

Hobby

Falco subbuteo

Category A

A summer visitor with breeding suspected in many years but not proven until 2014, also a passage migrant.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

A widespread breeding species across Europe except Ireland, Scotland and northern Fenno-Scandia, also in Asia south to Iran, the Himalayas, and southern China. Winters mainly in southern Africa.

Kent status (KOS 2021):

It is a breeding summer visitor and passage migrant in Kent.



Hobby at Saltwood Castle (Brian Harper)

The Hobby 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) considered it to be "a summer visitor in small numbers to Kent, where it has several times bred, and there is no doubt that if left alone it would do so regularly", however it was heavily persecuted by game preservers in the nineteenth century along with most raptors.

Harrison (1953) recounted how he had in his possession "an adult male, from Dr N. F. Ticehurst's collection, which was shot near Folkestone on the 5th June 1888", which was presumably within the modern boundaries but lacks any further specific details. He was unable to find any confirmation of breeding, but a number of summer records suggested that pairs could have nested in the old and more secluded woodland areas of the county.

The first fully documented local record came in 1950, when a pair were present by the Royal Military Canal near Hythe in June, then H. Schreiber saw one at Sandling Park on the 24th August 1960. There appear to be no further reports until 1980 but there were then four records from the West Hythe area by 1985 (a pair in June 1980, three birds in May/June 1982 and one in July 1985) and one or two were seen at Biggin's Wood (near Cheriton) in July between 1982 to 1988.

Singles were then seen at Copt Point in May 1987, Folkestone Warren and Hythe in October 1987, Copt Point in July and September 1988, and Mill Point in October 1988, with annual sightings thereafter.



Hobby at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)



Hobby at Hythe (Glenn Tutton)

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 Hobby at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was not confirmed in any tetrads, but there was probable breeding in three and possible breeding in ten 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%)	2	(6%)	10	(32%)
Probable/Confirmed	0	(0%)	0	(0%)	3	(10%)
Total	0	(0%)	2	(6%)	13	(42%)
Change			+2	(--%)	+11	(+550%)

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	--%	+550%	--%
Kent	5,800%	+193%	+17,200%

Taylor *et al* were able to report on successful breeding in three of the 25 years within their review period (1952-76), with one or two pairs on each occasion, but also noted that “pairs have summered in at least nine years since 1960, which augurs well for the future of this species as a Kentish breeding bird”.

Henderson & Hodge remarked on a steady increase at a national level since 1976 which became evident in the county during the second atlas period, when there was possible breeding in two local tetrads (TR13 M and TR23 E). Following an upsurge in spring migrants on the Kentish coast, unprecedented numbers were noted in the county (mainly in the Stour Valley) in summer from 1992, which was considered to “reflect a genuine change in status”.

Clements *et al.* (2015) reported that by the time of the third atlas, “Hobbies have consolidated and in-filled virtually all suitable habitat in the county, absent only from urban areas and some tree-less coasts”. Locally there were records of at least possible breeding from 42% of tetrads. Although breeding was suspected during the latest atlas, it was not confirmed until 2014 when a pair with a juvenile were seen by Phil Sharp at Lympne Park Wood in September 2014.

It has bred annually at this site since but there have been no other instances of confirmed breeding, although it has been suspected in recent years in the Asholt Wood (TR13 T) and Horn Street (TR13 X) areas.

Holling *et al.* (2019) stated that the “numbers reported to the Rare Breeding Bird Panel increased for many years, but after reaching a peak in 2009, the trend has been generally downward for the past decade”. They also provided an estimate of around 800 breeding pairs in Britain.

Overall distribution

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of Hobby by tetrad, with records in 25 tetrads (81%).

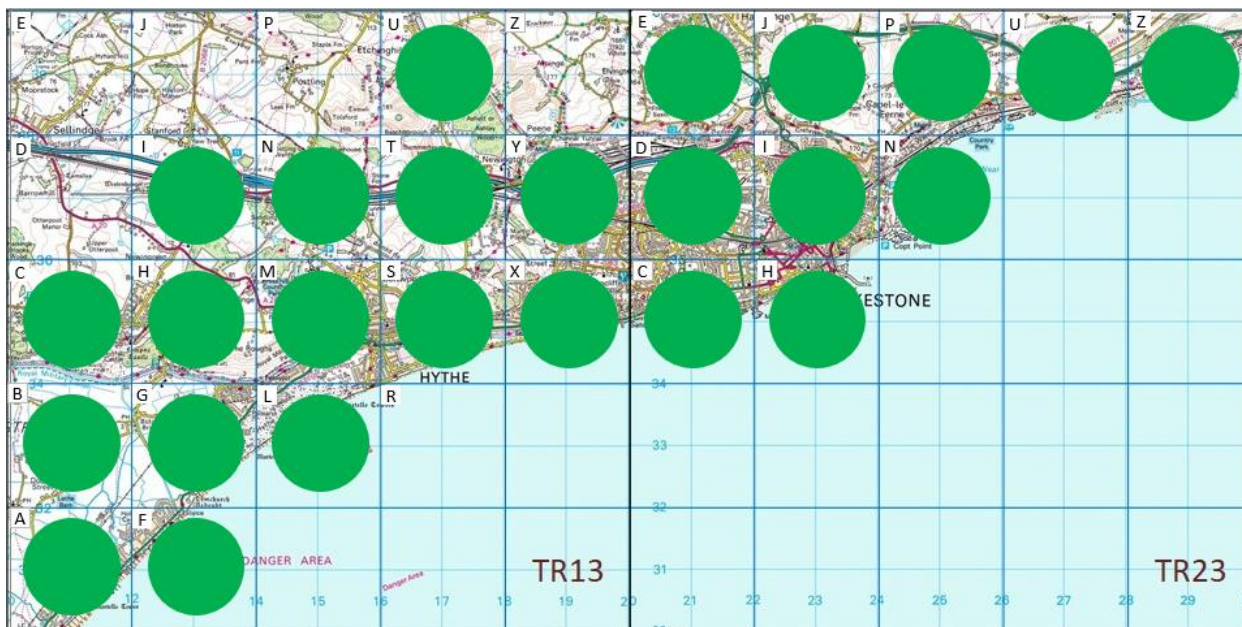


Figure 2: Distribution of all Hobby records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The earliest arrival date is the 9th April, with records on that date in two years (in 1998 one was seen at West Hythe and in 2006 one arrived in off the sea at Capel-le-Ferne) but a first appearance in the second half of the month is more usual, with the mean arrival over the last ten years being the 26th April.



Hobby at Princes Parade (Nigel Webster)



Hobby at Nickolls Quarry on 22nd October 2001 (Ian Roberts) – the second latest ever sighting

It can be difficult to differentiate between migrants and birds which are potentially breeding or summering but the average number of birds seen at coastal sites in spring has been around seven per year over the last 30 years.

The peak arrival years have been 1997 (with a total of 18, including counts of four arriving off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 26th May and five arriving off the sea at Capel-le-Ferne the next day) and 2001 (with a total of 20). Arrivals can continue into early June.

Hobbies are late breeders and newly fledged youngsters may be present well into September, so there is some degree of overlap between hunting birds and returning migrants (which may appear from late August), also making it hard to assess the volume of autumn passage, but the average number of birds seen at coastal sites in the season has been around six per year over the last 30 years.

The mean departure date over the last ten years is the 4th October and the latest was seen at Lympne on the 27th October 2021.

References

Clements, R., Orchard, M., McCanch, N. & Wood, S. 2015. *Kent Breeding Bird Atlas 2008-13*. Kent Ornithological Society.

Harrison, J. M. 1953. *The Birds of Kent*. Witherby, London.

Henderson, A. & Hodge, T. 1998. The Kent Breeding Bird Atlas 1988-94. *Kent Bird Report 1996*: 134-272.

Holling, M. & the Rare Breeding Birds Panel 2019. Rare breeding birds in the UK in 2017. *British Birds* 112: 706-758.

Kent Ornithological Society (KOS). 1953-2021. *Kent Bird Reports*. Kent Ornithological Society.

Knight, V. & Tolputt, F. 1871. List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood. *Fourth Annual Report of the Folkestone Natural History Society*. Available at: www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/46103

Snow, D. & Perrins, C.M. 1998. *The Birds of the Western Palearctic*. Oxford University Press.

Taylor, D., Davenport, D. & Flegg, J. 1981. *Birds of Kent*. Kent Ornithological Society.

Ticehurst, N. F. 1909. *A History of the Birds of Kent*. Witherby, London.

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.