



# CAIRDE EANLAITH NA GAILLIMHE BIRDWATCH GALWAY

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER – EDITOR: NEIL SHARKEY

Telephone: (091) 521554 e-mail: neilsharkey@eircom.net

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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

Over the last few months one of our members, Chris Peppiatt, has been busy setting up a BirdWatch Galway website. Now that the site is up and running I would invite everybody who has access to the internet to have a look at this new channel of branch communication. Chris did a wonderful job, not only making the Branch and our activities known to the world but also giving us easy access to other sites with a conservation or ornithological interest. Even tide tables and bird songs can be called up on your computer. The Branch information includes contact numbers, recent Galway sightings and where to watch birds in Galway. As Chris points out, this site is still 'under construction', so anyone who has suggestions on how to improve it, please contact Chris at [chris.peppiatt@iol.ie](mailto:chris.peppiatt@iol.ie) or by phone at (091) 539437. Another contribution you could make is to supply him with pictures of our favourite Galway haunts and the birds we are likely to see there.

Of course, all this does not mean that those of you who do not have access to a computer or the internet will be excluded from Branch exchanges. There will always be our quarterly newsletter, edited by Neil Sharkey and included with your issue of Wings, reminders of our programme of activities, which I regularly send out and the odd phone call to keep you up to date. The other way round is also available to all – if ever you have a query, an exciting sighting or a suggestion to make, please never hesitate to pick up the phone, drop us a note or come along to one of the branch meetings, at which everybody with a keen interest in BirdWatch Galway matters is very welcome. Even the internet cannot compete with the pint after the ornitho-business has been seen to! **Marianne ten Cate**

## Major R F Rutledge

Galway members will have been saddened to hear of the death of Major Rutledge. He passed away quietly on the afternoon of Sunday January 3th in his one hundred and third year. I do not intend to write here of his huge contribution to Irish ornithology – that will appear elsewhere – but rather to dwell on the personal loss that I feel and indeed that many others will experience also. Since he took up his final place of residence in Cummer in 1999, where he was cared for so admirably, I have been calling on him and, although we had corresponded over many years up to that, it was during those visits that our friendship really blossomed. He was a man of the utmost courtesy and who carried and conveyed his vast knowledge of birds and nature in a quiet and humble manner. Above all Major Rutledge was a friend, teacher and inspirer for all who sought to observe and study Ireland's birds. Love of one's country comes in many forms but his was the purest I have ever encountered. He loved his native Mayo, his beloved West of Ireland and Ireland, strictly in that order. He would brook no criticism of the Irish way of life which he regarded as being without equal anywhere in the world. Right to the very end he took an interest in Galway birdwatching and for that reason, although he had a national and international reputation in matters ornithological, we always felt that we in Galway had a special claim on him. His life spanned three centuries and his passing is truly the end of an era. On behalf of all I wish to express our sympathy to his family who loved him dearly and who will miss him so much.

Ar dheis Dé to raibh a anam.

NS

## BirdWatch Ireland 1000 years ago

The Irish monks and nuns of the First Millenium delighted in the creatures whose habitat they shared. Here is one of their many nature poems, this one on the blackbird, with characteristic freshness. (original Irish modernised by Tomás Ó Floinn, *Athbheo* 1955).

## An t-eán beag a lig fead

The little bird that let a whistle

de rinn a ghoibh ghlanbhúí

from the point of his pure yellow beak

## ceolann faoidh ós Loch Laoigh

sends out a call over Loch Laoigh  
an lon den gcraoibh bhárbhuí  
the blackbird, from the yellow-topped tree.

## Éan ag feadaíol ins an tsail,

A bird whistling in the willow,  
álainn goibín an ghlóir ghlain  
beautiful the little bill of the pure voice -  
buí-ghob binn an duibh-éin droin-  
sweet yellow bill of the black echoing bird -  
ceol is caoine, guth an loin.  
music most exquisite, the blackbird's voice.

## Uch, a loin, is sona dhuit,

Oh, bird, how happy for you  
sa muine thall i bhfuil do need  
in yonder wood that holds your nest,  
díthreabhach ná clingeann clog  
hermit that rings no bell:  
is binn bog sítheach mín do fhead.  
sweet, soft, peaceful, mellow your call.

## Breandán Ó Madagáin

Thanks to Breandán for a really wonderful poem and for his translation which does the original such justice. NS

## Outing to Kilcummin

Saturday 8th of September saw us gathering in the Cathedral Car Park at the early (!) hour of 8am. All having assembled we set off, with eager anticipation, for Kilcummin, Head north of Killala in County Mayo.

Although we had heard through the grapevine that there were record numbers of birds passing the headland my usual birdwatcher's 'realism' led me to expect the usual fair to middling day littered with 'might have beens'. Thankfully I was very wrong - we hit the jackpot - it turned out to be my red letter day.

When we reached Kilcummin we were met by a distinguished assembly of birdwatchers who had been at the site since daybreak. They had traveled through the night from Dublin, Belfast and other parts of Ireland - which made our 8 am departure pale by comparison. Already Irish records had been surpassed that morning with the highest ever passage of Leach's petrel recorded in Ireland. Enormous numbers of birds were on passage - gannets (juvenile, immature and adult) were close enough for thorough inspection. Fulmars and kittiwakes seemed within touching distance. Leach's petrels danced along the water just below us. Shearwaters - both Manx and sooty passed by in huge numbers. All 4 species of skua were seen. Great skuas and Arctic skuas were present in good numbers; the long tailed skua was seen at a distance. But, for me, the bird of the day was the Pomarine skua. At close range the contrast between the lovely yellow cheeks and nape and the broad dark breast-band against the light underparts made a striking impression rarely seen on larger species.

Among the many species of gulls seen one stood out as a milestone in my birdwatching. This was the Sabine's gull - a small tern like gull that can be recognised by its distinctive wing pattern and slightly forked tail.

Our final list included in addition - curlew, whimbrel, guillemot, black guillemot and razorbill. Finally, just to vary matters, an early flight of 8 Brent geese passed. These, together with some extra birds picked up en route, brought the day's total to 47 species.

It was indeed one of those days the memory of which will live long. Thanks to Marianne for the organising and driving and to those experts who so willingly shared their expertise and knowledge with us.

Ian A Brophy

## Galway Bay Count

The recent Galway Bay count on Sunday 13th Jan yielded the highest count ever. The total came in at just over 26,000 birds beating previous highest counts of circa 18,000. The numbers of cormorant, wigeon, and teal were records for these species. Grey plover amounted to a remarkable 401 - grey plover are usually a species that barely reach low double figure totals. There seemed to be two reasons behind the high count - the unusually dry winter (to date!) resulted in a curtailment of wetlands thus causing waterbirds to relocate to maritime habitats. Secondly there was evidence of spratt feeding in the Co. Clare side of the bay. In addition Martin Byrnes did a separate count of the Brent geese in the bay as part of the Brent goose census. All of this shows the importance of the regular counts conducted by the Galway Branch and as always thanks to those who unflinchingly turn up to carry out this exercise three times each winter. NS

## Coming events

Fri. 8th Feb: Talk - The birds of Tibet by Eric Dempsey. Anno Santo Hotel. Threadneedle Road 8pm.

Wed 20th Feb: Galway members meeting Anno Santo Hotel 8pm.

Sun. 24th Feb: Trip to Kilcolman Wetland Reserve in County Cork. Details and to pre-book your place call Marianne at (091) 552519.

Sat. 2nd March: Outing to Rusheen Bay with Tim Griffin. - meet at wind-surfers car park at 10.30am. This is an alternative to the usual Nimmo's Pier outing - for directions or other queries ring Tim Griffin at (091) 590154

Sat. 16th March: Final Galway Bay Count. Ring for details.

## We are on the Internet

Can I add to Marianne's introduction of our new site by again thanking Chris Peppiatt for all his hard work in putting together our new Internet site. We are most fortunate to have someone 'in house' with the necessary expertise to achieve this. I would urge members, who have internet facilities, to make maximum use of the site. Can I repeat the address:

[www.birdwatchgalway.org](http://www.birdwatchgalway.org)