



BIRDWATCH GALWAY

This newsletter is issued in support of the Galway Branch of BirdWatch Ireland. To get involved or to get on the email notice list contact Secretary Blaithe Kennedy (blaithe.kennedy@gmail.com) or Chairperson Cyril Manning (cyril.manning@hotmail.com)

A LIST OF THE BIRDS OF THE COUNTIES GALWAY & MAYO by R.F. RUTTLEDGE (Published 1950) (Continued from Ring Ouzel)

Blackbird Turdous merula merula L.

Resident and winter-visitor. More generally distributed than then Song-Thrush and more numerous. There is a large autumn immigration. Common and increasing. The breeding range has extended since 1890 in which year it was first found breeding on the Mullet where it now does so commonly and is thought to be increasing. In Achill it has become a common resident of comparatively recent years. It is very plentiful and breeds on Inishbofin, Clare Island, Aran Islands (except Inishere where it is scarce) and I have seen it on Inishturk. Gorumna Island in south Connemara holds a number in summer and throughout Connemara in summer it may be called abundant being found everywhere with a vestige of cover,

Wheatear. Oenanthe oenanthe oenanthe (L)

Regular summer-visitor and passage-migrant. Widely distributed on mainland and marine islands alike. More abundant in coastal areas than inland where in the breeding season it is found locally. Often first observed in March, sometimes early in the month. I have seen birds on passage on Slyne Head in Co. Galway in the first week of October.

Greenland Wheatear. Oenanthe oenanthe leucorrhoa (Gm).

Passage-migrant and probably annually and in greater numbers than suspected, but there is little evidence supported by specimens. Though it may pass through both counties, the only evidence is of coastal movement at light-stations in autumn.

Whinchat. Saxicola rubetra (L)

Scarce summer-visitor. Very local if present at all nowadays. Formally bred in places in N. E. of Co. Mayo in which area C. F. Scroope failed to locate any in 1937 and 1938 and states that even there they were always scarce. (This is the area between Ballycastle and Ballina where Ussher saw a bird and Warren knew them in 1898.) Good stated that he knew it near Westport but I have failed to trace it there

in extensive search in both counties nor does any observer report it. One was seen and heard singing near Achill Sound on Mat 14th 1937 by C. Oldhan. In Co. Galway one was obtained at South Aran Lighthouse on May 2nd 1889. A male and a female were watched by Mrs Tension on a hillside near Renvyle on the Connemara coast in July 1945.

British Stonechat. Saxicola torquata hibernans(Hart)

Resident. Widely distributed if somewhat local. Common on the sea-board and coastal regions. Resident on Achill and Inishbofin. Absent from Aran Islands and evidently from Clare Island where I saw none in April 1945 though formerly it was resident in small numbers in these islands. (Clare Island Survey. Aves p. 8) as well as as on Inishturk where I saw none in July 1945. This is a species that was greatly affected by the severe winter of 1916-17 and in places its recovery was slow while in some areas it never fully recovered. The severe week at the end of January 1945 again affected numbers.

To be continued

OWLS OF THE EASTERN ICE

This book has been on my book shelves for years but just lately I started to re-read it. The author is **Jonathan C. Slight** from Minnesota and tells of his research on **Blakinson's Fish Owl** located in a very remote part of Siberia. It is best perhaps to quote from the author's prologue in the book as follows --

I saw my first Blakinson's Fish Owl in the Rushing province of Primo rye, a coastal talon of land looking south into the belly of North East Asia. This is a remote corner of the world, nor fare from where Russia, China and North Korea meet in a tangle of mountains and barbed wire. One hike in the forest there in 2000, a companion and I unexpectedly flushed and enormous and panicked bird. Taking to the air with laboured flaps, it hooted its displeasure, then landed for a moment in the bare canopy perhaps a dozen meters above our heads. This dishevelled mass of wood-chip brown regarded us warily with electric yellow eyes. We were uncertain at first which actually, we'd come across. It was clearly an owl, but bigger than any I've seen, about the size of an eagle but fluffier and more portly, with enormous ear-tufts. Backlight by the hazy gray of a winter sky, it seemed almost too big and too comical to be a real bird, as if someone had hastily glued a fistful of feathers to a yearling bear, then propped the dazed beast in the tree. Having decided that we were a threat the creature pivoted to escape crashing

through the trees as its two-meter wingspan clipping the lattice of the branches. Flakes of displaced bark spiralled down the bird flew out of sight. Immediately after scaring off the owl I went of my doff-eared field guide, but no species seemed to fit. The fish-owl painted there reminded me of a dour thrash can than the defiant, floppy bird we had just seen and neither matched the fish owl in my mind. I didn't have of guess too long about what species I'd spotted though: I'd taken photographs. My grainy shots made their way to an ornithologist in Vladivlastok named Sergey Surmach, the only person working with fish owls in the region. It turned out that no scientist had seen a Blakinson's Fish Owl so far south in a hundred years, and my photographs were evidence than this rare, exclusive species still persisted.

I highly recommend this book – It is easily available at a modest price on the Amazon books search. Just Google for it.

My thanks to the author

NS

BIRDS IN POETRY

THE WREN

I am writing too much about Carrigskeewaun, I think, until you two come along, my grandsons, And we generalise at once about cows and sheep.

A day here represents a life-time, bird's-foot trefoil

Among wild thyme, dawn and dusk muddled on the ground

The crescent moon fading above Mweelrea's shoulder

And the innovative raven flips upside down
As hares seek brackish waters at the stepping stones

Like a contrapuntal runnel, and the heather
Stand that shelters the lesser twayblade shelters you.

We sleepwalk around a town land whooper swans

From tundra remember, and the Saharan
Wheatear. I want you both to remember me
And what the wind-tousled wren has been saying

All day long from fence posts and fuchsia depths,

A brain-rattling bramble-song inside a knothole.

Michael Longley

My acknowledgement to the author. **NS**



THE GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER OF AUGHRANE FOREST

In the small town of Ballygar in north-east county Galway lies a forest of approx. 1,600 acres called Aughrane, a place steeped in history, and archaeology of a forgotten past. It now provides dawned on me it was a woodpecker's nest. I slowly moved back and hid behind some trees. Eventually, an adult turned up, landed on the side of the tree and all hell broke loose with the squeaking of the juveniles knowing food was near, and then it happened. A little head pops out, mouth open wide waiting to be stuffed full of fresh larvae. Unknown to me I had just witnessed the first known successful breeding of Great Spotted Woodpecker in the county Galway. I returned with a camera I had borrowed to capture an image of the nest and adult (unknown to me at the time were the rules relating to photographing nesting birds, later this was relayed to me by a NPWS ranger.) I then proceeded to record my find on irishbirding.com, so on 12 June 2021 a record was made. It was after this I was contacted by a NPWS ranger who had been tracking the bird's spread into Galway over the years and was thrilled a nest was finally found. I have stayed in contact with the ranger to this day and keep him updated every year on the health of the species in my area. So today I have continued my love of animals and photography and have considerably updated my equipment with long-range lenses for the purpose of wildlife photography so I am able to stay a safe distance from wildlife while being able to capture images. The species you are trying to capture an image of should always have the highest consideration in that no disturbance is caused by you, and never enter or disturb a bird's nesting site. A licence is required for the purpose of photographing nesting birds: NPWS under Section 22(9) of the Wildlife Act 1976. I have also witnessed successful fledging of the woodpeckers in Aughrane Forest in 2022. In that year a nest was located directly beside a forest trail in full view of safe haven for a vast array of animal species hidden away in its many areas of native old forest, Scots pine and Sitka spruce. In March 2020, it's in this forest our story begins of a in morning because in the near distance he and Paul Farrell, out on his usual early morning run. But this is not what unfolds - he hears an unusual noise breaking silence, it's a knocking sound. What could this be he thought, Is my neighbour doing some home work on improvements at this hour, thinking it was some kind of power tool being used? But he sees movement in the trees ahead as he moves closer to the sound. It's a bird of some kind quickly shifting between

the trees, but this bird is different. It clings to the side of the tree and hides on him behind it, now and then peeking out on him to see if it's still being watched. Intrigued and excited by his discovery, I get a phone call from him and we try to clarify what he had seen and come to the conclusion that it is a Great Spotted Woodpecker. My mission now was to capture a photograph of this beautiful bird in its habitat and find out as much knowledge about it. So I began to walk the forest to see or hear if this little bird would present itself. I got to know their habits of the light tapping of trees and high-pitched squeak and extremely loud drumming which, depending on the tree, can be quite shockingly loud. But they are also very clever. When they know someone is near they manoeuvre themselves around the back of the tree, peeping out now and again to see if the coast is clear, like hide and seek between man and bird. They also love trees and old dead during my travels about the forest many of these trees have little holes pecked out, some unfinished. In fact, one tree I counted twelve holes in. In June 2021, I walked into a quiet area away from the trails and heard a low-level squeaking sound and walked closer as I had not heard this before, it was different. I saw an old birch tree which the top had broken off. It was about nine foot high and as I moved around it I could hear the sound coming from inside, which baffled me until I saw the hole, and then it did not hinder its success. In June 2023, I obtained a licence from NPWS to capture images of a nest site that was ideal. Using a 600mm lens and 1.6 crop camera and hide I was able to view and record these beautiful birds come and go feeding their young, and eventually share it with those who never saw a Great Spotted Woodpecker nest. This nest had a total of three juveniles, as they all had slightly different head markings, and these juveniles successfully fledged. I have also had sightings in local gardens at feeders and in a smaller forest just over the border in Co. Roscommon at Mount Talbot and at Mote Park Roscommon, so they are spreading. So this story comes to an end and as I write this piece at my home, which is only 200 yards from Aughrane Forest, I look forward to this year's loud drumming of the Great Spotted Woodpecker.

Shane Coyle January 2024.

Many thanks to Shane for this landmark woodpecker recording and for the wonderful descriptive writing of it. Thanks also to Stephen Heery for passing it on to me.

BirdWatch Galway (Branch of BirdWatch Ireland) 1st Quadrimester 2022

QUADRIMESTRAL BIRD REPORT COMPILED BY CHRIS PEPPIATT

DATE OF ISSUE: 8th March 2024

1st January: 2 male Brambling, again present, Moycullen. (1)

1st January: Glossy Ibis, Gort na gCapall, Inishmore (per Cliona O'Brien).

2nd January: Brambling, Loughrea (Tom Murtagh).

2nd January: 2nd yr. White-tailed Eagle, again present, Derryclare Lough. (2)

2nd January: Ad. Win. Little Gull, Rusheen Bay, Galway city (Aonghus O'Donaill).

3rd January: 6 Glossy Ibis, Kilcolgan (Paul Troake). (3)

3rd January: Juv. Lesser Yellowlegs, again present, Rahasane turlough. (4)

4th January: Allen's Gallinule, found dead, Creig an Cheirin, Inishmore (Heidrun Müller). (5)

5th January: Brambling, Glenard Crescent, Salthill, Galway city (Brendan Dunne).

7th January: 2 Great White Egret, again present, Lough Corrib. (6)

7th January: Ad. Fem. White-tailed Eagle, again present, Lough Corrib. (7)

7th January: Little Gull, Rusheen Bay, Galway city (Jacob Mead).

7th January: 2nd yr. Glaucous Gull & 4th yr. Iceland Gull, Spiddal Pier (Aonghus O'Donaill). (8)

8th January: 2 Hen Harrier, Lough Corrib.

9th January: Ad. Iceland Gull, 2 Little Gull & 8 Sandwich Tern, South Park/Mutton Island, Galway city (Mike Sylvia).

12th January: Fem. Goosander, again present, Eglington Canal/Nun's Island, Galway city. (9)

12th January: Siberian Chiffchaff (*P. c. tristis*), Rahasane turlough (Ian Brophy). (10)

12th January: Marsh Harrier, Muckrush, Lough Corrib (Sean Holland).

13th January: Ad. Kumlien's Gull, Omev Strand (Dermot Breen). (11)

13th January: Little Auk, off Kilcolgan Point, Tawin (Paul Troake).

13th January: 3rd yr. Glaucous Gull, Ross Beach (Dermot Breen).

15th January: Siberian Chiffchaff (*P. c. tristis*), NUI Galway campus, Galway city (Mike Sylvia). (12)

15th January: Ringtail Hen Harrier, Cloonteen, Kilconly (Hannah).

16th January: Little Auk, Sellerna Beach, Cleggan (Breda Brady).

16th January: Ad. Win. Forster's Tern, again present, Pollagh, Kinvara Bay. (13)

16th January: 4 Long-tailed Duck, Pollagh, Kinvara Bay (Paul Troake).

16th January: 1-2 Common Sandpiper, Kilcolgan River (Paul Troake).

17th January: Green-winged Teal, Cahermore turlough (Paul Troake).

18th January: 1st Win. Iceland Gull, Waterside, Galway city (Tom Cuffe). (14)

18th January: 21 Mediterranean Gull, Kilkieran Harbour (Dermot Breen).

21st January: 2nd yr. Iceland Gull, Kilcolgan Point, Tawin (Sean Holland).

22nd January: 10 Pintail, Killeeneen, Craughwell (Tom Hennessy).

24th January: 2 Peregrine, Belclare turlough (Darren Ellis).

24th January: White-tailed Eagle, Rahasane turlough (Dermot Breen). (15)

25th January: 2 Great Northern Diver, Curramore, Inchiquin, Lough Corrib (Neil Sharkey).

26th January: Drake Green-winged Teal, Rahasane turlough (Paul Troake).

27th January: Short-eared Owl, Inishmore (Aonghus O'Donaill).

28th January: Fem. Goosander, Lough Rea (Tom Murtagh).

4th February: Juv. Little Gull, Nimmo's Pier, Galway city (Tom Cuffe). (16)

6th February: 621 Pintail, Rahasane turlough (Dermot Breen).

11th February: Iceland Gull, Rusheen Bay, Galway city (Jacob Mead).

19th February: 1st Win. Ross' Gull, 5 Iceland Gull, Ad. Little Gull & 1st Win. Mediterranean Gull, Mutton Island, Galway city (Mike Sylvia). (17)

19th February: 67 Greenland White-fronted Goose & Pink-footed Goose, Creganna Marsh (Sean Holland).

20th February: 4 Little Gull, Glaucous Gull & 4 Iceland Gull, Mutton Island, Galway city (Brian McCloskey & John Cusack).

21st February: Ad. Ring-billed Gull & 1st Win. Iceland Gull, Nimmo's Pier, Galway city (Colin Delahunt).
23rd February: 1st Win. Little Gull, Mutton Island, Galway city (Jeff Copner).
23rd February: 5 (3-1st Win., 2nd. Win & Ad.) Iceland Gull, Mutton Island, Galway city (Cian Cardiff).
23rd February: Fem. Long-tailed Duck, Tarrea (Fintan Damer).
24th February: 4 (3-1st Win. & Ad.) Iceland Gull & 1st Win. Little Gull, Mutton Island, Galway city.
25th February: 2-1st Win. Iceland Gull & 2-1st Win. Little Gull, Mutton Island, Galway city.
28th February: Black-throated Diver & 16 Long-tailed Duck, Inishmore (Mike Sylvia).
1st March: Great Spotted Woodpecker, Derrycrag Wood, Woodford (Tom Murtagh).
1st March: Black-throated Diver, Traught (Sean Cronin).
3rd March: 2nd yr. Iceland Gull, Knocknacarra, Galway city (David O'Keeffe).
4th March: Ad. Little Gull, Mutton Island, Galway city (Mike Sylvia).
7th March: Green Sandpiper, Blackrock turlough (Mike Sylvia).
8th March: migrant Canada Goose (prob. Lesser Canada Goose, ssp. <i>parvipes</i>), Freagillaun North, off Renvyle (Dermot Breen). (18)
9th March: Wheatear, South Park, Galway city (Mike Sylvia).
10th March: 5 Iceland Gull & 2 (Ad. & 1st Win.) Little Gull, Mutton Island, Galway city (Paul Troake).
11th March: Spotted Redshank, Mutton Island, Galway city (Tom Cuffe).
14th March: Long-eared Owl & Woodcock, Moycullen (Gerard Walshe).
16th March: 2 Wheatear, Tawin (Sean Holland).
18th March: 40 Light-bellied Brent Goose & Wheatear, An Caladh Mór, Inis Meáin (Fearghas Mac Lochlainn). (19)
20th March: 2 Purple Sandpiper, An Caladh Mór, Inis Meáin (Fearghas Mac Lochlainn).
20th March: Barnacle Goose, Mutton Island, Galway city (Tom Cuffe).
21st March: Willow Warbler, Curramore, Nr. Inchiquin, Lough Corrib (Neil Sharkey).
25th March: Dipper, Mill Street, Galway city (Sally O'Meara).
27th March: 3 House Martin, Angliham, Lough Corrib (Marcus Hogan).
31st March: 5 Red-throated Diver & 4 Iceland Gull, Nimmo's Pier/Mutton Island, Galway city (Tom Cuffe).
1st April: 50-60 Eider, Slyne Head (Martin O'Malley).
1st April: 3 Manx Shearwater & Ad. Iceland Gull, Tawin (Sean Holland).
3rd April: 2 Ring-necked Duck & Grasshopper Warbler, Coolanillaun, Lough Corrib (Mike Sylvia).
5th April: Swallow, Cregg Hill (Dermot Breen).
11th April: 4 Sandwich Tern, Renvyle Beach (Mike McLaughlin).
14th April: Common Sandpiper, Murlach, Ballyconneely (Dermot Breen).
14th April: Cuckoo, Roundstone (Nicholas Griffin).
15th April: Whimbrel, Murvey (Dermot Breen).
17th April: Whitethroat, Loughrea bypass (Tom Murtagh).
18th April: Jack Snipe, 4 (2 pr.) Pintail, 2nd yr. Little Gull & 70 Black-tailed Godwit, Muckrush, Lough Corrib (Aonghus O'Donaill).
20th April: 3 Common Tern, Mutton Island, Galway city (Mike Sylvia).
22nd April: Male Blackcap, 10 Wheatear, 2 Peregrine, 3,000 Fulmar, 4 Chough & 80 Puffin, Inishturk (Arlene Walsh & Stephen Meany).
25th April: Corncrake, Omev Island (per NPWS Corncrake Census).
27th April: Corncrake, Nr. Dolphin Hotel, Inishbofin (per NPWS Corncrake Census).
28th April: Short-eared Owl, Clare River Bridge, N84, near Lough Corrib (per Marcus Hogan).
29th April: 2 Sedge Warbler, Galway Golf Course, Salthill, Galway city (David O'Keeffe).
30th April: 267 Whimbrel & Common Scoter, Roscam (Sean Holland).

NOTES:

- (1) The run of Brambling in Gerard Walshe's Moycullen garden began on the 17th of December 2021 carried on into 2022 and lasted through most of the period. Two males were seen on the 5th of January, 4 (three males and a female) were seen on the 7th of January, 5 on the 10th, 5 on the 15th, 4 on the 21st, 9 on the 22nd and 12 on the 28th of January, while 12 were seen on the 2nd, 18 on the 3rd, and a peak of 30 birds being seen on both the 6th and the 25th of February. Thereafter, numbers declined, with 10 remaining on the 21st of March and the final record there being of 7 on the 4th of April 2022.
- (2) This bird was first seen at Derryclare Lough on the 18th of December 2021.
- (3) The six Glossy Ibis recorded at Kilcolgan on the 3rd of January 2022 were followed by other records of what were presumably the same birds in that area, with 4 at Loughrea on the 5th of January, 6 again at Kilcolgan on the 10th of January and 6 at Clarinbridge on the 15th of January 2022.
- (4) The juvenile Lesser Yellowlegs first recorded at Rahasane turlough on the 30th of October 2021 was recorded until March 2022, with sightings made on the 3rd, 12th, 17th, 18th and 22nd of January 2022, the 4th and 6th of February 2022 and the 6th, 13th, 18th and 24th of March 2022.
- (5) The Allen's Gallinule on the 4th of January 2022 was the first record for Ireland; a pity that it was dead.
- (6) Great White Egret are resident now in Galway. In addition to the two birds recorded on the 7th of January at Lough Corrib, single birds were seen on Lough Corrib on the 8th of January 2022 and at Muckrush, Lough Corrib on the 14th of January 2022.
- (7) White-tailed eagles have been resident in Galway at Lough Corrib for some years now. In addition to the bird seen on the 7th of January 2022, an adult female was seen on the 8th of January 2022, one was seen between the River Clare and Muckrush on the 12th of January, one was seen at Muckrush on the 14th of January 2022 and one was seen at Curramore, Inchiquin on the 25th of January 2022.
- (8) The same two birds were also seen at Spiddal Pier on the next day, the 8th of January 2022.
- (9) The female Goosander first seen in the Nimmo's Pier/Galway city area on the 22nd of November 2021, was recorded on the 12th and 13th of January 2022 in Galway city in the Eglington Canal/Nun's Island area and what was presumably the same bird was later recorded at Mweelon, Tawin on the 30th of January 2022, at Lough Rusheen, Galway city on the 31st of January 2022 and at Renville West on the 2nd of February 2022.
- (10) A Siberian Chiffchaff was again seen at Rahasane turlough on the 31st of March 2022.
- (11) The adult Kumlien's Gull was again seen at Omev Island on the 15th of February 2022.
- (12) The Siberian Chiffchaff was also recorded at Galway University on the 24th, 25th, 27th, 28th and 31st of January, the 7th of February and the 13th of March 2022.
- (13) The long-staying Forster's Tern has made multiple annual returns to winter in Galway Bay, this winter it was first recorded in Kinvara Bay on the 16th of November 2021. In the first winter period of 2022, after being recorded on the 16th of January in Kinvara Bay, it was also recorded on the 25th of January (South Park, Galway city), 23rd of February (Kinvara Bay), 25th of February (Newtownlynch), 26th of February (Traught), 27th of February (Traught), 5th of March (Kinvara), 6th of March (Kinvara), 15th of March (Kinvara) and the 17th of March 2022 (Traught).
- (14) The 1st Winter Iceland Gull was also recorded at Waterside, Galway city on the 25th of January, the 10th of February, the 15th of February and the 6th of March 2022.
- (15) The White-tailed Eagle was also recorded at Rahasane turlough on the 30th of January, the 2nd of February, the 6th of February and the 6th of March 2022.
- (16) A juvenile Little Gull was also recorded at Nimmo's Pier on the 9th of February 2022.
- (17) The first winter Ross' Gull was also seen at Mutton Island on the 20th of February, the 22nd-28th of February, 1st March, 4th-6th of March, 8th and 9th of March, 11th and 12th of March, 16th of March, 24th of March, 20th of April, 22nd and 23rd of April and the 26th of April 2022.
- (18) The probable Lesser Canada Goose was also seen on Freagillaun North on the 10th of March 2022.
- (19) Fifteen Light-bellied Brent Goose were still present at An Caladh Mór on the 15th of April 2022.

HIGHLIGHTS:

2 Goosander, 1-2 Green-winged Teal, 2 Ring-necked Duck, probable Lesser Canada Goose, dead Allen's Gallinule, 6-7 Glossy Ibis, Ross' Gull, 2 Little Auk, 2 Siberian Chiffchaff. Long-staying Lesser Yellowlegs, Forster's Tern and resident Great White Egrets and White-tailed Eagles.

ARRIVING SPRING MIGRANTS:

Wheatear (9th of March), Willow Warbler (21st of March), House Martin (27th of March), Manx Shearwater (1st of April), Grasshopper Warbler (3rd of April), Swallow (5th April), Cuckoo (14th of April), Whimbrel (15th of April), Whitethroat (17th of April), Common Tern (20th of April), Corncrake (25th of April) and Sedge Warbler (29th of April).

LAST WINTERING MIGRANTS:

Greenland White-fronted Goose (19th of February), Pink-footed Goose (19th of February), Barnacle Goose (20th March), Brambling (4th April) and Light-bellied Brent Goose (15th of April).

OTHER BEASTIES:

2nd January: Pine Marten, Derryclare Lough (Dermot Breen).
8th January: Otter, Nimmo's Pier, Galway city (Gerard Walshe).