

# Peregrine

*Falco peregrinus*

Category A

Resident breeder until 1960 and again from the 1990s, also a winter visitor and passage migrant.

Found in many parts of the world: across much of Europe, Asia south to Australia, Africa, northern North America and southern South America.

Populations from the northern and eastern parts of Europe are migratory, moving south to winter, but southern and western birds are mostly resident, with some dispersal of mainly juvenile birds (Snow & Perrins, 1998).



Peregrine at Abbotscliffe (Ian Roberts)

It is a breeding resident in Kent, traditionally found around the coast but now occurring more frequently inland (KOS, 2020).

Ticehurst (1909) wrote that: “as a resident, the Peregrine is only found in a single locality, the only one that affords it suitable nesting places. This is the magnificent range of chalk cliffs that forms the sea-face of the North Downs between Folkestone and Walmer. Here, on either side of the town of Dover, the Peregrine has nested side by side with the Chough, Raven, Jackdaw, Starling and Herring Gull from time immemorial. The Raven and Chough have gone, but the commoner species remain, and amongst them, in spite of ceaseless persecution, the Peregrine still holds its own”.

“I have been to some trouble to collect statistics of the number of pairs that have bred from year to year in this neighbourhood, but I have found it quite impossible to obtain anything like a connected record. It is quite easy on such a range of cliffs to miss a pair when trying to form an estimate of their numbers, and it may well be that the number of pairs is more constant than the records indicate”.

“The normal population would appear seem to be five pairs – three to the east of Dover and two to the west – but the estimates in different years vary from three to seven, the latter as recently as 1907 I have on the authority of a good ornithologist well acquainted with the district, whose figures I have no reason to doubt. In 1908 I could not make it more than four pairs, but, as my visit was somewhat late, I might easily have missed one”.

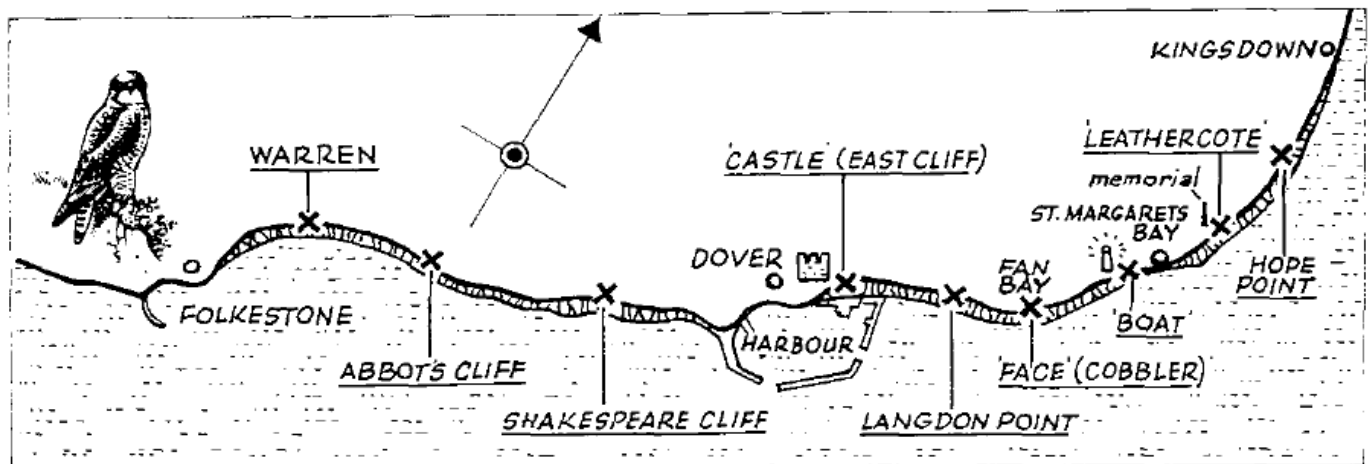
Guy Mannering (1936, in Harrison (1953)) noted that “six to eight pairs bred every years on the cliffs, commenting that their numbers had varied but very little for the past forty years”.

Major G. E. Took (1946, in Harrison (1953)) stated that “since 1931 I have each year examined nine eyries between Deal and Folkestone, ... and I believe them to have been existent long before I knew them intimately. These nine pairs were *in situ* when the war broke out (1939), but last year (1946) only five eyries were occupied and obviously four pairs had been shot out of existence by military orders” (during the war years the birds were considered to be a hazard to carrier pigeons and a number were shot by order of the War Office, (Taylor *et al*, 1981)). He later (1950) added that six pairs bred in that year.

Kent Bird Reports (KOS) indicate that five pairs continued to nest annually until 1956, decreasing to two or three until 1961, with “the long-used eyries on the south-east coast completely deserted” in 1962 (contra Taylor *et al*). Taylor *et al* described that “this decline followed a national trend, attributed to the effects of various persistent organochlorine pesticides. During the same period, there was also a decline in the numbers of passage migrants and winter visitors. There were 20-25 annually until 1957, dropping to 12 by 1962 ... and to only two to five in the remaining years to 1976”.

The only local records during this period were singles at Hythe on the 26<sup>th</sup> November 1967 and Folkestone Warren on the 16<sup>th</sup> September 1968.

Taylor *et al* also provided a map of the traditional sites of Peregrine eyries, reproduced below.



*Traditional sites of Peregrine eyries*

As Peregrines ceased to nest on the cliffs after 1961 there were no records of breeding in the county during the first Atlas. The 1989 Kent Bird Report (KOS) reported on the “re-establishment of the species as a breeding bird in Kent at a site in East, with four young being hatched. ... This breeding is the culmination of a gradual process over the last few years of a substantial increase in records, followed by staying later in spring, then summering and now breeding for the first time [in the county since 1961]”.

Clements *et al* (2015) recounted that “re-colonisation was slow at first. The second Kent atlas confirmed Peregrines as breeding in one tetrad, and summering in another” (both tetrads were to the east of Dover).

**Breeding 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 Peregrine at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in two tetrads with probable breeding in two 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	0	(0%)	0	(0%)	4	(13%)
Total	0	(0%)	0	(0%)	4	(13%)

The first modern records at the cliffs were singles at the East Cliff (Folkestone) on the 24<sup>th</sup> December 1988 and the 8<sup>th</sup> February 1989, and there were annual records from 1991 as it slowly began to recolonise. In 1992 a pair were seen displaying at Capel-le-Ferne but there were no further signs of breeding, whilst in 1994 and 1995 single birds summered on the cliffs. In 1996 a pair were present for most of the year in the Abbotscliffe area but breeding was not suspected, whilst a pair were present at Capel-le-Ferne in summer 1997 but again there was no evidence of breeding.

In 1998 a pair were seen displaying at Abbotscliffe and a pair were present at the eastern end of Samphire Hoe (the Shakespeare Cliff eyrie) but breeding was not confirmed. A pair were again present at the Shakespeare Cliff eyrie the following year and were “believed to have been feeding young but after helicopter disturbance by coastguards the pair became disinterested” (Derek Smith, pers. comm.). This pair attempted to nest again in 2000 and successfully raised one young (Green & James, 2002).

The Shakespeare Cliff eyrie has been occupied in most years since but breeding was not confirmed at either of the other sites until a pair bred successfully at the Warren eyrie in 2012. Since then two to three pairs have nested annually at the three traditional eyries. It can be difficult to determine how many pairs are breeding as some pairs may alternate between eyries in different years and birds can even be visiting different nest sites in the same season, before settling at one to lay eggs (Radcliffe, 1980).



Peregrine at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



Peregrine at Abbotscliffe (Ian Roberts)

Clements *et al* noted that since the coastal cliff sites have become fully re-occupied, subsequent increases in the county have resulted from occupation of man-made sites, such as inland quarries, pylons and tall buildings, whilst in neighbouring counties nest-sites in trees have been utilised. They reported an estimated population of around 30-40 pairs in Kent during the most recent atlas and considered that more marginal sites were likely to become occupied in future.

There have not been any confirmed cases of breeding yet away from the cliffs and those pairs presumably account for most of the sightings of birds hunting over the areas inland and over Folkestone. There was an interesting series of records in summer 2012, with one seen with prey at Saltwood Castle on the 17<sup>th</sup> May before it soared off high to the west, one flying north over Hythe carrying prey on the 28<sup>th</sup> June and one taking a Feral Pigeon from a Martello Tower on Hythe Ranges on the 8<sup>th</sup> July, which appeared to suggest a detected nest site in the Hythe locality. In June of the following year one was seen regularly taking pigeons from the same Martello Tower and there was also a sighting over Saltwood in early June, again suggesting local breeding. There have been occasional summer sightings since from Hythe and Saltwood, and also from Seabrook and Lympe but no further indications of nesting.

## Non-breeding distribution

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of Peregrine by tetrad, with records in 24 tetrads (77%).

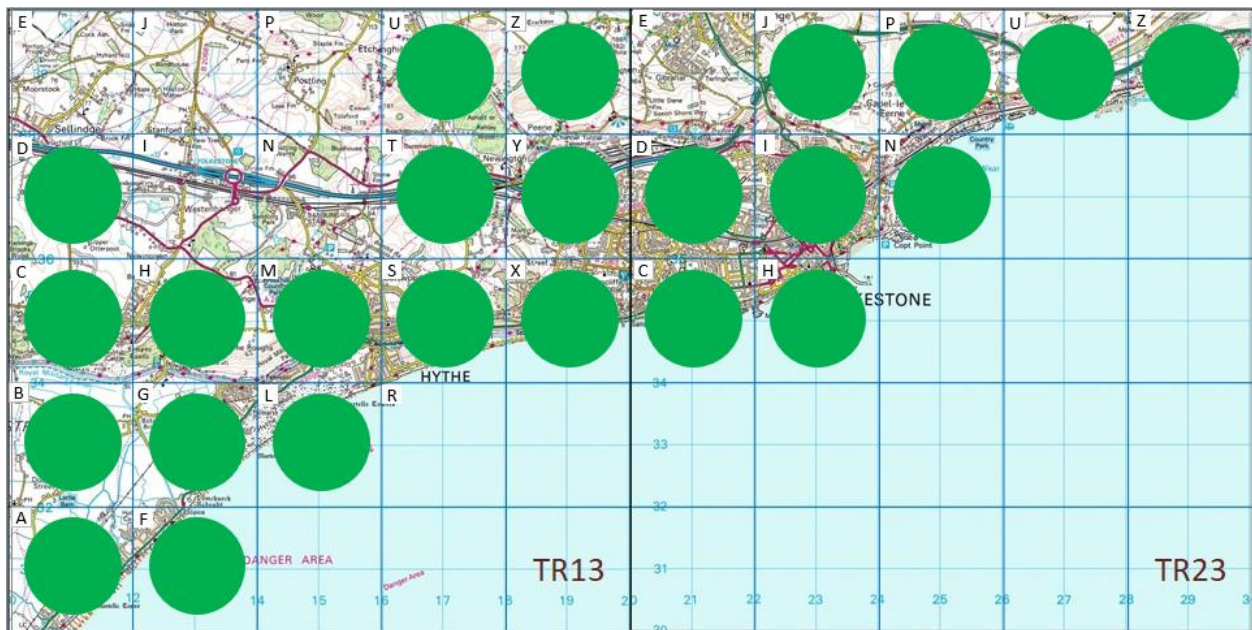


Figure 2: Distribution of all Peregrine records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

As the population in the county slowly recovered and then continued to expand, records in the non-breeding season increased away from the cliffs. The first record at Nickolls Quarry occurred on the 27<sup>th</sup> February 1992, with another there on the 8<sup>th</sup> December 1995 and one at West Hythe on the 8<sup>th</sup> September 1996. Further sightings on the marsh followed, with one at Botolph's Bridge on the 19<sup>th</sup> December 1998, one at West Hythe on the 26<sup>th</sup> December 1999 and one at Nickolls Quarry on the 19<sup>th</sup> November 2000. It has since occurred with increasing frequency and birds now regularly winter on the marsh, with widespread reports from other sites in the area.

There have been two ringing recoveries locally, both of which are of some note. The first involved an adult female seen alive on the cliffs at Abbotscliffe in March 2019, bearing the colour-ring 'green 21', which was the first reported sighting of this bird that had been ringed as a nestling on the cliffs at Birling Gap in East Sussex almost 12 years previously. This bird's sister (from a clutch of two females and a male) died in August 2019, having nested for many years in the West London area (Jon Franklin, pers. comm.).



Peregrine 'Green 21' at Abbotscliffe (Ian Roberts)



'Green 21' as nestling at Birling Gap (Jon Franklin)

The second involved a first-year male found dead at Beachborough on the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 that had been ringed as a nestling in northern Sweden in the preceding June (Steve Tomlinson, pers. comm.) Recoveries of foreign-ringed Peregrines in Britain are a scarce occurrence, with Wernham *et al* (2002) recording 14 instances, all originating from Scandinavia.



Peregrine at Folkestone (Steve Tomlinson)



Peregrine at Folkestone (Steve Tomlinson)

Whilst Peregrines are most often seen hunting pigeons, the prey items that have been seen to have been taken locally have included Green Woodpecker and Water Rail.

### **References**

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### **Acknowledgements**

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Peregrine at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)