

Black-headed Gull

Chroicocephalus ridibundus

Category A

Winter visitor and passage migrant.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds across upper and middle latitudes of Europe eastwards through northern Asia to Kamchatka and Ussuriland, also in Greenland and Newfoundland. It is mainly migratory to the east and north of the zone of winter freezing, dispersive or partially migratory elsewhere. The winter range extends south to western Africa and the Middle East.

Kent status (Clements et al. 2015; KOS 2021):

In Kent it breeds mainly around the Medway and Swale estuaries, with smaller numbers at Dungeness. The total county breeding population has been estimated at between 5,000 and 10,000 pairs. Elsewhere it is a common and widespread passage migrant and winter visitor.



Black-headed Gull at Seabrook (Brian Harper)

The Black-headed Gull 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) wrote that "along the whole of the Kent coast Black-headed Gulls are numerous in small and large flocks from the beginning of July until the end of February", so there can be little doubt that it was to be found locally.

Its status has changed little, and large numbers are present outside of the breeding season, whilst it is uncommon in summer as the nearest breeding population is at Dungeness.

Overall distribution

Figure 1 shows the distribution of all records of Black-headed Gull by tetrad, with records in 31 tetrads (100%).

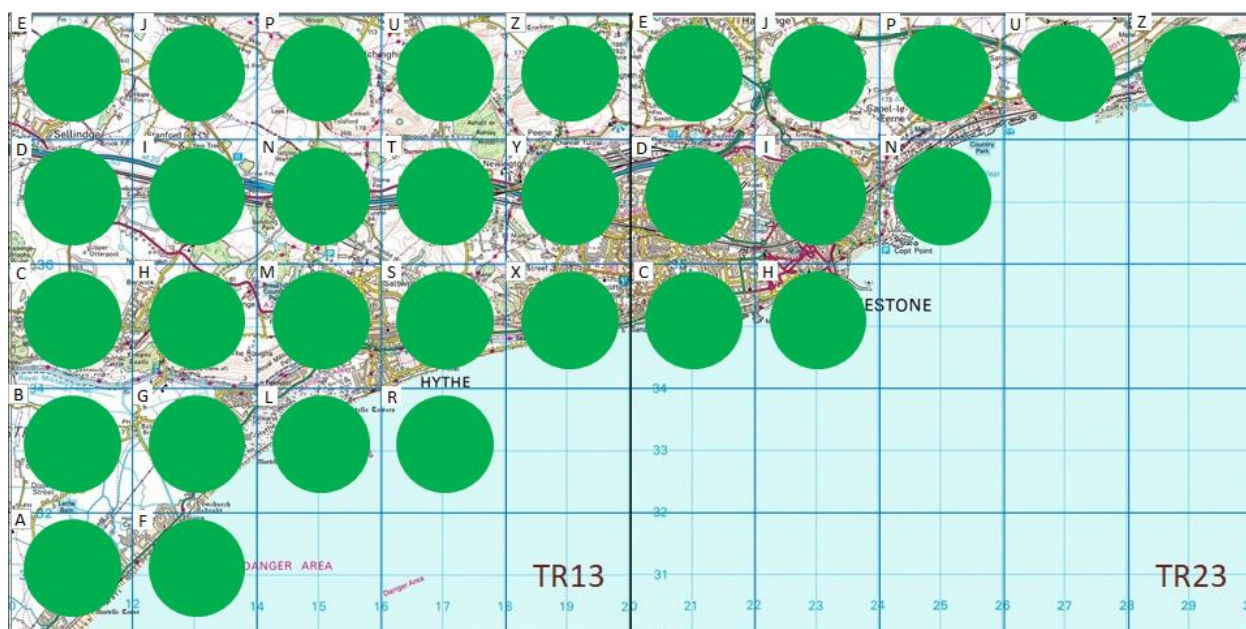


Figure 1: Distribution of all Black-headed Gull records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Four figure counts can be recorded as early as August, when at least 1,500 were seen in the Botolph's Bridge area on the 11th August 2000 and numbers increase during September, with a peak of 3,800 at Copt Point on the 15th September 1988.

Counts of 1,000 or more are not infrequent in the winter months although this species is often taken for granted and roosts are rarely counted. Congregations of 1,500 or more have been noted on a number of occasions:

5,000 at Hythe in January 1982
2,000 at Nickolls Quarry on the 14th February 1994
2,000 at Copt Point on the 10th December 1996
2,500+ at Copt Point on the 28th January 1998
2,000 at Copt Point on the 11th February 1998
2,000 at the Dymchurch Redoubt on the 1st November 1998
2,000 at Copt Point on the 16th January 1999
1,500 between Pedlinge and Lympne on the 12th March 2000
2,800 at Palmarsh on the 10th February 2001
2,710 off Hythe on the 17th January 2004
1,500 at Nickolls Quarry on the 1st December 2010

Spring passage can be quite pronounced between mid-March and mid-May, with movements of 200 or more logged on several occasions:

520 east past Mill Point on the 25th April 1990
230 east past Mill Point on the 4th May 1990
260 east past Mill Point on the 5th May 1990
200 east past Mill Point on the 18th March 1991
200 east past Mill Point on the 29th March 1991
650 east past Mill Point on the 10th May 1991
300 east past Abbotscliffe on the 19th March 1992
373 east past Mill Point on the 21st March 2016
290 east past Samphire Hoe on the 22nd April 2019
603 east past Hythe Ranges on the 27th March 2020
460 east past Samphire Hoe on the 21st March 2021

Ringling recoveries have included birds from the Czech Republic and Lithuania.



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Black-headed Gull at Folkestone Warren (Brian Harper)

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](#).

I am indebted to Andrew Henderson and Tim Hodge for providing access to the Kent Ornithological Society archives.