

Hawfinch

Coccothraustes coccothraustes Category A

Very rare vagrant, perhaps formerly resident 15 records

Well-distributed across Europe, only really being absent from Ireland and more northern areas such as northern Scotland, northern Fenno-Scandia and northern Russia. The northern populations migrate more than the southern ones which are largely sedentary. Juveniles migrate more than adults, and females more than males. Many birds move south-west across Europe, and winter chiefly in southern France, north-east Spain, northern and central Italy and the Balkans. Some cross the Mediterranean Sea to the Balearic Islands, Sardinia and Corsica. A thinly distributed resident in Kent in suitable woodlands primarily on the North Downs, with occasional coastal migrants. The Hawfinch favours mature deciduous woodland, with hornbeam, beech, sycamore and similar species, and shows a preference for cherry and damson orchards in the winter months.

The *Birds of Kent* (1981) noted possible breeding from the tetrad TR13 X (the Paraker Wood area) based on the Breeding Bird Atlas (1967-73) but nothing further is known of this record and there have been no other indications of local breeding. All other records refer to birds seen during the winter or coastal migrants. The Hawfinch is a very elusive species however and the *Birds of Kent* editors considered that it was “probably better distributed” than their map suggested. It is possible perhaps that it was locally resident in the past but it seems very unlikely that this is still the case, particularly as the population nationally has shown a marked decline (RSPB woodland surveys show a 74% decrease over the 20 years to 2003).

The winter records relate to one seen at “New Inn Green” (Newingreen), near Hythe on the 13th November 1965, up to three at Brockhill Country Park in late January and early February 1989, singles (possibly the same bird) at Nickolls Quarry on 25th November and 5th December 2002, one flying east along the top of Hythe Roughs on 3rd January 2011, one at a garden feeder in Saltwood on the 12th March 2018 and two in a garden in central Folkestone on the 17th March 2018.

Other records chiefly involve coastal migrants. The first was seen by F. R. Wise at Folkestone on the 27th October 1956 and “flew in from the direction of the sea during a big immigration of starlings, finches etc. It was following a party of Chaffinches and passed within six feet of the observer, flying close to the ground”. He had “excellent views of it and also heard the flight call”. There have been seven subsequent mostly coastal records, all but two from the Capel-le-Ferne area, with one record in April, two in May, two in June and two in October.

The records since 1985 are shown in figure 1.

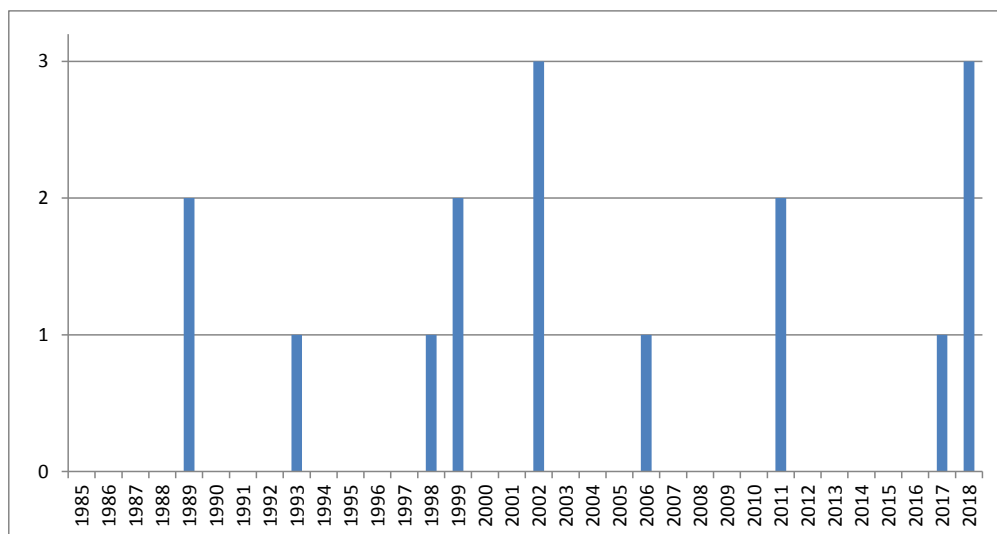


Figure 1: Hawfinch records since 1985 at Folkestone and Hythe

The records by week are given in figure 2.

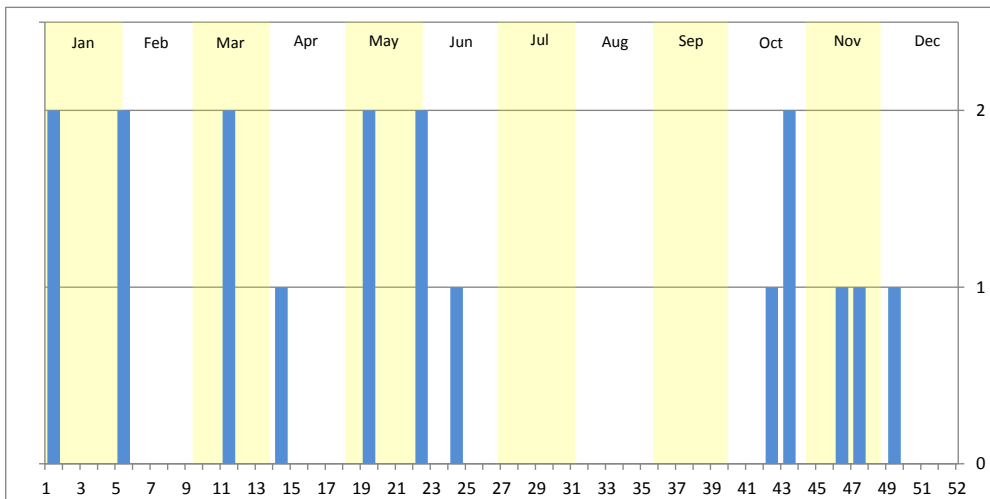


Figure 2: Hawfinch records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

The distribution of winter records recorded in the BTO/KOS Atlas (2007 – 2012) is shown in figure 3. This record relates to the one seen flying along the top of Hythe Roughs in January 2011, passing through at least two tetrads.

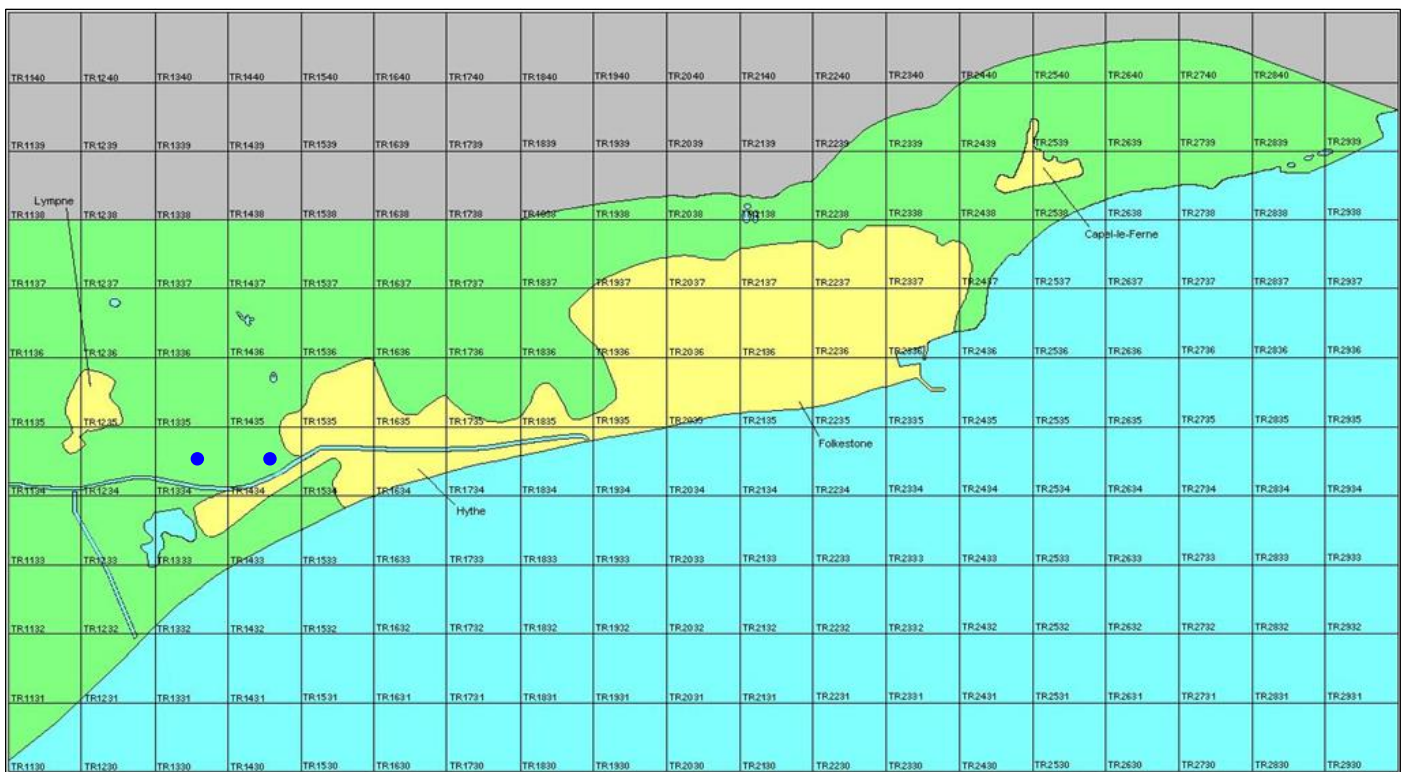


Figure 3: Wintering distribution of Hawfinch at Folkestone and Hythe (2007 – 2012 BTO/KOS Atlas)

The list of dated area records are as follows (no details are known of the instance of possible breeding):

- 1956** Folkestone, one flew in off sea, 27th October (F. R. Wise)
- 1965** Newingreen, one at "New Inn Green, near Hythe" 13th November (G. F. A. Munns)
- 1989** Brockhill CP, two, 31st January (I. A. Roberts), with three reported in February
- 1993** Capel-le-Ferne Café, one flew east, 16th June (D. A. Gibson)
- 1998** Capel-le-Ferne Gun Site, one flew east, 10th May (D. A. Gibson)
- 1999** Capel-le-Ferne Gun Site, one flew in/east, 1st June (I. A. Roberts), presumed same flew east again there the following day (D. A. Gibson)
- 2002** Capel-le-Ferne, one, 11th May (D. A. Gibson)
- 2002** Nickolls Quarry, one flew north, 25th November (I. A. Roberts)
- 2002** Nickolls Quarry, one, 5th December (R. K. Norman), possibly same as above

- 2006** Capel-le-Ferne Gun Site, two, then flew east, 2nd April (I. A. Roberts)
- 2011** Hythe Roughs, one flew east, 13th January (I. A. Roberts)
- 2017** Creteaway Down, three flew over, 27th October (B. Harper)
- 2018** Saltwood, one, 12th March (G. Cooke)
- 2018** Folkestone, two, 17th March (C. & J. Tomlinson)
- 2018** Horn Street, pair, 18th October (P. Howe)