

# Great Tit

*Parus major*

Category A

Breeding resident and passage migrant.

A widespread breeding species virtually throughout Europe and also extensively in Asia. It is resident over much of the southern and central part of its range but is an irregular eruptive migrant from northern areas, sometimes moving in huge numbers (Snow & Perrins, 1998).

A widespread and common resident and occasional passage migrant in Kent (KOS, 2020). Ancestrally birds of broad-leaved woodland, Great Tits have adapted well to most man-made habitats including urban gardens, coppices and conifer plantations. It is a common nest box user and a regular visitor to garden bird-bird tables even in the heart of urban areas (Clements *et al*, 2015, Taylor *et al*, 1981).



Great Tit 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.

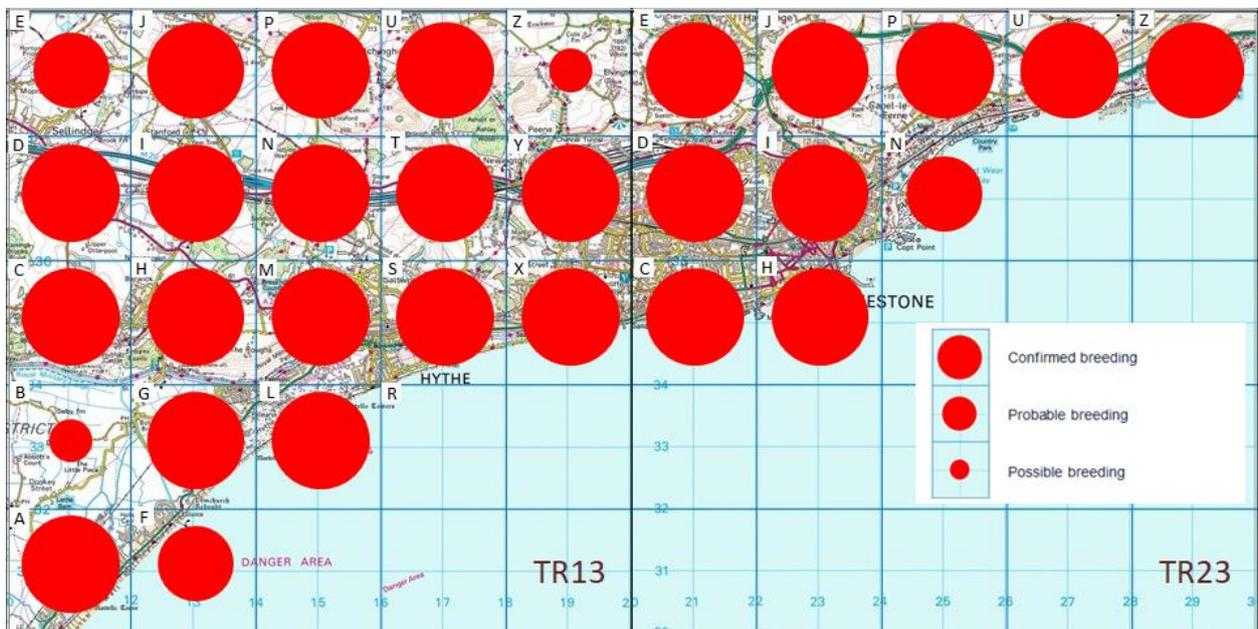


Figure 1: Breeding distribution of Great Tit at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in 25 tetrads, with probable breeding in three more and possible breeding in two others. 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%)	1	(3%)	2	(6%)
Probable/Confirmed	24	(77%)	27	(87%)	28	(90%)
Total	24	(77%)	28	(90%)	30	(97%)

Clements *et al* (2015) reported that the national population has shown a steady increase since the 1960s which may recently have ceased. The increase is thought to be linked to mild winters and the popularity of garden bird feeding. Great Tits have advanced their average laying date by 11 days since 1968, so their breeding cycle has largely kept pace with climate change. In Kent, they have almost certainly increased in numbers and extended their range since the second Atlas. The increase in occupied tetrads may reflect better coverage in the in the recent Atlas, but there is also evidence of spread into marginal habitat, and the same holds true locally.



Great Tit at Cheriton (Brian Harper)



Great Tit at Saltwood Castle (Brian Harper)

**Non-breeding distribution**

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

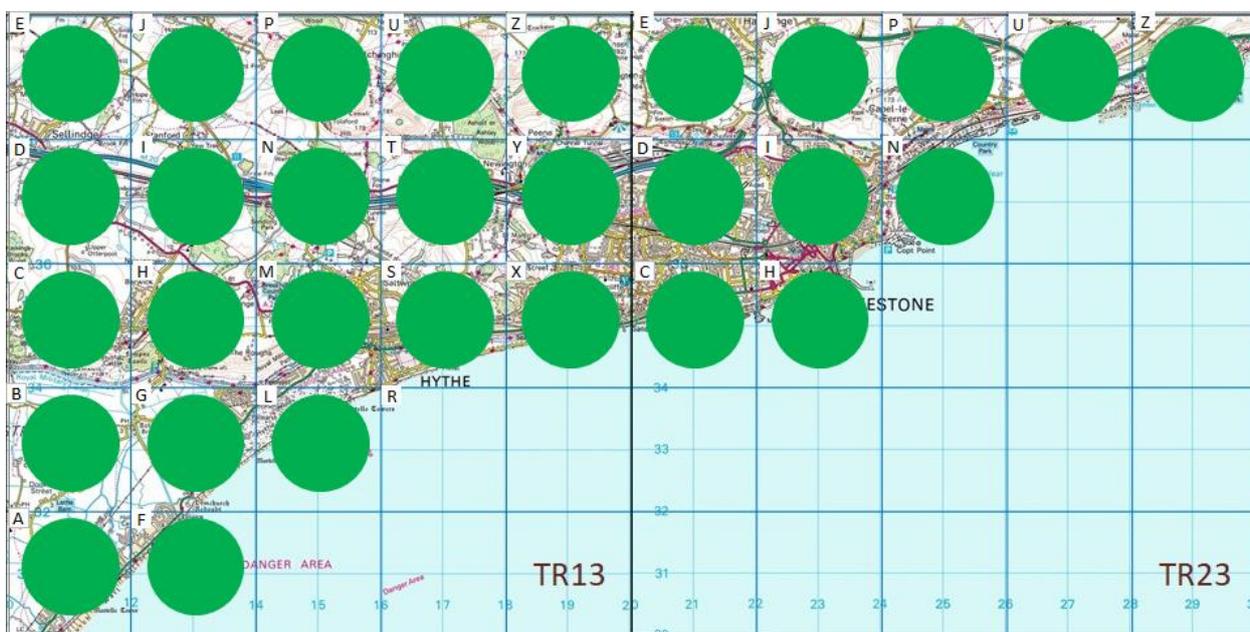


Figure 2: Distribution of all Great Tit records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Taylor *et al* stated that in most years passage is very light but in autumn larger numbers have been recorded occasionally mainly between mid-October and early November. However autumn 1957 and spring 1958 stand out was quite exceptional, as they do for Blue Tit, with birds first noted in mid-September and continuing to the end of October, with birds remaining in large numbers in some areas.

Locally the irruption was not as marked as it was with Blue Tit, but there was still a count of ten at Hythe Ranges on the 16<sup>th</sup> October 1957 and small numbers were noted at Nickolls Quarry where there was “no really suitable habitat to attract them” in late October. The following spring saw coastal movements of returning birds reported in March and April, including seven flying east at Hythe Ranges on the 31<sup>st</sup> March and “good numbers” there on the 9<sup>th</sup> April.

In 1969 Ian Wallace and Tony Greenland noted 50 in Folkestone Warren on the 13<sup>th</sup> October, whilst Dale Gibson saw 50 at Folkestone on the 29<sup>th</sup> September 1992 and 60 at Folkestone on the 18<sup>th</sup> September 1996. Subsequent counts have involved 20 in Folkestone Warren on the 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1998, 14 that “appeared to be moving through” at Nickolls Quarry on the 4<sup>th</sup> October 2007 and 29 at Beachborough Park on the 16<sup>th</sup> November 2018.

Spring passage has included an exceptional total of 59 (in three flocks comprising 15, 20 and 24) birds moving east at Capel Battery on the 8<sup>th</sup> March 2004, ten “moving through” Samphire Hoe on the 6<sup>th</sup> March 2013, 22 there on the 7<sup>th</sup> April 2013 and nine flying east there on the 25<sup>th</sup> March 2018.



Great Tit at West Hythe (Brian Harper)



Great Tit at Saltwood Castle (Brian Harper)

One that had been ringed at Herne on the 20<sup>th</sup> January 1974 was found dead at Folkestone, 32km to the south, on the 8<sup>th</sup> June 1975.



Great Tit at West Hythe (Brian Harper)



Great Tit at West Hythe (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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Snow, D. & Perrins, C.M., 1998. *The Birds of the Western Palearctic*. Oxford University Press.

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](#).