

Tawny Owl

Strix aluco

Category A

Breeding resident.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Widespread across most of Europe, absent only from Ireland and the far north, and eastwards discontinuously to China and Korea, south to northern Iran and the Himalayas. Breeding adults sedentary, remaining in territory all year. Juveniles disperse in August to November and will either replace a dead adult in a territory or starve and die.

Kent status (KOS 2021):

In Kent it is a widespread but under-recorded breeding species.



Tawny Owl at Newington (Garry Blackburn)

The Tawny Owl 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 "of general distribution in all suitable localities", whilst "on many of the estates and large parks where there is old timber affording suitable nesting places, these birds are quite abundant", so there can be little doubt that it was to be found locally.

Harrison (1953) gained the impression that this species was taken for granted in much of the county and therefore under-recorded, though the absence of records from the north Kent marshes and Romney Marsh was probably genuine. Taylor *et al.* (1981) stated that the picture had changed little and, probably due to its nocturnal habits, it is in most years grossly under-recorded. However, they considered that the 1967-1973 atlas had tended to redress the balance, and that the Tawny Owl had been reported from all suitable mature woodland and found in nearly one third of all tetrads (which the local results mirrored exactly).

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 Tawny Owl at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in one tetrad, with probable breeding in two more and possible breeding in six 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.

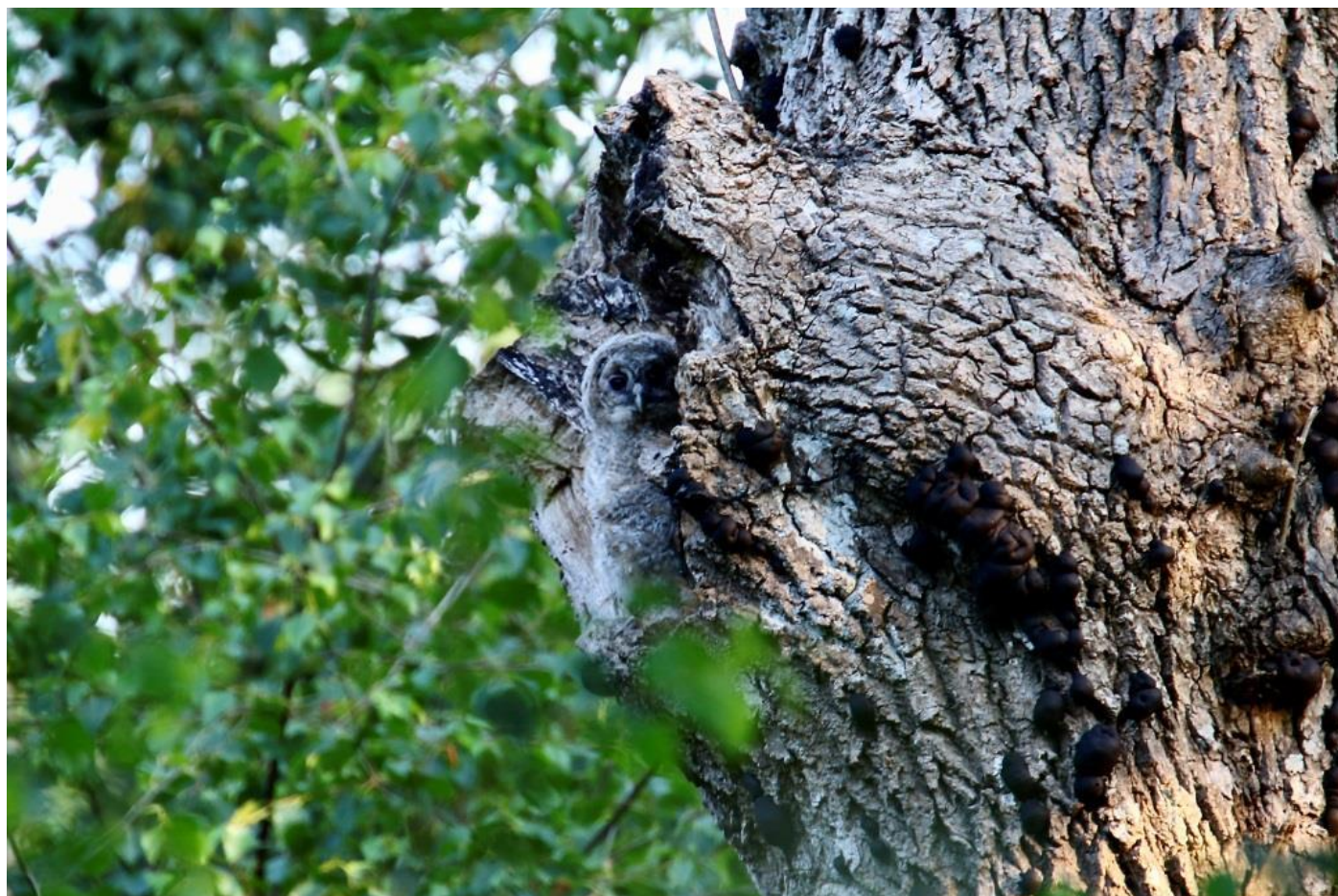
Breeding atlases	1967 - 1973		1988 - 1994		2007 - 2013	
Possible	5	(16%)	2	(6%)	6	(19%)
Probable/Confirmed	5	(16%)	7	(23%)	3	(10%)
Total	10	(32%)	9	(29%)	9	(29%)
Change			-1	(-10%)	0	(0%)

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	-10%	0%	-10%
Kent	-2%	+2%	0%

As Taylor *et al* stated when reviewing the results of the county atlas, the high proportion of possible and probable breeding records show how difficult it is to establish proof of successful nesting.

The first documented local occurrence was in 1949 when Roger Norman and Brian Uden found a nest in an old elm tree off Barrack Hill. Roger recalled that “Brian was lucky not to have his eye damaged as the bird hurtled out when he put his hand down the hole” (pers. comm.).



Tawny Owl at Folks' Wood (Phil Sharp)

Overall distribution

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of Tawny Owl by tetrad, with records in 21 tetrads (68%).

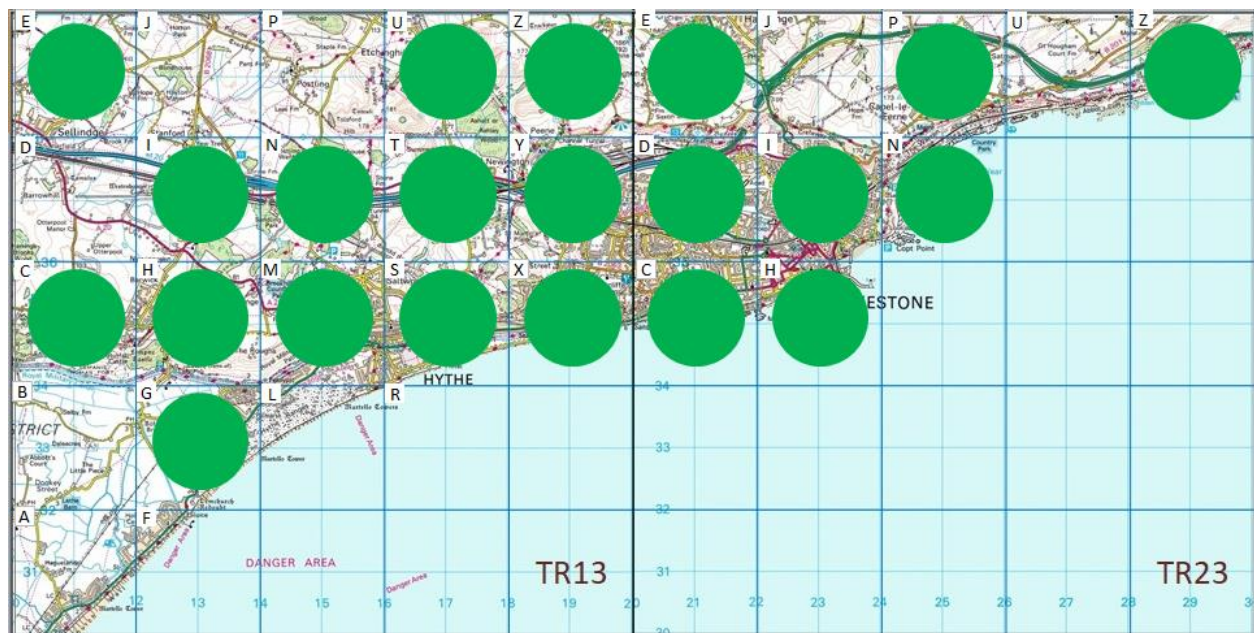


Figure 2: Distribution of all Tawny Owl records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

It has been recorded from just about all tetrads with any area of mature trees, in rural and urban areas, and is probably only genuinely absent from the open areas of marshland (TR13 A, B and F) and shingle (TR13 L and R). Improved nocturnal coverage of the other tetrads would probably complete at least some of the gaps.



Tawny Owl at Saltwood Castle (Brian Harper)



Tawny Owl at Hythe (Brian Harper)

References

- 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

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

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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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