

Greylag Goose

Anser anser

Category A, C2, C4

Formerly a rare winter visitor and passage migrant but now frequently recorded throughout the year, with most birds thought to originate from an increasing introduced population. Has bred in recent years.

Taylor *et al* (1981) stated that early records of this species in Kent were poorly documented, with the first confirmed record not occurring until 1925. Thereafter it became an almost annual winter visitor and passage migrant, with most records on the north Kent marshes in the winter period and very few on Romney Marsh, whilst most east Kent records concerned passage migrants.



Greylag Goose at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)

Greylag Geese were first introduced into the county in 1963, at the Sevenoaks reserve, with further releases at Dungeness in 1968, Westbere in 1969 and south Medway in 1970, and these have gone on to establish a successful feral population, which continues to increase as it does elsewhere in Britain, and Mitchell *et al* (2012) proposed that (for conservation management purposes) the remnant native Scottish and more widespread feral populations should be merged to form a new British Greylag Goose population. As a result of recent large increases in the abundance and distribution of both populations, there are now numerous areas where birds of mixed or uncertain provenance occur, making it impractical to continue to treat them as separate populations.

The first local records, one at Nickolls Quarry on the 5th February 1962 and one at West Hythe from the 6th to the 11th May in the same year, certainly relate to wild individuals as they pre-date the introductions into the county. A further record of three flying east past Hythe on the 19th October 1966 also appears very likely to have involved genuine migrants as the population at Sevenoaks at the time was small and fairly sedentary.

The next record, involving five arriving in off the sea at Folkestone on the 15th January 1983, probably also related to immigrants but it has become increasingly difficult to separate wild and introduced birds. Two at Nickolls Quarry on the 16th January 1984 may have been wild but six there on the 8th June of that year seem certain to have originated from feral stock as wild birds had not been recorded later than mid-May.

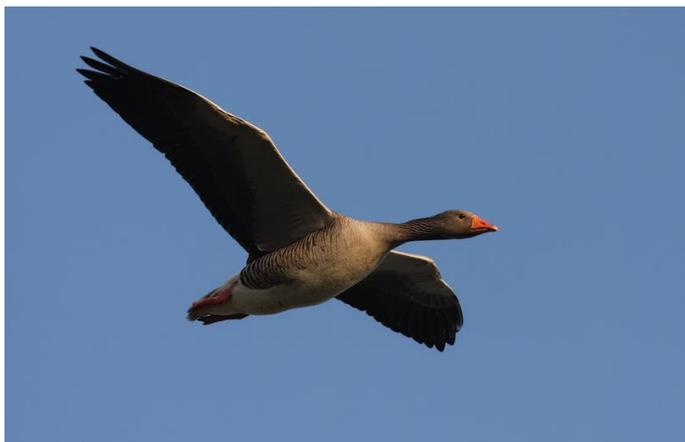
Another was seen at Nickolls Quarry on the 29th March 1987 whilst birds were noted moving up-channel past Mill Point on the 6th March 1989 (four), 1st April 1990 (two), 4th May 1990 (two) and 10th May 1991 (two). Up to three were present at Nickolls Quarry between March and May 1991, two flew west at Abbotscliffe on the 2nd April 1992, one flew west at Hythe Ranges on the 30th May 1992 and up to two were at Nickolls Quarry in May 1993 and May 1994. The following year saw the first double-figure count, when 18 flew east past Copt Point on the 11th March and nine were at Nickolls Quarry on 19th May 1995, with one remaining until the end of May (and with four there between the 3rd and 6th May), whilst two were seen on single dates in August and September.

In 1996 one remained at Nickolls Quarry between the 17th January and the 1st September, with 3 or 4 present on two dates in April, and three flew west at Abbotscliffe on the 10th April. There was an exceptional flock of at least 85 at Copt Point on the 17th September (which continues to be the record count) and ten were at Nickolls Quarry on the 20th October.

A similar pattern of records ensued, with small numbers making protracted stays at Nickolls Quarry or passing coastal sites typically in spring or autumn. Larger counts included 16 flying high south-west over Nickolls Quarry on the 7th October 1998, 13 flying north-east there on the 3rd March 2003, 53 flying north-east there on the 7th September 2003, c.20 flying north-east over Mill Point on the 6th February 2005 and 48 flying east over Hythe on the 3rd March 2005.

Further double figure counts involved 12 flying south over Abbotscliffe on the 28th March 2006, 14 flying west past Samphire Hoe on the 14th October 2008, 14 flying east there on the 4th February 2010 and 10 flying east past Mill Point on the 8th November 2011, when 11 were seen at Nickolls Quarry.

Cold weather in February 2013 led to a small influx, when a total of 24 (flocks of 3 and 21) flew east past Samphire Hoe on the 12th and 18 were seen at the Willop Basin on the 16th. A further 14 flew east past Samphire Hoe on the 17th March 2013.



Greylag Goose at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)

Greylag Goose at Nickolls Quarry (Ian Roberts)

A flock of 33 were seen at Botolph's Bridge on the 5th September 2015, 13 flew east past Hythe on the 10th April 2016, 15 were at Cock Ash Lake on the 7th December 2019 and a flock of 60 were feeding in fields in the Folkestone Racecourse area (Westenhanger) from the 8th February (with 39 still present at the month's end, decreasing to 18 by the 4th March and to two by the 10th March).

Although small numbers had been seen regularly in the Nickolls Quarry area in spring or early summer since 1993 breeding had not been suspected until a pair bred successfully in 2014 (with three chicks hatching in May, although only one appeared to survive beyond the end of the month). Birds have been present in subsequent years but breeding has not reoccurred. In 2020 up to 11 were present at Cock Ash Lake (TR13 E) from April to June and a pair bred, raising five young, whilst there were also five at Stanford Lake (TR13 E) and 19 at Horton Park Lakes (TR13 J) in May, although breeding was not suspected.

Breeding distribution

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

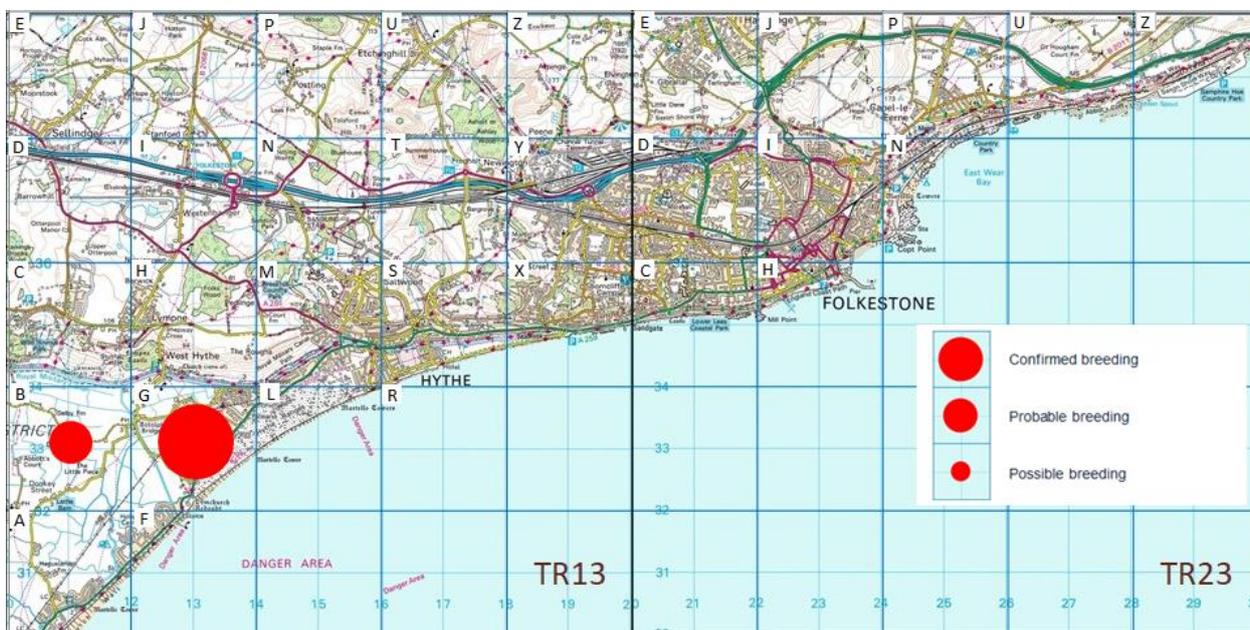


Figure 1: Breeding distribution of Greylag Goose at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

A pair was present in suitable breeding habitat at Nickolls Quarry (TR13 G) during the atlas period so this was recorded as ‘probable breeding’ under the BTO definitions, even though young were not detected. A bird was also noted in potential breeding habitat in the adjacent TR13 B, which was categorised as ‘possible breeding’.

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	0	(0%)	0	(0%)	1	(3%)
Total	0	(0%)	0	(0%)	1	(6%)

Greylag Goose was not recorded in either of the previous atlases. Balmer *et al* (2013) in the 2007-11 Bird Atlas describe how the species has shown an increase in the breeding range across Britain of 138% since the previous Atlas in 1988-91, and of 748% since the 1968-72 Breeding Atlas.



Greylag Geese at Nickolls Quarry (Ian Roberts)



Greylag Geese at Cock Ash Lake (Ian Roberts)

Non-breeding distribution

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of Greylag Goose by tetrad, with records in 19 tetrads (61%) and a noticeable gap from the Cheriton/Folkestone area and inland of here.

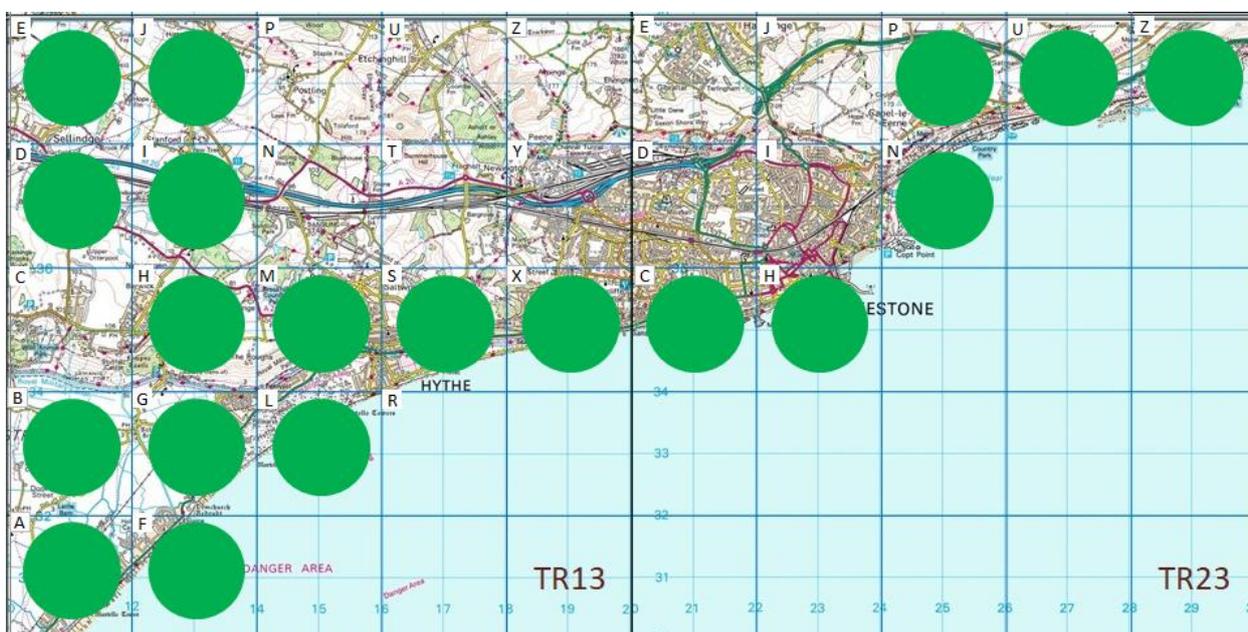


Figure 2: Distribution of all Greylag Goose records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

References

Balmer, D., Gillings, S., Caffrey, B., Swann, B., Downie, I & Fuller, R. 2013. *Bird Atlas 2007-11: The Breeding and Wintering Birds of Britain and Ireland*. British Trust for Ornithology

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

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Taylor, D., Davenport, D. & Flegg, J. 1981. *Birds of Kent*. Kent Ornithological Society

Acknowledgements

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



Greylag Geese at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)