



GALWAY BRANCH BIRDWATCH IRELAND

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BIRDS' NESTS

It is a given fact of nature that most birds build robust, intricately put together and diligently built nests using the limited dexterity of their bills, their feet, their claws and their body. I suspect that many readers are like me, having seen only a few nests of even fewer species, usually content to just watch a bird disappear into cover with its tell-tale beak full of food.

Birds follow their particular blueprint with regard to the architecture of their nests and where to build them, but there are local variations, even aberrations. Ralph Chislett, in his book *Northward Ho! – For Birds* (1933), describes a Hooded Crows' nest in a Shetland castle looking like a "marauder's stronghold", comprising wings of gulls and Arctic Skuas, and bones of sheep and birds, but lined with warm Shetland wool. Captain C.W.R. Knight, a well-known eagle 'falconer' and bird photographer in the early twentieth century, writes of a pair of Robins and a pair of Pied Wagtails that "shared the work of building a nest, of laying the eight eggs ... in brooding and in feeding the unusual family". He says one time he saw both Robin and Wagtail brooding at the same time. He shows two photographs, each of a respective parent feeding their young, in what is clearly the same nest, in *Aristocrats of the Air* (1925).

When we are lucky enough to be granted full view of nesting activity, we are delighted. My niece-in-law in Chicago sent me a photograph of a nest starkly built directly on top of a television set on their patio, with four almost fully fledged young. They were American Robins, the most abundant bird in America, a red-breasted, grey backed true thrush. Another niece-in-law, in Armagh, sent me a photograph of a Blackbird sitting on a nest in the engine of their old tractor, then another the following year of a Pied Wagtail in more or less the same place.

This brings me back to Galway. A neighbour up the road told me last year of a 'yellow bird' nesting in their yard, but Covid made me hesitate to go and see. This year, I was invited back and a quick glance at BirdWatch's identification guide told him it had been a Great Tit. It had nested in an old-fashioned village pump,

now a feature in his yard, only a few metres from their living room window. It had built its nest about 30 cm inside the hollow shaft, dropping down vertically from the open top to feed the young and exiting through the downward bending spout which was just above the level of the nest. The tits were seen prospecting this year but they must have found somewhere else to raise their family.

Stephen Heery

BIRDS IN POETRY

[This originally appeared in Newsletter 113 in 2003. Renewed thanks to Pat. NS]

In this poem Peter Reading presents eclectic experiences of bird encounters on several continents. He again displays the recurrent patterns of his verse - fondness for descriptive terminology and the Latin names. There is also the characteristic iconoclastic ending. The title can be defined as an over-mastering impulse, supernatural, poetic or otherwise (O.E.D.).

Pat Finnegan

Afflatious

That cinnamon Nankeen Night Heron
(slender, white nuchal plumes,
black crown, black bill, cream belly)
at roost on an island willow
brushing the brown lake mirror in
Melbourne Botanical Gardens...

And in Texas, that Painted Bunting
(head purple, back green, rump red,
red underparts, dark wings and tail,
bizarrely designed by committee)
picking at tumblegrass seed
in our arid desert garden...

And on Bardsey, off the Welsh coast,
that Wryneck (*Jynx torquilla*)
we caught in the mist-nets, beating
between the bracken and gorse clumps -
the way its head twisted around,
serpentine, primitive,
its vermicular dead-leaf plumage...

And in Badgers Creek, that Lyre Bird
(*Menura novaehollandiae*),
grey-brown, long filamentous tail,
and feet like a couple of garden rakes
grubbing the wet forest leaf-mould...

And on the Mexican border,
that Plain Chachalaca, dull grey,
long glizy green tail tipped white,
guzzling the leaves from the branches,
cha-cha-lac, cha-cha-lac, cha-cha-lac...

And I'd say (if I entertained
such mawkish conceits) that on each
of these afflatious encounters

my soul ascended like that
Skylark I watched as I lay
and dreamed through a summer morning
in a sweet pasture in Shropshire
on an upland when I was younger.

Peter Reading

(Acknowledgement: Bloodaxe Books Ltd.,
NE18 1RP UK)

A LIST OF BIRDS IN COUNTIES GALWAY & MAYO by R.F. RUTLEDGE (Continued from Short-toed Lark)

Sky-Lark. *Alauda arvensis arvensis* (L.)
Resident, very common and widespread. There is a large migration in October when, for days at a time, large numbers may be seen and heard passing northwards; many remain in both counties increasing the numbers already present.

Tree-Pipit. *Anthus trivialis triliavis* (L.)
Rare vagrant. Has twice been recorded from Co. Galway. A male in song was identified near Portumna Bridge on March 21st 1914 (*List of Irish Birds*, 1936, p. 10). A male was seen and heard in song between May 1st and July 30th 1932 (*Irish Nat. Jour.*, Vol. IV, p. 124).

Meadow-Pipit. *Anthus pratensis* (L.)
Resident, common in suitable localities, widespread. Numbers greatly augmented in autumn. In Achill it is abundant, fairly numerous on the Aran Islands. Inshibofin and Clare Island have comparatively few breeding. Not found on other islands in summer except Duvillaunmore where possibly it was breeding.

Red-throated Pipit. *Anthus cervinus* (Pall.)
The specimen obtained on Achill Island on May 26th 1895, formerly recorded as of this species, is a Meadow-Pipit, identification having been confirmed by H.F. Witherby.

Rock-Pipit *Anthus spinoletta petrosus* (Mont.)
Resident, breeds in vicinity of sea shores and on marine islands, even on the Bills Rocks off Achill and the Stags of Broad Haven.

Yellow Wagtail. *Motacilla flava flavissima* (Blyth)
Formerly a very occasional summer visitor which bred on the islands and shores of Loughs Corrib and Mask and on the southern extremity of Lough Carra. Outside the former breeding localities, a rare vagrant, one having occurred on Achill Island on May 15th 1892 and one seen near Killala Bay on April 15th 1875.



On August 28th 1916, Mr John Glanville watched 3 for over an hour on Mutton Island in Galway Bay. Extensive search of its former breeding grounds has failed to prove any present nowadays. Pairs were seen on three islands in Lough Mask in 1917. By 1922 the bird was extremely scarce, individuals being noted up to 1925, since when there is no record. Mr Sean Ford and others, as well as I, have failed to find any on Lough Corrib.

Grey Wagtail. *Motacilla cinerea cinerea* (Tunst.)

Resident. Breeds, very locally distributed. Scarce in extreme western districts. Not nearly as plentiful as the Pied Wagtail. Became very scarce after the hard winter of 1916-17 and has never, I think, returned to its former numbers, I have not seen it on marine islands except on Achill, on which it is scarce. No trace of it on Clare Island in 1945, though formerly it was resident. (*Clare Island Survey, Aves*, p. 12). It appears to be absent from the Bulet although it occurs at Belmullet. Plentiful in Ballina district. A few found in Westport and Louisburgh where it appears very regularly in October and November, but very few summer in that district (W.A. Wallace). Scarce through Connemara generally. Mr. John Garvey attributes a decrease coinciding with the general increase of the Pied species which he believes harasses it.

Pied Wagtail. *Motacilla alba yarrelli* (Gould)

Resident, common, generally distributed. There was a very definite increase, especially in the western regions where in Ussher's time it was far less plentiful. Common even in the Mullet where it breeds, as it does on Clare Island, Inishturk, Inishbofin, Achill and the Aran Islands. Large flocks occur in July.

White Wagtail. *Motacilla alba alba* (L.)

Passage-migrant in spring and autumn. Was first recorded in County Mayo in April 1851 when Warren observed one on Bartragh Island in Killala Bay. From then Warren made frequent reports of its occurrence in spring. In 1893 an adult male was shot on Achill Island. Good secured specimens at Westport, Co. Mayo in August 1891 and one near Newport on October 6th 1924. White Wagtails have been observed on the Mullet where I have seen a bird on June 8th. In June 1898, Ussher and others saw a bird in north Mayo which had a piece of cotton-rush in its bill. (*Birds of Ireland*, Ussher and Warren, p. 37).

In Galway White Wagtails have occurred on the Aran Islands and Clare Island. (*Clare Island Survey, Aves*, p.12). Mr

Glanville, while lighthouse keeper on Mutton Island in Galway Bay, reported White Wagtails, a bird he had become familiar with elsewhere, on both spring and autumn passage, and wings were sent to me for confirmation. On September 23rd 1920, I observed two at Slyne Head Lighthouse, followed by another on October 2nd. Inland, it occurs only rarely. On September 2nd 1928, I secured an adult female (identification confirmed by the late Mr Williams of Dublin and the Nat. Hist. Museum, London), now in my possession, from a party of five resting on rocks in Lough Carra, Co. Mayo. In Co. Galway, Mrs Gough clearly identified six at Raforde near Athenry on September 21st 1924. Next day they had departed.

British Tree-Creeper. *Certhia familiaris britannica* (Ridgew.)

Resident and plentiful throughout the wooded districts. A marked increase was noted for some years, starting in 1917. The severe winter of 1916-1917 and the severe spell at the end of January 1945 had little or no effect on its numbers. I have heard it as far west as Ballinahinch in Connemara. May says it breeds in Kylmore. In Achill I found its status needs further investigation as reports about it are conflicting (see *Irish Nat. Journal*, Vol. viii p. 4).

To be continued **NS**

RECENT ADDITIONS TO THE GALWAY LIST

A Shore Lark (also Horned Lark) at Killeany, Inishmore, on 3 October 2021 and an Allen's Gallinule found dead at Creig a Cheirnin, Inishmore, on 4 January 2022 will become, if accepted by the IRBC, the two newest additions to the Co. Galway list which will then stand at 329 species. The Gallinule will be, if accepted, the first Irish record of this species, the 221st species for Inishmore and the 228th species for the Aran Islands (incl. adjacent islands off the west end of Inishmore). Inishbofin has recorded 219 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

WHOSE BIRD? – CORY

Cory's Shearwater *Colonectris diomedea* (Scopoli 1769)

Cory's Bittern *Ixobrychus neoxinus*

Charles Barney Cory (1857-1921) was an American ornithologist. He donated his collection of 19,000 bird specimens to the Field Museum in Chicago, in exchange for departmental status of ornithology and an appointment as lifetime curator without resident obligations. The Department of Ornithology with Curator Cory and Assistant Curators C.K. Cherry and N. Dearborn, remained separate for six years.

Cory wrote *Birds of Haiti and San Domingo* in 1885, *Birds of West Indies* in 1889 and *Birds of Illinois and Wisconsin* in 1909.

He was the first person to describe this shearwater as a species; he named the Atlantic subspecies *Colonectris d. borealis* in 1881. Scopoli originally described the species in 1769 but thought it a race of another shearwater.

The bittern proved to be a rare erythristic [abnormal redness in plumage] morph of the Least Bittern (*Ixobrychus exilis*) and not a separate species.

[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