



## THE BIRDWATCH IRELAND GALWAY NEWSLETTER – PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

In the 1980s, Galway committee member Dave Nuttall and I attempted a newsletter with some pre-Windows software and using, as I recall, an early BBC minicomputer. However, technical and other difficulties meant it was short-lived: there were only five issues. See Dave's article further on.

The 1990s saw the arrival of the early version of Microsoft Windows and, around 1991, I acquired a desktop Wang computer – the ESB sold them and you could spread the considerable twelve-hundred-pounds cost over your monthly ESB electricity bills! So, with this on board began the quarterly BirdWatch Galway Newsletter.

The general idea was to inform Galway members of branch happenings and forthcoming events and rare, unusual and first-of-season bird sightings. This was before or in the infancy of the internet and mobile phones so keeping members in touch was more important and difficult than it is today. In effect, the newsletter was just a single typed A4 sheet which was sent to BWI HQ who photocopied it for Galway members and included it with the *Wings* quarterly issues. At that time, *Wings* was packed and addressed in BWI headquarters by a team of volunteers.

However, some time around the year 2000, BWI outsourced the *Wings* dispatch and it was no longer possible to manually insert the *Galway Newsletter*. So instead, committee members of the Galway branch gathered in the Anno Santo Hotel and addressed envelopes for posting to Galway members. To minimise postage costs, I cycled all around Galway city to hand-deliver to city members!

With postage costs continually rising, this really started to make it too much of a financial burden and with more and more people having access to e-mail, by around 2007 distribution was changed to e-mail addresses only. In this manner it now goes out to just short of 450 subscribers – mainly based in County Galway but with a good number of other Irish and overseas locations as well. The latter are often former Galway birdwatchers now based elsewhere who still like to keep in touch.

The format and policy of the newsletter has not changed much – it has remained low-tech and the aim is still to keep to mainly Galway bird interests and to especially target that majority of bird supporters who perhaps often feel they are not really that knowledgeable about birds but whose hearts are in the right place in relation to them and their conservation.

Of course, to achieve this, the newsletter has depended on articles and content from those with top-level birding skills and specific bird-related interests and to them I have been most grateful for their contributions over the years.

As to the future – at my stage of life further 'signal' edition goalposts are unlikely so from now on it will be periodic or seasonal rather than strict numerical quarterly and it some stage too its future and editor's succession will need consideration.

It remains to thank all those who helped over the years with *Galway Newsletter* matters. Thanks to Chris Peppiest for his quarterly Galway Bird Report which gives the newsletter a greatly enhanced status. To Tim Griffin and Tom Cuffed for their very successful monthly Nimmo's Pier outings, so much appreciated by all, and to Brendan Dunne who kept records of the outings and prepared them for several publications in the newsletter. To the unfailing expert newsletter contributors like Dermot Breen, Stephen Heery and Aonghus O Donnell and many others. To Pat Finnegan, who selected and introduced poems for 55 newsletters. Without all of their input there would have been no *Newsletter*.

Finally, a particular thanks to Marianne ten Cate – the most stalwart of all – who, amongst so much other endeavour for Galway birds, has unfailingly proofread all these one hundred *Galway Newsletter* issues and thus ensured that they reached readers error-free and in first-class presentational order.

To all many thanks and well done. And, finally, it is so good also to see that the very next item below is by Colin Heaslip, announcing the establishment of a new branch committee. It is the perfect announcement to have in this milestone edition.

NS

### NEW BRANCH COMMITTEE

A meeting was held in the Connaught Hotel on February 7<sup>th</sup> with the purpose of reforming a formal Galway Branch Committee to progress some of the exciting events lined-up for 2018 on top of the unflinching events routinely run by the current Branch stalwarts. The newly formed committee for the first half of 2018 is as follows:

- Officers: Blaithin Kennedy (Secretary), Sean Gavin (Treasurer) and Colin Heaslip (Chair);
- General committee members: M. Ní Fhéinne, C. Mulkeen, C. Bruton, B. Browne, C. Manning, J. Murphy, C. Forkan, M. Garvey, D. Scully, C. Peppiatt and G. Ward.

This group could not have been formed without the continued support of Neil Sharkey, Marianne ten Cate and Tom Cuffe, whose guidance regarding the Galway Branch we hope will continue.

Colin Heaslip

### NIMMO'S PIER MONTHLY OUTINGS

These monthly outings are really successful and popular and below is photograph of a typical Saturday morning's outing with leader/organiser Tom Cuffe (inset).

NS



### BIRDS ON THE PAGE

Birdwatching can be exciting, enjoyable, frustrating, challenging, often – but by no means always – energetic, sometimes scientific, and even spiritual. A bird notebook is a useful thing to keep. Contained in a notebook are memories to be resurrected after many years, reliable memories based on names, numbers, places and dates written down soon after the event, essential ingredients of a published bird report. I have kept a bird notebook since 1994.

Browsing through the earliest notebook, I found that on 12<sup>th</sup> January 1994 I saw two males and a ringtail Hen Harrier hunting on Carrownagappul bog near Mountbellew. The ringtail had blue and green wing tags and I later found out that it had been tagged in Scotland, if my memory serves me well. On 17<sup>th</sup> April 1994, I heard Greenland White-fronted Geese flying north-north-west over my house in Lawrence-town on a clear moonlit night, on a direct line from the Little Brosna to Iceland. On 19<sup>th</sup> February 1995, I found Lapwings and Golden Plovers, with some Dunlins, "spread uniformly at about one bird per four square metres" over a four-hectare field on Friars Island, Meelick, possibly up to 10,000 birds in all.

Leafing forward twenty-one years through the pages of the notebooks, I found an entry on 8<sup>th</sup> April 2016, memorable in two ways. It was the day my first granddaughter was born and I had listed ten bird species that were going about the business of raising their own young in our garden in Lawrencetown. There was a Blackbird with food in its beak; a Song Thrush leaving through a prickly gap in a Holly bush (eight days later two fledged birds were feeding on the lawn); a pair of Greenfinches on the apple tree; two Wrens fiercely fighting; a Starling feverishly collecting straw from the strawberry bed for its nest in next door's barn, returning almost as soon as it had left; a Pied Wagtail collecting nesting material for a nest in the same barn (it would later be feeding its demanding young on the lawn); a pair of Coal Tits; Robins feeding young in a nest in the depths of a roll of chicken wire in the turf shed; a Woodpigeon quietly feeding on the lawn; and a Mistle Thrush flying low over the hedge on its way to a nest in a nearby ash tree (it had nested in the apple tree the year before).

Stephen Heery

### BIRDING AS A YOUNGSTER

I turned 18 last September. This momentous milestone in my life gave me cause to reflect on what has been the most profound passion throughout my time on this planet thus far – birding.

I have always been fascinated by nature, always intrigued by whatever flapped, crawled, hopped or swam in the natural world. My interest in birds developed from this, along with the need for something tangible to go out and pursue – I could read about whales and dolphins incessantly, but to actually go and see them was a whole other matter. With birds it was easy, observing them was as easy as taking a short walk down the road. My interest really came to the fore when I got my first bird book (the RSPB handbook to British birds) and a cheap



but effective pair of binoculars. This was at the age of about 7 or 8. I devoured the book cover to cover, and soon, to my amazement, discovered the wealth of ornithological life right on my doorstep. I found a 'local patch' and grew familiar with its new species.

In sixth class we were fortunate enough to be paid a visit by the esteemed Tom Cuffe, who mentioned the monthly Nimmo's Pier outings to me. I attended my first outing in the winter of 2012 and was instantly and warmly welcomed to the Galway birdwatching scene - and discovered how much I wanted a telescope! I was very lucky to grow up in Galway, not only is there a profusion of high-quality coastal sites near me for birdwatching, but relatively speaking there is a high density of birders, especially for the west of Ireland. Before long I found myself some birding mentors, to whom I am incredibly grateful. I won't name names, but you know who you are. They have been exceptionally good to me over the years, bringing me to places I'd have struggled to drag an unwilling parent to otherwise, as well as patiently tutoring me with encyclopaedic knowledge.

As my birding life flourished, so did my social life at school. I soon hit the major challenge all young birders face at some stage - the toxic effect of peer pressure. For reasons unfathomable to me, the vast majority of the population finds the observance of birds as 'uncool', or 'weird'. I'd been told as much at school by those who unfortunately discovered my passion. Thus, it would quickly become a very well-kept secret. I kept my birding under wraps for years, and still do to an extent. I even went as far as having two separate Facebook accounts, one for my school friends and another for liking birding pages and befriending birders. However, this was unsustainable and as I go on more and more of my friends are discovering my unusual but marvellous hobby/lifestyle. This brings me onto another positive force in the lives of young birders today - social media.

I joined twitter precociously at the age of 12. I wanted to receive rare bird news and twitter was, and still is, the best place to get it. However, to my surprise I discovered I was not alone! Through the years I met four young Irish birders scattered across the country. We quickly became excellent friends and formed a cathartic like-minded group, one which is still growing and gaining members today. All of a sudden, I felt a lot less alone as a young ornithologist. I discovered that these friends too all kept their birding a secret from school friends. It's a shame it has to be this way, but, fortunately, it has not hindered us in our development as birders.

Galway is in the seemingly unique position of having a very strong new generation of up and coming ornithologists. I can think of at least three or four off the top of my head. A lot of this is surely due to the fantastic work Tom Cuffe does promoting the awareness of birdlife in schools, potentially igniting and sustaining the avian spark before it gets snuffed out by peer pressure and the rigours of secondary school life. If I had to give advice to the young birders across the country today, I would say this: you are not alone! Make sure to use social media to its fullest extent, always keep a notebook, and, most

importantly, don't lose that spark, that passion. It will take you to amazing places.

**Cathal Forken**

### BRANCH OR NO BRANCH

As the Galway branch of BirdWatch Ireland has not had a formal structure since 2011, some may say it looks as if BirdWatch in Galway is hibernating, others may say it feels like a very prolonged summer recess. Yet, there is still a lot of birdwatching activity throughout the year and it is worth celebrating the continuing commitment of many of our members.

Hibernation has never been an option on our birdwatching calendar, winter being the busiest season of the year. The enthusiasm with which Galway members are contributing to the Irish Wetland Bird Survey (I-WeBS) has never flagged and a cohort of young and old goes out on monthly counts from September to March all over County Galway and/or contributes to the three Inner Galway Bay and two Lower Lough Corrib I-WeBS counts every winter. Further-more, numerous members take part in the winter Garden Bird Survey and commit to looking after the birds in their garden. And there is the ongoing effort to monitor specific species, such as the Brent Goose or (more sporadically) the Whooper Swan. Last, but by no means least, the monthly Nimmo's Pier outings, which originated as a unique Galway BirdWatch event, have been a staple of the winter diary; they are invariably well attended and attract new and younger people, and those who may not do surveys but still have a keen interest in watching birds in the company of experts.

A prolonged summer recess is not on the cards for many members either. To name some of the ongoing activities, there is the Country-side Bird Survey to keep a number of members busy year on year, there are efforts to better protect and 'accommodate' some of our summer migrants, members survey endangered breeding species or raptors, and members contribute data to Spring Alive and the European Breeding Bird Atlas.

Members also give talks about birds to groups in their locality or represent BirdWatch in other organisations, irrespective of seasons.

Yet, there is something lacking, especially for those of us who had got used to monthly branch meetings, regular winter talks and annual outings, which cemented the cohesion of the membership and guaranteed contact between members. Therefore, the efforts of Colin Heaslip to revive the branch in Galway are to be lauded and supported.

During the fifteen years or so, the internet has, to some extent, afforded to a certain cohort of members some measure of a sense of birdwatchers' community through dedicated web sites. But, most of those are national and international sites, not rooted, and not always relevant, in Galway. This is where the *Galway Newsletter* has been invaluable; we may have had to resort to distribution through the internet but its content never lost its focus on Galway - its birds, their Galway habitats and the Galway members of BirdWatch Ireland. We owe much gratitude to the esteemed editor of the *Newsletter*, Neil Sharkey, who has been at the helm of its quarterly production since 1993 and has now, 25 years later, produced its 100<sup>th</sup> issue. I have no doubt

that such stamina and commitment will remain unparalleled. Hats off and thank you, Neil.

**Marianne ten Cate**

### A JOURNEY INTO BIRDING

I arrived back home from South Africa in January 2007 and found myself settled in Galway by the following April. Life was OK. I had a Monday to Friday job and free time on evenings and weekends for the first time in my life. I fell in with the very active Galway branch of BirdWatch Ireland, having become entirely over-excited about seeing Little Egrets in Treanlaur near Oranmore. Recruitment into the Galway Bay I-WeBS counts followed and I got to know some really great folk.

My early equipment consisted of a terrible Aldi spotting scope mounted on a rickety plastic tripod and a pair of old Tasco bins that were still caked in the sandstone soils of South Africa. Michael Davis introduced some stability to my world having 'sold' me a good tripod he had to spare for a scandalously low price. Not long afterwards, Tom Cuffe lent me a Nikon scope for an inordinate length of time until I saved enough for my own (which he also helped me source). It took almost two years. I can never repay the kindness those two gentlemen showed me, but have endeavoured to pass it forward. The early days were tough as I was not a natural birder, but I studied the books and things slowly improved. I was often in the company of more accomplished ornithologists and my confidence grew. I even gave a talk or two in the Anno Santo Hotel; oh, the glory days!

The Galway Bay counts were always great craic, and, depending on who you were with, the between-location conversations often flowed from politics to sport to wildlife. Though not a good spectator sport, birding most definitely has a powerful communal aspect and is in my opinion one of society's great levellers. Birders are insular creatures and seldom seek personal information. Religion, race, gender or profession are all unimportant in comparison to lists, places visited and birds ticked.

By the time I could tell a Whimbrel from a Curlew (in typical Galway weather), I had quit my full-time job and was studying Environmental Science at NUI Galway. As the years progressed, my skills and knowledge improved to a level where birding as a pastime was replaced by bird surveys for environmental consultancies. My degree led me into a PhD which was entomological in nature, but my professional bird work continued as a welcome (and necessary) aside to my unhealthy interest in flies. My 'mega-bird' eventually came along on one such survey in March 2016 - a Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor* in Co Westmeath. However, owing to confidentiality agreements with the client for whom I was working, I could not officially report it. It was akin to winning the Lotto and not being able to spend a penny of it; a fact I think I will always resent.

Time became even scarcer when my son arrived in May 2015, and before I knew it, the prospect of settling in Galway permanently started to become less feasible. My plot in *the graveyard of ambition* was seemingly not for sale (or more realistically, horrendously overpriced!). Ten years after I first ran aground among that most merry and wonderful bunch of folk that make up the Galway





branch of BirdWatch Ireland, I had to say *adieu*. With parchments in hand, and a boisterous two-year-old in tow, my wonderful wife and I left Galway behind to move to my native Sligo where I took up a Ranger position with the National Parks and Wildlife Service - an ambition of mine since I began my academic and birding adventure. I will be spoiled: Barnacle Geese, Eider Ducks, Hen Harriers, Peregrine, and Chough - all on my patch and so much more to discover.

On the occasion of this 100<sup>th</sup> issue of the *Galway Newsletter*, I would like to say a huge thank you to all of you who have contributed to my own journey. I have named two, but there are many more who know who they are. I will miss Galway and all the local patches I used to visit. I will miss the white-winged gulls at Nimmo's Pier and the hordes of waders and wildfowl at Rahasane. I will miss the Grass-hopper Warblers in Dangan and the Sparrowhawks that hunt the pigeons on the university campus. I will miss running into familiar and friendly faces and catching up. I will miss the people who make Galway such a special place for birdwatching. Continued success and health to you all.

John Carey

### BIRDS IN POETRY

A feature of the newsletter, greatly loved by all, was the 'Birds in Poetry' series, chosen and presented by Pat Finnegan. To recall this, Pat has chosen to repeat *Wheatear* by Michael Longley, originally included in *Newsletter* No. 57 of February 2007.

NS

'Wheatear' by Michael Longley, first published in *Snow Water* in 2004, was reproduced in *The Lake without a Name*, a beautiful collection commemorating Longley's association with County Mayo. Again, he celebrates in lyrical language the natural beauty of Carrigskeewaun while relating to the panic of the trapped 'wheatear from Africa' before rejoicing in its restoration to freedom.

Pat Finnegan

### WHEATEAR

Poem beginning with a line of J.M. Synge

Brown lark beside the sun  
Supervising Carrigskeewaun  
In late May, marsh marigolds  
And yellow flags, trout at the low  
Bridge hesitating, even  
The raven's ramshackle nest -  
Applaud yourself, applaud me  
As I find inside the cottage  
A wheatear from Africa  
Banging against the windowpane  
And hold in my hands her creamy-  
Buff underparts and white rump  
And carry her to the door  
And she joins you beside the sun  
Before skimming across the dunes  
To mimic in a rabbit hole  
Among silverweed and speedwell  
My panic, my breathlessness.

Michael Longley

Acknowledgements to Jonathan Cape and  
The Blackstaff Press.

### THE ORIGINAL NEWSLETTER EFFORT WITH THE TECHNOLOGY OF YESTERYEAR!

In 1984 I bought a BBCb microcomputer and I also bought a word processor program called Interword. This program came on a special ROM chip which had to be inserted into a free socket on the mainboard of the computer. This software had no built-in formatting tool and consequently required the appropriate ASCII code to produce formatted pages, including the line break, the paragraph and so on. Consequently, the file that was produced looked like a computer program with all these control codes that had to be embedded. The font was also bespoke in those early days.

I had a dot matrix printer and I believe we formatted the output so that we could snip and paste to make it fit an A5 size sheet. This was then photocopied to produce the newsletter. Now it is all so relatively straight forward.

I must say, it was a pleasure to assist you, Neil, in making those newsletters and I offer my warmest congratulations on your achievement of 100 issues of the current version.

David Nuttall

### BELCLARE FOR GEESE

It is not often that the bird sites of rural north Galway figure in unusual bird ticks but two recent finds by Eamonn Delaney put us into the top birding news. In successive weeks in January/February he first recorded Bean Geese (4), only the third ever sightings for County Galway, and the first in recent decades. Then, a week or so later, he had a flock of 13 Pink-footed Geese, the largest flock ever recorded in the county. Belclare is also good for Greenland White-fronted and Greylag Geese so overall it is well worth a visit.

NS



Photo of the Belclare Bean Geese  
by Dylan Storey Branagh

### MORE BIRDS I CAN IDENTIFY MYSELF

When my father produced the 75<sup>th</sup> issue of the *Galway Newsletter* (which I honestly think he thought would be the last big milestone!), I produced a silly but heartfelt piece on my own relationship to those birds which I can actually recognise without parental support.

As a further significant milestone has come around, it seems right to mark the occasion by continuing my recollections. While, through nature or nurture, I have some of my father's enthusiasm for birds, I did not inherit any of the skills needed to identify and catalogue, but there is a select set of *Birds I can identify myself* and here are some more of them.

*Little Egret*: first glimpsed in profusion on *la plus belle riviere en toute la France*, the Odet. Well, that is what the promotional literature said. Probably not the most beautiful river in all France, but a pleasant, tree-lined, meandering stretch of water nonetheless. Taking the tourist trip on a pleasure boat passed a lazy hour. As we rounded a gentle bend, the tree opposite was suddenly filled with a profusion of Little Egrets; as though a wand had been waved and this sleepy Northern European backwater was an exotic jungle river.

It was many years later before my next encounter with the egret family. Cycling through the fringes of the Camargue, just west of Arles in the deep South of France, on a stifling hot day, I rounded a bend to see a field with one of those majestic grey horses - a true Camargue steed. This fine horse was simply standing in a field next the road, but what froze this scene in my mind's eye was a large egret standing on the back of the horse. Gingerly bringing my bike to as silent a halt as I could manage, I fished out my phone to record this strange and wonderful sight. But as I fumbled, the egret abandoned its mount and flapped slowly to take up station on a post on the far side of the field. The 'just too late photo' of the heat-shrouded field with the horse gazing impassively over the fence and the egret distantly separated was a favourite screen-saver for many years. A reminder of the sometimes-surreal behaviour of animals, at least in the eye of the beholder, and of the importance of timing.

*Kingfisher*: I have always been fascinated by this bird, so tiny with such an exotic name. The first few times I saw it was a flash of azure, an impression more than an actual sight. Every time I was near a river bank in the summer months, I diligently kept my eyes peeled, but with little reward - the Kingfisher is an elusive creature, and my patience rarely matched my enthusiasm.

Then one day, I am not just near the river, but on it. My next-door neighbour Roger (sadly now no longer with us) had kept in his later years a tidy, tiny boat on the Thames near our house. One fine late-summer day he suggested we take a trip, just a gentle chug up to the Hennerton backwater.

Given we were three males (as son Theo came along too), and the precise stretch of Thames we chugged over features large in Jerome K. Jerome's classic novel, the potential for comic incident was high. But there were no amusing episodes with cheese or dogs or fellow river users, just a tranquil day. We pulled in to the grassy bank, tied up and just sat in the boat, content and peaceful.



Without sound or warning, a kingfisher came and perched on the stem end of Chubba, Roger's tiny, tiny craft. Close enough to reach out and touch, it just perched there, time stood still and our conversation fell away, as we had a view beating any David Attenborough 'special' of this tiny, yet perfect, creature.

**Treecreeper:** I first heard of this bird from my father while I was in my early-30s. He explained its unusual feeding practice of a helical walk up a tree trunk in search of insects. This unusual practice and strange contra-distinction to the nuthatch (helical walk downwards!) appealed to me somehow, but I had to be content with second-hand descriptions of a parental kind.

Fast forward to nearly the present day. Now in my early-50s, I am making a call to my parents' house, returning from a golf trip in County Sligo. After lunch it is suggested, as the day is turning fine, we should take a walk through the Pigeon Hole woods near Cong. The day is indeed turning fine: earlier rain has decisively burned off and glorious early autumn sunshine is warming the woods as we set out.

No sooner we got under the canopy than I glanced up to see a small bird making what looked suspiciously like a walk up and around the top of the tree trunk. Cautiously drawing attention to this, I was soon rewarded – my first ever Treecreeper! And I got the 'spotting' credit, which itself is somewhat of a first. To cap it, I also spotted a second Treecreeper, though merely flying between trees later in the circuit. But the real pleasure in that day was to spend time in the company of one I love.

**Hoopoe:** This bird, in many respects, is the one I have nurtured the most in the inner recesses of my mind. Unusually for an avian association, the instigator of the interest is my mother. Fadó fadó, when I was but a stripling of maybe 8 or 9 years old, I fell ill with whooping cough. The exact details elude me, but it involved a lengthy period of lying in bed feeling pretty grotty. My marvellous and creative mother hit on the idea of making a cut-out bird to hang above the bed to distract me. I do not know why she chose the hoopoe from one of dad's bird books. Maybe because the name was onomatopoeically close to my medical condition? Or perhaps because the plumage was the most vivid and cheering? Whatever the reason, this early exposure kindled in my mind a great fondness for this exotic creature. For many years, I scarcely believed it really existed and certainly didn't know anything about where to go looking for it.

Then, out of the blue, the hoopoe came looking for me, earlier on that same sun-soaked Saturday mentioned earlier. We cycled in single file alongside a wide, tranquil canal, on our way to, though we kenned it not at the time, disturb the egret from the horse.

All at once, from the trees lining the bank beside us, there was a shock of colour and there it was; undulating over the wide canal the mystical hoopoe, long-drawn tail, exotic colours and outlandish head

crowns. Every detail was perfect, just as it was on the cardboard cut-out over my bed 40-something years before.

I was surprised, on setting about this short memoir, by realising that several other avians made the long-list, but did not carry quite enough emotional weight to make the final cut. So, *thanks but not this time* to the woodpeckers (Green and Lesser Spotted), Jay and Goldfinch.

I hope all serious birders reading this frivolous piece will realise that even hard-core non-birdwatchers can be drawn to these beautiful, yet strange creatures. And that we are grateful for the efforts of all serious ornithological folk in spotting, recording and cataloguing their numbers, habits and habitations.

Hopefully, the editor will kindly permit me licence to close by saying 'Congratulations on your 100<sup>th</sup> Issue Dad, from your proud son'.

**Eoin Sharkey**

### PROTECTING NATURE RESERVES

The EU Bird Directive requires each EU country to conserve the habitats in areas of "international importance" for migratory species. BirdLife International applied the definition of "international importance", originally adopted for waterfowl, to all species, and gradually com-piled a list of breeding areas, roosts, wintering areas and bottlenecks throughout Europe.

In Ireland, there are 140 areas listed in the BirdLife publication *Important Bird Areas in Europe*, and Ireland has a legal duty to conserve them. This duty is not being carried out properly and Ireland is in breach of EU law. As well as all the land areas listed, there are certainly places in Irish Sea areas where internationally important numbers of seabirds gather regularly. These areas need to be identified and some of us are considering to what extent it might be possible to do this using information gathered by satellites for other purposes. This might be needed to keep oil and gas exploration out of the areas identified, or fishing that would result in feeding birds being caught and drowned. Fisheries biologists have found that fish stocks are tending to move northwards, probably due to climate change, and information on land areas listed also needs to be kept up to date. So, there is an on-going need for information which BirdWatch members can gather. Organisations like BirdLife International now visualise a network of reserves for birds throughout Europe, disregarding national frontiers except when it is necessary to bring governments to the European Court of Justice to make them protect the areas for which they are responsible. The history of the bird directive is explained in Andrew Jackson's book 'Conserving Europe's Wildlife - Law and Policy', due to be published in the spring of 2018.

**John Temple Lang**

John Temple Lang is a founder member and former trustee of BirdWatch Ireland and the earlier Irish Wildbird Consequency.

**NS**

### THIRTY YEARS BIRDING IN SOUTH GALWAY

One of the great advantages of keeping nature notes is that, when memory becomes unreliable, one can look back at special events, wild encounters, enjoyable sightings and, of course, changes that have occurred over an extended period.

I am lucky to live where I do – surrounded by wild garden and wetland, on the edge of Galway Bay, close to areas of limestone karst and patches of mature woodland. I can actually walk to all these habitats from my home.

Change in season and weather have enormous influence on the birdlife of my place. Spring and summer are full of birdsong. Willow, Sedge and Grasshopper Warblers, Chiffchaffs, Blackcaps and Whitethroats which nest in and around my patch enliven the long days with their warbling. Cuckoos continue to come every spring but are not as common or vocal as they were before the millennium turn. Comcrakes and Partridges are long gone – gone before I came, but I met old people in my village who recall them. My notes record the disappearance of the Tree Sparrow and the Yellowhammer and the last Nightjar singing in the north Burren, in the 1990s. As in many places, both Lapwing and Snipe have ceased to nest in the wetland close to my house. Two pairs of Lapwing attempted to do so in 2016 but were chased off by Hooded Crows. The more secretive Water Rail still inhabits the wetland and, judging by its piglet-like squealing in summer, probably nests there. Sparrowhawks and Kestrels are 'regulars' and obviously nest in the parish. Merlin, Peregrine and the occasional Hen Harrier show up mainly in winter, often startling the birds in the estuary near the house. Owls are decidedly rare, though a Long-eared drifted into the garden one time at dusk and I had the pleasure of rearing a young Long-eared (fallen from a nest) and returning it to the wild. In the 80s and 90s there were Barn Owls in the parish; they left their distinctive pellets in ruined Tyrone house. Unfortunately, I have not seen one in this locality for several years.

We have had our share of unusual bird experiences. On one occasion in 1985, two Kingfishers struck our rear dining room window. On the plus side, I was able to admire and compare the genders of these gem birds in the hand; on the negative side, only one, the male, recovered to fly away. On another occasion, a dark-phase Arctic Skua flew through the garden in a storm and, on a hot summer day a few years ago, a Red-footed Falcon flew overhead. Other birds of prey of note were an adult White-tailed Eagle (near Ballinderreen) and a Buzzard close to the garden.

Note-taking is especially valuable in recording change, in summer and winter birds, in migrants etc. While some species have become rare or died away, others have arrived as newcomers. Most prominent among the latter is undoubtedly the Little Egret. Virtually unknown in this country thirty years ago, it



has become part of the avian 'furniture'. Up to a dozen regularly hang out in the estuary. Certain migrant waders have become commoner over the years, perhaps due to a shift in their migration routes or other extraneous factors; Greenshank and Whimbrel are two such species. It is my opinion also that Goldfinches have become commoner; I often see flocks of thirty or more in rough ground near the shore.

Doubtless, such fluctuations will continue to occur in tandem with the cycles of nature. Climate change is surely having an effect just as it has on the seasons and the weather we now experience.

Birding is about birds but it is also about people. Like birds, birders fall into different categories - summer and winter visitors (good and bad weather birders) and passage migrants (birders on tour). There are even the occasional stragglers or rare visitors, mainly in pursuit of similar birds. Sadly, as with the birds, there have also been losses. I think particularly of Tony Whilde, the Major [R.F. Rutledge], Éamon de Builéar and Gerritt van Gelderen who have left lasting contributions.

I have fond memories of the marvellous collaborative effort that enabled the building of the bird hide at Belclare Turlough and the floods that almost stymied our plans to open it. It has been a success. It is good to know that it is being used for the purpose for which it was intended (though, unfortunately, also occasionally as a drinking retreat!).

In my view, one of the most important contributions we can make as birders is in the field of education – in particular, as regards children. I remember Tony Whilde expressing frustration about the free-for-all situation at Rahasane turlough which, we agreed, had great educational potential. I have on a number of occasions taken children from nearby Killeeneen national school to the turlough. Despite the fact that we frequently got wet, due to a lack of shelter, our outings were always worth it, with follow-up exercises often leading to a project on the turlough. Despite being seen by some as 'waste ground' (ongoing drainage works on the Dunkellin River and outrageous tyre-dumping), Rahasane continues to be an extraordinary magnet for wintering waders and wildfowl - one of the country's great nature habitats.

Wouldn't it be great if the Galway branch of BirdWatch was now to put its weight behind having a bird hide built at Rahasane? A wooden structure on stilts, large enough to hold a class and teacher, carefully located, for least disturbance - like that constructed by the Fingal branch. I am well aware of the complexities involved in bringing such a plan to fruition but I believe it would be worth the effort. We could name it after Tony; I know he would approve. I would be glad to be part of a deputation to meet with the county council and the various other bodies involved to get such a project off the ground. Fellow birders, what do you think?

**Gordon D'Arcy**

## BirdWatch Galway (Branch of BirdWatch Ireland) 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 2017

QUARTERLY BIRD REPORT COMPILED BY CHRIS PEPIATT

DATE OF ISSUE: 12<sup>th</sup> March 2019

1st October: Juv. Curlew Sandpiper, Juv. Common Sandpiper, Ad. Little Gull, Ad. Mediterranean Gull, 2 Arctic Tern & Storm Petrel, Mutton Island/Nimmo's Pier, Galway city (Niall Keogh).

1st October: 2 Arctic Skua & Great Skua, Salthill, Galway city (Marcin Pisula).

1st October: Peregrine, Salthill, Galway city (Brendan Dunne).

5th October: Juv. Lesser Yellowlegs, Kilmurvey turlough, Inishmore (Alex Ash). (1)

5th October: Lesser Whitethroat & 5 Barnacle Goose, Inishmore (Alex Ash & Dermot Breen). (2)

7th October: Red-eyed Vireo, Bun Gabhla, Inishmore (Dermot Breen). (3)

7th October: Yellow-browed Warbler & Snow Bunting, Bun Gabhla, Inishmore (Dermot Breen, Niall Keogh, Hugh Delaney, Paul Troake & Cathal Forkan).

8th October: 3 Yellow-browed Warbler & Lesser Whitethroat, Inishmore (Dermot Breen, Niall Keogh, Hugh Delaney, Paul Troake & Cathal Forkan).

9th October: Barred Warbler, Yellow-browed Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat & Snow Bunting, Inishmore (Dermot Breen, Niall Keogh, Hugh Delaney, Paul Troake, Cathal Forkan & John Murphy).

9th October: Yellow-browed Warbler, Inisheer (Paul Troake).

9th October: 3 Pomarine Skua, off Inishmaan (John Murphy).

10th October: Yellow-browed Warbler & Lapland Bunting, Inishmore (Dermot Breen, Hugh Delaney, Cathal Forkan & John Murphy).

11th October: Red-eyed Vireo, Kilronan Woods, Inishmore, possibly a different bird, Kilronan is 9.4 km East of Bun Gabhla (John Murphy).

11th October: Yellow-browed Warbler, Inishmore (Hugh Delaney, Dermot Breen & John Murphy).

11th October: 11 Greenland White-fronted Goose & 13 Ruff, Rahasane turlough (Tom Murtagh).

15th October: Lesser Whitethroat, Slyne Head (Dermot Breen).

15th October: Common Rosefinch & Greenland ('*rostrata*') Redpoll, Inishbofin (Anthony McGeehan).

17th October: 5 Pomarine Skua, from Inishmore Ferry, Galway Bay (Hugh Delaney).

18th October: Yellow-browed Warbler & 7 Redwing, Inishmore (Hugh Delaney).

19th October: Barred Warbler & Wheatear, Inishmore (Hugh Delaney).

20th October: Turtle Dove, Seancheibh, Spiddal.

22nd October: Snow Bunting, Diamond Hill, Connemara National Park.

22nd October: Arctic Skua, Tawin (Neil Ellis).

22nd October: 1st Win. Glaucous Gull, off Cleggan (Aur lie Jambon).

22nd October: Yellow-browed Warbler, Inishmore (Hugh Delaney).

22nd October: Juv. White-tailed Eagle, Garryland (Mark Helmore).

22nd October: 2 Yellowhammer, Glenrevagh, Corrandulla (Pete Tyndall).

22nd October: 7 Barnacle Goose, Renvyle (John McLoughlin).

23rd October: Yellow-browed Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat & Reed Warbler, Inishmore (Hugh Delaney).

24th October: Fem. Surf Scoter, Carrickoagh Bay, Inishmore (Richard Moores). (4)

25th October: 2 Yellow-browed Warbler & 3 Twite, Inishmore (Richard Moores).

26th October: Ad. Win Forster's Tern, Ballyloughaun, Galway city (Tim Griffin). (5)

26th October: Juv. Black Tern, Rahasane turlough (Tom Murtagh). (6)

26th October: Bittern, Muckrush, Lough Corrib (Aonghus O'Donail).

26th October: Common Rosefinch & Brambling, Inishmore (Richard Moores). (7)

26th October: Sabine's Gull, North Sound, Galway Bay (Pete Tyndall).

27th October: 4 Yellow-browed Warbler & Brambling, Slyne Head (Dermot Breen).

27th October: 2 Yellow-browed Warbler, Inishmore (Richard Moores).

28th October: Yellow-browed Warbler, Inishmore (Richard Moores).

28th October: Peregrine & 4 Common Buzzard, Claregalway (Jim Glennon).



29th October: Juv. Little Stint & Juv. Curlew Sandpiper, Rahasane turlough (Paidi Cullinan).
29th October: Juv. Fem. Surf Scoter, off Carrickglass Beach, Lettergesh (Mary Maloney & James Sheehan). (8)
29th October: 2 Purple Sandpiper, Salthill (Brendan Dunne).
29th October: Imm. Arctic Tern, Angliham, Lough Corrib (Marcin Pisula).
1st November: Lapland Bunting, Diamond Hill, Connemara National Park (Dermot Breen).
1st November: Ad. Ring-billed Gull, again present, Nimmo's Pier, Galway city. (9)
3rd November: Barn Owl, found dead on M6 hard shoulder 3 km west of toll plaza, Ballinasloe (Ciaran & Enda Flynn).
3rd November: Arctic Tern, Menlo, Lough Corrib (Marcin Pisula).
7th November: min. 2 Common Crossbill, Oldtown, Moycullen (Steve Bierley).
9th November: Sum. plumage Black-throated Diver, Newtownlynch Pier (Paul Troake).
9th November: 2 Velvet Scoter, Ardfry (Deirdre Comerford).
9th November: Red-throated Diver, Traught (Deirdre Comerford).
15th November: 7 Sandwich Tern & Mediterranean Gull, Newtownlynch Pier (Paidi Cullinan).
16th November: Drake Lesser Scaup, Rahasane turlough (Sean Cronin). (10)
18th November: Drake Ring-necked Duck, Rahasane turlough (John Murphy).
19th November: 17 Long-tailed Duck, Common Scoter & Whimbrel, Inishmore (Alex Ash).
21st November: 1st Win. male Eider, Rossadillask, Cleggan (Dermot Breen).
22nd November: Hen Harrier, Sliabh Rua, Inchiquin, Lough Corrib (Deirdre Comerford, Úna Fleming & Neil Sharkey).
24th November: Fem./Imm. Scaup, Lough Atalia, Galway city (Niall Keogh).
25th November: 30 Greenland White-fronted Goose, Belclare turlough (Eamonn Delaney).
25th November: 3 Spotted Redshank & Mediterranean Gull, Tawin (Paul Troake).
26th November: 4 Common Buzzard, Oranmore (Martin O'Malley).
26th November: Peregrine, Creganna Marsh (John Curley).
28th November: Canada Goose & 70 Whooper Swan, Lydacan (Paul Troake).
29th November: 38 Gadwall & 2 Scaup, Lough Atalia, Galway city (Niall Keogh).
2nd December: Drake Ring-necked Duck, Lough Rea (Alex Ash). (11)
2nd December: Chiffchaff, Bearna (Cathal Forkan).
2nd December: Great white Egret, again present, Angliham, Lough Corrib. (12)
3rd December: Common Buzzard & Chiffchaff, Mountross, Lough Corrib (Neil Ellis).
3rd December: 3 Ruff & Peregrine, Rahasane turlough (Marcin Pisula).
4th December: Pink-footed Goose & 36 Greylag Goose, Keeraunacussann, Nr. Casla (Dermot Breen).
8th December: Water Rail, Cregg River, Cloonboo (Ian Brophy).
9th December: Long-tailed Duck, Mutton Island, Galway city (Niall Keogh).
9th December: 3 Scaup, Ad. Win. Mediterranean Gull & 38 Gadwall, Lough Atalia, Galway city (Niall Keogh).
9th December: Ad. White-tailed Eagle, Lough Corrib (Aonghus O'Donail).
9th December: 20 Greenland White-fronted Goose, NW of Spiddal (Paul Troake).
11th December: Spotted Redshank, Tawin (Paul Troake).
11th December: 2 Sandwich Tern, Rossaveal (Paul Troake).
11th December: Ringtail Hen Harrier, Letterfir (Paul Troake).
15th December: 3 (1st Win & 2 Ad.) Iceland Gull & 1st Win. Glaucous Gull, Spiddal (Alex Ash).
16th December: Whimbrel, Kilcaimin (Paul Troake).
16th December: 2 (2nd Win. & Ad.) Iceland Gull, Spiddal (Alex Ash).
17th December: 1st Win. Iceland Gull, Nimmo's Pier, Galway city (Cathal Forkan). (13)
20th December: Ad. Kumlien's Gull & 20 Twite, Omev Island (Dermot Breen).
22nd December: 3 Snow Bunting, Mutton Island, Galway city (Cathal Forkan). (14)
28th December: Common Buzzard, Cregg, Corrandulla (Peter Tyndall).

29th December: Glossy Ibis, Mainistir, Inishmore (Peadar O'Connell).
30th December: Kingfisher, Loch-an-tSaile, near Camus Bay (Fearghas MacLochlainn).
31st December: Common Buzzard, Kilbannon, Tuam (Ted Steede).
31st December: Juv. male Hen Harrier & Peregrine, Angliham, Lough Corrib (Dermot Breen).
31st December: Ad. Win. Little Gull, Blackrock, Salthill, Galway city (Dermot Breen, Cathal Forkan & Paidi Cullinan).
31st December: 2 (Ad. & 1st Win.) Iceland Gull, Mutton Island, Galway city (Cathal Forkan & Paidi Cullinan).

#### NOTES:

- (1) The Lesser Yellowlegs was also seen on the 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> of October 2017.
- (2) The five Barnacle geese were still present on the 7<sup>th</sup> of October 2017.
- (3) The Bun Gabhla Red-eyed Vireo was also seen on the 8<sup>th</sup> of October 2017. A vireo was seen on the 11<sup>th</sup> of October 2017 at Kilonan (q.v.). Possibly the same bird after moving, or another individual.
- (4) The Inishmore Surf Scoter was also recorded on the 25<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of October 2017.
- (5) The returning Forster's Tern was also recorded on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of November (at Newtownlynch), the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November (at Kinvara), the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> of December (at Nimmo's Pier and Mutton Island, Galway city) and on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December (back at Nimmo's Pier).
- (6) A Black Tern, possibly the same bird, was also recorded at the same site on the 29<sup>th</sup> of October 2017.
- (7) The Inishmore Common Rosefinch was also recorded on the 27<sup>th</sup> of October 2017.
- (8) The Lettergesh Surf Scoter was also recorded on the 31<sup>st</sup> of October 2017.
- (9) The adult Ring-billed Gull at Nimmo's Pier, Galway city, had been present since the third quarter of 2017 and was also recorded on the 9<sup>th</sup> of December 2017.
- (10) The Lesser Scaup was also recorded on the 18<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> of November and the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> of December 2017.
- (11) The Lough Rea Ring-necked Duck was also recorded on the 26<sup>th</sup> of December 2017.
- (12) Lough Corrib sightings of a single long-staying Great White Egret were previously recorded in March and September 2017. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of December a definite two birds were recorded at Angliham and Muckrush (Dermot Breen) and two birds were again recorded on the 27<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2017.
- (13) The first winter Iceland Gull was also recorded at Nimmo's Pier on the 26<sup>th</sup> of December 2017.
- (14) Two Snow Bunting were still present at Mutton Island on the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2017.

#### HIGHLIGHTS:

Glossy Ibis, Eurasian Bittern, Lesser Scaup, two Ring-necked Duck, two Surf Scoter, two Velvet Scoter, Sabine's Gull, Lesser Yellowlegs, Red-eyed Vireo, two Common Rosefinch, Turtle Dove, 1-2 Barred Warbler, at least 9 Yellow-browed Warbler, two Lapland Bunting, five Snow Buntings and 23 Twite. Long-staying Forster's Tern and Great White Egret (two birds recorded). Four to six Iceland Gull and one Kumlien's Gull.

#### WINTER ARRIVALS:

Barnacle Goose (5<sup>th</sup> October), Greenland White-fronted Goose (11<sup>th</sup> October), Redwing (18<sup>th</sup> of October), Pink-footed Goose (4<sup>th</sup> December).