



CAIRDE EANLAITH NA GAILLIMHE BIRDWATCH GALWAY

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER – EDITOR: NEIL SHARKEY

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The aim of the Newsletter is to give Galway members a local viewpoint and to promote a common interest in birds and their conservation.

THOUGHT FROM THE CHAIR

When Neil asked me to submit my 'thought' for this newsletter I realised that watching birds, conservation issues and membership concerns were very far from my mind. My thoughts these last few weeks have been very much with the Gordon family as they have to come to terms with the sudden loss of Tony. After the initial shock of Tony dying so unexpectedly a profound sadness has taken hold of many of us.

Within the branch Tony will be greatly missed for his level-headed, good-tempered contributions to our meetings, his welcoming ways and his easy going willingness to help whenever help was needed. Over the years this made a lot of people feel they had found a loyal friend and judging by the grateful and appreciative tributes paid to him there are many, in other circles too, experiencing his passing in similar vein.

We last saw Tony heading off to Dublin the day before he died. He said goodbye in his usual cheerful, upbeat way and it seems totally apt that, what turned out to be a final farewell, was on the shore of Rusheen Bay where Jo and Tony spent so much time together watching birds and enjoying their walks.

Jo, Lynn, Simon, Niamh and Isolde, their family and friends are picking up their lives one step at a time. On behalf of all of us I wish them strength, courage and lots of support and friendship. Jo has assured me we will see her again at our meetings and she will join us on outings and counts. Knowing her, she will do so with a smile on her face despite the deep void she is now feeling. I hope we can all take a leaf out of her book and focus again on the busy season ahead of us – outings, lectures, counts, publications and the open day at Rusheen. There are jobs to be done and we will do them but Tony, and the way he contributed, will be very sadly missed.

Marianne ten Cate

BIRDS IN POETRY

This poem – *Some Herons*, is taken from Mary Oliver's collection *House of Light* published in 1990. This is another brilliantly crafted poem about birds in their natural surroundings. The perceptual awareness of the poet is conveyed in a liquid cadence of great lyrical beauty.

Pat Finnegan

Some Herons

A blue preacher flew toward the swamp,

in slow motion.

On the leafy banks, an old Chinese poet,

hunched in the white gown of his wings,

was waiting.

The water was the kind of dark silk

that has silver lines shot through it

when it is touched by the wind or is splashed upward,

in a small, quick flower, by the life beneath it.

The preacher made his difficult landing,

his skirts up around his knees.

The poet's eyes flared, just as a poet's eyes are said to do

when the poet is awakened from the forest of meditation.

It was summer.

It was only a few moments past the sun's rising,

which meant that the whole long sweet day lay before them.

They greeted each other, rumpling their gowns for an instant,

and then smoothing them.

They entered the water,

and instantly two more herons— equally as beautiful —

joined them and stood just beneath them

in the black, polished water where they fished, all day.

Mary Oliver

Published: Beacon Press, 25 Beacon Street, Boston, Massachusetts

AN EAGLE FOR LUNCH

In the garden:

The large bird soaring over the garden stayed around long enough to be identified as a booted eagle. This was the exciting start to our two week stay outside Pollensa in Northern Majorca in the first two weeks of May. It was followed, on subsequent days, by Eleanora's falcons, a small flock of bee-eaters, regular five o'clock visitors, and golden orioles flashing by. A pair of Sardinian warblers nested in the lavender bush and a hoopoe came by most mornings. More familiar birds such as blackbirds, great tits, goldfinches and sparrows also nested there, in spite of regular visits from the red-backed shrike.

The Boquer Valley

Situated north of Porta Pollensa the valley is a mecca for bird watchers. A first sight of the black vulture called the 'flying plank' because of its silhouette, was the highlight of a morning here. Kindly English birders with scopes allowed us to see a stone curlew, spotted flycatchers, corn buntings and Eleanora's falcons. We missed the rock thrush and the blue rock thrush which I had seen there in September. Rumours of Marmora's warblers were not confirmed.

The Natural Park of S'Albufera

The park lies half an hour south of Pollensa. Declared a National Park in 1988 it became a Ramsar Site the following year. It comprises 1708 hectares of marshes, dunes, lagoons and canals, with good hides and well laid out paths. Cars are not allowed in the park which makes it easy to hear the bird calls, if not necessarily to identify them! The basis of the ecological richness is water, the virtually permanent inundation provides favourable conditions for growth and variety of vegetation. S'Albufera's suite of ecosystems supports the greatest bio-diversity of any site in the Balearics. Frogs, reptiles, twenty nine species of fish, rats, mice and a great diversity of invertebrates serve to attract up to two hundred species of birds. Sixty one species of breeding birds are made up of resident birds and Summer visitors. In the Winter large flocks of duck, such as shoveler, teal and wigeon together with a range of heron species settle in the park. Garganey, ruff and other waders use the park when on migration. The following are some of the birds which we saw on our several visits to the park: ringed plover, little ringed plover, little stint, purple sandpiper, dunlin, collared pratincole, grey heron, purple heron, night heron, little bittern, cattle egret, black winged stilt, purple gallinule, red-crested pochard, gadwall, little grebe, marsh harrier, reed warbler, yellow wagtail, serin. The spotted redshank in its almost black Summer plumage was a surprise.

Deirdre Comerford

P.S. the food is good, the wine delicious and the people pleasant!

COMING EVENTS

Saturday 8 September, day trip to Kilcummin Head, North Mayo. Departure from Cathedral 8am. To book a place on the bus ring Marianne (091-552519).

Wednesday 12 September, Committee meeting, Anno Santo, 8pm.

Saturday 15 September, open day at Rusheen – The Small Wood, from 12 noon.

Saturday 6 October, short outing with Tim Griffin at Nimmo's Pier, 10.30am.

Friday 12 October, "Raptors & the Irish Golden Eagle Project" – by Lorcan O'Toole, Anno Santo, 8pm.

Wednesday 10 or 17 October (to be decided), Committee meeting, Anno Santo, 8pm.

Saturday 3 November, short outing with Tim Griffin at Nimmo's Pier, 10.30am.

MAJOR RUTLEDGE

The newsletter sends greetings to Major Rutledge who will be one hundred and two in September. He continues to take a lively interest in all matters ornithological and is always keen to hear the latest Galway birding news.

THANK YOU

I should like to make use of this remaining space to thank all our old and new Galway BirdWatch members for the invaluable and vital support that your membership gives us. It is not given to all to be active in birdwatching but without the two hundred or more Galway members it would be impossible to maintain our efforts to conserve our birds and their habitats.

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