

Magpie

Pica pica

Category A

Breeding resident.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

A widespread breeding resident across almost all of Europe and Asia.

Kent status (KOS 2021):

It is a common and widespread breeding species in Kent.



Magpie at the Hythe Imperial golf course (Brian Harper)

The Magpie 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. Ticehurst (1909) wrote that "in years gone by the Magpie must have been an abundant bird in Kent, but since the advent of game preserving on an extensive scale, though it is still generally distributed, its numbers are sadly reduced and in some districts it is practically extinct". He continued to state that "it is only in the most dense and secluded of woods, where game is not very strictly preserved, that more than a pair or so can be found at the present time, but in ... Romney Marsh ... it is still fairly numerous, ... and they breed in the old hedgerow elms and the high thorns that dot the marsh here and there". There appears to 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.

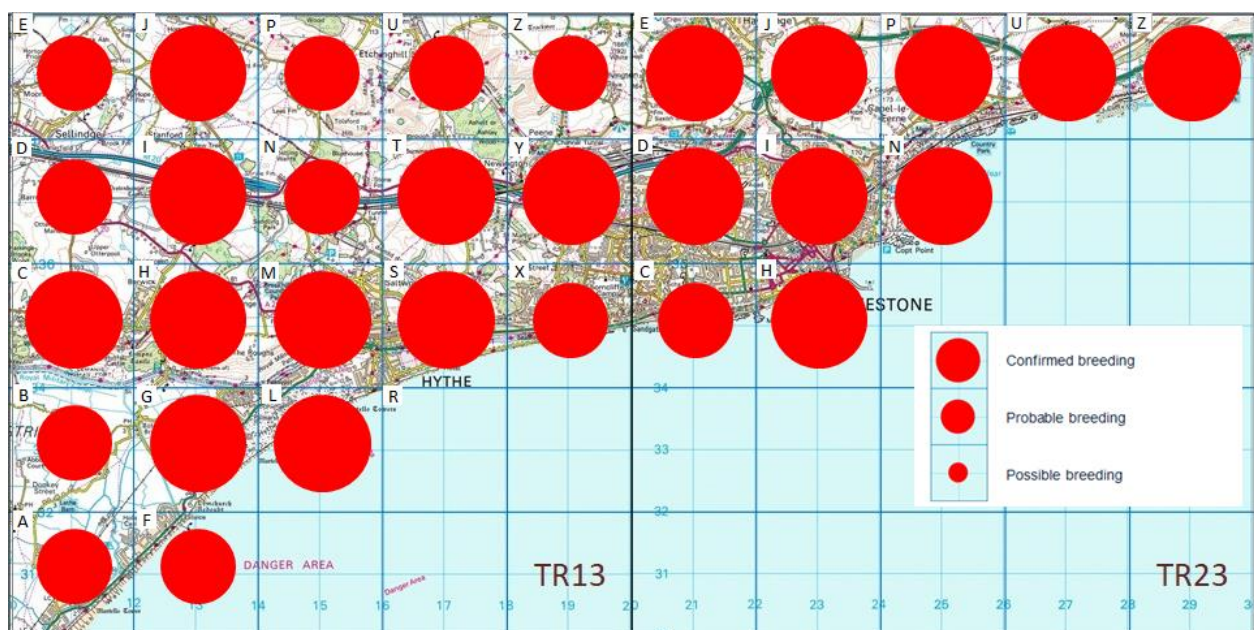


Figure 1: Breeding distribution of Magpie at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in 19 tetrads, with probable breeding in 11 more. 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%)	0	(0%)	0	(0%)
Probable/Confirmed	26	(84%)	30	(97%)	30	(97%)
Total	26	(84%)	30	(97%)	30	(97%)
Change			+4	(+15%)	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	+15%	0%	+15%
Kent	+47%	+4%	+53%

Clements *et al.* (2015) reported that Magpies suffered intensive persecution throughout Britain from the eighteenth century until the First World War, when a reduction in game-keeping led to an increase. The population continued to grow until around 1990, followed by stability, perhaps indicating that they were at or near carrying capacity in their favourite farmland and suburban habitats. BTO Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data for 1995 to 2012 showed a 10% increase for south-east England and the number of tetrads occupied in Kent continued to rise between the second and third atlases (by 4%) but this was considered to probably be due to improved coverage. Whilst there was little scope for an expansion in range locally, numbers continued to increase between the second and third atlases.

Clements *et al.* stated that “thanks to their bulky and conspicuous nests and continual racket during the breeding season, Magpies were confirmed as breeders in a high proportion of tetrads”, and this held true locally.



Magpie at Mill Point (Ian Roberts)



Magpie at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)

Overall distribution

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of Magpie by tetrad, with records in 30 tetrads (97%).

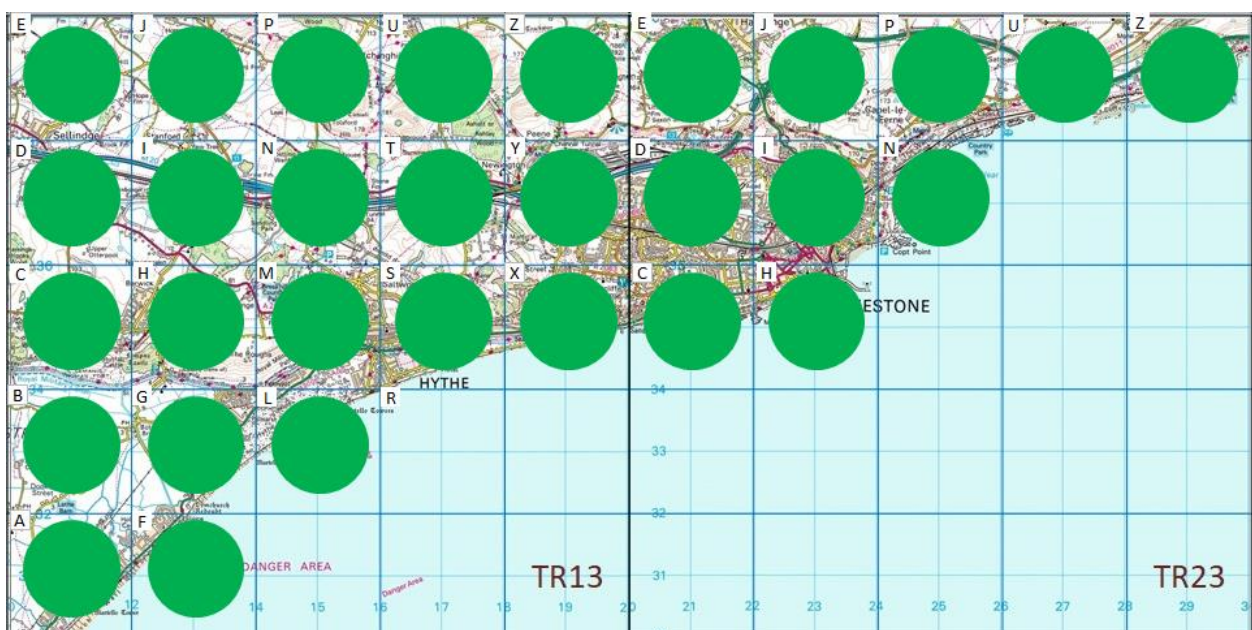


Figure 2: Distribution of all Magpie records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Taylor *et al* (1981) remarked that out of the breeding season it was sometimes gregarious, occasionally forming sizeable flocks during the winter months. Counts of up to 25 are fairly regular, whilst larger congregations have involved 50 at Capel Battery on the 14th October 2000, 30 at Hythe Roughts on the 1st January 2002, 26 at Creteway Down on the 6th April 2009 and 12th February 2011, 28 there on the 15th October 2016, 26 at Capel Battery on the 31st October 2016, 29 at Nickolls Quarry on the 21st January 2018, 26 at Beachborough Park on the 8th March 2018, 46 at Botolph's Bridge on the 15th November 2020 and 30 there on the 9th January 2022.

The largest count to date was a post-roost dispersal noted on the 25th November 2020, when Dylan Wrathall recorded "51 birds leaving the tall trees along the canal by the Aldergate Bridge between 07:10 and 07:25, and flying off towards Donkey Street".

Some indication of abundance is provided by an anecdote supplied by Roger Norman, whereby one of the wardens at Hythe Ranges informed him that he had shot over 200 there during 1990 (Norman 2006).



Magpie at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



Magpie at the Hythe Imperial golf course (Brian Harper)

Harrison (1953) referred to influxes from the continent in late September and October, but Taylor *et al* stated that there had been little evidence of passage in recent years. The following counts may have referred to immigrants or at least local wanderers: 17 east high over Copt Point on the 28th September 1984, 24 west at Abbotscliffe on the 27th October 2006, 10 west at Capel-le-Ferne on the 19th October 2007, 15 west at Abbotscliffe on the 18th October 2010, 15 east high over Abbotscliffe on the 22nd March 2011 and 12 east there on the 30th March 2020.



Magpies at Samphire Hoe (Ian Roberts)



Magpie at Mill Point (Ian Roberts)

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.



Magpies at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)