

Quail

Coturnix coturnix

Category A

Very rare vagrant

3 modern records

A widespread breeding species across Europe, though patchily distributed in Britain and Ireland and largely absent from Fenno-Scandia. The 2010 Rare Breeding Birds report gave a total of 572 singing males across Britain, which was slightly above the five year mean yet 30% fewer than in 2009. Quail numbers vary greatly between years, depending on the scale of the irruptions from the south. The majority of the European population are believed to be trans-Saharan migrants.

A scarce passage migrant and summer visitor to Kent, with only four singing males in the county in 2010.

Ticehurst (1909) in his *A History of the Birds of Kent* wrote that the Quail bred at one time or another in every part of the county, but towards the end of the nineteenth century the numbers declined, and Harrison (1953) in his *The Birds of Kent* records only sporadic breeding, mostly in the east and south. There was however something of an increase in the 1940s and the KOS *Birds of Kent* (1981) gives details of four invasion years between then and 1976. This latest county avifauna states that breeding population levels are very difficult to estimate as most recent records refer only to males calling, and that the few records there are confirm the known preference for rolling chalk downland particularly between Charing and Dover.

Locally the species was included in Knight and Tolputt's "List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood" published in the Folkestone Natural History Society's annual report for 1871. However this list covered an area of six mile radius of Folkestone town hall, which extends further inland than the current recording area and so is not conclusive evidence of its occurrence here.

Mr. Benjamin Turner (gamekeeper to Major H. W. Deedes of the Saltwood Castle estate) told Ticehurst that a pair bred regularly just outside the area at Aldington from 1836 to 1840 before their favoured hedge was grubbed. Up till the 1890s though he used to meet with the birds every year in autumn, he frequently shot five or six in a day, and found them particularly abundant on the high ground overlooking Romney Marsh. He did most of his shooting within the Saltwood Castle estate so presumably a number of these birds would have been met with in the local area.

Some years later (in 1968) Miss H. M. Rowland stated in *Some aspects of the natural history of the Folkestone district* that "in spring and early summer it is not very unusual to hear ... [Quail calling] from some downland field". The only specific records however in the KOS database are from 1959 (one calling at Sandling Park on the 4th July) and 1960 (one at Cheriton on the 15th August), whilst three were heard calling at West Hougham in the invasion year of 1970.

There have only been three modern records of Quail in the Folkestone and Hythe area, in 1994, 2004 and 2014, as shown in figure 1.

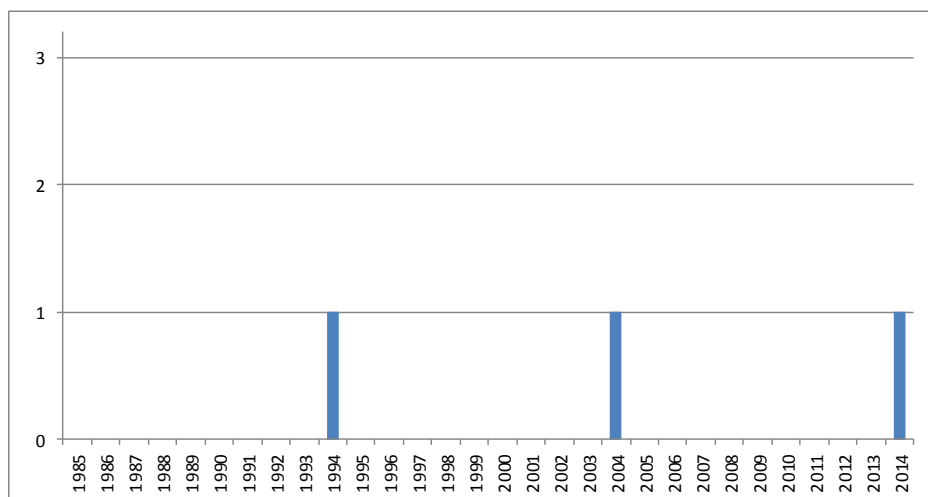


Figure 1: Quail records since 1985 at Folkestone and Hythe

The dated records are well spread, as demonstrated by figure 2, with records from April, July, August (2) and October. The April, October and most recent August records are known to relate to migrants but the others might refer to breeding birds, as might the undated record from West Hougham in 1970.

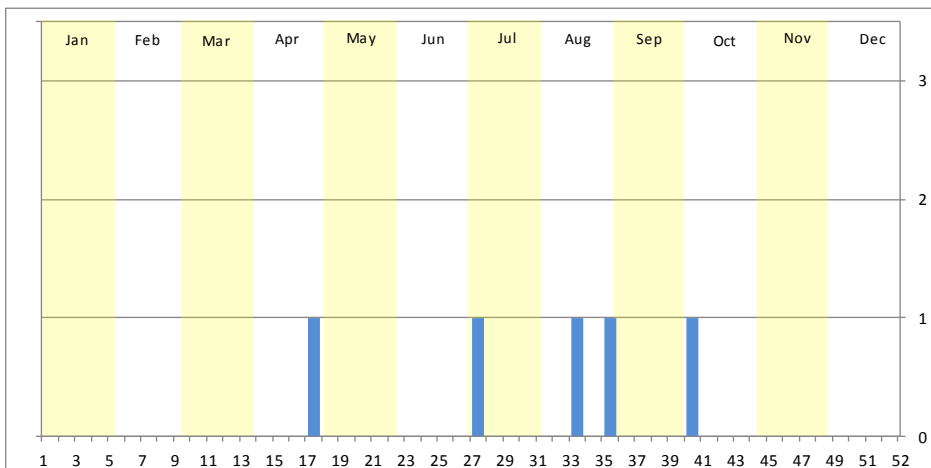


Figure 2: Quail records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

The two records of known migrants were from Abbotscliffe, whilst those of potential breeders are widely distributed.

The full list of dated records is as follows:

- 1959** Sandling Park, one calling, 4th July (H. Schreiber)
- 1960** Cheriton, one seen on a railway bank, 15th August (C. Moore)
- 1970** West Hougham, three calling, spring/summer (reported)
- 1994** Abbotscliffe, one flushed from field, 1st October, (Dale A Gibson)
- 2004** Abbotscliffe, one flushed from cliff-edge then flew inland, 24th April (I. A. Roberts)
- 2014** Abbotscliffe, one flushed from arable field, 31st August (M. D. Kennett)