

Woodpigeon

Columba palumbus

Category A

Breeding resident and passage migrant.

Breeds throughout Europe, eastwards into Asia. Western populations are largely resident but northern and eastern breeders move south and west to winter in south-west France and Iberia (Snow & Perrins, 1998).

It is an abundant resident breeding species in Kent, also a passage migrant, occasionally in large numbers in the autumn (KOS, 2020).



Woodpigeon at West Hythe (Brian Harper)

Breeding distribution

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

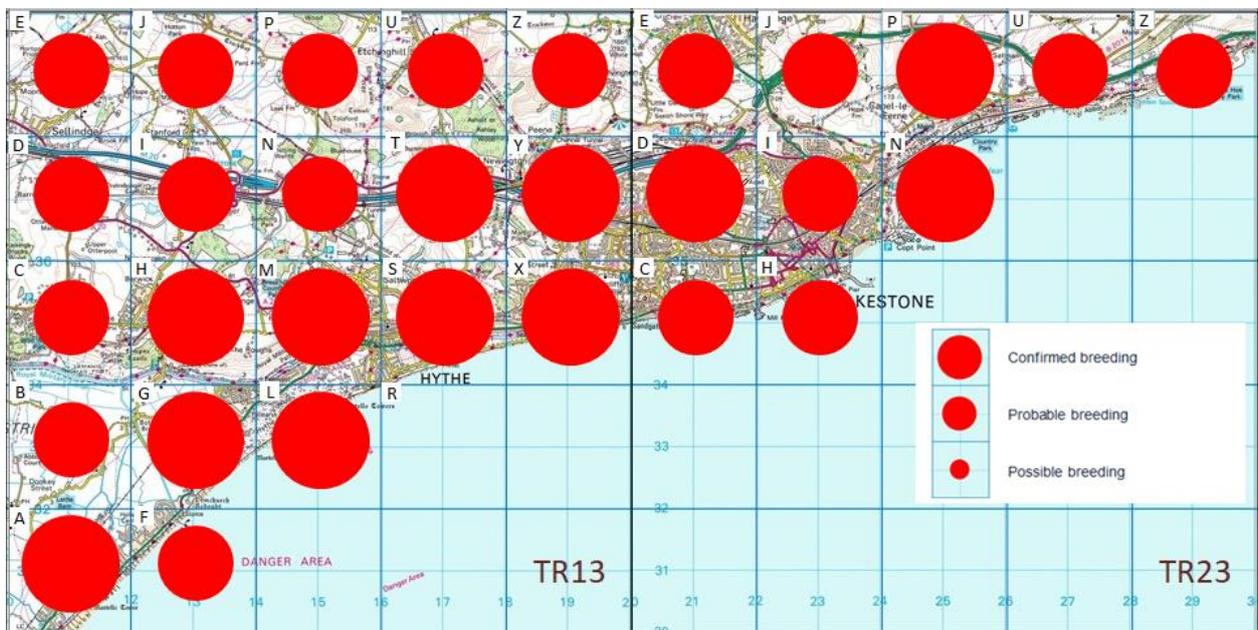


Figure 1: Breeding distribution of Woodpigeon at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in 12 tetrads, with probable breeding in 18 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	1	(3%)	0	(0%)	0	(0%)
Probable/Confirmed	24	(77%)	30	(97%)	30	(97%)
Total	25	(81%)	30	(97%)	30	(97%)

The ubiquitous Woodpigeon is one of the most widespread and abundant birds in the county. Henderson & Hodge felt that the few gaps in the first atlas were artificial and that the infilling of these by the time of the second atlas were due to better and more even coverage. However Clements *et al* (2015) reported that the national population has increased steadily since the 1970s, with some evidence linking this to autumn cereal growing, especially of oilseed rape, so the expansion could be genuine.

Traditionally a woodland species, it has become particularly abundant over farmland, nesting in small copses and isolated trees and bushes, having also spread into parks and gardens.

Non-breeding distribution

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of Woodpigeon by tetrad, with records in 30 tetrads (97%).

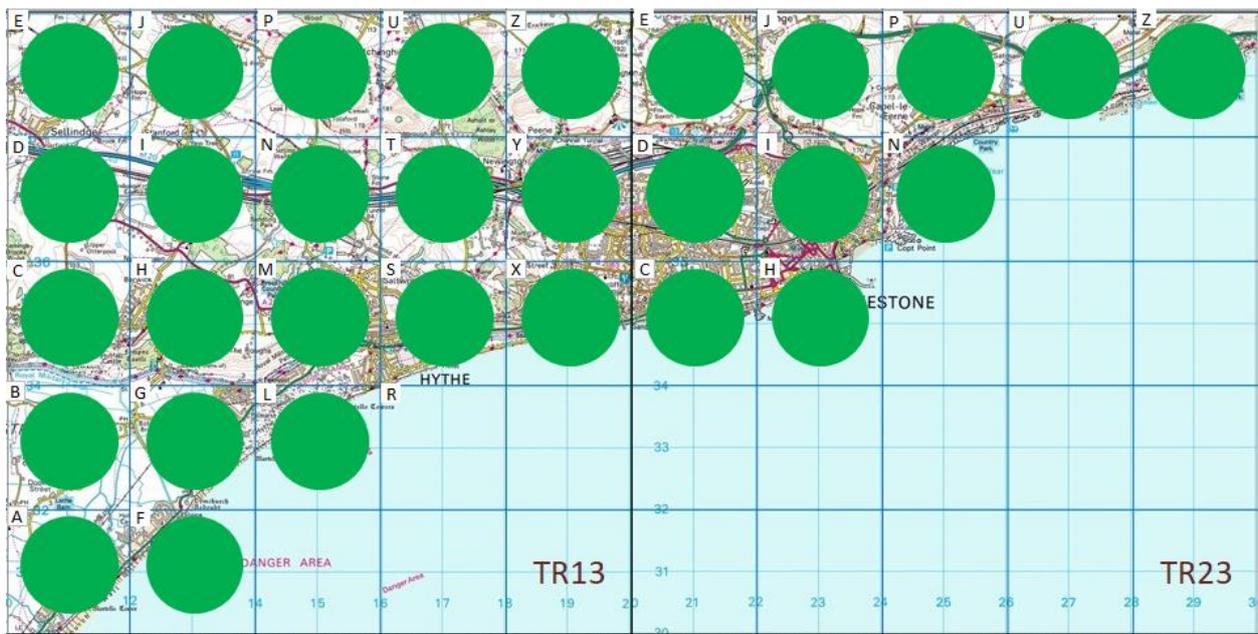


Figure 2: Distribution of all Woodpigeon records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The post-breeding population gathers into large flocks, which increase in size during the autumn, and woodland roosts also increase from early November. The largest numbers to date were present in November 2015, when thousands of birds were feeding in fields in the Botolph's Bridge area and appeared to be roosting on the wooded slopes to the north of the canal. From first light on the 28th November 2015, an estimated 10,000 flew from the roost to feeding areas on the marsh. At least 5,000 remained into early January 2016.

Other four-figure counts have involved 1,000 at West Hythe in February 1980, at Church Hougham in December 1996, at Crete Road West in February 2012 and Kiln Wood in January 2019, 1,150 at Barrowhill (Sellindge) in December 2010, 1,900 at Nickolls Quarry in February 1995, 2,000 at West Hythe in January 1984, 2,500 at Botolph's Bridge in January 2015 and 3,000 at Abbotscliffe in February 1997.



Woodpigeon at Seabrook (Brian Harper)



Woodpigeons at West Hythe (Brian Harper)

Although Woodpigeons breeding locally are essentially sedentary, migrants from elsewhere occur regularly and peak movements are usually in late October or November. Counts have included 1,165 flying west at Folkestone on the 28th October 1994, 1,040 west at Copt Point on the 8th November 1996, 1,770 west at Nickolls Quarry on the 4th November 2002, 1,160 west at Abbotscliffe on the 26th October 2004, 1,855 west at Abbotscliffe on the 5th November 2005 and 1,300 west at Samphire Hoe on the 12th November 2008.

Spring passage is far less regular and marked, but has been recorded occasionally in March and April, with counts including 1,280 flying west at Capel Battery on the 3rd April 2006, 1,750 west there on the 9th April 2006 and 1,500 flying north at Botolph's Bridge on the 8th April 2008.



Woodpigeon at West Hythe (Brian Harper)



Woodpigeon at Seabrook (Brian Harper)

References

Clements, R., Orchard, M., McCanch, N. & Wood, S. 2015. *Kent Breeding Bird Atlas 2008-13*. Kent Ornithological Society

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](#).



Woodpigeons at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper) – part of the record flock present in November 2015



Woodpigeons at Abbotscliffe (Ian Roberts) – autumn migrants in November 2019