

Blue Tit

Cyanistes caeruleus

Category A

Breeding resident and passage migrant.

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Widespread throughout most of Europe except the far north and eastwards to Iran. It is basically resident, though over much of the centre and north of its range it makes irregular eruptive movements, mainly to the west and south. Continental birds sometimes reach Britain in autumn, particularly but not exclusively in years of eruption.

Kent status (KOS 2021):

An abundant resident and a passage migrant in varying numbers in Kent.



Blue Tit at East Cliff, Folkestone (Brian Harper)

The Blue 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 "abundant, resident and generally distributed throughout the county, and is the most numerous of all the Titmice", 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.

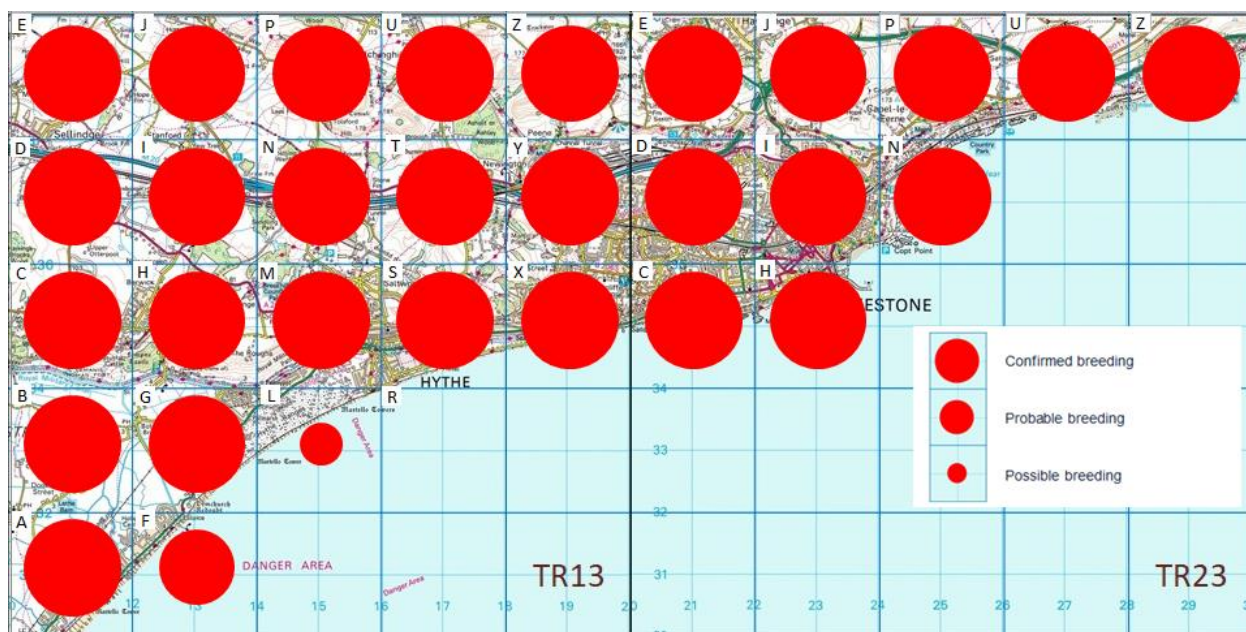


Figure 1: Breeding distribution of Blue Tit at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in 28 tetrads, with probable breeding in one more and possible breeding in one other. 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%)	1	(3%)
Probable/Confirmed	28	(90%)	30	(97%)	29	(94%)
Total	28	(90%)	30	(97%)	30	(97%)
Change			+2	(+7%)	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	+7%	0 %	+7%
Kent	+10%	+3%	+13%

Taylor *et al.* noted that “although ancestrally forest canopy birds, Blue Tits continue to adapt to the changes wrought by man on the landscape. This includes the exploitation of farmland and gardens for feeding and the use of man-made nest sites, some unintentionally provided, but often deliberately in the form of nest boxes.



Blue Tit at Beachborough (Steve Tomlinson)



Blue Tit at West Hythe (Brian Harper)



Blue Tit at Saltwood Castle (Brian Harper)



Blue Tit at Saltwood Castle (Brian Harper)

Overall distribution

Clements *et al.* (2015) stated that “at the national level, Blue Tits have shown a shallow long-term increase, which may be linked to milder winters, increased garden feeding and nest-box provision. BTO Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data for south-east England shows a 9% increase between 1995 and 2012”. It is uncertain if the slight increase locally between the first and second atlases reflected improved coverage or a spread into the most marginal habitats.

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

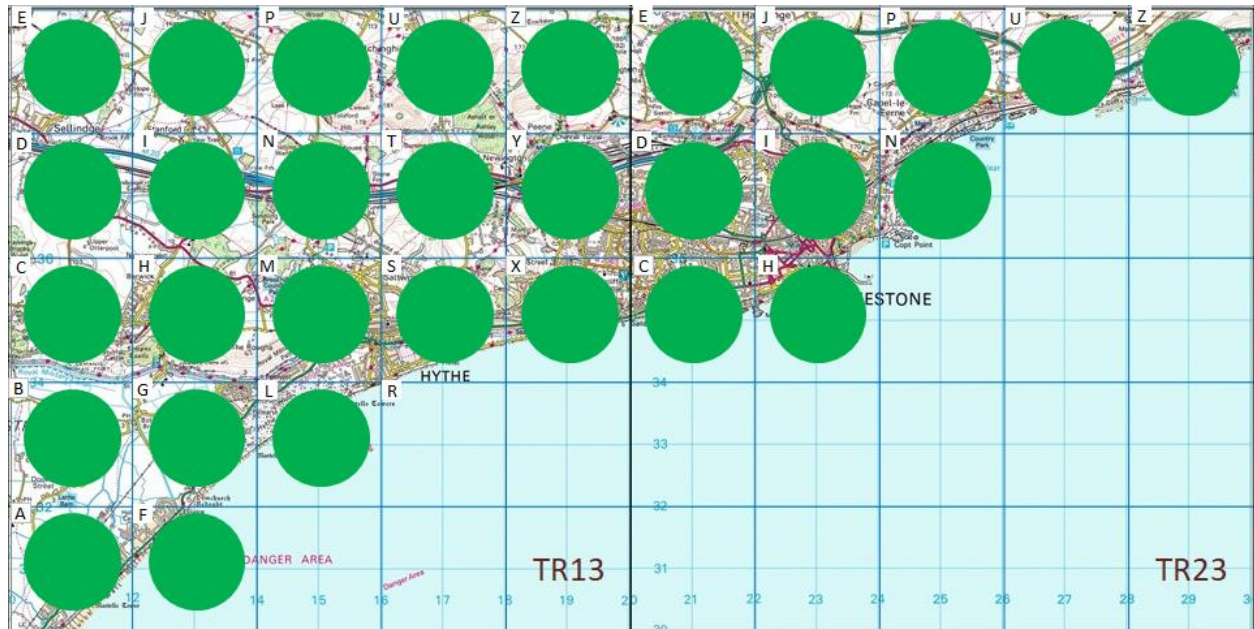
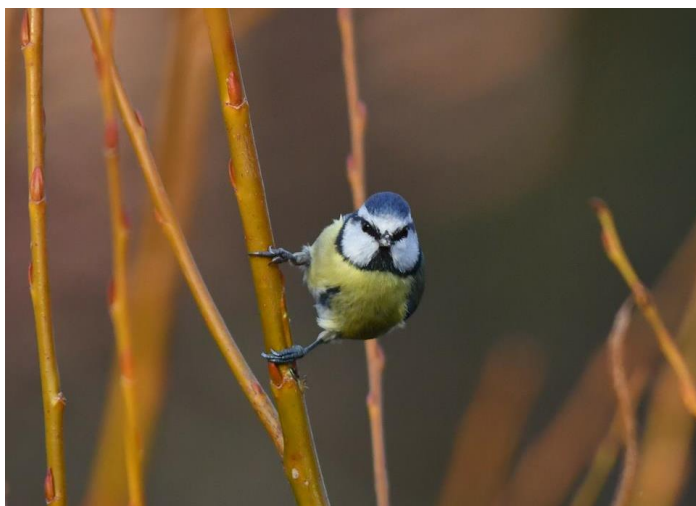


Figure 2: Distribution of all Blue Tit records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Taylor *et al* noted that “Blue Tits are subject to autumn irruptive movements, when numbers far above average are recorded, usually coastally, but often also inland, where many may remain through the winter”. “An exceptionally heavy influx of continental origin was noted nationally in 1957, being particularly marked in Kent. Large numbers were seen in all coastal areas between the 15th September and late October”.

Locally Roger Norman noted that 1957 was the only year of the 1950s when the species was seen regularly at Nickolls Quarry, where there was “no really suitable habitat to attract them”. Counts there included five on the 19th September, seven on the 4th October and six on the 5th October, when “good numbers” were also noted at West Hythe. Larger numbers were logged at Hythe Ranges, where there were ten on the 2nd October, also “many flying over” on the following day, and 20 on the 10th and 16th October (Norman 2006; 2007).



Blue Tit at Princes Parade (Nigel Webster)



Blue Tit at Princes Parade (Nigel Webster)

Taylor *et al* also stated that “early in 1958 high overwintering numbers were reported from many areas inland and the outgoing spring passage ... was heavier than usual”. Locally there was a movement of 25 flying east at Hythe Ranges in two hours on the 30th March 1958. One bird that was ringed at New Romney in December 1957 was recovered in spring 1958 in northern Germany, giving some idea of the source of the irruption.

On the 13th October 1969 Ian Wallace and Tony Greenland logged the record count to date, when 75 were present in Folkestone Warren, whilst a counts of 30 there in September 1971 and 35 in the following January many have involved immigrants. Other autumn counts of note have included 40 at Folkestone on the 29th September 1992, 60 at Folkestone on the 18th September 1996, 30 at Folkestone Warren on the 22nd November 1998 and 64 in Folkestone Warren on the 19th October 1999, but there has been very little indication of spring passage.

A post-breeding count of 65+ at Beachborough Park on the 30th August 2018 is also noteworthy.

One that was ringed at Sandling Park on the 5th March 1962 was found dead at Wrotham, c.40 miles to the north-west, on the 25th March of the same year.



Blue Tit at Saltwood Castle (Brian Harper)



Blue Tit at Saltwood Castle (Brian Harper)

References

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

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

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

Norman, R. K. 2006. Some observations of birds on Hythe Ranges since 1950. <https://folkestonebirds.com/where-to-watch> (see "Further Information" section).

Norman, R. K. 2007. The Birds of Palmarsh Gravel Pit. <https://folkestonebirds.com/where-to-watch> (see "Further Information" section).

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.