



**CAIRDE EANLAITH NA GAILLIMHE
BIRDWATCH GALWAY**

www.birdwatchgalway.org

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER – EDITOR: NEIL SHARKEY

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

THOUGHT FROM THE CHAIR

This summer a lot was said about the weather and the effects it had on every aspect of our lives. Of course, it is tempting to attribute a lot more than we can possibly prove to the dismal conditions of the summer months. For instance, 'our' terns did not come back to Mutton Island this year. Were they put off by the rain? Not very likely. Similarly, we cannot jump to the conclusion that they were disturbed by the construction works or that the heavy predation they suffered during the previous breeding seasons made them move to another breeding site. Terns are notoriously fickle so maybe that is all there is to it! With so many factors having a bearing on the well being of our resident, breeding and wintering populations of birds it is all the more important to monitor their numbers, their breeding success and their habitats. Many Galway members have taken part in the Countryside Bird Survey this summer, others will be looking at wintering birds over the next few months. If you are interested in taking part in any of the long-term monitoring programmes, please let us know. An extra pair of eyes will always be very welcome.

Marianne ten Cate

AUSTRALIA'S WONDERFUL BIRDS

Our trip to Australia arose for a variety of reasons. Retirement provided the time, various relations and friends out there gave us huge encouragement to come as did the fact that we could break the journey in Dubai thus providing the bonus of seeing family and grandchildren. In addition of course there was the lure of Australia's birds - over eight hundred different species according to *Simpson & Day's Field Guide to the Birds of Australia* an invaluable (kindly loaned) companion throughout the trip.

The actual air journey to get there can be quite long and difficult but once you have arrived there Australia must rate as one of the very best foreign travel destinations. It combines first world facilities and efficiency with truly exotic and unique landscapes, habitats and flora and fauna. It also speaks English - albeit 'Australian' English - and you drive on the 'right' i.e. left-hand side of the road. Left-hand side driving not alone makes driving easier but it also means that you look the 'right' way before crossing streets etc. Many a foreign holiday has come to grief through momentary confusion at a busy street crossing! Needless to say also the people are cheerful, positive and, as we found, a pure joy to meet.

Our travels took us along almost two thousand miles of Australia's East Coast from Sydney to Cairns via stopovers in Brisbane and Townsville. We travelled by train and bus, journeys of immense length - 23 hours in one case. Birds seen varied as we moved from the warm but temperate areas of Sydney and Brisbane to the tropical rainforests and uplands of North Queensland. This was not a birdwatching holiday per se but to be honest most outings, even to urban places such as central Sydney, became opportunities for adding to our list. Generally speaking the weather and light is near perfect in Australia and the birds, being mainly brightly coloured, are relatively easy to identify. I say 'relatively' because there are whole families of birds there unknown to Irish birdwatchers. Where we have one brown coloured wren Australia has several dozen gloriously attired species- strictly speaking 'fairy' and 'scrub' wrens. In effect Australia presents you with a completely new set of birds: honeyeaters (over 60 species), cockatoos, lorikeets, parrots, pittas, lyrebirds, white-eyes etc. Therefore you find yourself getting a split second view of a brightly coloured bird for which you have no reference point whatsoever. However this just adds to the challenge and enjoyment.

The first birds always in a new location are the common or endemic ones. In Sydney and Brisbane areas this was the noisy miner, a colourful honeyeater, whereas north of Brisbane it was the common mynah - almost something of a 'pest' species. Silver gulls are universal as, to my surprise, are the straw-necked and sacred ibis. Egrets were common and we saw all five species - cattle, great, little, intermediate and eastern reef. Highlight of birds seen must go to four of Australia's large 'stately' birds. Rarest and most splendid is the southern cassowary a magnificent pale blue wattled bird of the tropical rainforest standing almost eight feet high. During our time in the rainforest one 'looked in' on us as we were having our breakfast on a veranda six feet clear of ground level! We also had splendid views of two Sarus cranes regally pacing their way along an Atherton Tableland wetland. From the train south of Townsville we saw the second crane species of Australia - the Brolga. Australian trains are marvellous but for some reason they proceed at a snail pace - good for birdwatching! Also on Mabeela wetlands we saw the tall black-necked stork and a variety of duck - cotton pygmy-goose, green pygmy-goose and the pink-eared duck. Raptors abounded - the black kite was everywhere. On one occasion between 70 and 100 were in view at the one time soaring over a crocodile farm south of Cairns. The Brahminy kite was also common and we 'ticked' in addition the osprey, wedge-tailed eagle and the magnificent white-bellied sea eagle. The colours of the smaller birds were almost unbelievable. Seeing the Gouldian finch for instance makes you gasp with disbelief - can such colours be real?

I could go on but I am breaking my own rule of articles not to exceed five hundred words! In all we saw just over 150 species 'new' to us. Go to Australia - see the Sydney Opera House, the Great Barrier Reef, the Rainforest, meet the cheerful and helpful Australian people *and* as a bonus have one of the best birdwatching holidays of your life

Neil Sharkey

BIRDS IN POETRY

Poems by Mary Oliver, the American poet, living in Massachusetts have been featured several times and a new edition of poems published this year is entitled *'WHAT DO WE KNOW'*. In this volume she re-visits familiar themes of nature and bird-life with her usual intensity of engagement and fluent technique. **Pat Finnegan**

Snowy Night

*last night, an owl
in the blue dark
tossed
an indeterminate number*

*of carefully shaped sounds I
nto
the world, in which
a quarter of a mile away, I happened
to be standing.*

*I couldn't tell
which one it was -
the barred or the great-horned
ship of the air -*

*it was that distant. But, anyway,
aren't there moments
that are better than knowing something,
and sweeter? Snow was falling,*

*so much like stars
filling the dark trees
that one could easily imagine
its reason for being was nothing more*

*than prettiness. I suppose
if this were someone else's story
they would have insisted on knowing
whatever is knowable - would have hurried*

*over the fields
to name it - the owl, I mean.
But it's mine, this poem of the night,
and I just stood there, listening and holding out*

*my hands to the soft glitter
falling through the air. I love this world,
but not for its answers.
And I wish good luck to the owl,*

*whatever its name -
and I wish great welcome to the snow,
whatever its severe and comfortless
and beautiful meaning.*

Mary Oliver

Acknowledgement - Da Capo Press, Perseus Books Group, Cambridge MA.

REMINDER

I-WeBS and CBS returns should now be completed and sent to Rutledge House. Thanks to all who took part.

MEMBERSHIP

I recently got an up to date Galway membership list from HQ. The total for Galway is just short of 300 - an all time high. It is so encouraging to see new names and just as good to see names that I have been familiar with for 20 years or more. Thanks to all for your support. To the few formerly long present names now 'missing' can I ask them to get around to writing that long postponed renewal cheque and so resume your valuable support. **NS**

COMING EVENTS

Saturday 7 September 11.00am - 3.00pm: Birdwatching at The Small Wood, Rusheen Bay, as part of National Heritage Week.

Wednesday 18 September 8.00pm: BirdWatch Galway committee and members meeting, Anno Santo Hotel, Threadneedle Road, Salthill.

Saturday 5 October, 10.30am: Short outing with Tim Griffin at Nimmo's Pier.

Wednesday 16 October 8.00pm: BirdWatch Galway committee and members meeting, Anno Santo Hotel, Threadneedle Road, Salthill.

Friday 25 October, 8.00pm: 'Birds and Whales of Mexico', a talk with slides by Dick Coombes, Anno Santo Hotel, Threadneedle Road, Salthill.

GALWAY NATURALISTS' FIELD CLUB

This welcome venture has got off to a fine start and has held several successful outings to date. Get further details via the link on the BirdWatch Galway internet site:

www.birdwatchgalway.org