffe on the 1st November 2001
 1,250 in/west at Abbotscliffe on the 9th October 2003
 528 in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 11th October 2003
 571 in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 29th October 2006
 3,715 in/west at Abbotscliffe on the 4th November 2006
 500 in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 19th October 2011
 910 in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 26th October 2017
 2,875 in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 9th October 2020

Chaffinches are widespread in winter but few large flocks have been reported and counts of 50 or more are noteworthy:

Between 120 and 150 at Uden's Farm, Palmarsh on the 27th December 1957, with c.100 in January 1958
 70 in Folkestone Warren on the 21st November 1971
 60 at Princes Parade on the 4th January 1989
 50 at Princes Parade on the 4th January 1990
 80 at Church Hougham on the 8th November 1996
 50 at Abbotscliffe on the 21st February 2018
 67 at Beachborough Park on the 22nd February 2018
 200 at Beachborough Park on the 15th November 2018, with up to 70 to the 21st November



Chaffinch at West Hythe (Brian Harper)



Chaffinch at West Hythe (Brian Harper)

Spring passage may be noted between late February and mid-April, and typically peaks in March. Since systematic coverage began at Abbotscliffe in the 1990s it has emerged as one of the top sites in the country for observing Chaffinch migration at this season, having produced six of the ten highest counts that have been recorded on *Trektellen.org* (no date). The largest movements are usually associated with north-westerly winds.

Four-figure counts have been recorded in most recent years, with counts of 1,500 or more having been noted as follows:

2,240 east at Hythe Ranges on the 30th March 1958
1,505 east at Capel-le-Ferne Café on the 26th March 2002
1,545 east at Abbotscliffe on the 17th March 2009
2,135 east at Abbotscliffe on the 19th March 2009
2,055 east at Capel-le-Ferne Café on the 14th March 2011
3,035 east at Abbotscliffe on the 19th March 2011
3,145 east at Abbotscliffe on the 27th March 2012
2,550 east at Abbotscliffe on the 17th March 2015
8,190 east at Abbotscliffe on the 18th March 2015
3,605 east at Abbotscliffe on the 20th March 2016
2,850 east at Abbotscliffe on the 21th March 2016
2,490 east at Abbotscliffe on the 31st March 2016
4,655 east at Abbotscliffe on the 13th March 2017
3,075 east at Abbotscliffe on the 25th March 2019
1,570 east at Abbotscliffe on the 16th March 2020
1,845 east at Abbotscliffe on the 30th March 2020
1,640 east at Abbotscliffe on the 31st March 2020
3,200 east at Abbotscliffe on the 7th March 2021
1,715 east at Abbotscliffe on the 15th March 2021
2,480 east at Abbotscliffe on the 17th March 2021
4,875 east at Abbotscliffe on the 18th March 2021
4,335 east at Abbotscliffe on the 20th March 2021
8,190 east at Abbotscliffe on the 21st March 2021



Chaffinches on spring migration at Abbotscliffe (Ian Roberts)

One that had been ringed at Sandling Park by H. Schreiber on the 27th February 1959 was recovered in Belgium on the 5th November 1960.

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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Chaffinch at Saltwood Castle (Brian Harper)



Chaffinch at Seabrook (Brian Harper)