



CAIRDE EANLAITH NA GAILLIMHE

BIRDWATCH GALWAY

www.birdwatchgalway.org

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER – EDITOR: NEIL SHARKEY

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

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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

In mythology, folklore and poetry death and doom are often associated with black crows, either as single silent figures or as flocks of dreaded messengers. Not so for me. This summer, from various bedsides in Ireland and abroad, I have enjoyed views of milling gulls, roof-dwelling oystercatchers, foraging dunnocks, tits coming to feeders and cheeky jackdaws on balconies. During the night I heard owls, during the day whimbrel and curlews, woodpeckers and jays. Once I was surprised by a loud squawk and a bright green parrot flying past the window, obviously an escapee. All these birds were a constant reminder of a world outside, where life went on and seasons were changing. They brightened many a day both for me and for those I shared my observations with.

We all know fellow birdwatchers who, during periods of grieve or despair, still picked up their gear and took a walk in the wilds in pursuit of distraction and birds. Likewise, many of us will, at one time or another, have handed friends in need a pair of binoculars to lure them out of their low ebb.

I will never forget a Canadian visitor who had been seriously ill and, at the age of 52, was given his first ever pair of binoculars, while still in hospital, to draw him out of his narrowed-down existence into the world of birds and bird watching. By the time I met him in Ireland he was deeply committed to both ornithology and nature conservation – two things he had never even heard of before he got ill.

Just a thought. **Marianne ten Cate**

RECOGNITION

The Galway Civic Trust submitted the project in The Small Wood at Rusheen Bay for an environmental award of the Conservation Volunteers of Ireland and the ESB. The adjudicators, including Dr. David Bellamy, must have been duly impressed by the work the FAS workers did under the auspices of the Civic Trust as the project has been awarded a prize of 1,900Euros. Part of this will be spent on the continuous conservation management of The Small Wood. Congratulations to all involved, particularly the team working with Michael Davis who did such a fantastic job on the site. I would like to thank the Galway Civic Trust, on behalf of BirdWatch Galway, for their input of organisation, publicity and finance.

Marianne ten Cate

BIRDS ON LOUGH DERG

Lough Derg – the biggest lake on the Shannon system, a Special Protection Area for birds and incorporating a Wildfowl Sanctuary yet it has never had a complete, ground based count of its waterfowl! It seemed too good a challenge to pass up. In the past there have been some boat-based counts of waterfowl by Dúchas rangers and sporadic IWeBS counts have happened on some stretches of shoreline. More recently, Dúchas and BirdWatch staff have carried out counts from the air. Last winter, five Dúchas rangers (William Cormacan, East Galway, Patrick Graham, North Tipperary, Denis Ryan, South Tipperary, Stefan Jones, East Clare and I) arranged to give co-ordinated, ground-based counts a try.

We selected three days in November, January and March and were lucky enough to get almost perfect weather each time. Our peak numbers were 4,263 in January, which is below the mean numbers of 5,149 for Lough Derg in the 1994-99 period IWeBS information. Previous counts had been showing up Nationally Important numbers of cormorant, mute swan, tufted duck, goldeneye and black-tailed godwit, while our count found lower numbers of mute swan and goldeneye but Nationally Important numbers of little grebe, great-crested grebe, cormorant, tufted duck and coot. It is hardly surprising that we found more of the dispersed, shoreline species but we missed the large numbers of lapwing found by those in the air. Black-tailed godwits were conspicuous in their absence from our ground counts but they apparently use the lake as a stage in migratory passage, so we would have been lucky to come across them. On a more general note, whooper swans turned up the odd time and a hen harrier sighting regularly made the day out more exciting. Unfortunately, we found no sign (then or at other times) of the flock of Greenland white-fronted geese that used to be found in the Scarriff area. We hope to repeat the survey at least once on an annual basis. It is certainly the more enjoyable aspect of our work and also adds to the solid information base that IWeBS is producing for waterfowl in Ireland.

For those of you wanting to try Lough Derg for a day out, the piers are the best access points, but are few and far between on the Galway section. The bays in the middle and north of the lake tend to have more species and the Wildfowl Sanctuary at Portumna remains the stronghold for ducks. A visit to Portumna Forest Park will be rewarded with good sightings of fallow deer and, if you are lucky, red squirrel.

Ciara O' Mahony, Conservation Ranger for South Galway, (Dúchas The Heritage Service)

Dr. Reitze Siebe ten Cate

All of us connected with BirdWatch offer our sympathy to Marianne and family on the recent death in the Netherlands of her father Dr. Reitze ten Cate. We also offer condolences to her mother Mrs E. J. M. ten Cate-Stahlie and to the extended family. The late Dr. ten Cate was a frequent visitor to Ireland and over the years gave wholehearted support in so many ways to Irish conservation matters. This support was a tremendous encouragement to all of us and was greatly appreciated. He was in a quiet but effective way a true friend of Ireland and his passing is a matter of great regret.

NS

BIRDS IN POETRY

David Krause is a distinguished American academic and critic with a major interest in Ireland and Irish literature. He is best known as the editor of *The Letters of Sean O'Casey* and is also the author of critical works on James Joyce and Dion Boucicault. He has published two volumes of poems: *Finnegan Unbound* and *Finnegan Wakes*. The poem featured in this issue has been kindly submitted by Alf MacLochlainn and we are grateful to him and the author for permission to publish it.

Pat Finnegan

Invariables

*Cormorants invariably fly alone
Close to the surface of the sea to cut
Through the sharp edge of the buffering wind*

*But yesterday high in the sky I saw
Six of those black preachers in a tight flock
Drifting toward the Saltees in ragged haste*

*Oystercatchers invariably fly low
In flocks on swivelling black and white wings
That seem to churn up salt spray as they go*

*But today I saw a lonesome catcher
Flapping high over Ballymoney cliffs
As if he were injured or lost in space
Were these breaks with the invariables
Omens for us of anarchy above?*

David Krause

GALWAY NATURALISTS FIELD CLUB

Congratulations to the GNFC on the completion of their first year's summer programme. The final outing was a seashore outing to Finvarra on 21st Sept. A large attendance was rewarded with perfect weather and the sight and identifying of a truly amazing array of seashore creatures 'great and small'. All interested in future activities are welcome to keep in touch through the GNFC web site, which can be accessed via the link through

www.birdwatchgalway.org

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMME

Saturday 2 November 10.30am Short outing Rusheen Bay with Tim Griffin- Meet at 'Sailboard' slipway.

Wed 13 Nov. 8pm Anno Santo, committee and members meeting.

Sunday 17 Nov 9.30am - outing to Rahasane. Meet at the old graveyard there. Bring lunch etc.

Sunday 24 Nov 9.30am. Provisional date for Galway Bay count.

Saturday Dec 7th. 10.30am. Short outing Nimmo's Pier with Tim Griffin.

December - Outing to Banagher and Shannon Callows. (Date to be advised)

For further details on any of the above contact Marianne at (091) 552519 or any committee member,