

Skylark

Alauda arvensis

Category A

Breeding resident, winter visitor and passage migrant.

A widespread breeding species across much of Europe and northern Asia. Northern and central Europe are largely vacated in winter, with movements south-west on a broad front, reaching the Atlantic coast and Mediterranean area. Large-scale cold-weather movements can occur at any time during winter (Snow & Perrins, 1998).

It is a widespread, common but declining resident species in Kent, also a common passage migrant and winter visitor (KOS, 2020).



Skylark at Donkey Street (Brian Harper)

Breeding distribution

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

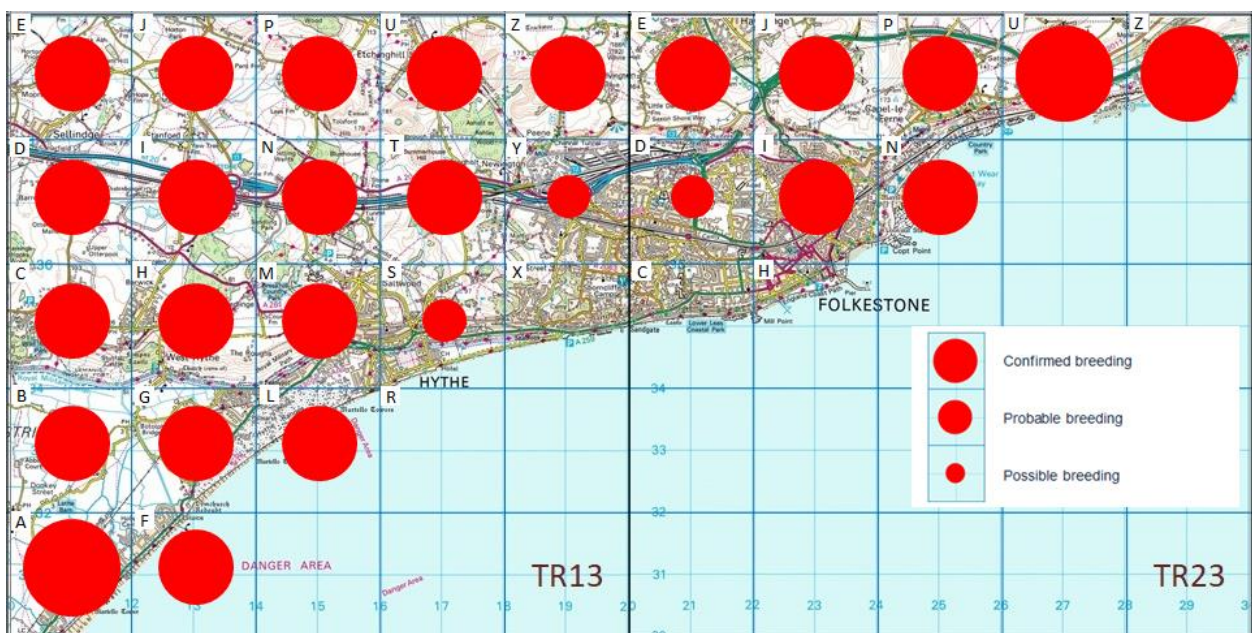


Figure 1: Breeding distribution of Skylark at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in three tetrads, with probable breeding in 21 more and possible breeding in three 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	1	(3%)	0	(0%)	3	(10%)
Probable/Confirmed	22	(71%)	26	(84%)	24	(77%)
Total	23	(74%)	26	(84%)	27	(87%)

Clements *et al* (2015) stated that “Skylarks are birds of open country that use low vegetation, including agricultural crops, for feeding and nesting. Changes in farming practice, especially the move from spring to autumn cereal sowing, has had a very damaging effect on the species by reducing its food supply in winter and preventing birds from nesting in spring. This has led to a continuing national decline that is mirrored in Kent”.

The BBS trend for 1995 to 2012 was a 29% decline in south-east England, but the decrease in occupied tetrads in Kent between second and third atlases was just 7%, suggesting that so far the reduction in numbers is more significant than the reduction in range. Locally the range is yet to show any sign of contraction.



Skylark at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)



Skylark at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)

Non-breeding distribution

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of Skylark by tetrad, with records in 31 tetrads (100%).

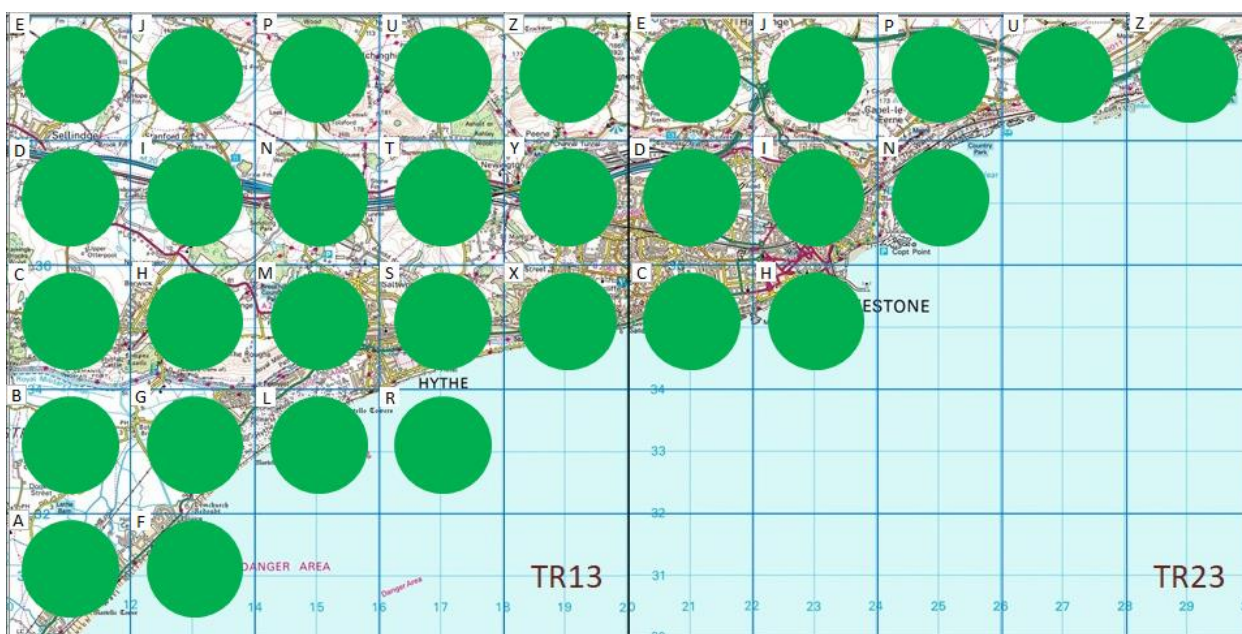


Figure 2: Distribution of all Skylark records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Autumn passage may be noted between late September and late November, when flocks may accumulate in fields or be seen arriving in off the sea or heading west along the coast. Three-figure accumulations or movements have comprised:

- 194 in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 20th October 1991
- 243 in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 15th October 1993
- 120 flying west at Abbotscliffe on the 14th October 1996
- 100 at Abbotscliffe on the 19th October 1996
- 200 at Capel-le-Ferne on the 10th November 1996
- 200 at Abbotscliffe on the 16th November 1996
- 100 at Abbotscliffe on the 10th October 1997
- 133 in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 12th October 1997

150 in/west at Abbotscliffe on the 10th October 1998
135 at Abbotscliffe on the 20th October 1998
110 at Abbotscliffe on the 18th November 1998
100 at Abbotscliffe on the 24th October 2003
118 at Abbotscliffe on the 24th October 2010
110 at Abbotscliffe on the 18th November 2016

The largest counts in the winter months are typically associated with the onset of cold weather. Early records included c.100 at Palmarsh on the 29th December 1957, 650 flying north-west over Folkestone on the 27th December 1964, a “very heavy hard weather movement to the north-west” over Folkestone on the 10th December 1967 and a “constant stream moving NNW” over Folkestone on the 30th December 1968. In more recent years the following three-figure counts have been noted:

783 off the sea at Copt Point on the 5th January 1985
120 at Nickolls Quarry on the 1st January 1993
128 at Abbotscliffe on the 8th January 1993
c.200 at Capel-le-Ferne on the 2nd January 1995
c.100 at Nickolls Quarry on the 29th December 1996
c.200 at Nickolls Quarry on the 1st January 1997
326 at Botolph's Bridge on the 26th December 2010
545 in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 16th January 2013



Skylark at Copt Point (David Featherbe)



Skylark at Hythe Roughs (Brian Harper)

There has been little evidence of spring passage, with the only double-figure count involving 22 arriving in off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 3rd March 1997.



Skylark at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)



Skylark at Donkey Street (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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Acknowledgements

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



Skylark at Hythe Roughs (Brian Harper)