



GALWAY BRANCH BIRDWATCH IRELAND

For information on or to get involved with the BWI Galway branch, e-mail Chairman Cyril Manning (cyril.manning@hotmail.com) or Secretary, Bláithín Kennedy (blaitthin.kennedy@gmail.com).

A GOOD DAY AT RAHASANE

Scanning around at Rahasane this afternoon and a Storm Petrel appeared in my scope, flying about low over the turlough!!

As if that wasn't bizarre enough, the resident juvenile Peregrine Falcon soon appeared on the scene, making several unsuccessful swipes at the petrel, which evaded capture mainly by dropping to the water or into the grass. After a subsequent swipe however, the petrel lifted up just as the Peregrine came along and grabbed it, seemingly to torture it rather than eat it. After several minutes on the ground, the Peregrine let go of the petrel, which fluttered a short distance away, as though maimed. When the Peregrine went in to grab it again, the Storm Petrel took off, seemingly unharmed, and the chase was on again. Not so long this time. After about 10 minutes of plucking torture on the ground, the petrel was still clearly alive shortly before the Peregrine took it to some lower ground out of view briefly, then reappeared to perch nearby, apparently empty-taloned.

Not something you see every day!

Paul Troake

THE STATUS OF THE TREE SPARROW (*Passer montanus*) IN COUNTY GALWAY

The status of the Tree Sparrow in Galway is that of rare vagrant and former rare breeder. Neither Thompson (1850) nor Ussher and Warren (1900) make any mention of the species having been recorded in Galway while Ruttledge in his *A List of the Birds of the Counties of Galway and Mayo* (1950) lists the species' known breeding haunts in Co. Mayo but states that "Careful search has not revealed any elsewhere in Mayo, nor in Galway".

Tree Sparrows were first discovered in Galway, breeding at Ardfry (minimum two pairs), Bunowen Castle (minimum one pair) and Bunowen Harbour near Ballyconneely (two pairs), in 1964. In 1966, Bunowen Castle still had a minimum of one pair while the other two sites had two pairs each. Four pairs were feeding young at Bunowen Harbour in May 1967 and breeding at Bunowen was recorded during the 1968-1972 breeding atlas survey (*Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland*, 1976).

A pair was present and suspected of breeding on Inishshark in 1968 and again in 1971 but breeding was not proven and none were recorded there during a visit in 1975. Breeding was first recorded at the old Coastguard station near Rossaveal in 1970 but little or no information is available about the history of breeding at this site.

Unlike the birds at Bunowen and Rossaveal which nested in ruined buildings, nesting at Ardfry took

place in dead Ash trees which were blown down in 1974 and the site was then deserted. While recorded on Inishbofin in small numbers throughout the 1970s (maximum count of 5 in 1977), there was no evidence of breeding on 'Bofin and all recent records from there are thought to involve birds moving from nearby Clare Island in Co. Mayo, a site which lost its small population of Tree Sparrows sometime around the third breeding atlas survey of 2007-2011 (*Bird Atlas 2007-11, the breeding and wintering birds in Britain and Ireland*, 2013).

The species was not recorded in Galway during 1988-1991 nor 2007-2011 but was recorded at a minimum of seven different locations during the winter atlas survey of 1981-1984 (*The Atlas of Wintering Birds in Britain and Ireland*, 1986). Occurrences since the cessation of breeding have been rare and the following have been recorded in the county since 1989:

- 1989 Single birds, Tully and Roundstone, May.
- 1993 Six, near Tawin, 28th January.
- 1994 One, Roundstone, December.
- 1996 Inishbofin: one, 14th May; two, 19th May.
- 1997 Three, Mweeloon, 21st November.
- 1997 Two, Tawin, 21st November.
- 1998 One, Tawin, 5th February.
- 2005 Two, Glenamaddy, 3rd January.
- 2005 One, Porridgetown, Oughterard, 29th July.
- 2007 One, Inishbofin, 12th October.
- 2008 One, Inishbofin, 30th October to 1st November.
- 2010 One, Inishbofin, 11th October.
- 2011 Inishbofin: minimum of four, 29th April to 1st May; one, 5th July; one, 30th September.
- 2011 Three, Carrarea, Ballyglunin, 19th November.
- 2012 Six, Newbridge, near Moylough, 23rd February.
- 2019 One, male, Moycullen, 23rd July.

While the Irish population is considered stable, it is a species that has undergone a moderate decline in its European breeding population and is prone to fluctuations in numbers. The current Irish distribution of the Tree Sparrow is largely associated with cereal production and therefore it is predominantly a bird of the eastern third of the country, with some small localised populations found elsewhere in Donegal, Mayo, Kerry, Tipperary and Waterford.

Largely sedentary, it does not range far though juveniles can disperse to new areas. In winter it

tends to favour stubble fields and weedy areas and can often be found in these habitats with flocks of finches, though it will also come to peanut feeders and bird tables. Any further records would be very welcome.

Aonghus O Donail

WHOSE BIRD? – MARMORA

Marmora's Warbler *Sylvia sarda* (Temminck 1820)

Alberto Ferrero Della Marmora (1789-1863) was an Italian general and naturalist who had a distinguished career in the Napoleonic wars and was personally decorated by Napoleon with the Legion of Honour. He was the elder brother of **Alessandro Ferrero Della Marmora** (1799-1855), soldier and founder of the Bersaglieri (sharpshooters), and of **Alfonso Ferrero Della Marmora** (1804-1878), Italian general and statesman.

[**Alfonso** Della Marmora was employed by the king of Sardinia, King Vittorio Emanuele II, and stands accused of having massacred those who revolted against the reign of the Savoy in 1849 in Genoa (at the time reluctantly part of the Kingdom of Sardinia) by using his newly-formed cadre of uniformed soldiers. After the city was effectively occupied, Vittorio Emanuele II thanked General Alfonso Della Marmora in a letter.]

Alberto Ferrero Della Marmora wrote *Viaggio in Sardegna* (Travel in Sardinia) in 1860. He is credited with having named Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonora*. [Eleonora d'Arborea (1347-1404) was one of the most powerful judges of the Judicate of Arborea in Sardinia, and Sardinia's most famous heroine.] Furthermore, Alberto Marmora is credited with rediscovering and collecting a specimen of Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti* on Sardinia.

Alberto Marmora also has a mountain in Sardinia named after him.

Taken from: Bo Beolens and Michael Watkins, *Whose Bird? Common bird names and the people they commemorate* (Yale University Press, 2015). The book was first published in 2003 by Helm with the title *Whose Bird? Men and women commemorated in the common names of birds* by Michel Watkins and Bo Beolens.

NS

BIRDS IN POETRY

George Mackay Brown was born in Stromness in the Orkney Islands in 1921. In his teens he developed tuberculosis and he suffered a recurrence in 1952 but survived to graduate from Edinburgh University. Following a period of postgraduate study, he returned to Orkney and life as a writer and one of the finest Scottish lyric poets. Until his death in 1996, he celebrated the place and the people of Orkney and its complex history; the fishermen, the farmers and the daily lives of the people. The publication of the



Collected Poems in 2005 is a fitting tribute to his love for 'the small green world' of the Orkney Islands, his birthplace and home.

Pat Finnegan

THE HAWK

On Sunday the hawk fell on Bigging
And a chicken screamed
Lost in its own little snowstorm.
And on Monday he fell on the moor
And the Field Club
Raised a hundred silent prisms.
And on Tuesday he fell on the hill
And the happy lamb
Never knew why the loud collie straddled him.
And on Wednesday he fell on a bush
And the blackbird
Laid by his little flute for the last time.
And on Thursday he fell on Cleat
And peerie Tom's rabbit
Swung in a single arc from shore to hill.
And on Friday he fell on a ditch
But the rampant rat,
That eye and that tooth, quenched his flame.
And on Saturday he fell on Bigging
And Jock lowered his gun
And nailed a small wing over the corn.

George Mackay Brown

Acknowledgements to John Murray, Publishers.

[This poem and the accompanying narrative were originally contributed by Pat in Newsletter No. 66 in August 2008. Renewed thanks and appreciation. NS]

A LIST OF BIRDS IN COUNTIES GALWAY & MAYO by R.F. RUTLEDGE

(Continued from Corn Bunting)

Yellow Bunting. *Emberiza citronella* (L.)

Resident, common, generally distributed on the most exposed inhabited islands off the coast with the exception of the Aran Islands, where I have failed to find it. No decrease noted. Warren found it absent from Ballina in September but this is not the case elsewhere.

[Now better known as Yellowhammer and sadly really scarce in both counties. NS]

Reed Bunting. *Emberiza schoeniclus schoeniclus* (L.)

Resident, common, widespread on bogs, lake-islands and by rivers. Inhabits Clare Island; Achill abundant; not found on any other marine islands although gave Inishbofin and Cott observed it there in 1920 (*Irish Nat. Jour.* Vol 31, p. 34). During two summer visits I failed to trace it on this island. Many desert their normal habitat in winter when they occur in hedgerows alongside roads.

Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis nivalis* (L.)

Winter-visitor and passage-migrant on the coasts

where it is often abundant. Rarely inland. Good saw one on the road just west of Lough Carra Co, Mayo. It has occurred in May on Slyne Head and as early as the autumn on September 10th. On Clare Island and at North Aran on September 20th. A summer record is that of one at North Aran on July 6th 1897.

House Sparrow. *Passer domesticus domesticus* (L.) Resident, breeds. Widely distributed, though local in many parts of both counties. Becomes even more local to the west of the great Connacht lakes, though even on the seaboard it is locally numerous in towns such as Belmullet, Louisburgh and about Lennane; along the thickly populated shore along Galway Bay it is abundant in places. Though I have never been able to trace it in Clifden, other places as far as Bunowen are inhabited. Said to be very local indeed in the Athenry district of Co. Galway. In some districts where I have noticed a decrease this may be due to the replacement of thatch by slated roofs. This is certainly in the case of Clare Island where in 1945 only a few pairs were to be found though formerly the birds was abundant. (*Irish Nat. Jour.* Vol viii, p. 311). In Achill, Inishbofin and in the Aran Islands, especially in Inishmaan with its many thatched houses, it is common. Inshurk Co. Mayo has a little colony in ivy near the harbour. Inishkea North and South are now deserted since the inhabitants left these islands. From the village of Achill Sound it seems to have disappeared (*Irish Nat. Jour.* Vol. viii, p. 31).

[Now, almost 100 years later, it might be interesting to undertake an 'ornithological pilgrimage' to all these Galway/Mayo locations to check current House Sparrow presence. Any volunteers? NS]

Tree-Sparrow *Passer montanus montanus* (L.)

Formerly locally resident in Co. Mayo. Original there was a flourishing colony in Belmullet (*Clare Island Survey, Aves*, p. 16) but I have searched there repeatedly and can only conclude that the colony has ceased to exist though a pair, with newly fledged young, were seen in September 1937. These were the only Tree Sparrows seen by my brother W. Rutledge during a ten-day visit; since then, there is no evidence. The colony discovered in 1907 by C.F. Scroope in the ruins of St Cummin's Church in Kilmurmin near Killala had ceased to exist in 1938 but it is not known how long this had been the case. My brother and I failed to find any in other locations in 1938 and 1939. There is a former record of birds at Rosserk Abbey on Killala Bay, but they are not present nowadays. In 1939 a pair bred at Blackrock off the Mayo coast. Careful search has not revealed any elsewhere in Mayo nor in Galway, nor in the inhabited marine islands of these two counties.

Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla brachydactyla*

An adult was shot in Blackrock Co. Mayo on Oct. 11th 1890 (*Birds of Ireland*, Ussher & Warren, p. 102). The specimen is now in the Barrington collection in the National Museum.

A GLOSSY IBIS

September 2021 saw me return to my regular I-WeBS duties near Glenamaddy after a Covid-induced hiatus. I live in Kinvara and so was well outside lockdown restrictions throughout. My two sites are Kiltullagh Lake, just west of the village, and Glenamaddy Turlough to the east.

Kiltullagh – always first on my visit – was holding quite a lot of water and showed up a reasonable number of birds, with a typical early season mix of waders and wildfowl. A solitary Black-tailed Godwit was a slightly unusual tick.

Glenamaddy Turlough was completely dry, apart from some odd little gullies. This is not unusual in September. There was just a vast expanse of brownish-grey mud, suggesting there had been a rapid emptying quite recently. No sign of birdlife – except that in a far corner of the site, well out of reach, I thought I could see movement. Even with the telescope, I could not, for the life of me, make out what it was. I had an impression of a large bird with brown feathers and, maybe, some white. The only thought that came to mind was something along the scale and colouring of a Buzzard! There was no way I knew of to get closer to it – so I went home.

A month later, I was back on my rounds again, of course. Arrived at Kiltullagh, I set up the scope in my usual spot and started to scan the site. There, standing in a reed bed that marks the 'waist-line' of this shallow lake, was a Glossy Ibis. No fear of imagining it was a Buzzard this time!

Martin Ryan

RECENT ADDITIONS TO THE GALWAY LIST

A Shore/Horned Lark at Killeany, Inishmore on 3rd October 2021 and an **Allen's Gallinule** found dead at Creig a Cheimin, Inishmore, on 4th January 2022 became the two newest additions to the County Galway list which now stands at 329 species. Both records have yet to be accepted by the Irish Rare Birds Committee and the Gallinule will be, if accepted, the first Irish record of this species.

The Gallinule was the 218th species for Inishmore and the 220th species for the Aran Islands (incl. adjacent islands off the west end of Inishmore) while Inishbofin has also recorded 220 species to date.

The only other distinct geographical area within the county for which I have data is Galway City which has recorded a remarkable total of 208 species.

Inishbofin has added three species to the Irish list: **Mourning Dove** (2007), **Cedar Waxwing** (2009) and **Tennessee Warbler** (2021), with Inishmore adding one with **Eastern Kingbird** (2012) and a second – the aforementioned Allen's Gallinule (2022 – pending) while Galway City has been responsible for two additions to the Irish list with **Double-crested Cormorant** (1995) and **Slaty-backed Gull** (2014).

Aonghus O Donail

(To be continued. NS)

BirdWatch Galway (Branch of BirdWatch Ireland) 1st Quadrimester 2021

QUADRIMESTRAL BIRD REPORT COMPILED BY CHRIS PEPIATT

DATE OF ISSUE: 12th March 2023

1st January: Whimbrel, Nr. Ballinderreen (Paul Troake).

2nd January: Fem. Ring-necked Duck, Lough Corrib, Nr. Moycullen (Paul Troake).

3rd January: drumming Great-spotted Woodpecker, Monivea Woods (Paidi Cullinan).

3rd January: 118 Tufted Duck, 59 Shoveler & 75 Whooper Swan, Kiltiernan turlough (Paul Troake).

3rd January: 6 Long-tailed Duck, Mulroog (Paul Troake).

3rd January: Forster's Tern, Oranmore Bay (John Curley). (1)

4th January: 2nd Win. Iceland Gull, 8 Sandwich Tern & 1st Win. Glaucous Gull, Nimmo's Pier, Galway city (Tom Cuffe).

5th January: 2 Woodcock, Renville Woods, Oranmore (Stephen Walton).

7th January: 3 Ad. Mediterranean Gull, off Fornais/Furnace Island (Sean McCann).

7th January: Glossy Ibis, Rusheen Bay, Galway city (Veronica O'Neill).

9th January: Drake American Wigeon, again present, Kilcolgan River. (2)

15th January: 5 Sandwich Tern & 3 Long-tailed Duck, Pollagh, Kinvara Bay (Paul Troake).

17th January: 16 Yellowhammer, Glenrevagh, Corrandulla (Peter Tyndall).

25th January: Common Sandpiper, Kilcolgan (Paul Troake).

26th January: Kingfisher, Canal Road Lower, Galway city (Ciaran Bruton).

27th January: 2 Dipper, River Corrib Canal, Newtownsmith, Galway city (Sally O'Meara).

2nd February: Snow Bunting, Nimmo's Pier, Galway city.

3rd February: 20 Yellowhammer, Glenrevagh, Corrandulla (Peter Tyndall).

6th February: 16 Purple Sandpiper & drake Eider, Salthill, Galway city (Mike Sylvia).

6th February: 10 Sandwich Tern, South Park, Galway city (Marcin Pisula).

6th February: Ad. Ring-billed Gull, Nimmo's Pier, Galway city (Marcin Pisula).

11th February: Merlin, Oranmore (Sean Holland).

18th February: pair Goosander, Lehanagh Lough, Inagh Valley (Dermot Breen).

19th February: Ad. Little Gull, Nimmo's Pier, Galway city (Mike Sylvia).

19th February: 175+ Whooper Swan, Garryduff Bog, Clonfert (Patrick Veale).

22nd February: c. 500 Common Gull, Slieveroe, Nr. Lough Corrib (Neil Sharkey).

27th February: 1st Win. Iceland Gull, Rusheen Bay, Galway city (Cathal Forkan).

27th February: Slavonian Grebe, Ardfry (Mike Sylvia).

6th March: Great-spotted Woodpecker, Moycullen (Jane Stark).

6th March: 3 Sand Martin, over R. Corrib, Dangan, Galway city (Cathal Forkan).

6th March: White-tailed Eagle & Hen Harrier, Baranny, Lough Corrib (Ian O'Connor).

14th March: 46 Greenland White-fronted Goose, Belclare turlough (Marcin Pisula).

14th March: Woodcock & 20 Fieldfare, Annaghkeen, Lough Corrib (Marcin Pisula).

20th March: Male Merlin, Portumna (Frank Corcoran).

25th March: Wheatear, Tully Hill, Renvyle (Dermot Breen).

29th March: Long-eared Owl, Aillebrack, Nr. Ballyconneely.

29th March: Manx Shearwater, off Loughaunbeg (Aonghus O'Donaill).

30th March: Swallow, Lettermullan (Sean McCann).

30th March: Swallow, Killursa, Headford (Neil Sharkey).

30th March: Swallow, Clarenbridge (Pádraig Keirns).

31st March: Willow Warbler, Bearna (Cathal Forkan).

31st March: Cuckoo, Rosmuc (Noreen Ryan).

4th April: 50 Light-bellied Brent Goose, Trá Leitreach, Inis Meáin (Fearghas Mac Lochlainn).

5th April: House Martin, Nimmo's Pier, Galway city (Tom Cuffe).

7th April: 5 (3 Male & 2 Fem.) Long-tailed Duck, Coral Strand, Carraroe (Aonghus O'Donail).
8th April: 2 Whimbrel, Tully Cross (Dermot Breen).
10th April: 2 White Wagtail & Jack Snipe, Roscam Point, Galway Bay (Marcin Pisula).
11th April: Common Sandpiper & Redwing, Derryclare Wood (Dermot Breen).
11th April: Redwing, Ellagh, Headford (Neil Sharkey).
17th April: 3 Little Tern, 2 Common Tern, 60 Sandwich Tern & 3 White Wagtail, Loughaunbeg (Cathal Forkan).
18th April: Great White Egret, Murlach, Nr. Ballyconneely (Eamonn Mannion). (4)
18th April: 4 Wheatear, Lettermullan (Sean McCann).
19th April: 8 Greylag Goose, 2 Arctic Tern & 30 Common Gull, Curraghmore, Nr. Inchiquin, Lough Corrib (Neil Sharkey).
19th April: 6 White Wagtail, 6 Common Tern, & 3 Wheatear, Rusheen Bay, Galway city (Mike Sylvia).
19th April: Corncrake, Inishbofin (per NPWS Corncrake Census).
21st April: Grasshopper Warbler, Bearnna (Cathal Forkan).
21st April: 3 Shelduck, Levally Lough (Chris Peppiatt).
22nd April: Sedge Warbler, Ballyconneely (Dermot Breen).
23rd April: Greenland Wheatear, Truska, Nr. Ballyconneely (Dermot Breen).
24th April: Fem./Imm. Marsh Harrier, Little Gull, 53 Common Tern, 6 Shoveler, 12 Gadwall, 4 Teal, 8 Pochard & Pintail, Angliham, Lough Corrib (Jacob Mead & Dermot Breen).
25th April: 4 Whitethroat, Nr. Monivea (Paidí Cullinan).
25th April: 4 Swift, Dangan, Galway city (Cathal Forkan).
26th April: 16 Teal, 24 Shoveler, Wigeon & drake Pintail, Ahapouleen turlough (Paul Troake).
26th April: 13 White Wagtail, 105 Whimbrel, 160 Kittiwake, 3 Puffin, Arctic Skua, 8 Red-throated Diver & 3 Wheatear, Tawin (Paul Troake).

NOTES:

(1) The long-staying Forster's Tern has made multiple annual returns to winter in Galway Bay, it was present in November and December 2020 and was also recorded on the 15th of January 2021 (Kinvara Bay) and the 6th of February 2021 (South Park, Galway city).

(2) The drake American Wigeon (first recorded on the 23rd of December 2020) was also recorded at Kilcolgan on the 26th January 2021 and the 8th February 2021 and may well be the same bird that was recorded there in November 2019.

(3) An adult Ring-billed Gull was also recorded at Nimmo's Pier on the 19th of February 2021.

(4) The Great White Egret was also recorded at Ballyconneely on the 19th and 22nd of April 2021.

HIGHLIGHTS:

Slavonian Grebe, American Wigeon, Ring-necked Duck, 2 Goosander & Glossy Ibis. Returning long-staying Forster's Tern and resident Great White Egret.

ARRIVING SPRING MIGRANTS:

Sand Martin (6th March), Wheatear (25th of March), Manx Shearwater (29th of March), Swallow (30th March), Willow Warbler (31st of March), Cuckoo (31st of March), House Martin (5th of April), Whimbrel (8th of April, first apparent Spring migrant, wintering bird present in January, see above), White Wagtail (10th of April), Common Sandpiper (11th of April; wintering bird recorded 25th January, see above), Little Tern (17th of April), Common Tern (17th of April), Arctic Tern (19th of April), Corncrake (19th of April), Grasshopper Warbler (21st of April), Sedge Warbler (22nd of April), Whitethroat (25th of April), Swift (25th of April) & Arctic Skua (26th of April).

LAST WINTERING MIGRANTS:

Greenland White-fronted Goose (14th of March), Fieldfare (14th of March), Light-bellied Brent Goose (4th of April) & Redwing (11th of April).