

# Song Thrush

*Turdus philomelos* Category A

Breeding resident, winter visitor and passage migrant.

*World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998; Wernham et al. 2002):*

Breeds across much of Europe, although discontinuously in the very south, eastwards to Lake Baikal, also in northern Iran. Introduced to Australia and New Zealand. Mostly resident in the south and west, but northern populations are partially or entirely migratory, with more birds moving if the weather is severe. Whilst the British population is largely resident, small numbers migrate south to winter in France or Iberia and appreciable numbers from the Low Countries winter in Britain.

*Kent status (KOS 2021):*

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



Song Thrush at West Hythe (Brian Harper)

The Song Thrush 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 “an exceedingly common resident, inhabiting the town gardens as well as the hedgerows, orchards and Woodlands of the countryside. There is no area of the county in which it is not found, and it is equally at home in the thornbushes of the marshlands ... as it is in the leafy lanes of the uplands”, 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.

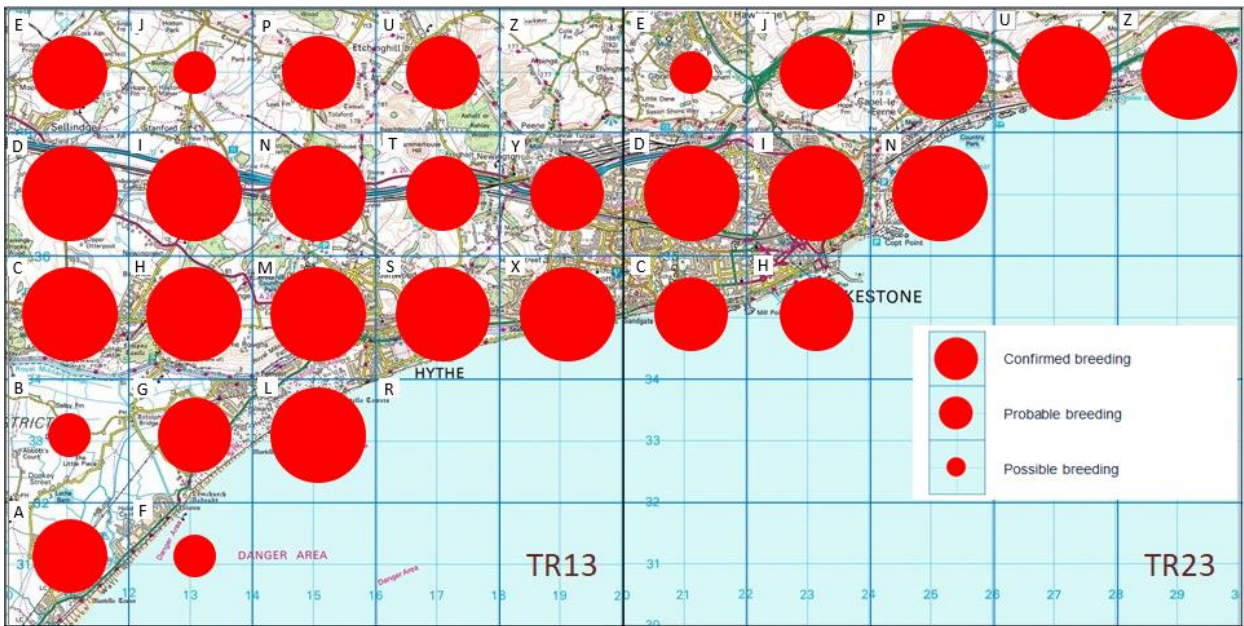


Figure 1: Breeding distribution of Song Thrush at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in 15 tetrads, with probable breeding in ten more and possible breeding in four 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%)	4	(13%)
Probable/Confirmed	27	(87%)	30	(97%)	25	(81%)
Total	28	(90%)	30	(97%)	29	(94%)
Change			+2	(+7%)	-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	+7%	-3%	+4%
Kent	+5%	-2%	+3%

Balmer *et al.* (2013) described an overall population decline of 54% across Britain between 1970 and 2010, although the most recent part of that period (from 1995 to 2010) was characterised by a 13% increase. Historical declines in Britain have been linked to increased mortality during the first year of life; the causes of this are uncertain but likely candidates include changes in farm management, land drainage, pesticide use and predation. Contrary to the national recovery, east and south-east England continued to see a reduction between 1995 and 2010 (of 13% across south-east England). Balmer *et al.* considered that this ongoing decline might be attributable to the increasing dryness of agricultural soils and the loss of grassland from eastern arable counties.

As Clements *et al.* (2015) noted, this decline has been slow to become reflected in the distribution maps, with just a 2% decrease in occupied tetrads across the county between the second and third atlases, and a 3% decrease locally. However there has been a more noticeable decline in the tetrads with confirmed breeding across the same period (16% nationally, 17% locally), which presumably reflects the reduced breeding density.

### Overall distribution

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

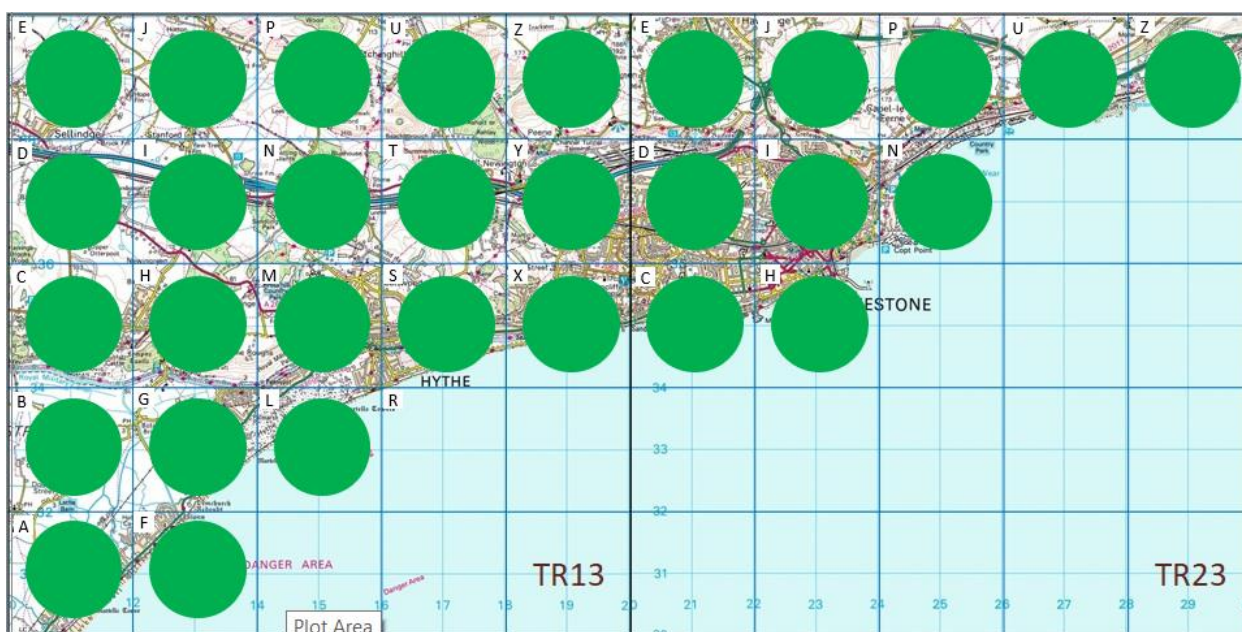


Figure 2: Distribution of all Song Thrush records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad



Autumn passage is usually noted between the last week of September and the first week of November, when counts of 50 or more have been noted on a number of occasions:

100 at Folkestone Warren at dawn on the 30<sup>th</sup> September 1956  
60 at Folkestone Warren on the 29<sup>th</sup> September 1971  
60 at Folkestone Warren on the 20<sup>th</sup> October 1971  
50 at Copt Point on the 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1983  
91 at Folkestone on the 25<sup>th</sup> September 1993  
51 at Capel Battery on the 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1998  
81 at Capel Battery on the 9<sup>th</sup> October 1998  
110 at Crete Road East on the 12<sup>th</sup> October 2013  
240 at Crete Road East on the 12<sup>th</sup> October 2015  
60 over Beachborough Park on the 7<sup>th</sup> October 2016  
55 over Beachborough Park on the 11<sup>th</sup> October 2016  
54 over Beachborough Park on the 26<sup>th</sup> October 2016  
150 at Sene Valley Golf Course and 50 at Abbotscliffe on the 6<sup>th</sup> October 2019



Song Thrush at West Hythe (Brian Harper)

Song Thrushes are also often noted on nocturnal passage in apparently small numbers although movements at night are difficult to quantify.

Good numbers formerly wintered in the damper areas to the north of Nickolls Quarry, with peaks there of 25 in winter 2000/2001 and 20 there in January 2007 but building works there have gradually reduced the suitable habitat. The area between the Botolph's Bridge Road and the Dymchurch Redoubt has also attracted large numbers, with a peak of 26 there in January 2019, whilst the Beachborough Park area has produced counts of 44 in February 2018 and 23 in January 2019. There may also be movements or temporary congregations, often during cold weather, including 30 at Samphire Hoe on the 13<sup>th</sup> January 2010, 21 at Lympne on the 13<sup>th</sup> February 2021 and 23 at West Hythe dam on the 6<sup>th</sup> January 2022.

The Kent Bird Report for 1961 remarked on an instance of early nesting at Folkestone, when a pair were seen nest building on the 14<sup>th</sup> February.

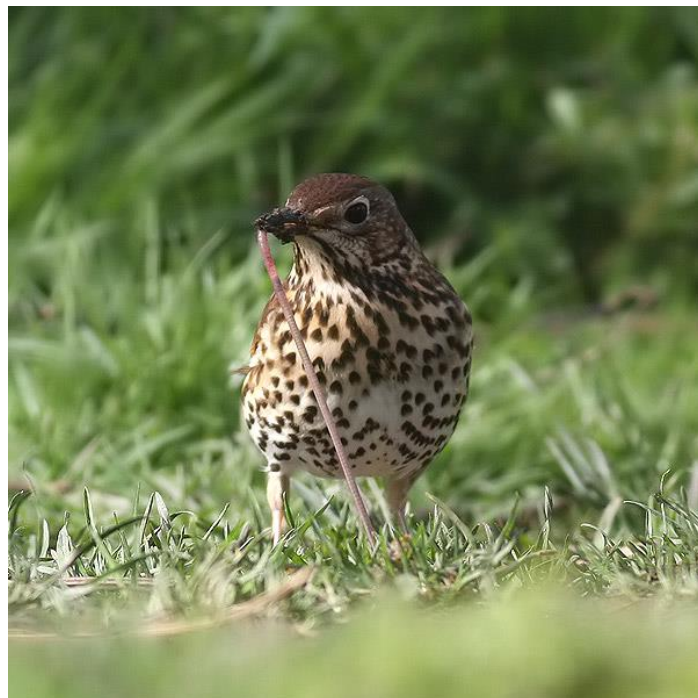
Return passage in March and April is less pronounced and again a proportion will move overnight. Counts in excess of 20 have involved 35 at Hythe Ranges on the 18<sup>th</sup> April 1958 and 27 at Abbotscliffe on the 20<sup>th</sup> April 1992.



The most significant local ringing recovery involved one ringed at Piteå in north-east Sweden on the 28<sup>th</sup> June 1938 and recovered at Folkestone on the 25<sup>th</sup> December 1939, a south-westerly movement of almost 2,000km. Other more localised movements revealed by ringing have comprised one ringed at Seaford in Sussex on the 6<sup>th</sup> March 1947 and recovered at Sellindge on the 9<sup>th</sup> August 1949 (74km NE), and one Dungeness on the 27<sup>th</sup> January 1955 found dead at Hythe on the 15<sup>th</sup> April 1957 (19km NNE).



Song Thrush at West Hythe (Brian Harper)



Song Thrush at West Hythe (Brian Harper)



Song Thrush at West Hythe (Brian Harper)



Song Thrush at West Hythe (Brian Harper)

### **References**

Balmer, D., Gillings, S., Caffrey, B., Swann, B., Downie, I & Fuller, R. 2013. *Bird Atlas 2007-11: The Breeding and Wintering Birds of Britain and Ireland*. British Trust for Ornithology.

Clements, R., Orchard, M., McCanch, N. & Wood, S. 2015. *Kent Breeding Bird Atlas 2008-13*. Kent Ornithological Society.

Harrison, J. M. 1953. *The Birds of Kent*. Witherby, London.

Henderson, A. & Hodge, T. 1998. The Kent Breeding Bird Atlas 1988-94. *Kent Bird Report 1996*: 134-272.

Kent Ornithological Society (KOS). 1953-2021. *Kent Bird Reports*. Kent Ornithological Society.

Knight, V. & Tolputt, F. 1871. List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood. *Fourth Annual Report of the Folkestone Natural History Society*. Available at: [www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/46103](http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/46103)

Snow, D. & Perrins, C.M. 1998. *The Birds of the Western Palearctic*. Oxford University Press.

Taylor, D., Davenport, D. & Flegg, J. 1981. *Birds of Kent*. Kent Ornithological Society.

Ticehurst, N. F. 1909. *A History of the Birds of Kent*. Witherby, London.

Wernham, C. V., Toms, M. P., Marchant, J. H., Clark, J. A., Sitiwardena, G. M. & Baillie, S. R. (eds). 2002. *The Migration Atlas: movements of the birds of Britain and Ireland*. T. & A. D. Poyser, London.

### **Acknowledgements**

The tetrad map images were produced from the Ordnance Survey [Get-a-map service](#) and are reproduced with kind permission of [Ordnance Survey](#). I am indebted to Andrew Henderson and Tim Hodge for providing access to the Kent Ornithological Society archives.





Song Thrush at West Hythe (Brian Harper)