



BIRDWATCH - GALWAY BRANCH

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

JOHN TEMPLE LANG ARTICLE

As I mentioned in the last *Galway Newsletter* (December 2022), below is an article that John Temple Lang wrote for me very shortly before his recent death. It sums up all the great work he and others did when establishing the Irish Wildbird Conservancy, now BirdWatch, to benefit Ireland's birds. I include it here as a fitting tribute to John. *Ar dheis Dé to raibh a anam.*

NS

BWI'S ORIGINS – THE FIRST FIVE YEARS

Richard Nairn and Oran O'Sullivan summarised the activities of what is now BWI during the period 1970 to 2010 in *Wings* in 2019. I [JTL] have been asked to write about 1966 to 1970, the first five years of its activities. 1996 was the year in which the organisation was launched in substantially its present form. There were three principal aims: To revive the old and ineffective Irish Society for the Protection of Birds, to obtain a Wildlife Conservation Act, and to set up a reserve for Greenland White-fronted Geese in Wexford. Many of the same individuals were involved, to a greater or lesser extent, in all three aims and in the three organisations then concerned with bird conservation: the ISPB, the Irish Wildfowl Conservancy and the Irish Ornithologists' Club. However, until the three were merged in December 1968, the Wexford project was handled by the IWC and the legislation by the ISPB.

WEXFORD

As Richard Nairn explained in *Wings*, part of the North Slob in Wexford was ultimately acquired in 1968, jointly by the relevant Irish authorities (now the National Parks and Wildlife Service) and the organisation that resulted from the merger of the ISPB, the IWC and the Irish Ornithologists' Club. The negotiations were lengthy because they involved the first arrangement of this kind for both the Irish authorities and the World Wildlife Fund.

MERGER

In December 1968, the three societies agreed to merge and the Report and Conservation Review of the Irish Wildbird Conservancy for 1968 covers the activities of the three of them. Since many of the same individuals were

involved in all of them this was an obvious rationalisation.

ALL IRELAND CONFERENCES

In 1966, Peter Conder, the Director of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, and I agreed that there should be annual conferences on alternate sides of the border, jointly organised by the RSPB and the IWC. The first was held in Newcastle in 1967 and the second in Malahide in 1968. This began a series of very successful joint conferences, which for many members was the principal opportunity to meet other members and scientists.

SURVEY

Also in 1966, it was agreed to carry out a survey of peregrine falcons breeding in the Republic of Ireland. This disclosed and confirmed a very serious situation.

RESERVES

In 1969, the IWC obtained a long lease of the Little Skellig that enabled it to be described as an IWC Reserve. In the following year, the IWC acquired another seabird colony, Oilean Maistir.

JTL

WHOSE BIRD? - JOHN FRANKLIN

Franklin's Goose *Falcapennos Canadensis franklini* (Douglas 1932) (Alt. Spruce Grouse)
Franklin's Gull *Larus pipixcan* (Wagler 1832)
Franklin's Nightjar *Caprimulgus montocolus* (Horsfield 1821)
Franklin's *Prinia Prinia hodgsoni* (Blyth 1844) (Alt. - Ashy-grey/Hodgson's/Franklin's/Grey-breasted Prinia/Wren Warbler)

Sir John Franklin (1786-1847) was an officer in the Royal Navy and is best known as an explorer of the Northwest Passage. The youngest of twelve boys, Franklin joined the navy in his youth and spent the rest of his life in the service. He undertook his first arctic voyage in 1818, commanding a vessel trying to reach the North Pole. In 1819, he led the first attempt to find the Northwest Passage, the sea route across the Arctic to the Pacific Ocean. He returned empty handed after two years amid rumours of starvation, murder and cannibalism. Franklin was involved in several more voyages to the north before disappearing in 1845 in another attempt to cross the arctic by sea. A search was undertaken under the command of Sir Clements Robert Markham. **Viellot** named the gull which **Wagler** described.

[Taken from: Bo Beolens and Michael Watkins, *Whose Bird? Common bird names and the people they commemorate* (Yale University Press, 2015).] This may have appeared in an earlier edition of the

Newsletter as I picked names at random over the years.

NS

BLUE TITS

H.J. Massingham, a dogged advocate of old ecological ways of the land in the face of rapid agricultural change in England, says in his memoir *Remembrance* (1942) he was pleased, while convalescing, to watch a pair of blue tits feeding 1,500 'orchard pests' per day to their young. In *Winged Builders* (1959), Nancy Price, a famous actor and keen birdwatcher, reported 1,480 caterpillars in a day, also while convalescing. I recalled these observations when I noticed blue tits, up to now undetected, slipping in and out of the nest box against the bark of a thirty-year old oak tree in our garden in June 2022. I made some desultory attempts at counting their visits; once they made 19 visits in ten minutes but another time only two.

Despite the colourful illustrations in bird books, the visits were remarkably easy to miss. Adult feeding sites were varied: they feverishly searched behind the new leaves of a freshly-cut beech hedge, hung onto drooping clusters of flowers on the overgrown hawthorn hedge and, of course, lost themselves among the foliage of the oak tree. While I watched, they ignored the overwhelming clusters of grey aphids on ailing lupins close at hand, but they may have taken them at other times. Blue tits are, in fact, very dynamic and varied in their choice of prey in relation to availability, distribution and searching methods. Recent DNA analysis of blue tits' faecal matter in nest boxes in Scottish woodlands by the University of Edinburgh found that flies, wasps, beetles and spiders were popular items. Apparently, moth caterpillars are the items most often fed to the young. These are part of the unseen wildlife around us. Over sixty species of night-flying moths were listed by Ken Bond from a moth trap in our garden a few years ago.

Watching the next morning. I was rewarded by the sight of a young bird leaving the nest box. Immediately after the adult bird had poked some food into the hole, a young bird's face appeared cheeping inside the entrance, a bright orange flange around its beak. For the next few minutes, it advanced and retreated, each time squeezing itself further and further out until it seemed it would fall. And then it was out, clinging to the bark for a while before it disappeared into the oak foliage. The adult arrived to feed another bird inside and this too emerged soon afterwards and made its way along the horizontal branch that led away from the box. Its lack of colour contrast, duller cap and yellowish face, made it seem part of the tree. As it turned out, the exodus had started earlier. There was already a young bird on the apple tree, quivering its wings. Surprisingly,



another young bird was fed on the telegraph wire, its camouflage counting for nothing.

Stephen Heery

BIRDS IN POETRY

Waders

Noisy, scuttering, running, flapping sky pilots, cloud forming, shuffling, bending, piping.

Wonderful and pleasing estuarine champions galloping windward thru surf and over stone.

Probing mud for grub on cold and dreary days made sweeter by their sound.

Birder's friends; one for all and all for one alone together in winter's storms.

Joe Hobbs

Thanks to Joe for composing and submitting this evocative poem. Joe is a long-time stalwart for Irish birds, especially for their detailed recording.

NS

A LIST OF BIRDS IN COUNTIES GALWAY & MAYO BY R.F. RUTTLEDGE

(Continued from Pied Flycatcher)

Goldcrest. *Regulus regulus angslorum* (Hart)

Resident, widely distributed and plentiful wherever there are woodlands or even a few conifers. Found throughout Connemara and on Achill Island to which it spread in 1870. In 1866 it was considered scarce in north Co. Mayo but later increased (*Clare Island Survey* Aves, p. 9). The severe winter of 1916/17 took great toll of numbers although recovery was rapid. The very severe week at the end of January 1945 left the Goldcrest very scarce and, except locally, was still uncommon in 1947.

Chiffchaff. *Phylloscopus collybita collybita*

Regular and abundant summer-visitor. Widespread. Appears during the last week of March and is heard late in September. Earliest date heard: March 13th 1948. Frequents not only the wooded areas, where there are small bushes, though not in Connemara where I have only found it in the woods of Ballinahich and Kylemore where it is plentiful. Numerous Old Head near Louisburgh. Not met with on the Mullet nor on the marine islands. First recorded on Achill on May 1st 1937 when one was heard in song in Glendarary Wood (*British Birds*, Vol. xxxi, p. 58); one in song there May 15th 1948 (E. Brown, *in litt.*). One heard in song in February 1940 at Tuam, Co. Galway was perhaps a wandering bird.

Siberian Chiffchaff. *Phylloscopus collybita tristis* (Blythe)

One was killed against the wires of Eeragh Lighthouse, Aran Islands, Co. Galway on November 25th 1943. The remains have been preserved in the National Museum (*British Birds*, Vol. xxxvii, p. 234 and *Irish Nat. Journal* viii, p. 220).

Willow Warbler. *Phylloscopus trochilus trochilus* (L)

Regular and abundant summer-visitor. Widely distributed. Arrives usually in the first week of April and may be heard in the first week of September. Earliest date March 25th 19.. in which year the early spread was noticeable as far north as the Pontoon district. I have one record for March 27th but March records are exceptional in either county. Though widespread it is less plentiful in the western portions of both counties. Not heard of on the Mullet though one at Bangor Erris, a desolate place. Visits Achill and is plentiful on the shores of Clew Bay, also in Connemara at Kylemore, Ballinahinch and as far west as Errislannan west of Clifden.

Wood Warbler. *Phylloscopus sibilatrix* (Bechest)

Very rare. Was formerly known repeatedly at Clonbrock, Co. Galway, where it was found breeding (*Birds of Ireland*, Ussher and Warren, p. 22). It has evidently ceased to breed there as there are no records and I could not trace the birds when I stayed at Clonbrock in June 1944. One was shot at Blackrock off the Co. Mayo coast on May 27th 1890. I have failed to find this bird in either county, in spite of constant search.

Grasshopper Warbler. *Locustella naevia naevia* (Bodd)

Rare and local summer-visitor. In Co. Mayo it was recorded at Cooleronan near Foxford in 1886. I found another one which certainly had a nest and heard another in song near Foxford. I am reliably informed that near Moorborok in the locality the bird is a regular summer visitor. Rev. M.J. Heaney informed me (*in litt.*) that near Loughboy in the Ballyhaunis district he heard singing birds in April, May and June 1941 and in more than one locality. I heard a bird on July 1st, 1944 at Castlebreaffy near the sea coast N.W. of Westport but could find no nest. A bird was singing not far from Ballinrobe on May 7th 1942 and an unmatched bird singing at Cloonee on April 30th to May 12th 1942. In Co. Galway it breeds plentifully at the callows by the Shannon at Portumna. I have been unable to trace this warbler in any other localities in these counties in which Ussher had little or no knowledge of it and no record of it breeding in Co. Galway, but J.E.M. Summer has June records of 'reeling' birds near Westport and Newport, Co. Mayo in different years and J.F. Simms saw and heard three in the bogland near Killala and Ballycastle on August 7th 1947.

(To be continued. NS)

BOOK REVIEW – BIRD GIRL
by MAYA ROSE CRAIG

Review by Riona Ni Aodha

Birdgirl is the story of Dr Mya Rose Craig, a 20-year-old British-Bangladeshi birder, environmentalist and diversity activist. Written by Dr Craig herself, *Birdgirl* tells of Craig's travels to the seven continents of the world with her parents while birdwatching, her campaigning for inclusivity in the nature sector,

her family's struggles with her mother's bipolar disorder and much, much more.

Born into a bird-passionate family – mom, dad and older sister – Craig started birdwatching long before her earliest memories start. She went on her first twitch at nine days old. When she was six years old, she completed a 'Big Year' with her parents and saw 325 species of birds in the U.K. within a calendar year.

Craig and her parents went on her first world birdwatching trip when she was 8 years old to Ecuador. Her parents noticed that the birdwatching helped them all cope with Craig's mother's undiagnosed bipolar disorder. Throughout her book, Craig writes of the benefits of nature for mental health. Seeing many pluses to world birding, Craig and her parents continued, going on a six-months trip around South America the next year. Craig reached her seventh continent when she was just 13 and, by the age of 17, she had seen half of the world's bird species. Craig's parents have always tried to make a positive impact on the places they visit to compensate for their carbon footprint.

Craig describes her experiences while birdwatching on the seven continents, from the birds, beasts and habitats, to the people, politics and poverty. Her descriptions of the birds sometimes bring a laugh, such as when she compares the King Penguins amongst the smaller ones to "self-conscious teenagers whose growth spurt had set in before their peers ... hunched over, trying not to stand out from the crowd." Craig has often used her popular blog, *Birdgirl*, which she started when she was 11, to tell of her birding trips or to raise awareness of environmental or social issues.

With beautiful artwork on the cover and at the start of each chapter, *Birdgirl* caught my eye right away. It was exciting to see a bird book by an author both young and female. For Craig, her sister was "the cool birding role model that most young women lack." I had recently noticed a lack of female authors on my nature bookshelf and was eager for some diversity.

As I read *Birdgirl*, I discovered that the lack of diversity in the nature sector also applies to ethnicity. In her book, Craig tells of founding the charity Black2Nature and campaigning for greater inclusivity in the nature sector. Unfortunately, she also has many cases of the Islamophobic, sexist and belittling attitudes directed toward her to describe.

As a young teenager, I have particularly enjoyed *Birdgirl* and relate to many of the themes mentioned. Packed with passion, information, hope and ideas for the future, Craig's jewel of a book will inspire any reader.