

Bullfinch

Pyrrhula pyrrhula

Category A

Breeding resident.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds across middle and northern latitudes in Europe eastwards through Asia to Kamchatka, Sakhalin Island and Japan. Most populations are probably partially migratory, wintering chiefly within the breeding range but also south to the Mediterranean. Some northern birds (mainly from Russia) move longer distances and may also be an eruptive migrant.



Bullfinch at West Hythe (Brian Harper)

Kent status (KOS 2021):

In Kent it is a widespread resident that is dispersive in autumn.

The Bullfinch 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 "numerous and generally distributed throughout those districts which are wooded or possess large gardens and orchards", so there can be little doubt that it was to be found locally. Ticehurst also made an incidental reference to the species in association with a Great Grey Shrike that was caught in Folkestone Warren in the winter of 1903 of by some boys, "who were liming Bullfinches on the Warren".

Breeding atlas distribution

Figure 1 shows the breeding distribution by tetrad based on the results of the 2007-13 BTO/KOS atlas fieldwork.

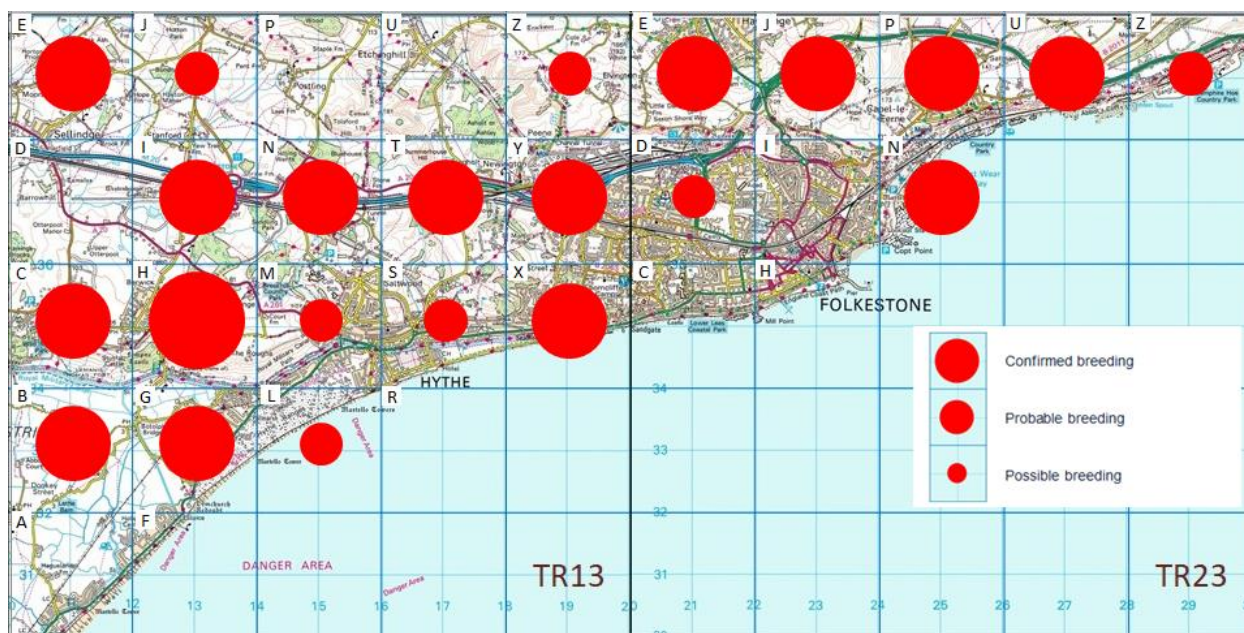


Figure 1: Breeding distribution of Bullfinch at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in one tetrad, with probable breeding in 14 more and possible breeding in seven 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	4	(13%)	4	(13%)	7	(23%)
Probable/Confirmed	20	(65%)	17	(55%)	15	(48%)
Total	24	(77%)	21	(68%)	22	(71%)
Change			-3	(-13%)	+1	(+5%)

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	-13%	+5%	-8%
Kent	+14%	+6%	+21%

Clements *et al.* (2015) noted that proving breeding is difficult as this species is easily over-looked during the breeding season, so a high proportion of records refer to possible or probable breeding. Clements *et al.* also remarked on a 26% decline in occupied tetrads across the county between the second and third atlases and a decline in population of 34% across south-east England between 1995 and 2012 (based on BTO Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) trends), which was considered to be linked to agricultural intensification and the clearance of scrub and hedgerows.

However, the retraction in range has mainly been evident in north Kent, from Gravesend to Thanet and it remains well-distributed in Kent, with no indication of range contraction locally. It may be that whilst its range has remained similar locally this could have masked a reduction in population but there have been few estimates of breeding numbers made, although Neil Frampton thought that there were probably in excess of 20 pairs along the Royal Military Canal between the Aldergate Bridge and Hythe in the early 1980s which appears to be higher than the current density.



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Locally it has been found in the breeding season in 71% of tetrads, with absences from two tetrads along the North Downs (TR13 P and TR13 U), three urban tetrads in Folkestone (TR23 C, TR23 H and TR23 I) and two on the marsh (TR13 A and TR13 F). It was possibly overlooked in the first five of these as there have been records here at other times but its absence from the Romney Marsh appears to be genuine and was also noted by Clements *et al.*

Overall distribution

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of Bullfinch by tetrad, with records in 28 tetrads (90%).

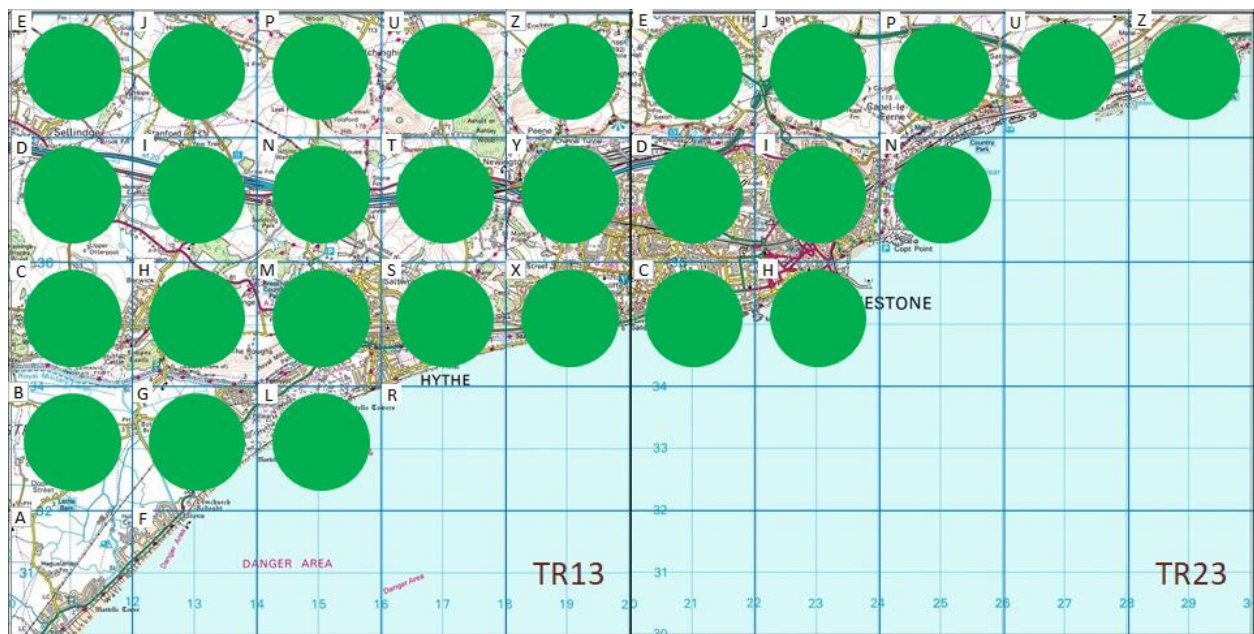
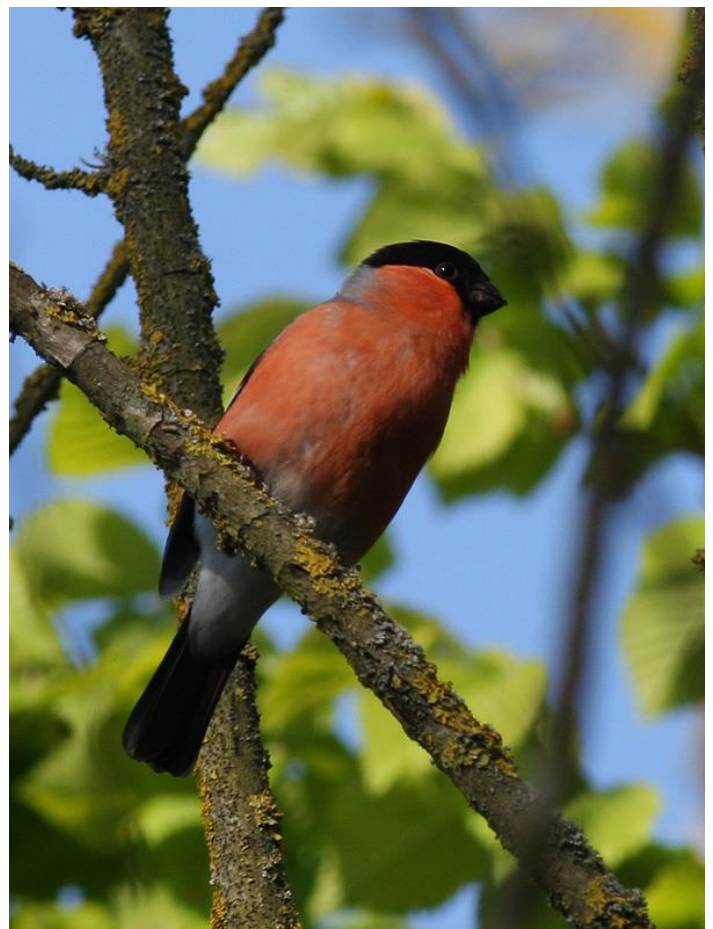


Figure 2: Distribution of all Bullfinch records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The Kent Bird Report for 1968 noted a “westerly movement reported at Hythe from the 9th to 11th January, with over 50 on the 11th”, whilst the report for 1971 mentions a total of 17 at Folkestone Warren on the 21st November 1971 and the KOS database holds a record of 50 at Folkestone Warren on the 25th January 1981. These far exceed any recent counts.



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Most indications of migration or dispersal have been from the cliffs, where small numbers (usually up to three) may be seen moving in some years in late October or early November.

There has been little indication of spring movement, although a pair appeared to fly out to sea from Capel-le-Ferne Café on the 19th March 2005 and a pair flew east at Abbotscliffe on the 31st March 2016.

A female ringed by H. Schreiber at Sandling Park on the 20th December 1961 was found dead at Bedford (155km to the north-west) on the 3rd May 1962.

Click [here](#) to listen to a local audio recording of one calling at Bartholomew's Wood on the 21st June 2022 (Ian Roberts).

Northern Bullfinch and Continental Bullfinch

Pyrrhula pyrrhula pyrrhula and *P. p. europaea*

There was a notable passage of Bullfinches in autumn 2005, when two flew west at Abbotscliffe on the 23rd October, two flew west at Capel-le-Ferne Café on the 4th November, six flew west at Abbotscliffe the next day and one flew east there on the 13th November. These were part of a large influx into the county, which included counts of 34 at Dungeness on the 4th November and 166 at Reculver the following day. The origin of this arrival remains unclear: some of the Dungeness birds were heard to utter the “trumpet” calls associated with the northern, nominate form *P. p. pyrrhula* whereas some of the Reculver birds were trapped and considered to be of the near-continental form *P. p. europaea*.

A male at Capel-le-Ferne Orchid Field on the 8th November 2002 and three (two males and a female) there on the 7th November 2004 were also considered to have shown characteristics of one of the continental forms.



Bullfinch at Palmarsh (Esther Preedy)



Bullfinch at West Hythe (David Gower)

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](#).

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