



## CAIRDE EANLAITH NA GAILLIMHE

### BIRDWATCH GALWAY

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

Going through lots of old diaries and other paper work recently it struck me how many members of our branch have been around and contributed for a great number of years. This stability is probably the key to our branch being a solid and productive one. But, equally, the number of new active members cropping up in the notes and minutes is a good sign for the future. Responsibilities have to be shared and passed around and the input of different people undoubtedly gives a different hue to the branch over time. Of course, there are certain things we are 'for ever' committed to, such as the monthly meetings, talks for our members, Galway Bay counts and other surveys. But, there is always room for innovation and expansion of activities and anybody who has ideas to make that happen should feel welcome to make proposals and take action.

Just some small examples of what I came across in the diaries. On 31 December 1989 some of our members did a 'bird race' – the winners recording 78 species in one day, with or without cheating... On 26 January 1991 some other members went to Kilcolman National Nature Reserve – an outing we repeated not so long ago, more than 10 years later. Meetings in the late 70s and early 80s were held in bars and, for one year, in a room in UCG (now NUIG) – we came a long way with the help of Gerry Vaughan at the Anno Santo Hotel where we have had a comfortable venue for the last number of years. So, some things change, some stay remarkably the same – as in the world of birds where we have seen new arrivals such as the little egrets around Galway Bay and demises such as the white-fronted geese from Connemara but where we, fortunately, also see a lot of stability. It sure helps to keep notes and diaries!

Marianne ten Cate

### RAHASANE- FOUR YEARS OF I-WeBS

It is hard to believe that it was four years ago that I wandered into the BirdWatch Galway AGM, still relatively new to Ireland. My partner, Janet, and I relocated to Co. Galway in September of 1998, and I decided to go to the meeting in order to meet some fellow birders. My reward for attending was to be volunteered by the committee to count Rahasane Turlough for I-WeBS, on the premise that I lived nearby! I very quickly developed a love-hate relationship with the site – I absolutely love going there as it has a truly unique atmosphere, but I hate trying to count the duck when the water level is high, the sun is reflecting off the water (it does occasionally happen!), and the shooters are out disturbing everything.

There is some doubt about the veracity of Rahasane as a turlough, because the River Dunkellin flows through it. The debate centres on whether Rahasane floods from the river, or from swallow-holes in the ground, as with other turloughs. One thing is certain, though – it is one of the most significant wetlands in the county.

When conditions are right, the turlough holds a significant flock of Golden Plover – over the past four years, up to 6000 have regularly been present. The best time of year to see this impressive sight is October to early November, before water levels get too high. It is truly amazing when they take to the air, spooked by the resident Peregrine, the sun catching their plumage.

Other waders that are regular include Lapwing (up to 3000), Curlew (500), Dunlin (1500) and Redshank (200). Both species of Godwits occur, with good numbers of Black-tailed during autumn migration. I have regularly seen flocks of 150+ feeding in the shallows of the lake. Numbers of Bar-tailed do not usually exceed 20. Snipe is relatively scarce although that could simply be that I could never find them! In autumn, Ruff

is a regular passage migrant and I've also found Whimbrel, Greenshank and Spotted Redshank feeding with the other waders.

Rahasane is a stronghold for the Greenland White-fronted Goose. Over the past four years, numbers have remained steady at around 200. One haunting experience was visiting Rahasane in thick fog (the sun was shining at home, honest!), and hearing the geese calling in the distance. During the winters of 1998 and 1999, a pair of Pink-footed Geese stayed with the Whitefronts for the winter – an excellent record as Pinkfeet are relatively scarce in the west of Ireland.

The three swan species occur, with numbers of Mute peaking during the winter with up to 200 present. The Whooper flock has been consistent with 100 to 150 birds present. They do tend to disperse in the surrounding area if conditions aren't to their liking. Numbers of Bewick's are smaller, rarely reaching double figures, so check the Whoopers, just in case!

The main duck species is Wigeon, with numbers up to 6000. Good numbers of Teal and Mallard are also present. The flocks are worth scanning carefully, as Pintail is regular, usually in small numbers, although on one memorable occasion I counted 58 individuals. Gadwall and Shoveler are also regular, and the presence of Tufted Duck and Pochard is testimony to the depth of the water when the turlough floods. Some other avian highlights include a Great Northern Diver in January of 1999, and Osprey and Black Tern in September 2000. A Blue-winged Teal was present in September of 2002. I cannot end this brief article without mentioning the Otters. If you visit the turlough in winter when the water levels are high, keep your eyes open for this fabulous mammal. They seem to favour the southern end of the turlough, where I've often seen one or two fishing for eels.

The turlough really is worth a visit, and I am very thankful that I went to that fateful meeting four years ago!

Pete Capsey

### READING GULL RINGS

Bird ringing is an important aspect of ornithology. Birds are ringed either in the nest or by catching them in mist nets, attaching the ring and releasing them back. Recovery and reading of these rings gives vital information as to migration patterns and age. This recovery is usually by re-capture by mist net or if a bird is found dead with a ring attached. Up to recently rings on gulls or small birds rings were considered impossible to read when the bird was in the wild. However with the help of a first class telescope and immense and painstaking patience Michael Davis has recently been perfecting the reading of rings in the field. The results have been quite dramatic. In the past while Michael has encountered gulls ringed in Sweden, Hungary, Iceland, Denmark, Netherlands and UK all now happily wintering in Galway. Pride of place, however, must go to the Mediterranean Gull ringed somewhere in the Czech Republic and currently sitting out the winter in Wood Quay. This is a good example of innovative and practical birdwatching.

NS

### RING OUZEL THINGS COME IN THREES!

Recently visiting Georgia, U.S.A. with my mother Joan Kieran, we were taken on a bird walk with Tim Keyes at The Charley Elliott Wildlife Centre. We ended the day with two state firsts - a Western sage thrasher and two tundra swans. On the 4th January, while walking at Boleybeg, Kylebrack, in the Slieve Aughty Hills, I was passing a cattle feeder when I noticed a black bird get up that seemed different. It was a bright frosty morning and the bird perched not far from me in an ash tree, giving me a superb view for 20 minutes. I couldn't believe my eyes - a Ring Ouzel. It had slight dappling on its back, a clear white crescent on its chest and scaled mottling on its breast. While it preened, I noticed it was pale under wing; it's bill was a paler yellow than that of a male blackbird. I continued my walk on air. On returning home, having studied the books before I dared phone Neil Sharkey & Gordon D'Arcy with my theory! And now it has been identified as being of the Southern European sub-species 'Alpestris', maybe the first ever sighting of that variant in Ireland. - **Poona McNally**  
Note: Full credit to Poona for seeing and identifying the bird in such a remote location.

NS

### BIRDS IN POETRY

In this edition we feature another poem by David Krause.

PF

#### A trickle of sweet water

*We had the glasses fixed squarely on him  
As his pink beak dipped in the sweet water  
Trickling behind the Fethard salt marshes.*

*Where we were sipping our mugs of strong tea  
On the ruined bridge while a hungry mullet  
Scoured the low tide for lugworms or sandeels.*

*But we ignored his antics and beheld  
Our thirsty guest with high green plumage  
Preening the flashes of gold in his wings.*

*As if he knew we were admiring him  
And he tilted his head in a salute  
To us and the end of his droughty days*

*Six songbirds and that mullet in it  
But we drank to the glorious greenfinch.*

David Krause

### COMING EVENTS

Saturday 1 February, short outing with Tim Griffin, Nimmo's Pier, 10.30am;  
Sat./Sun. 1/2 February, Galway Bay Count training with Galway Naturalists Club;  
Wednesday 26 February, committee/members meeting, Anno Santo Hotel, 8pm; Spring talk to be announced.  
Saturday 1 March, short outing with Tim Griffin, The Small Wood, 10.30am;  
Saturday 8 March, Galway Bay count, Imperial Hotel, Eyre Square, 9.30am;  
Wednesday 19 March, committee/members meeting, Anno Santo Hotel, 8pm; Spring outing to be announced.  
Saturday 5 April, short outing with Tim Griffin, Nimmo's Pier, 10.30am;  
Wednesday 16 April, committee/members meeting, Anno Santo Hotel, 8pm;

# BirdWatch Galway (Branch of BirdWatch Ireland)

A QUARTERLY BIRD REPORT BY TIM GRIFFIN & CHRIS PEPPAIAT

4th Quarter 2002

TEL. (091) 590154 or at [www.birdwatchgalway.org](http://www.birdwatchgalway.org)

DATE OF ISSUE: 18 January 2003

Species	Location	No	Date	Observer	Species	Location	No	Date	Observer
Arctic Skua	Silver Strand	3	01.10.02	TG	Little Gull	Nimmo's Pier	1-1st W	01.12.02	CP
Long-tailed Duck	Silver Strand	1 male	01.10.02	TG	Siskin	Knocknacarra	2	01.12.02	TG
Ring-billed Gull	Nimmo's Pier	1st Win.	01.10.02	TG	Hen Harrier (male)	Curraghline, Nr. L. Corr	1	02.12.02	AOD
Curlew Sandpiper	Kilcaimin	2	01.10.02	NS & MD	Gaucous Gull	Blackrock, Salthill	1-1st W	02.12.02	AOD
Ruff	Caherglassaun, Nr. Gort	1	01.10.02	NS & MD	Little Gull	Blackrock, Salthill	3	02.12.02	AOD
Sooty Shearwater	Silver Strand	5	02.10.02	TG	Iceland Gull	Rusheen Bay	1 Ad.	04.12.02	MD
Arctic Skua	Silver Strand	6	02.10.02	TG	Little Egret	Salthill Golf Course	1	05.12.02	TG
Jack Snipe	Inis Mór, Aran Islands	1	04.10.02	DB	Red-throated Diver	Ballyloughan	26	06.12.02	AOD
Green Sandpiper	Inis Mór, Aran Islands	1	05.10.02	DB	Sandwich Tern	Nimmo's Pier	2	07.10.02	BWG outing
Garden Warbler	Inis Mór, Aran Islands	1	05.10.02	DB	Little Gull	Nimmo's Pier	1-Ad. W	07.12.02	BWG outing
Purple Sandpiper	Traught	1	05.10.02	DC	Iceland Gull	Nimmo's Pier	1-Ad. W	08.12.02	AOD
Wheatear	Traught	1	05.10.02	DC	Black-throated Diver	Nimmo's Pier	1	09.12.02	AOD
Little Egret	Traught	1	05.10.02	TG	Sandwich Tern	Nimmo's Pier	2	10.12.02	TG
Ruff	Rahasane Turlough	4	05.10.02	TG	Bewick's Swan	Gort	10	10.12.02	MD & AOD
Slavonian Grebe	Mweeloon, Nr. Tawin	1	07.10.02	JM & GOK	Sandwich Tern	Nimmo's Pier	3	12.02.02	AOD
Ring-billed Gull	Nimmo's Pier	1-1st S	07.10.02	DB	Little Egret	Rusheen Bay	1	12.12.02	TG
Sanderling	Nimmo's Pier	1	07.10.02	DB	Wigeon (leucistic)	Rahasane Turlough	1	14.12.02	TG
Kingfisher	Lough Atalia	1	07.10.02	AOD	Purple Sandpiper	Blackrock, Salthill	22	15.12.02	CP
Curlew sandpiper	Nimmo's Pier	1	07.10.02	AOD	Mediterranean Gull	Nimmo's Pier	1-Ad. W	16.12.02	AOD
Sooty Shearwater	Aran Ferry	1	07.10.02	BMcG	Jack Snipe	Roscam	2	17.12.02	AOD & MD
UNID large shearwater	Aran Ferry	1	07.10.02	BMcG	Iceland Gull	Nimmo's Pier	1 Ad.	20.12.02	TG
Pectoral Sandpiper	Angliham, L. Corrib	1	10.10.02	AOD	Little Gull	Nimmo's Pier	1 Ad.	20.12.02	TG
Curlew Sandpiper	Kilcaimin	2	11.10.02	AOD & MD	Mediterranean Gull	Waterside	1-Ad. W	21.12.02	MD
Spotted Redshank	Kilcaimin	2	11.10.02	AOD & MD	Mediterranean Gull	Traught	1-Ad. W	22.12.02	MD, MaD & MB
Swallow	Loughrea	3	12.10.02	PF	Twite	Aughinish, Co. Clare	2	22.12.02	TG
Water Rail	Errisbeg, Roundstone	1	12.10.02	RP & TP	Iceland Gull	Rusheen Bay	1	22.12.02	TG
Grey Phalarope	Dog's Bay	1	12.10.02	SB	Iceland Gull	Nimmo's Pier	1-1st. W	24.12.02	CP
Twite	Dog's Bay	5	12.10.02	SB	Mediterranean Gull	Nimmo's Pier	1	25.12.02	TG
Twite	Sky Road, Nr. C'duff	2	12.10.02	SB	Iceland Gull	Nimmo's Pier	1-1st W	26.12.02	TG
Arctic Skua	Baile na hAbhann	2	13.10.02	TG	Hen Harrier	Carrowbrowne	1	26.12.02	TG
Little Gull	Ballyloughan	3	13.10.02	CP	Ring-billed Gull	Waterside	5	26.12.02	MD See Note
Water Rail	Cashel	1	13.10.02	RC	Crossbill	Cloosh	2	27.12.02	TG
Black-throated Diver	Traught	2	14.10.02	TG	Little Egret	Rossaveal	1	27.12.02	TG
Common Sandpiper	Kilcaimin	2	15.10.02	MD	Black-throated Diver	Traught	6	30.12.02	TG
Spotted Redshank	Kilcaimin	4	15.10.02	MD	Glaucous Gull	Galway Docks	1-1st W	30.12.02	TG
Barnacle Goose	Silver Strand	13	16.10.02	TG	Iceland Gull	Galway Docks	1 Juv.	30.12.02	TG
Whooper Swan	Silver Strand	6	16.10.02	TG	Glaucous Gull	Nimmo's Pier	1-1st W	30.12.02	CP
Black-throated Diver	Traught	1	17.10.02	AOD & MD	Snow Bunting	Grattan Beach	2	31.12.02	AOD
Curlew Sandpiper	Kilcaimin	2	17.10.02	AOD & MD	Little Egret	Rusheen Bay	1	31.12.02	TG
Barnacle Goose	Kilcaimin	13	17.10.02	AOD & MD	Iceland Gull	Nimmo's Pier	1-1st W	31.12.02	TG
Whooper Swan	Ballyconneely	12	17.10.02	BMcG					
Wheatear	Ballyconneely	3	17.10.02	BMcG					
Great Skua	Silver Strand	1	22.10.02	TG	<b>CORRECTION (3rd Qtr.)</b>				
Mediterranean Gull	Silver Strand	1 Ad.	22.10.02	TG	Rose-coloured Starling	Inishboffin	1	05.07.02	BINS
Little Gull	Silver Strand	1 Juv.	24.10.02	TG	Should have read				
Little Egret	Rossaveal	1	27.10.02	TG	Rose-coloured Starling	Inishboffin	1	08.07.02	BINS
Sabine's Gull	Inverin	1 Ad. W	30.10.02	AOD					
Snow Bunting	Kiltiernan	1	30.10.02	BOM & COM	Juv. = Juvenile, Ad. = Adult; W = Winter; S = Summer.				
Purple Sandpiper	Kilcaimin	1	07.11.02	NS, MD & AOD	* Note re RBG per MD on 26 Dec		(3-Ad., 1-1st W. & 1-2nd W)		
Spotted Redshank	Kilcaimin	2	10.11.02	MD					
American Golden Plover	Keerhaunmore	1 Juv/1st W	12.11.02	AOD					
Gyr Falcon (white phase)	Belclare Turlough	1	12.11.02	PMcN					
Black-headed Gull (leucistic)	Nimmo's Pier	1	13.11.02	TG					
Snow Bunting	Bishop's Quarter, Clare	1	13.11.02	TG					
GmInd Whitefronted Goose	Rahasane Turlough	101	17.11.02	BWG outing					
Black-throated Diver	Traught	1	17.11.02	BWG outing					
Long-tailed Duck	Traught	2	17.11.02	BWG outing					
Little Egret	Traught	2	17.11.02	BWG outing					
Spotted Redshank	Kilcaimin	1	17.11.02	BWG outing					
Hen Harrier (male)	Cutteenty, Annaghdown	1	17.11.02	JK					
Little Gull	Nimmo's Pier	2	19.11.02	TG					
Jack Snipe	Mount Ross, L. Corrib	1	20.11.02	NS & AOD	<b>CONTRIBUTORS</b>				
Little Egret	Salthill Golf Course	1	21.11.02	SC	BWG = BirdWatch Galway; BINS = Birds of Ireland News Service;				
Mediterranean Gull	Rossaveal	1-1st W	21.11.02	DB	SB = Sean Bourke; MB = Martin Byrnes; DC = Deirdre Comerford;				
Ring-billed Gull	Rossaveal	1-1st W	21.11.02	DB	SC = Seamus Cuddy; MaD = Mark Davis; MD = Michael Davis; PF = Pat Finnegan;				
Ring-billed Gull	Waterside	1-2nd W	21.11.02	DB	JG = Jo Gordon; TG = Tim Griffin; JK = Joe Kavanagh; BMcG = Bernie McGrath;				
Crossbill	Cloosh	1	21.11.02	TG	PMcN = Peter McNally; JM = Joe Murphy; AOD = Aonghus O'Donail.				
Spotted Redshank	Kilcaimin	3	23.11.02	MD	BOM = Breandán Ó Madagáin; COM = Clair Ó Madagáin; CP = Chris Peppiatt;				
Little Egret	Kilcaimin	1	23.11.02	MD	RP = Robin Pryce; TP = Teresa Pryce; NS = Neil Sharkey.				
Snow Bunting	Aughinish, Co. Clare	8	24.11.02	DC, MaD, MD, JG	DB = Dermot Breen; RC = Rosemary Carr; GOK = Gerry O Keeffe.				
Sandwich Tern	Goat Island	2	24.11.02	DC, MaD, MD, JG					
Long-tailed Duck	Traught	9	24.11.02	DC, MaD, MD, JG					
Glaucous Gull	Rossaveal	1-1st W	29.11.02	MD					