



**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 Newsletter contains some very interesting and varied contributions from BirdWatch Galway members. It is nice to see Aonghus having a good time in Donegal, even though we miss his raptor expertise in Galway. And it is great to know that we have a new 'ringer' near Galway at last. Chris is bound to turn up some interesting finds about certain species, bird movements, site fidelity and the effect of weather conditions or disturbance. It cannot be stressed enough how important long-term ringing studies are to find out more about bird populations, migration and other behaviour. Of course, long-term monitoring remains our only tool to assess trends of increase or decline. Hence, the various surveys taking place in both breeding and winter seasons. The Irish Wetland Bird Survey is celebrating its tenth birthday this winter and many of our members have faithfully contributed to that over the years. Results of our counts have been called upon by scientists, developers and local authorities, which goes to show there is an increasing need for such data, particularly in the light of more stringent environmental laws and assessments. It also shows that BirdWatch Galway clearly has a dual role – to cater for people with an interest in birds, be they regular garden visitors or exotic rarities, and to work in various ways for the protection of birds and their habitats. Whichever appeals most to you, please, join in our activities, make your contribution and enjoy the coming season.

Last season, in late July, one of our founding members, Eily O'Connor, passed away. Eily has been very supportive throughout the years. We sympathise with her family and her dear friend Brendan Dillon, President of BirdWatch Galway. Through this Newsletter - a greeting from Galway to Brendan, who now lives in Tralee but remains keenly interested in BirdWatch Galway.

Marianne ten Cate

Donegal Diary

There are now 24 Golden Eagles flying free in Co. Donegal. Eleven birds were released this August, sporting red wing tags to aid identification and to distinguish them from birds released in previous years. I was fortunate enough to assist in the tagging of the birds, the opportunity of a lifetime for anyone with an interest in birds of prey. Though only 12 weeks old the birds are fully-grown, immensely strong and can be extremely aggressive, possessing talons capable of causing considerable damage to anything perceived as a threat. Each bird is tagged, weighed, has a series of measurements and blood samples taken and has a radio transmitter attached. This will allow each bird to have its movements radio-tracked for the lifetime of the transmitter battery - up to four years. Quality rather than quantity is how I would describe Donegal's birdlife. Buzzards abound – the Inishowen peninsula alone holds a minimum of 80 pairs - and other delights such as Goshawk, Red-throated Diver, Goosander, Whooper Swan, Ring Ouzel and Wood Warbler have all found a place in my notebook this summer. A visit to Inistrahull island off Malin Head in May produced a number of fresh Snowy Owl pellets – one of the birds which attempted to breed in Donegal in recent years perhaps? Autumn seawatching has produced good numbers of Arctic and Great skuas and both Storm and Leaches petrels.

Winter sites such as Inch Levels and Blanket Nook are possibly the best places in Ireland for elusive birds such as Slavonian Grebe and Smew. Both are recorded annually here along with White-fronted, Pink-footed and

Greylag Geese. Huge numbers of Whooper swans congregate here in late October before dispersing throughout the country. Nearctic ducks are regular in Donegal, with the aforementioned sites having turned up Surf Scoter, Ring-necked Duck and Lesser Scaup in a single day last winter. The eagles, however, hold pride of place. As for the snowy owls.....!
Aonghus O Donail

Ringling Birds in North Galway

Before coming to live near Milltown, Tuam (where I am building a house on my uncle's farm) from Manchester a year ago, I had previously ringed birds here during holidays. Although I had caught good numbers of certain species, I could not get an accurate idea of the various bird populations in the area, and the different species from season to season. Although a year is nowhere near long enough to accurately form an opinion on these questions, it has at least allowed me to come to some preliminary conclusions about the local avifauna. The first, and most obvious is, just how many individuals there are of certain species; Willow Warbler for instance, with birds seemingly singing from every bush last summer (and also this spring!), a total of 144 (unringed) birds trapped, and another 98 ringed as nestlings, making a total of 242 for the year. Many of these were re-trapped, some several times over, and especially nice was to re-trap birds that had been originally ringed in the nest, which proved of course, that those particular nests were successful. Although still fairly early into the migration season, I have caught several males (always the first to come back) with my rings on from last year. Also interesting is the large number of this species trapped compared to other areas of the British Isles, with ringers witnessing a long term decline in numbers caught,

Birds in Poetry

In this brief prose poem, Peter Reading delivers a vivid account of nature - red in tooth and claw. On this occasion one of the Sanderling (*Calidris alba*) comes to a sudden end. Hilbre Island is an important site in the Dee estuary with impressive records of Oystercatcher, Knot and Dunlin.
Pat Finnegan

Extract from 'Journal'

Then we waded at low tide to Hilbre Island; and we marvelled at scores of thousands of waders - / Sanderling, Knot, Oystercatcher, Redshank, Curlew and Dunlin; / and the giant gull of the north, the hyperborean Glaucous; / glided snow-mantled above the remains of the old lifeboat station; / and there suddenly stooped from a cloud the colour of Blaenau Ffestiniog slate/ a Peregrine into a blizzard of wheeling *Calidris alba* / and the falcon hit and we heard the thud and a handful of silvery feathers/ whorled in the wind and the great dark raptor rose with the dead meat locked in its talons; / and I said to my friend: 'We will mind this as long as we live'. (He is dead now.)

Peter Reading

(Acknowledgement: Bloodaxe Books Ltd. NE 18 1RP UK)

although Scottish ringers reported a good year in 2002. The Celtic populations of Willow Warbler therefore seem to be doing well for the present, so it is important to keep monitoring this delightful summer visitor while numbers are still reasonably high.

Mortality amongst small passerines is well known to be exceptionally high from year to year in certain species, the Goldcrest being a glaring example. In 2002, up to November,

I ringed 45 individuals, nearly all juveniles from the local breeding population, and re-trapped most of them several times over. However, following the bad weather from December, including many hard frosts, I have to date this year just recaptured one of these. As 'our' Goldcrests are thought to be sedentary, and should spend the winter on, or close to their breeding grounds, this clearly shows a mortality rate in the high nineties percent over the season, and is a good example of how ringing demonstrates such facts. Another species doing well locally is the Lesser Redpoll, with a good breeding population in the area and a healthy number attending my feeding station in the winter. A total of 78 have been caught in the last 12 months around the farm, with unusually high numbers re-trapped, some individuals even several times in a day, which in itself is a rare occurrence. Most birds, once trapped, say early morning in a mist net, usually do not get caught in that net again in the same day – it may just be that the lure of a guaranteed food source was enough to balance out the risk of getting caught. In fact on one day at the end of February, of 38 Lesser Redpoll caught 36 already wore rings! This is all valuable information though, as it tells us where a particular bird was at a given time, and also allows comparison of, for instance, weight change at original capture and subsequent re-capture(s).

I hope that this short summary of some of my ringing activities has been of interest, and I hope to write regular articles on the subject in future newsletters. In the meantime, if you would like a leaflet briefly explaining the outline of the Ringing scheme in Ireland and Britain, or just wish to know more about my particular Ringing, please contact me at the address below.

Chris Benson

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Coming Events

Saturday 1 November, short outing on Nimmo's Pier, Galway City, 10.30am;
Wednesday 12 November, committee/members meeting, Anno Santo Hotel, Threadneedle Road, Salthill, 8pm;
Friday 14 November, talk on the Annagh Marsh project by Dave Suddaby, Anno Santo Hotel, 8pm;
Saturday (or Sunday) 15 (16) November, Galway Bay Count 9am. - ring Marianne;
Saturday 6 December, short outing on Nimmo's Pier, Galway City, 10.30am;
Wednesday 10 December, table quiz and Christmas Sale, Anno Santo Hotel, 7.30pm;
Wednesday 17 December, committee/members meeting, Anno Santo Hotel, 8pm;
For details of our annual Christmas outing ring Marianne nearer the time;
Saturday 3 January, short outing on Nimmo's Pier, Galway City, 10.30am;
Friday 16 January, AGM and surprise talk, Anno Santo Hotel, 8pm;
Saturday 7 February, short outing on Nimmo's Pier, 10.30

Contributions

Galway members are invited to contribute articles or news items for the newsletter. Items such as birds seen, holiday accounts or anything of 'the waters and the wild' will be most welcome. If submitting by computer type straight on to an e-mail not by file attachment. Thanks - NS

BirdWatch Galway (Branch of BirdWatch Ireland)

A QUARTERLY BIRD REPORT BY TIM GRIFFIN & CHRIS PEPPIATT

3rd Quarter 2003

TEL. (091) 590154 or at www.birdwatchgalway.org

DATE OF ISSUE: 14 October 2003

Species	Location	No	Date	Observer	Species	Location	No	Date	Observer	
Common Scoter	Silver Strand		3	01.07.03	TG	Semi-palmated Sandpiper	Rahasane Turlough	1	12.09.03	TG
Ring-billed Gull	Nimmo's Pier		1	01.07.03	TG	Glaucous Gull	Nimmo's Pier	2ndW	12.09.03	TG
Arctic Skua	Silver Strand		3	01.07.03	TG	Grey Phalarope	Spiddal	2	13.09.03	ROC
Storm Petrel	Silver Strand		1	01.07.03	TG	Curlew Sandpiper	Nimmo's Pier	1	14.09.03	DB
Corncrake	Inishbofin		5-6 calling	04.07.03	GD	Ring-billed Gull	Nimmo's Pier	AW	14.09.03	DB
Crossbill	Cloosh Wood		22	04.07.03	TG	Ring-billed Gull	Waterside	2ndW	14.09.03	DB
Great Northern Diver	Baile na hAbhann		5 bp	05.07.03	TG	Mediterranean Gull	Nimmo's Pier	AW	14.09.03	TG
Red-throated Diver	Baile na hAbhann		6 bp	06.07.03	TG	Pectoral Sandpiper	Rahasane Turlough	2	14.09.03	MD
Arctic Skua	Nimmo's Pier		1	08.07.03	TG	Little Stint	Rahasane Turlough	1	14.09.03	MD
Whimbrel	Silver Strand		1	11.07.03	TG	Arctic Skua	Baile na hAbhann	5	15.09.03	TG
Mediterranean Gull	Nimmo's Pier		AS	12.07.03	MD	Pomarine Skua	Inverin	2	15.09.03	TG
Little Gull	Nimmo's Pier		1stS	12.07.03	MD	Great Skua	Inverin	1	15.09.03	TG
Arctic Skua	Silver Strand		1 dp	12.07.03	AOD	Black Tern	Baile na hAbhann	1	15.09.03	TG
Red Grouse	Cloch na gCon		1	13.07.03	TG	Little Gull	Baile na hAbhann	Juv.	15.09.03	TG
Ring-billed Gull	Nimmo's Pier		2ndS	13.07.03	DB & MD	Great Northern Diver	Traught	1	15.09.03	TG
Jay	Merlin Park Woods		1	16.07.03	MD	Glaucous Gull	Long Walk	2ndW	16.09.03	MD
Mediterranean Gull	Nimmo's Pier		1stS	17.07.03	RM	Great Skua	Inverin	1	16.09.03	TG
Black-tailed Godwit	Kilcaimin		15	17.07.03	MD	Arctic Skua	Baile na hAbhann	7	17.09.03	TG
Little Egret	Traught		2	17.07.03	TG	Jay	Rahasane Turlough	1	19.09.03	TG
Bar-tailed Godwit	Rusheen Bay		2	23.07.03	MD	Lesser Yellowlegs	Rahasane Turlough	1	26.09.03	MD ****
Storm Petrel	Baile na hAbhann		7	25.07.03	TG	Great Skua	Inverin	2	27.09.03	TG
Arctic Skua	Baile na hAbhann		6	25.07.03	TG	Sanderling	Inverin	1	28.09.03	TG
Common Sandpiper	Long Walk		1	25.07.03	MD	Little Gull	Inverin	Juv.	30.09.03	TG
Greenshank	Kilcaimin		1 Juv.	25.07.03	MD					
Turnstone	Kilcaimin		1	25.07.03	MD					
Great Skua	Baile na hAbhann		1	26.07.03	TG					
Sanderling	Inverin		1	26.07.03	TG					
Great Skua	Baile na hAbhann		1	27.07.03	TG					
Arctic Skua	Baile na hAbhann		2	27.07.03	TG					
Arctic Skua	Silver Strand		2	29.07.03	TG					
Great Skua	Silver Strand		2	29.07.03	TG					
Storm Petrel	Silver Strand		15	29.07.03	TG					
Great Skua	Baile na hAbhann		2	30.07.03	TG					
Arctic Skua	Baile na hAbhann		6	01.08.03	TG					
Storm Petrel	Inverin/Baile na hAbhann		18	01.08.03	TG					
Sanderling	Inishbofin		20	02.08.03	ML, VS & CP					
Barn Owl	Laban, Nr. Ardrahan		1	03.08.03	DMcC					
Arctic Skua	Inverin		6	04.08.03	TG					
Hen Harrier	Poll na Clocha, Nr. Moycullen		F/Imm.	06.08.03	PK					
Manx Shearwater	Aran Ferry		50	07.08.03	NS					
Cuckoo	Nr. Oughterard Pier		F rufous form	09.08.03	CP					
Merlin	Poll na Clocha, Nr. Moycullen		1	18.08.03	PK					
Ring-billed Gull	Waterside		2ndS	18.08.03	MD					
Ruff	Rahasane Turlough		7	18.08.03	MD					
Arctic Skua	Baile na hAbhann		11	20.08.03	TG					
Great Skua	Baile na hAbhann		1	20.08.03	TG	ABBREVIATIONS				
Ruff	Rahasane Turlough		12	22.08.03	TG					
Arctic Skua	Inverin		4	23.08.03	TG	Juv. = Juvenile; A = Adult; W = Winter; S = Summer; F = Female; M = Male;				
Whimbrel	Inverin		1	23.08.03	TG	Imm. = Immature; Leuc. = Leucistic; hyb. = hybrid.				
Sanderling	Inverin		2	23.08.03	TG					
Ruff	Rahasane Turlough		12	24.08.03	TG	NOTES				
Wigeon	Rahasane Turlough		1	25.08.03	MD					
Ruff	Rahasane Turlough		1	25.08.03	MD	* Present until 19.09.03.				
Black-tailed Godwit	Rahasane Turlough		1	25.08.03	MD	** Present on 02.09.03 also.				
Arctic Skua	Baile na hAbhann		6	26.08.03	TG	*** Single bird present 12.09.03 also.				
Wood Sandpiper	Rahasane Turlough		1	27.08.03	TG *	**** Present until end Sept at least.				
Ruff	Rahasane Turlough		8	27.08.03	TG					
Knot	Rahasane Turlough		2	28.08.03	MD					
Arctic Skua	Baile na hAbhann		15	28.08.03	TG					
Grey Plover	Silver Strand		2	29.08.03	TG					
Common Scoter	Baile na hAbhann		2	30.08.03	TG	CONTRIBUTORS				
Great Skua	Baile na hAbhann		1	30.08.03	TG					
Arctic Skua	Baile na hAbhann		11	30.08.03	TG	AOD = Aonghus O'Donail; CP = Chris Peppiatt;				
Arctic Skua	Baile na hAbhann		10	31.08.03	TG	DMcC = Danny Mc Connell; DB = Dermot Breen; GD = Gordon D'Arcy;				
Crossbill	Cloosh Wood		10	31.08.03	TG	IB = Ian Brophy; ML = Maria Long; MD = Michael Davis; NS = Neil Sharkey;				
Long-billed Dowitcher	Rusheen Bay		1A	01.09.03	MD **	PK = Pádraig Keirns; RM = Richard Millington; ROC = Ronan O'Carra;				
Pomarine Skua	Baile na hAbhann		1	02.09.03	TG	TG = Tim Griffin; VS = Vinciane Sacre.				
Peregrine	Rusheen Bay		1	07.09.03	ROC					
Kingfisher	Rusheen Bay		1	09.09.03	IB					
Mediterranean Gull	Waterside		1stW	10.09.03	MD					
Curlew Sandpiper	Kilcaimin		1	10.09.03	MD					
Pomarine Skua	Baile na hAbhann		2	11.09.03	TG					
Pectoral Sandpiper	Rahasane Turlough		1	11.09.03	MD ***					