

Coal Tit

Periparus ater

Category A

Breeding resident and passage migrant.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds across much of Europe and Asia. In Europe it is sedentary in the south and west of its range, but eruptive, sometimes in very large numbers, over much of the remainder. Eruptions may involve a large part of the breeding area, or only isolated populations, and birds head chiefly west or south-west. During eruptions, continental birds regularly reach Britain. Eruptions usually peak in the second half of September, continuing to the end of October or early November, with a return passage between March and May.

Kent status (KOS 2021):

In Kent it is a widespread resident species and passage migrant in small numbers.



Coal Tit at Saltwood Castle (Brian Harper)

The Coal Tit 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 "generally, but locally, distributed throughout the county", 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.

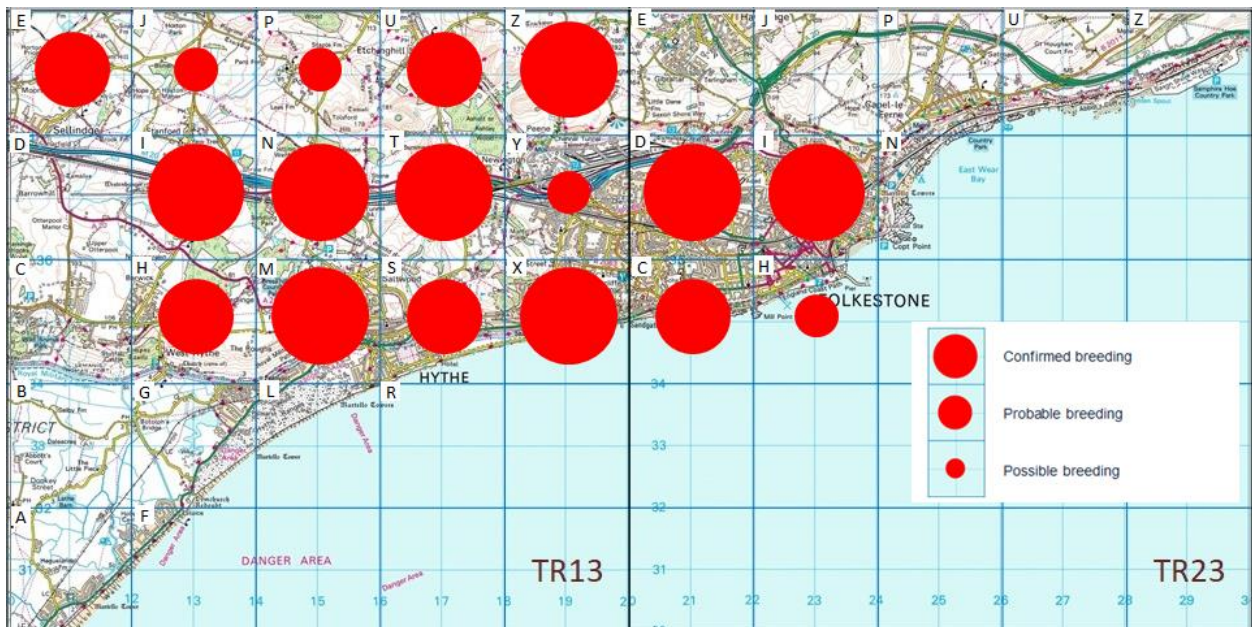


Figure 1: Breeding distribution of Coal Tit at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in eight tetrads, with probable breeding in five 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.

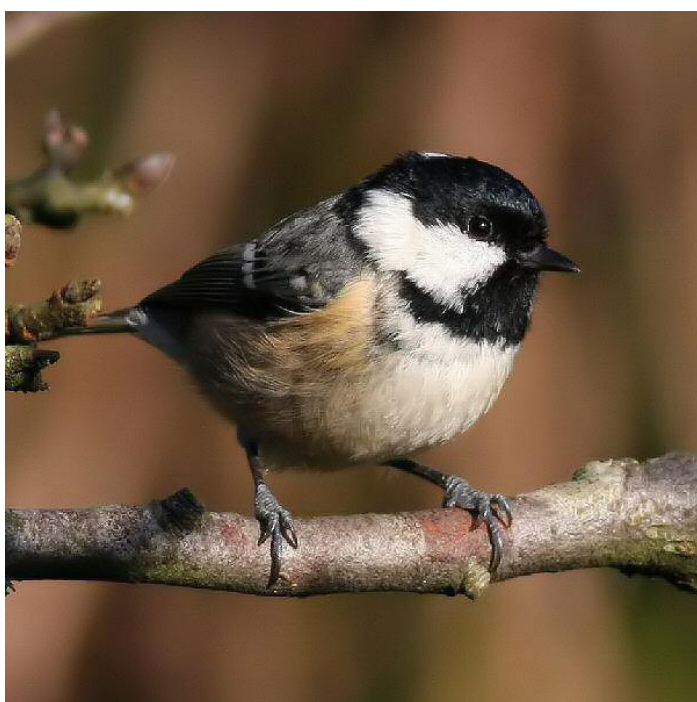
Breeding atlases	1967 - 1973		1988 - 1994		2007 - 2013	
Possible	0	(0%)	4	(13%)	4	(13%)
Probable/Confirmed	8	(26%)	10	(32%)	13	(42%)
Total	8	(26%)	14	(45%)	17	(55%)
Change			+6	(+75%)	+3	(+21%)

The table below shows the changes in tetrad occupancy across the three atlas periods.

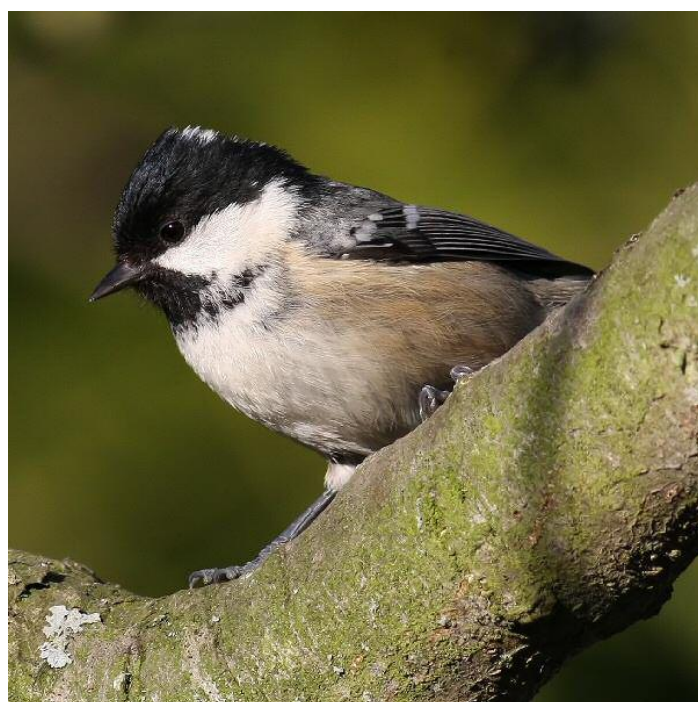
Trends	First to second atlas (1967-73 to 1988-94)	Second to third atlas (1988-94 to 2007-13)	First to third atlas (1967-73 to 2007-13)
Local	+75%	+21%	+113%
Kent	+24%	-9%	+13%

Clements *et al.* (2015) wrote that there was little evidence that the status of the Coal Tit had changed little since the second Kent atlas and that they remain concentrated in coniferous and mixed woodland in the Weald and along the North Downs, but breeding pairs may be found in gardens, churchyards and cemeteries, wherever conifers or yews are present. However, as Henderson & Hodge noted, it is largely absent from the north Kent marshes, Thanet, the Stour marshes and Romney Marsh.

At a county level there was an increase in occupied tetrads of 24% between the first and second atlases, followed by a 9% decrease between the second and third, so the continued apparent spread locally is puzzling and may be attributable to improved coverage.



Coal Tit at Saltwood Castle (Brian Harper)



Coal Tit at Saltwood Castle (Brian Harper)



Coal Tit at Samphire Hoe (Paul Holt)



Coal Tit at Sandling (Brian Harper)

Overall distribution

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of Coal Tit by tetrad, with records in 27 tetrads (87%).

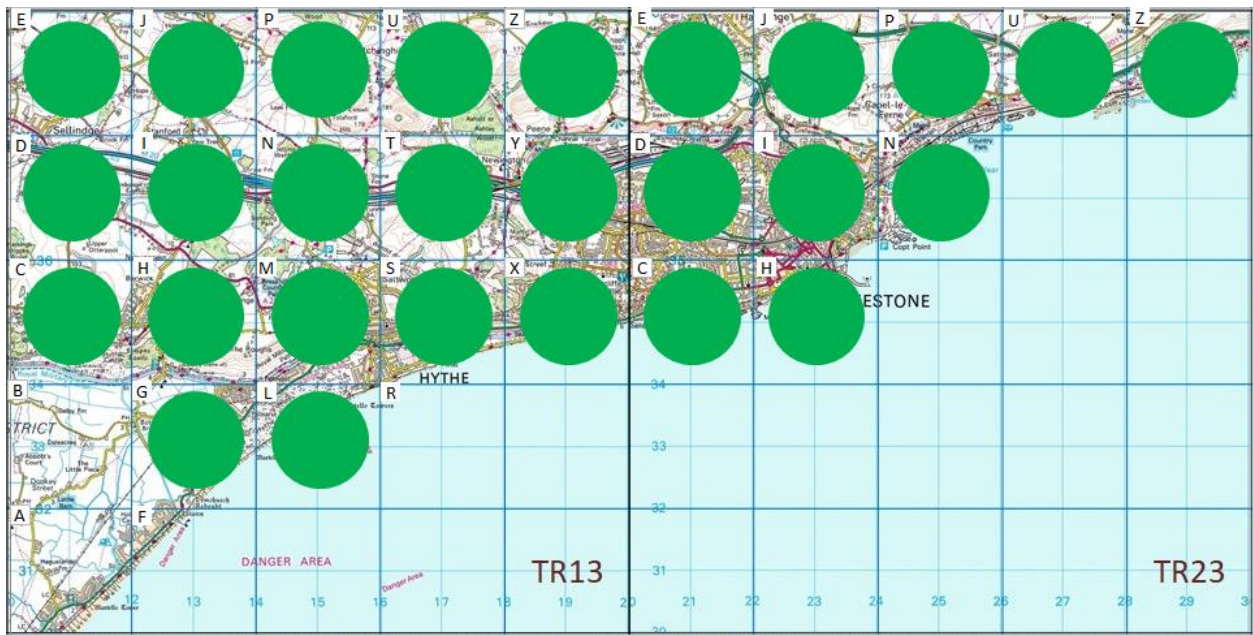


Figure 2: Distribution of all Coal Tit records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Continental Coal Tit

Periparus ater ater

The form that breeds in Britain is *P. a. britannicus*, whilst most of its European range is occupied by the nominate continental form *P. a. ater*. Passage migrants often involve birds showing characteristics of the continental form and occur in varying numbers, with occasional eruptions. Autumn arrivals tend to occur between mid- September and early November. The first observation of migration was recorded by Roger Norman in 1957, when there was “a marked passage in coastal localities [in Britain] from mid-September to late October and it was in this period that the only bird recorded at Nickolls Quarry in the 1950s was seen”, whilst he also noted “several in scrub at Hythe Ranges” between the 9th and 13th October (Norman 2006; 2007). An individual of the continental race at Folkestone in autumn 1961 was included in the Kent Bird Report for that year.

There were no further reports until 1988, when there were two continental race birds at Copt Point on the 30th September and two possibly of this form at Mill Point on the 3rd October.



Coal Tit at Abbotscliffe (Ian Roberts)



Coal Tit at Samphire Hoe (Ian Roberts)

There was an exceptional influx of continental birds in September 1996, with three on the 17th, increasing to a record total of 49 at coastal sites on the 18th, 38 the next day, 30 on the 20th and 20 on the 21st, with a further six in September and six in October. It was estimated that around 100 individuals were involved overall.

Since 2000 there have been sightings of birds apparently of the continental form in nine autumns as follows:

- 2001: one at Abbotscliffe on the 17th October
- 2003: four at Capel-le-Ferne in late October/early November
- 2005: three at Samphire Hoe in late September/early October
- 2007: one at Samphire Hoe on the 7th October
- 2008: five at Samphire Hoe in October/early November
- 2010: three at Samphire Hoe and three at Abbotscliffe in late September/October
- 2012: one at Samphire Hoe and two at Capel-le-Ferne in October
- 2015: one at Capel-le-Ferne on the October
- 2017: seven at coastal sites in October/early November

A return passage may be witnessed between March and May. On the 29th May 1973 P. Want saw 12 in Folkestone Warren that "looked like continental birds" and in 1998 there was one at Capel Battery on the 7th April and two at Copt Point on the 9th May.

Since 2000 there have been sightings of birds apparently of the continental form in seven springs as follows:

- 2004: two at Capel Battery on the 12th April
- 2006: one at Capel-le-Ferne on the 22nd March, one at Capel Battery on the 2nd April, up to four at Samphire Hoe between the 1st and 5th April
- 2008: three at Samphire Hoe on the 2nd April, one there on the 3rd, three there on the 6th and one there on the 12th April
- 2009: two at Capel-le-Ferne on the 21st March and two at Samphire Hoe on the 22nd March
- 2012: one at Capel-le-Ferne on the 19th March
- 2016: one at Abbotscliffe and three at Samphire Hoe on the 31st March, two at Seabrook and four at Mill Point on the 3rd April, two at Abbotscliffe on the 5th April, one at Hythe seafront on the 8th April and one at Samphire Hoe on the 1st May
- 2018: four at Folkestone Warren on the 25th March

In 1990 a pair that bred at Mill Point were considered by John Hollyer to show characteristics of the continental form.

References

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Coal Tit at Saltwood Castle (Brian Harper)



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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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