

Red-legged Partridge

Alectoris rufa

Category C1

Breeding resident, possibly declining.

The Red-legged Partridge was successfully introduced into Britain in 1790 but only reached Kent in around 1850. It first appeared as a resident in the north-west of the county and slowly spread south and east. The earliest local record was in about 1870, when Mr. B. Turner first saw them at Sandling and there is some evidence that a pair had bred there about then (Ticehurst, 1909). This sighting is presumably the basis for its inclusion in Knight and Tolputt’s “list of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood” (1871).



Red-legged Partridge at Botolph’s Bridge (Brian Harper)

Ticehurst considered that records from east Kent prior to its colonisation involved arrivals from the continental but there has been no suggestion of immigration in recent years.

The latest Kent Bird Report (KOS, 2018) described it as a fairly widespread resident, particularly on coastal marshes in the north of the county, with many birds being released for shooting.

Breeding distribution

Figure 1 shows the breeding distribution by tetrad based on the results of the 2007-13 BTO/KOS atlas fieldwork.

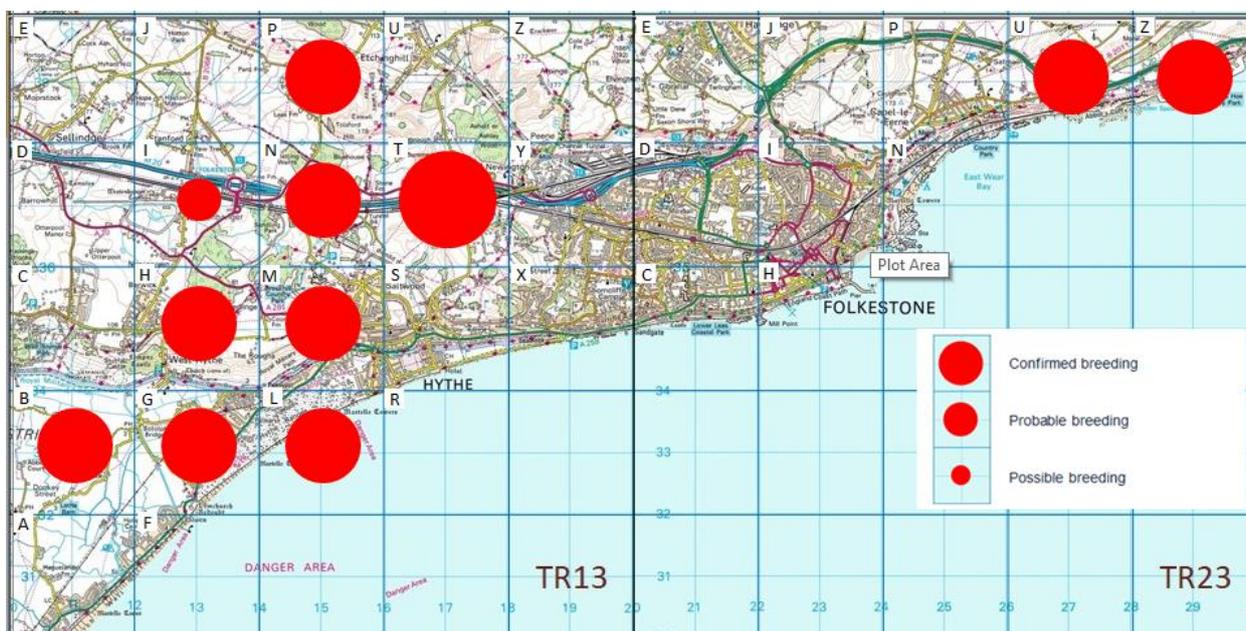


Figure 1: Breeding distribution of Red-legged Partridge at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in one tetrad, with probable breeding in nine 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%)	5	(0%)	1	(3%)
Probable/Confirmed	1	(3%)	3	(0%)	10	(32%)
Total	1	(3%)	8	(0%)	11	(35%)

Clements *et al* (2015) considered that the first atlas “may have understated its status”, with the distribution having doubled by the time of the second atlas, and that “this rate of increase appears to have slowed somewhat” by the latest atlas. The latest Kent Bird Report however stated that “the large numbers of birds released for shooting make an appraisal of the true status of the introduced gamebird difficult to evaluate”.

The stronghold of this partridge locally is to the north and west of Hythe, with another population in the Abbotscliffe area. Taylor *et al* observed that the “shingle wastes of Dungeness have for many years attracted a resident population” and the same is true locally on the shingle at Hythe Ranges where the species has been known since 1958.

There is some indication that it may have decreased in recent years. Double-figure counts were fairly frequent until the early 2000s but there has been only one since, when 12 were at Abbotscliffe in October 2009. The apparent decline has perhaps been due to the agricultural intensification that is also thought to be driving the decline in the Grey Partridge population (BTO, 2020).

Non-breeding distribution

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of [Species] by tetrad.

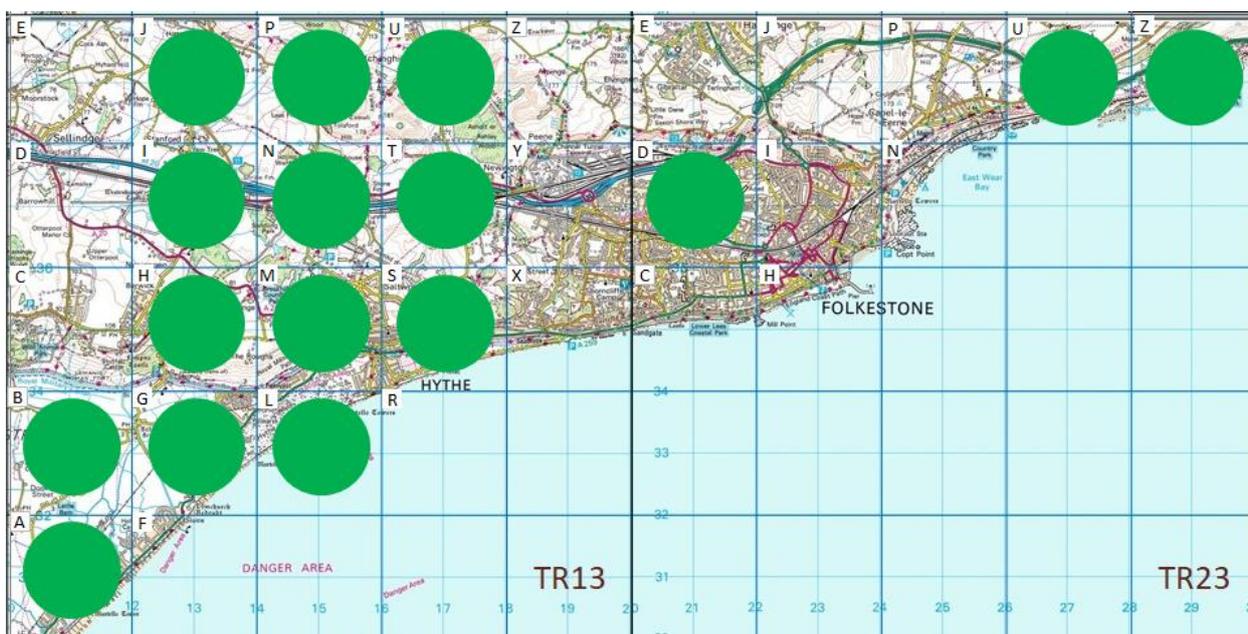


Figure 2: Distribution of all Red-legged Partridge records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

There have been records from 16 (52%) of tetrads. The species is largely sedentary so the overall distribution is very similar to the breeding distribution. Sightings away from likely breeding habitat are unusual and there are two of particular note: singles at Princes Parade (TR13 S) on the 26th September 2017 and in a garden in Laurel Close, Cheriton (TR23 D) on the 23rd March 2018. Occasional records from Samphire Hoe presumably originate from Abbotscliffe.

Clements *et al* stated that “from the early 1970s, birds released in Britain included increasing proportions of hybrids between Red-legged Partridge and the Chukar, or in some cases pure Chukars. Observers have seldom discriminated between true Red-legs and Chukars, so the Kent Atlas map represents a mixed population”. There have been no specific reports of hybrids or Chukars locally but the same may be true of the local mapping.



Red-legged Partridge at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)



Red-legged Partridge at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)



Red-legged Partridge at Princes Parade (Brian Harper)



Red-legged Partridge at Laurel Close (Vincent Lloyd)



Red-legged Partridge at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



Red-legged Partridge at Hythe Redoubt (Brian Harper)

References

BTO. *Bird Trends: Grey Partridge*: <https://app.bto.org/birdtrends/species.jsp?year=2017&s=grepa> (accessed 2020)

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Acknowledgements

The tetrad map images were produced from the Ordnance Survey [Get-a-map service](#) and are reproduced with kind permission of [Ordnance Survey](#).