

# Reed Warbler

*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

Category A

Breeding summer visitor and passage migrant.

*World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):*

Breeds across middle latitudes of Europe eastwards to Altai in southern Siberia and south to Iran. Winters in Africa south of the Sahara.

*Kent status (KOS 2021):*

It is a locally numerous and increasing summer visitor and passage migrant in Kent.



Reed Warbler at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)

The Reed Warbler 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) found that "in suitable localities ... it is generally distributed in summer and is in places particularly abundant". He further noted that "in Romney Marsh it is specially numerous in like localities from the Military Canal to within a few yards of the sea", so there can be little doubt that it has long inhabited the local section of the canal and the marsh, as well as other suitable habitats.

## 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 Reed Warbler at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in six tetrads, with probable breeding in five more and possible breeding in two 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	1	(3%)	1	(3%)	2	(6%)
Probable/Confirmed	4	(13%)	12	(39%)	11	(35%)
Total	5	(16%)	13	(42%)	13	(42%)
Change			+8	(+160%)	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	+160%	0%	+160%
Kent	+67%	+3%	+71%

This species strongly favours *Phragmites* in reed beds, along riverbanks, around gravel pits and in lowland ditch systems and most of the local population is concentrated along the Royal Military Canal and on Romney Marsh to the south, where it can be found in some density.

Population estimates have included up to 35 pairs along the canal between the Aldergate Bridge and Hythe, up to 35 pairs between along the canal between Hythe and Seabrook, up to 35 pairs at Nickolls Quarry and up to 25 pairs along the canal cutting between West Hythe dam and the coast.

Scattered pairs may be found wherever patches of *Phragmites* exist and the only sites with more than one or two pairs are at Beachborough Lakes (with about 4 pairs) and the Newington Quarry SSSI (with about 3 pairs) (both in TR13 T). At Samphire Hoe a pair bred by the small pond for the first time in 2016.

Henderson & Hodge reported that there was considerable similarity between the results of the national surveys in 1967-1973 and 1988-1994, concluding that apparent spread in Kent was mostly due to improved coverage. However Roger Norman was only able to report three pairs from the Nickolls Quarry site in the 1960s and Peter Wells also recorded three singing males there during a survey in June 1984, whilst Roger noted an increase at the site during the 1990s although “part of the increase was due to access to a greater part of the complex” (Norman, 2007).

There has been little change in the range of the species locally since the 1990s and the results of the second and third atlases are remarkably similar, whilst across the county as a whole there was only a marginal increase (3%) in occupied tetrads, however the local population may have continued to increase (at least at Nickolls Quarry, where there were 13 pairs in 1999, increasing to up to 35 pairs by 2003, however the *Phragmites* cover there has increased). The national population has increased rapidly in recent years but has largely been attributed to a northward extension of their range and expansion into new areas (Clements *et al.* 2015).

### Overall distribution

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of Reed Warbler by tetrad, with records in 26 tetrads (84%).

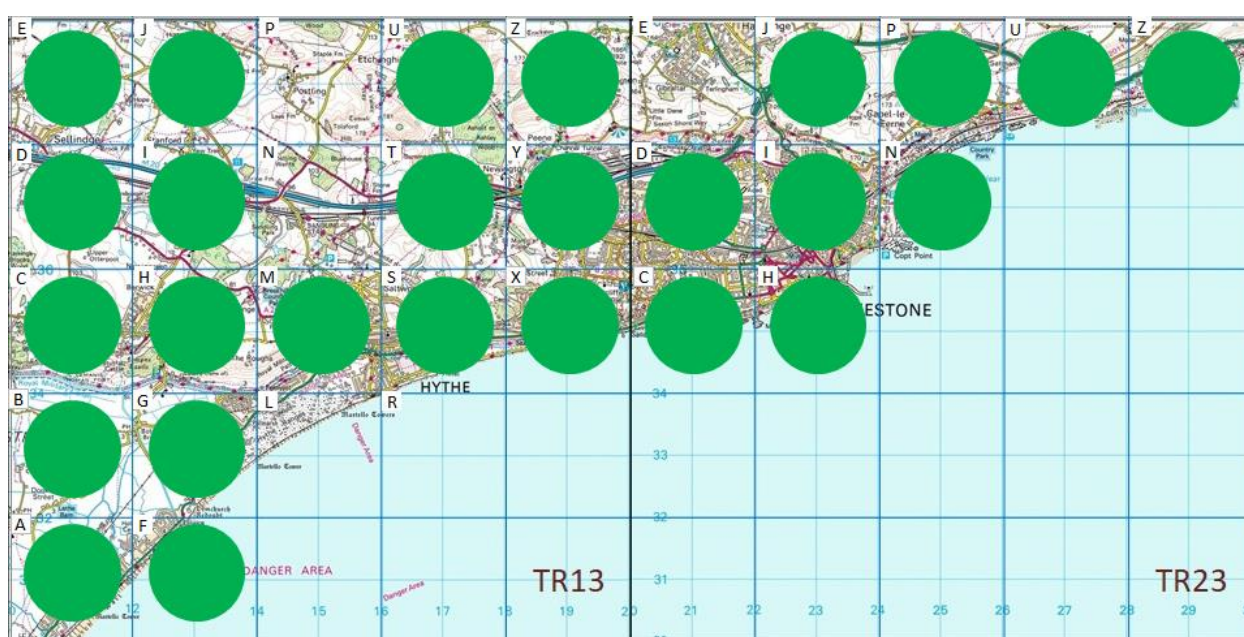


Figure 2: Distribution of all Reed Warbler records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad



Roger Norman gave the first arrival dates at Nickolls Quarry in the 1990s as between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> April, whilst arrivals elsewhere in that decade were similar with the only sighting in the first half of the month being a particularly early bird at Hythe on the 6<sup>th</sup> April 1996. The mean arrival date in the 2000s was the 19<sup>th</sup> April but there were only two years with arrivals in the first half of the month, in 2001 (12<sup>th</sup> April) and 2009 (10<sup>th</sup> April).



Reed Warbler at Seabrook (Brian Harper)



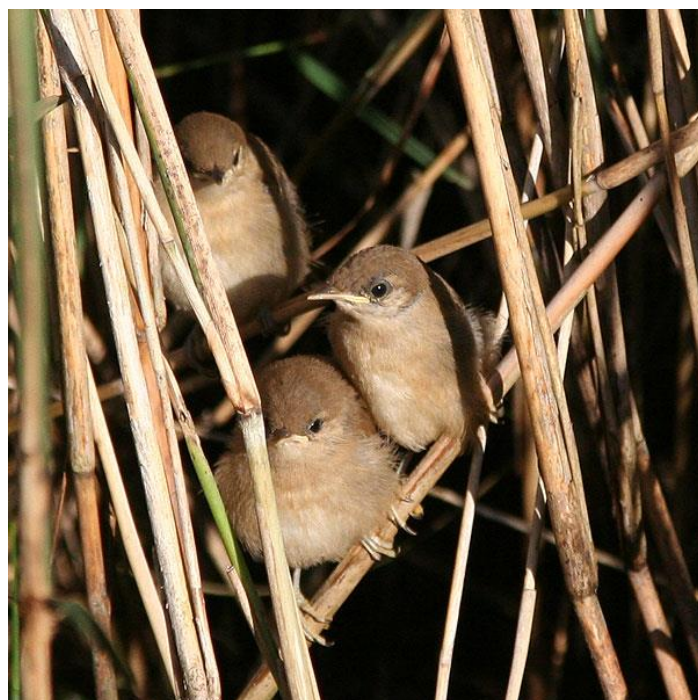
Reed Warbler at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)

The most recent decade has seen the mean arrival date move forward to the 11<sup>th</sup> April and the first bird has been noted in the first ten days of the month in four years, in 2011 (9<sup>th</sup> April), 2016 (3<sup>rd</sup> April), 2017 (3<sup>rd</sup> April) and 2020 (6<sup>th</sup> April).

As Kovács *et al.* (2012) have demonstrated, the spring arrival dates of the Reed Warbler do appear to be getting earlier, presumably related to climatic change.



Reed Warbler at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)



Reed Warblers at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)



Spring migrants away from breeding sites are scarce and may occur late in the season, often in late May or into June. Sightings typically involve one or two birds, with the only larger counts being six at Capel Battery on the 15<sup>th</sup> May 2001 and three there on the 30<sup>th</sup> April 2005.



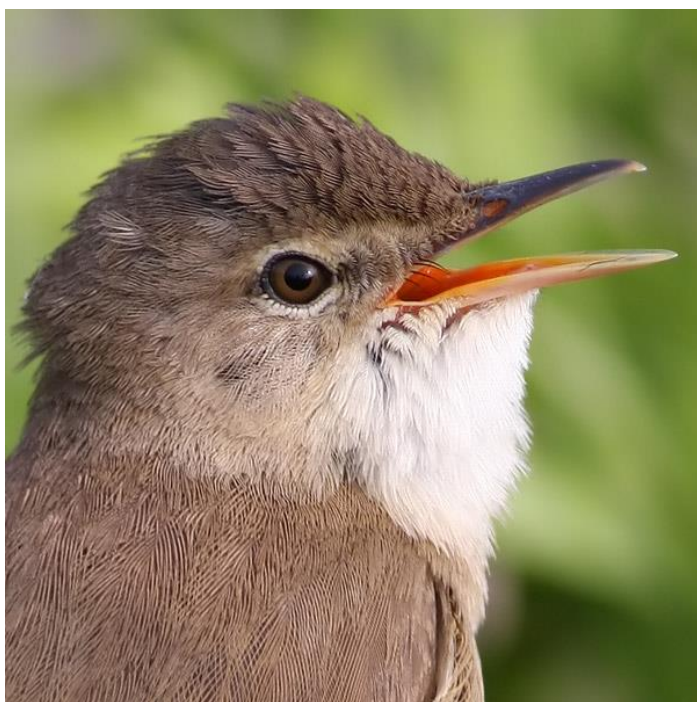
Reed Warbler at Princes Parade (Nigel Webster)



Reed Warbler at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)

The first departing migrants may be seen from late July but mostly occur during August and September. Numbers are small, again usually ones and twos, with peak counts of four at Capel Battery on the 7<sup>th</sup> August 1997 and at Abbotscliffe on the 17<sup>th</sup> August 2005.

The mean departure date over the last decade has been the 26<sup>th</sup> September and sightings after the end of September are rare, having occurred in just 14 years. There have only been three records after mid-October, with singles at West Hythe on the 30<sup>th</sup> October 2008, along the canal west of Hythe on the 4<sup>th</sup> November 1984 and at Donkey Street on the 24<sup>th</sup> November 2018.



Reed Warbler at Seabrook (Brian Harper)



Reed Warbler at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)

Click [here](#) to listen to a local audio recording of one singing at Botolph's Bridge on the 24<sup>th</sup> May 2015 (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.



Reed Warbler at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)