

Tufted Duck

Aythya fuligula

Category A

Breeding resident, winter visitor and passage migrant

A widespread breeding species across northern and mid-latitude Europe and Asia east to Kamchatka and Japan. Northern European populations mostly migrate west and south-west to winter mainly in Britain and the Low Countries, but some remain on the Baltic coasts. Populations breeding in southern Britain, France and the Netherlands are mostly resident (Snow & Perrins, 1998).



Tufted Duck on canal at Seabrook (Brian Harper)

Ticehurst (1909) considered it to be only a cold weather visitor to Kent and it was not included in Knight and Tolputt's "list of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood" (1871). Harrison (1953) was able to report on a "marked alteration of status" as it became established as a breeding species in the county from about 1935. Taylor *et al* (1981) described "a considerable increase in numbers, at all times of the year" that had taken place during their review period (1952-76), attributing the increase largely to the provision of man-made lakes.

Clements *et al* (2015) reported on its continued success, noting that "the distribution and numbers ... increased markedly between successive atlases", with a range expansion between the first (1967-73) and second (1988-94) of "as much as 150%" and a "further expansion of at least 30%" by the third (2007-13). It is currently considered to be a regular breeding species on suitable waters in Kent, also a passage migrant and widespread winter visitor (KOS, 2020), with an estimate of around 500 breeding pairs (Clements *et al*).

The first documented local record involved a female seen by Roger Norman at Nickolls Quarry on the 8th December 1957 and up to four were noted irregularly there in the late 1950s and early 1960s. There were then few records until the late 1970s, which was probably a reflection of lack of coverage, as Dave Weaver counted 60 at Nickolls Quarry on the 14th January 1982 and there were around 100 there on the 16th February 1985. Roger Norman speculated that the increase in numbers in the 1980s compared to the 1950s "may be solely due to the vastly increased water area by the 1980s", but the growing county population is also likely to have been a factor.

Breeding distribution

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



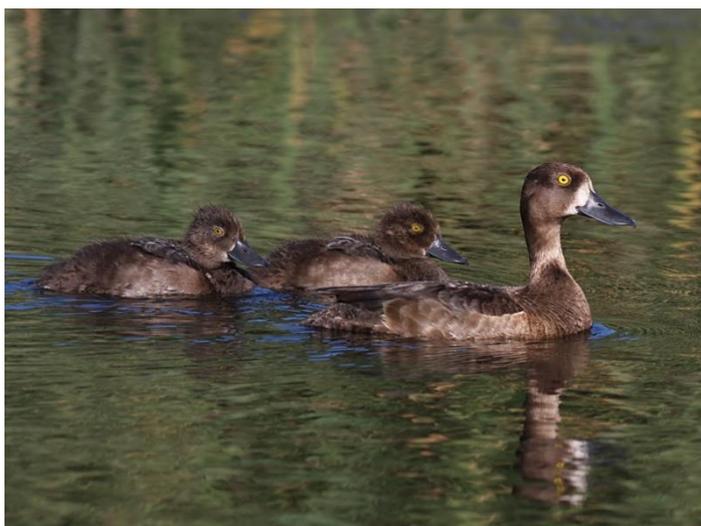
Figure 1: Breeding distribution of Tufted Duck at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in one tetrad, with probable breeding in four 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%)	4	(13%)	0	(0%)
Probable/Confirmed	0	(0%)	0	(0%)	5	(16%)
Total	0	(0%)	4	(13%)	5	(16%)

The local numbers reflect the countywide growth, with an absence in the first atlas, progressing to possible breeding in the second and confirmed breeding in the third.

The only instance of confirmed breeding during the most recent atlas was at Botolph’s Bridge (TR13 G) where a duck was seen with three chicks in July 2009, but there has since also been confirmed breeding at Cock Ash Lake (TR13 E). Breeding has also been suspected at Nickolls Quarry (TR13 G), Folkestone Racecourse (TR13 I), Sandling Park (TR13 N), Beachborough Lakes (TR13 T) and Oak Banks (TR13 T).



Tufted Duck at Botolph’s Bridge (Brian Harper)



Tufted Duck at Beachborough Lakes (Steve Tomlinson)

Non-breeding distribution

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of Tufted Duck by tetrad, with records in 17 tetrads (55%).

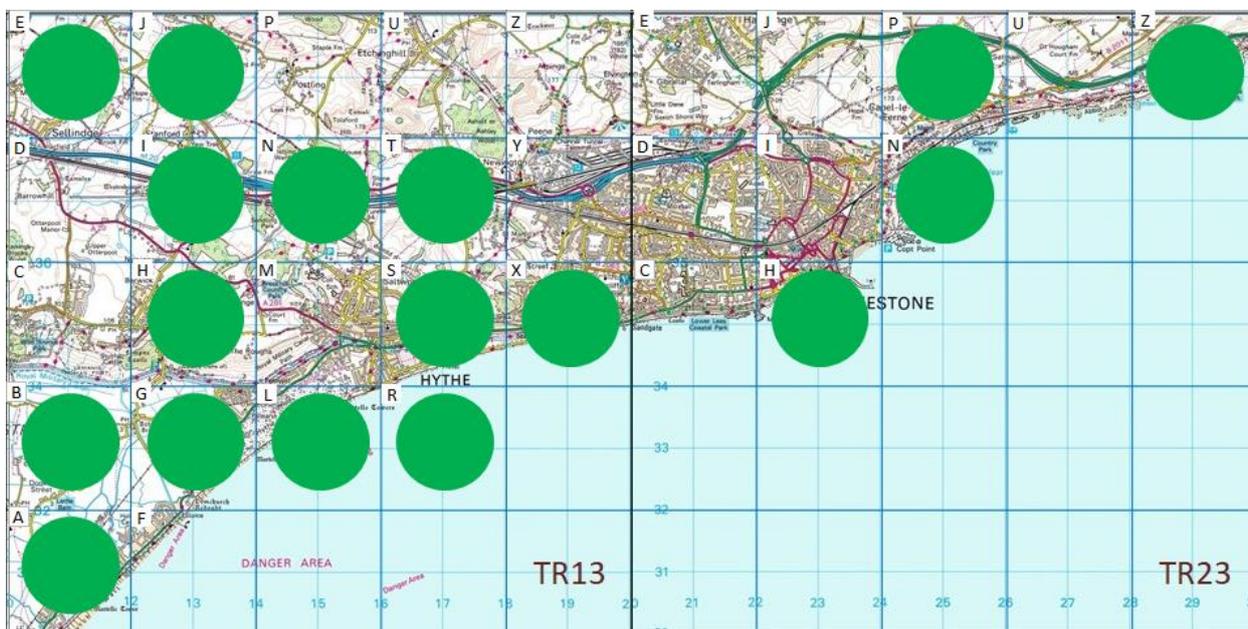


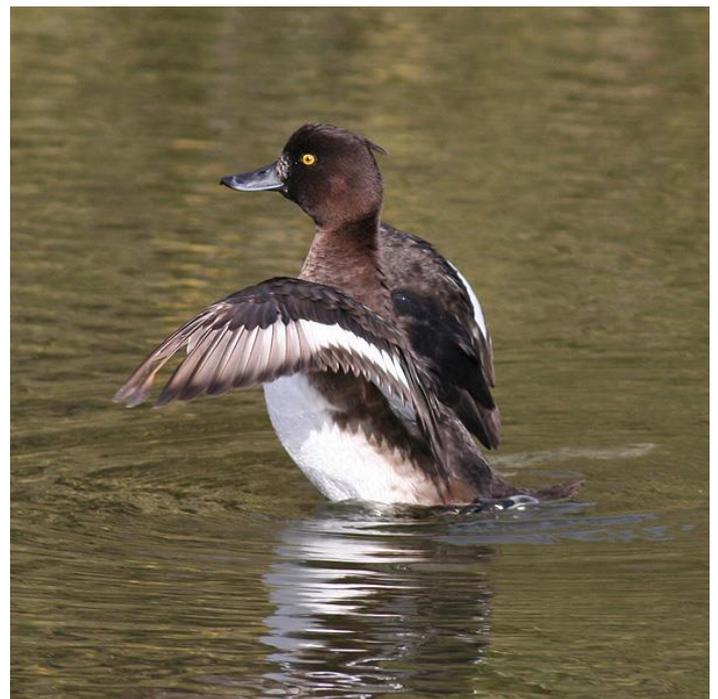
Figure 2: Distribution of all Tufted Duck records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The large counts from the 1980s have never been repeated and counts of 40 or more have been noteworthy since, usually associated with cold weather. Up to 46 were present at Nickolls Quarry in February 1991, with 40 there in January 1993, up to 48 there in February 1996, 43 there in January 2003 and up to 53 there in December 2010.

Nickolls Quarry has become increasingly less attractive to wildfowl in recent years due to increased disturbance associated with the formation of a new leisure club at the site and commencement of habitat degradation through development works. The last double figure count at the site was 13 on the 18th January 2017.

Non-breeding records are widespread. There are several records from the Royal Military Canal between Hythe and Seabrook, where up to 11 were present during cold weather in January 1997, and small areas of water can attract the species, with it even having occurred on the ponds at Samphire Hoe.

Coastal records however are scarce and have been just about annual in recent years. There appears to be little pattern to these, with records in all months except June and September, and no distinct spring or autumn passage. The largest count, of 15 flying west past Hythe on the 2nd December 2010, was associated with a cold weather movement.



Tufted Duck on the Royal Military Canal at Seabrook (Brian Harper)



Tufted Duck at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



Tufted Ducks at Folkestone Racecourse (Ian Roberts)

References

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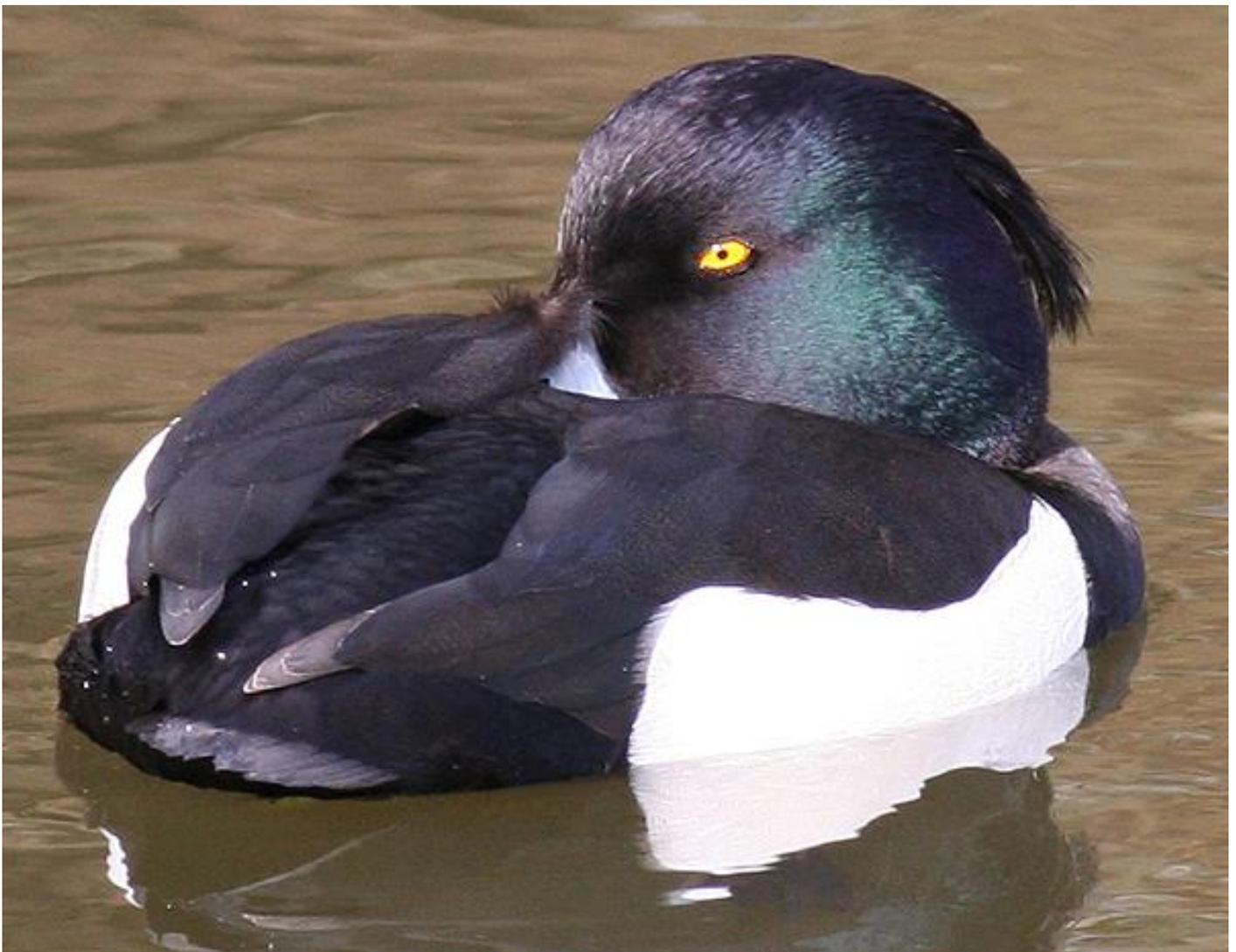
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Acknowledgements

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Tufted Duck on the Royal Military Canal at Seabrook (Brian Harper)