



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

Have you ever wondered what the summer version of hibernation would be called? I think our branch needs to coin a word if there isn't one already. This year, due to the foot and mouth disease, we had to lay low for longer than usual and missed a lot of our spring and summer activities. It is only during the last couple of months that the Branch is in full swing again— and I am glad we are! After our first Branch meeting in September we started with the unveiling of a plaque at Rusheen Bay to acknowledge both the Galway Civic Trust and FAS input into the erection of the new bird watch facilities in the Small Wood overlooking the bay. These will add to the enjoyment the O'Malley family have secured for us through their generous donation of the Small Wood to BirdWatch Ireland. I hope many a bird-watcher will avail of what is there.

We have had our first lecture of the winter season - Lorcan O'Toole's presentation was extremely informative, challenging and enjoyable. Keep an eye out for those eagles! As you will see from the list of forthcoming events hibernation is certainly not on the agenda and I trust that we will see a lot of members attending events and partaking in surveys and outings. And, please, don't forget to bring that friend.

Marianne ten Cate

BIRDS IN POETRY

Lonely, White Fields is another carefully structured poem by Mary Oliver. The introductory lines remind us of John Clare's gift of painting a word-picture with a few deft brush strokes. The beauties and terrors of the natural world are conveyed in lines of brilliant linguistic effect.

Pat Finnegan

Lonely, White Fields

Every night
the owl
with his wild monkey-face
calls through the black branches,
and the mice freeze
and the rabbits shiver
in the snowy fields—
and then there is the long, deep trough of silence
when he stops singing, and steps
into the air.
I don't know
what death's ultimate
purpose is, but I think
this: whoever dreams of holding his
life in his fist
year after year into the hundreds of years
has never considered the owl—
how he comes, exhausted,
through the snow,
through the icy trees,
past snags and vines, wheeling
out of barns and church steeples,

turning this way and that way
through the mesh of every obstacle—
undeterred by anything—
filling himself time and time again
with a red and digestible joy
sickled up from the lonely, white fields—
and how at daybreak,
as though everything had been done
that must be done, the fields
swell with a rosy light,
the owl fades
back into the branches,
the snow goes on falling
flake after perfect flake.

Mary Oliver

Acknowledgement: Beacon Press 25 Beacon St. Boston MA USA

THE KIMBERLY

When I read the trip in the brochure I knew I just had to go to the Kimberly. About the size of Poland this rugged area of sandstone quartzite in the north of Western Australia is divided by dramatic limestone ridges split by deep gorges up to 100m deep.

There are no towns in the interior of the area and the Aboriginal villages and odd cattle stations are catered for by service stations with supermarkets. In between, mostly unsealed roads run through savannah woodland. Our leader met the four of us in his Toyota Landcruiser (4WD) with five spare tyres on top and a trailer for the camping, the cooking equipment and food.

On the road, we saw black and whistling kites, brown falcons and nankeen kestrels. Darby Warf, with tides of up to 12m, produced the giant great billed heron, and a common sandpiper, also great egret, striated, white-faced and nankeen night heron, silver gull and gull billed tern. At a marshy area we had whistling and wood duck, pacific, black duck, green pygmy goose, grey teal, Australian pratincole, black fronted dotteril and masked lapwing.

Putting up our tents by moonlight at 6pm we slept under the Coolibah tree and next morning washed in the Billabong. On a visit to Winjanna Gorge we had our first 'freshies' (fresh water crocodiles), a peregrine and a barking owl. Around the picnic area there were honeyeaters, diamond and peaceful doves, magpie larks and olive backed oriole.

The sandstone terraces of the Mitchell Plateau, like the Burren on a grand scale, lead to the stunning five tier Mitchell falls and gave us our first view of Aboriginal rock art (2000 years old)

In general the birds were relatively easy to see due to their tameness, the superb light and because the savannah woodland is not dense – mostly eucalypti, grevillia, bushes and acacia scrub.

Altogether we saw twelve species of honey-eater, five of kingfisher including the blue winged kookaburra but we failed to see the black swan which is the state bird of Western Australia.

Bernie McGrath

SPIDDAL SEAWATCHING

This is a short note about a visit to Spiddal pier on August 24th to do some seawatching. I arrived at approx. 8.00am and left at approx. 11.30am. The wind was SW force 5-6 with some gusts and no rain with good visibility and no heat haze to talk about. The morning's tally was completely unexpected and breaks down as follows: Arctic skua-79, great skua-9, Pomarine skua-8, Leaches petrel-1, storm petrel-20+, common dolphin approx.10. There was a substantial passage of Manx shearwaters further out into the bay which appeared to eventually be passing between Inis Oirr and the

Clare coast. While not taking note of any numbers or making any structured counts my 'guesstimate' is that numbers passing were in the region of 10,000 per hour. The skuas were concentrating their efforts on the large numbers of terns and kittiwakes present in the area throughout the morning and some fabulous views were had of all three skua species. At one stage I was treated to views of three Arctic skuas sitting in the water only 100m offshore before they began to chase a passing Pomarine skua towards the shore. The sheer numbers of skua were an amazing experience. I have never seen anything like it as the numbers above relate only to the birds that I could positively identify, there being at least this number of birds again passing through which were beyond the realms of my bird identification skills. Certainly a site to be watched in the future.

Aonghus O Donhail

COMING EVENTS

Saturday 3 November Short outing with Tim Griffin, Nimmo's Pier, Galway. 10.30am

Wednesday 14 November: Branch meeting, Anno Santo Hotel, Threadneedle Rd., Salthill 8pm

Saturday 17 November: Galway Bay Count, for details ring Marianne (091 552519)

Saturday 1 December: Short outing with Tim Griffin, Nimmo's Pier, Galway. 10.30am.

Friday 7 December: 'Birds of Portugal' – talk by John Murphy and Christmas Sale

- Anno Santo Hotel, Threadneedle Rd., 8pm

Wednesday 12 December: Branch meeting Anno Santo Hotel, Threadneedle Rd., Salthill 8pm

Saturday 29 December: Outing to Cloosh Forest. For details ring Jo at (091) 591588

Saturday 5 January 2002: Short outing with Tim Griffin Nimmo's Pier, Galway. 10.30am

Wednesday 16 January: AGM and Branch meeting, Anno Santo Hotel, Threadneedle Rd., Salthill 8pm

Sunday 13 January: Galway Bay Count and Light-bellied Brent Goose Survey – details to be confirmed. Ring Marianne.

Saturday 2 February: Short outing with Tim Griffin, Nimmo's Pier, Galway. 10.30am

Friday 8 February: 'Birds of Tibet' – talk by Eric Dempsey Anno Santo Hotel, Threadneedle Rd., Salthill 8pm

I-WeBS and WHOOPERS

A reminder to all that it is time to take up I-WeBS counts once more. Most should have received forms, newsletter etc. Contact me if you did not. Also let me know if you come on any whoopers with bands or rings. I will pass on any such sightings to those involved.

THANK YOU

This remaining space enables me to thank all Galway members – new and old – for their continued support.