

Hawfinch

Coccothraustes coccothraustes Category A

Rare migrant and winter visitor. 20 records

Well-distributed across Europe, only really being absent from Ireland and more northern areas such as northern Scotland, northern Fenno-Scandia and northern Russia. The northern populations migrate more than the southern ones which are largely sedentary. Juveniles migrate more than adults, and females more than males.

Many birds move south-west across Europe, and winter chiefly in southern France, north-east Spain, northern and central Italy and the Balkans. Some cross the Mediterranean Sea to the Balearic Islands, Sardinia and Corsica (Snow & Perrins 1998).



Hawfinch at Burmarsh (Brian Harper)

The Hawfinch has been in steep decline across Britain in recent years and the Rare Breeding Birds Panel has been monitoring the species since 2006 (Holling *et al.* 2009). In Kent it is a thinly distributed resident in suitable woodlands primarily on the North Downs, with occasional coastal migrants. It favours mature deciduous woodland, with hornbeam, beech, sycamore and similar species, and shows a preference for cherry and damson orchards in the winter months (KOS 2020; Taylor *et al.* 1981).

It was first recorded on the 27th October 1956 when F. R. Wise saw one “flying in from the direction of the sea during a big immigration of starlings, finches etc. It was following a party of Chaffinches and passed within six feet of the observer, flying close to the ground”. He had “excellent views of it and also heard the flight call”.

The next record occurred on the 13th November 1965 when Geoffrey Munns saw one at “New Inn Green, near Hythe” (Newingreen).

In 1989 two were seen at Brockhill Country Park on the 31st January, and three were reported there in February, and there have been 17 subsequent records, all since 1990, as shown by year in figure 1.

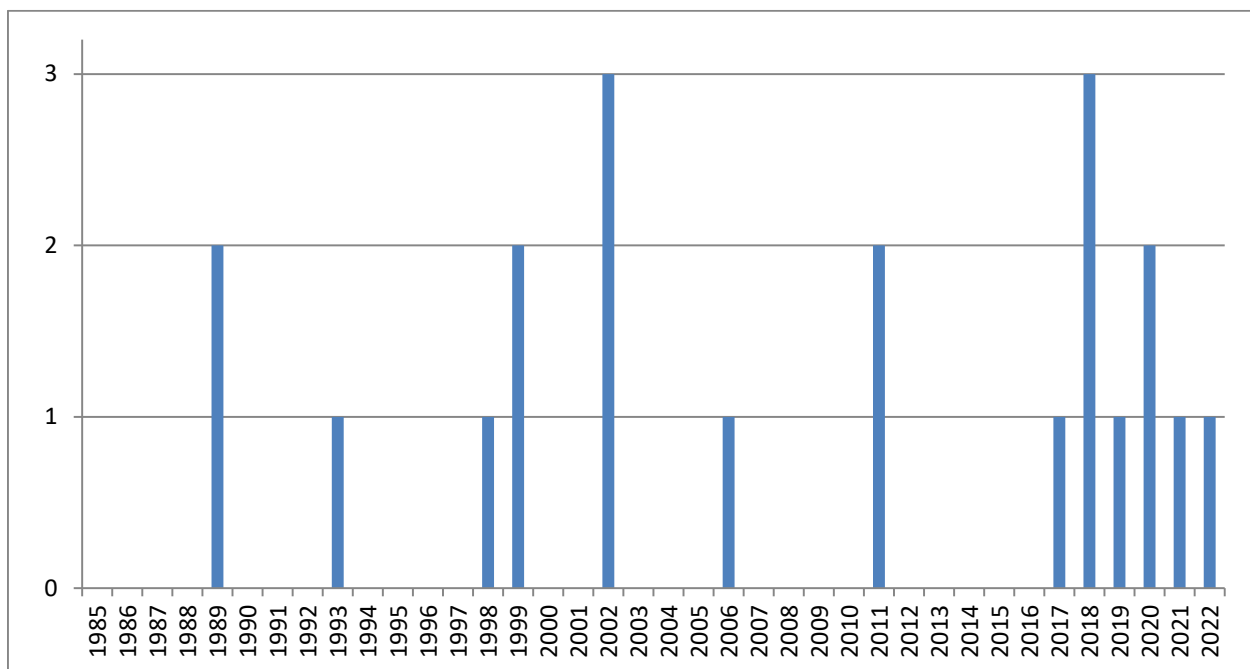


Figure 1: Hawfinch records at Folkestone and Hythe since 1985

The records by week are given in figure 2 and figure 3 shows the distribution of records by tetrad.

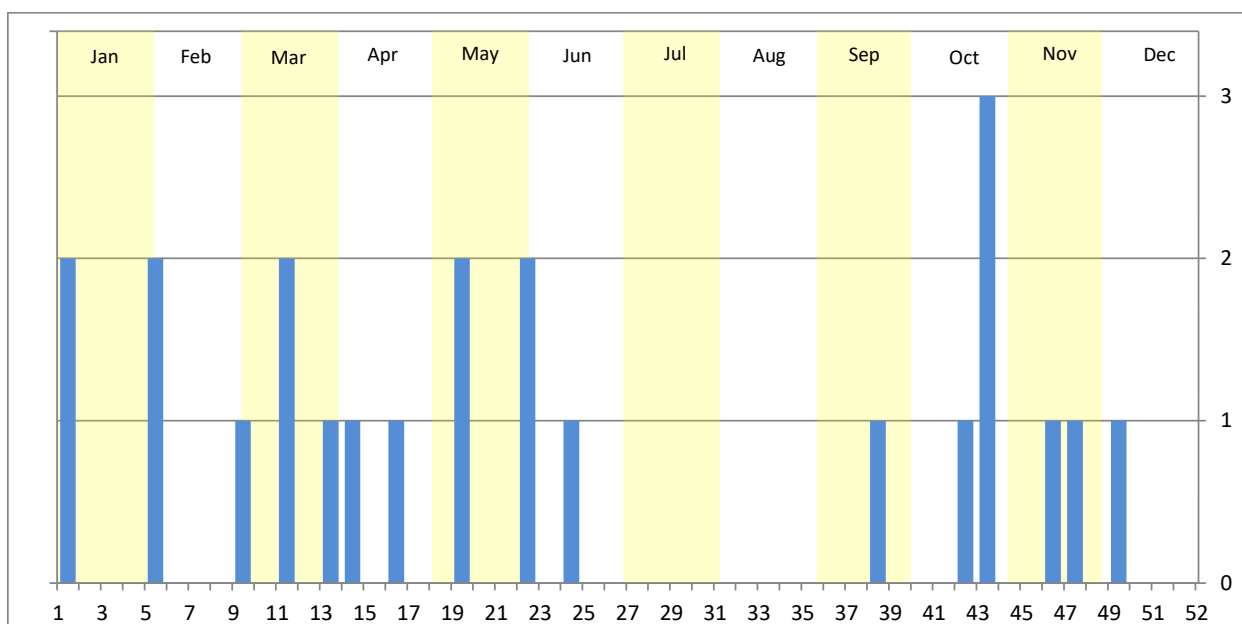


Figure 2: Hawfinch records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

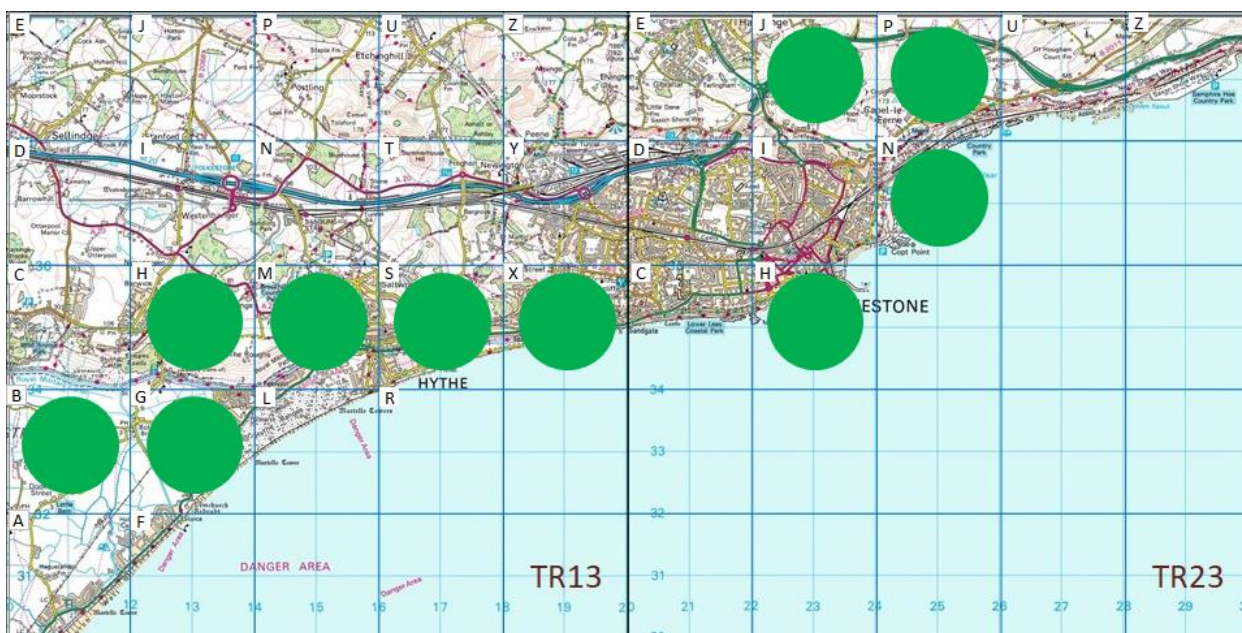


Figure 3: Distribution of all Hawfinch records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Since 1990 there have been five records from Capel-le-Ferne (between 1993 and 2006), with others at nearby Creteway Down (in October 2017) and Copt Point (in September 2020), and three at Nickolls Quarry (two in late 2002 and one in October 2019). One was seen flying east along the top of Hythe Roughs in January 2011, there were three records during a national irruption in 2018, with one at a garden feeder in Saltwood on the 12th March, two in a garden in central Folkestone on the 17th March and a pair at Horn Street on the 18th October. One was seen in Burmarsh Churchyard on the 3rd March 2020, with one seen briefly at Saltwood before it flew north on the 30th March 2021 and one visited a garden pond in Folkestone on the 17th April 2022.

Records have been well distributed by month with records in all except July and August.

The full list of records is as follows:

1956 Folkestone, one flew in off sea, 27th October (F. R. Wise)

1965 Newingreen, one at "New Inn Green, near Hythe" 13th November (G. F. A. Munns)

1989 Brockhill CP, two, 31st January (I. A. Roberts), with three reported in February

- 1993** Capel-le-Ferne Café, one flew east, 16th June (D. A. Gibson)
1998 Capel-le-Ferne Gun Site, one flew east, 10th May (D. A. Gibson)
1999 Capel-le-Ferne Gun Site, one flew in/east, 1st June (I. A. Roberts), presumed same flew east again there the following day (D. A. Gibson)
2002 Capel-le-Ferne, one, 11th May (D. A. Gibson)
2002 Nickolls Quarry, one flew north, 25th November (I. A. Roberts)
2002 Nickolls Quarry, one, 5th December (R. K. Norman), possibly same as above
2006 Capel-le-Ferne Gun Site, two, then flew east, 2nd April (I. A. Roberts)
2011 Hythe Roughs, one flew east, 13th January (I. A. Roberts)
2017 Creteaway Down, three flew over, 27th October (B. Harper)
2018 Saltwood, one, 12th March (G. Cooke)
2018 Folkestone, two, 17th March (C. & J. Tomlinson)
2018 Horn Street, pair, 18th October (P. Howe)
2019 Nickolls Quarry, one, 22nd October (R. K. Norman)
2020 Burmarsh Churchyard, one, 3rd March, photographed (B. Harper)
2020 Copt Point, one, 22nd September (D. A. Gibson)
2021 Saltwood, one then flew north, 30th March (S. Clancy)
2022 Folkestone, one, 17th April (C. & J. Tomlinson)

References

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Acknowledgements

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Hawfinch at Folkestone (John Tomlinson)