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BIRDWATCH GALWAY
www.birdwatchgalway.org
QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER – EDITOR: NEIL SHARKEY
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This is a local newsletter. To help us keep distribution costs down we ask that you agree to receive it by e-mail. Over seventy members are now doing so. Please send me your E-mail address if not done so already.

THOUGHT FROM THE CHAIR

As I write for the first newsletter of the new year, I find myself reflecting that the strength of an NGO like BirdWatch Ireland is its members. The Galway branch currently has about 285 paid up members. The support of all of our members is greatly valued, but the members attending indoor meetings are probably drawn from a pool of about 60 people and the number of people taking part in field trips or counts is probably 20 or 30. I wonder if any BirdWatch Galway members out there have ever considered taking a further step and becoming involved in the bird projects that the branch engages in? The branch has had input into heritage projects under the aegis of both Galway City and County Councils, including the mapping of important areas for birds. Another example is the work that started last spring for the atlas of breeding birds in Galway City. The city area covers 24 tetrads (2km by 2km squares) and members undertook to survey these individually. Evidence of possible, probable and confirmed breeding was looked for and over 40 species were recorded. Among these were Wheatear, Dipper, Barn Owl and Twite, although not all of these necessarily bred. Work is currently progressing to knock the data into the most useful form possible and it is hoped that the city will be surveyed for at least the next two summers to make the atlas as accurate and comprehensive as possible. To any members wishing to become involved in bird monitoring or mapping projects I would say "please, get in touch" because your input would be invaluable. Please, don't worry that you don't have enough knowledge, a lot of the work is not as difficult as you might think and we all have to start somewhere. **Chris Peppiatt**

GALWAY NEWSLETTER

The Galway branch of BirdWatch Ireland has published this Newsletter for the past twelve years. The policy has always been to keep the format simple – a single page of articles and items of interest with the records of the previous quarter on the back. For most of these twelve years the Newsletter was simply included with the Wings copy for Galway members. As already advised this ceased in 2002 due to the way Wings is now being sent out to members. Since then we have been getting it to Galway members by a variety of means – posting, hand delivery and e-mail. An appeal for stamps received a response and we are grateful for this. E-mail distribution has been quite successful – over 100 people are receiving the Newsletter electronically. We again ask for additional e-mail contact addresses. Members do not necessarily have to have their own personal e-mail. Most of us nowadays have some contact with computers and e-mail – any e-mail address will do, be it that of another family member or a friend willing to receive it on your behalf. So, do think e-mail for the future. Send us that e-mail address. Due to extra cost and other attendant difficulties we have decided on the following changes: We will continue the present distribution methods until Issue No. 50 – this is two more issues. After that distribution will only be by e-mail and to those who send stamped addressed envelopes. Do not send stamped envelopes at this stage – we will advise when to do so. The newsletter will also be available on the branch web site www.birdwatchgalway.org and at our regular winter lectures. We thank members for their support and interest and hope that the newsletter can continue to fulfill its role in giving Galway BirdWatch members some added benefit and input from their membership. **NS**

BIRDS IN POETRY

Sean Lysaght was born in Limerick in 1957. He now teaches in the Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology and lives in Westport. In his book *The Clare Island Survey (1991)* he commemorates the Praeger survey and explores the landscape and bird life of the west of Ireland. The poem *Grey Heron* is taken from this collection. **Pat Finnegan**

Grey Heron

It's time to go
when the dark is gathering
over the lagoon,
although you'd still stalk

as far as Rinneanna
after geese and other secrets,
with just a bird book
and a one-track mind.

Why not end the day
as the bat starts,
with home,
and the lure of kind?

When the wind rises
through the reed-mace,
and the heron shrieks in the cold,
you know it's time to go.

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RING OUZEL

From late September blackbirds of all shades have been whizzing in and out of the garden, stripping berries. I wasn't paying much heed, other than counting them. That changed on Sunday, 24th October, 2004 – the binoculars are nowadays hardly ever off them!

About 10 a.m., one perched on a branch about 20 feet away, facing me. I was in the conservatory. It was brownish, but what caught my eye was a distinct paler crescent on the breast. A Ring Ouzel? For roughly two minutes I had a good look with binoculars before deciding to photograph it. As I moved towards the door the bird flew out of camera range. I could see it, and its crescent, clearly for a couple of minutes before it went deeper into trees.

I rang some BirdWatch colleagues and trawled my books. The bird was most likely a first winter male Ring Ouzel, (Collins). Tim Griffin arrived within minutes, but the bird had flown. I haven't seen it since. **Brendan Dunne**

FAVOURITE BIRDS – A NEW SERIES

Of all birds the nightjar is a firm favourite of mine although I have in fact never managed to see or hear it. It is not for the want of trying. I recall midnight excursions up the Slieve Bloom mountains with Ger Duane armed with a tape lure. Another occasion had me pacing through a pitch black Cloosh Wood, with Tony Whilde and some others, being eaten alive by midges, and trying to persuade Tony that the numerous calling grasshopper warblers *might* be nightjars! Good ornithologist that he was he would have none of it!

There is good reason for my failure. Whilde, Hutchinson and Rutledge in their various publications speak of decline and scarcity especially west of the Shannon. The annual *Irish Birds* systematic list rarely contains more than two or three confirmed nightjar reports. So you have to be either very lucky or, as the school reports of long ago would have said, 'should try harder'!

So what about the nightjar? It is a scarce, secretive, nocturnal bird. It feeds on insects which it catches on the wing with its large gaping beak. The strange churring

voice of the nightjar has many times been recorded. It is a quite astonishing sound, a rapid succession of notes all at the same pitch with a down-toned slat interrupting at intervals. Francesca Greenoak in her incomparable *All the Birds of the Air* has the following beautifully written description:

" Ideally the nightjar likes dry, sandy heaths with scattered trees and copses. It remains silent as dusk falls, the time when the last light is fading and the land, familiar and bright by day, takes on a dark soft-edged eeriness. The best nightjar nights are warm and windless; silent, except for the rustling of trees and a low hum of insects. The song breaks on the air with extraordinary sonority. It is directionless, seeming to come from one place, then from another (an impression enhanced by the way the birds call to each other and fly about from one singing place to another). The flight is silent, they sing only when perched on some suitable branch. Any sound you make, even along a path, echoes and crashes through the stillness between 'churrs' - and sometimes the nightjar will come to investigate. Against the dim sky, the hawk-like shape can be made out, the noiseless wings tilted upwards as the bird wheels round, often accompanied by the smaller forms of the pipistrelle bats, like tiny footmen. Occasionally, a courting nightjar will 'clap' its wings in a sharp report. Then, as the night blacks out every visible object, it will be gone, suddenly, leaving you lost in the darkness."

This then is a pen picture of the nightjar. A poor substitute for experiencing the 'real thing' but nevertheless I hope my article will encourage others (and myself) to persevere in the quest of (an Irish) hearing and seeing this elusive bird.

Neil Sharkey

Note: I would welcome contributions from other Galway birdwatchers on *their* favourite bird.

COMING EVENTS

There are still some copies of the new *Birds of Galway* left. Put in your order by ringing or e-mailing Marianne (091-552519; marriannetencate@eircom.net) or, better still, come to any of the meetings.

- Saturday 12 February, Corrib Count, 10am.
- Wednesday 23 February, committee/members meeting, Anno Santo, 8pm.
- Friday 4 March, talk by Richard Nairn: "Galway City Habitats: from survey to conservation action", Anno Santo, 8pm.
- Saturday 5 March, short outing, Nimmo's Pier, 10.30am.
- Sat./Sun. 12/13 March, Galway Bay count.
- Wednesday 16 March, committee/members meeting, Anno Santo, 8pm.
- (Sat./Sun. 26/27 March, alternative Galway Bay)
- Saturday 2 April, short outing, Nimmo's Pier, 10.30am.
- Spring outing, possibly to Glenveagh National Park.
- Wednesday 13 April, committee/members meeting, Anno Santo, 8pm.
- Saturday 7 May, short outing, Nimmo's Pier, 10.30am.

Re details of Spring outing contact Chris or Marianne after 16 March.

SWAN RESCUE

Galway-Claddagh Swan Rrescue do commendable work in this area and we are happy to give them our full support and appreciation. They can be contacted at

087 3826471

BirdWatch Galway (Branch of BirdWatch Ireland)

A QUARTERLY BIRD REPORT BY TIM GRIFFIN & CHRIS PEPPIATT

4th Quarter 2004

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

DATE OF ISSUE: 4th February 2005

Species	Location	No	Date	Observer	Species	Location	No	Date	Observer
Ring-billed Gull	Nimmo's Pier		A 01.10.04	TG	Mediterranean Gull	Mutton Island	AW	11.11.04	MD
Wheatear	Salthill Prom.		1 01.10.04	BD	Little Gull	Nimmo's Pier	26	12.11.04	AOD
Swallow	Salthill		1 01.10.04	TG	Hen Harrier	Curraghline	Juv	13.11.04	AOD
Baird's Sandpiper	Rahasane Turlough *		Juv. 02.10.04	Many obs.	Merlin	Curraghline	1	13.11.04	AOD
Little Stint	Rahasane Turlough		Juv. 02.10.04	Many obs.	Water Rail	Curraghline	1	13.11.04	AOD
Pectoral Sandpiper	Rahasane Turlough *		1 02.10.04	Many obs.	Twite	Aughinish Causeway	1	13.11.04	DB & CP
Ruff	Rahasane Turlough		1 02.10.04	TG	Merlin	Traught	F	13.11.04	DB & CP
American Herring Gull	Nimmo's Pier		2ndW 03.10.04	TG	Snow Bunting	Durras Pier	M	13.11.04	TG
Glaucous Gull	Nimmo's Pier		1 03.10.04	TG	Long-tailed Duck	Durras Pier	3	13.11.04	TG
Whooper Swan	Rahasane Turlough		13 04.10.04	TG	Greenland Whitefronted Goose	Rahasane Turlough	95	14.11.04	PC
Ruff	Rahasane Turlough		6 04.10.04	MD	Peregrine	Rahasane Turlough	1	14.11.04	PC
Arctic Tern	Nimmo's Pier		1stW 05.10.04	DB	Ring-billed Gull	Nimmo's Pier	2A	15.11.04	MD
Grey Phalarope	Davillaun Is., Connemara		1 07.10.04	GO'D	Glaucous Gull	Nimmo's Pier	2ndW	15.11.04	MD
Barnacle Goose	Davillaun Is., Connemara		4 07.10.04	GO'D	Merlin	Bushy Park	M	16.11.04	PK
Barnacle Goose	Inishark		24 07.10.04	GO'D	Snow Bunting	Mutton Island	2	19.11.04	MD
Greenland Whitefronted Goose	Inishmore, Aran Islands		1 07.10.04	GG	Mediterranean Gull	Mutton Island	2ndW	19.11.04	MD
Common Sandpiper	Lough Atalia		1 07.10.04	DB	Whooper Swan	Silver Strand	5	19.11.04	TG
Red-throated Diver	Silver Strand		1 07.10.04	TG	Little Egret	Traught	1	20.11.04	TG
Long-tailed Duck	Silver Strand		M 07.10.04	TG	Purple Sandpiper	Inverin	3	22.11.04	TG
Grey Phalarope	Slyne Head		2 08.10.04	GO'D	GW Teal X Teal hybrid	Bell Harbour, Co. Clare	1	22.11.04	TG
Little Auk	Slyne Head		1 08.10.04	GO'D	Mediterranean Gull	Mutton Island	2(1stW&A)	22.11.04	MD
Snow Bunting	Slyne Head		M 08.10.04	GO'D	Purple Sandpiper	Mutton Island	1	22.11.04	MD
Redwing	Nr. Milltown, Tuam		first of winter 08.10.04	CB	Little Egret	Tawin	2	23.11.04	JeM & JM
Barred Warbler	Inishmore, Aran Islands		1 08.10.04	DB	Black-throated Diver	Durras Pier	9	24.11.04	TG
Black Guillemot	Inishmore, Aran Islands		76 08.10.04	DB	Waxwing	Taylor's Hill, Galway	20	24.11.04	GD
Little Egret	Rossaveal		1 08.10.04	TG	Merlin	Tawin	F	26.11.04	DB & MD
Sanderling	Inverin		1 08.10.04	TG	Black-throated Diver	Tawin	1	26.11.04	DB & MD
Arctic Skua	Baile na hAbhann		2 08.10.04	TG	Spotted Redshank	Tawin	1	26.11.04	DB & MD
Yellow-browed Warbler	Inishmore, Aran Islands		3 09.10.04	DB	American Wigeon	Blackrock Turlough	M	27.11.04	DB & MD
Fieldfare	Inishmore, Aran Islands		first of winter 09.10.04	DB	Crossbill	Cloosh	1	03.12.04	TG
Greenland Whitefronted Goose	Rahasane Turlough		30 09.10.04	TG	Peregrine	Nimmo's Pier	1	04.12.04	Many obs.
Redstart	Inishmore, Aran Islands		1 10.10.04	DB & GG	Waxwing	Newcastle, Galway	50+	04.12.04	PG
Mediterranean Gull	Rossaveal		AW 10.10.04	DB	Ferruginous Duck	Coole Lough	M	10.12.04	SN
Wheatear	Rinville		1 10.10.04	BD	Ring-necked Duck	Coole Lough	F	12.12.04	DB
Yellow-browed Warbler	Inishmore, Aran Islands		1 11.10.04	GG	Waxwing	UCHG	6	13.12.04	PD
Barnacle Goose	Rahasane Turlough		1 12.10.04	MD	American Herring Gull	Long Walk, Galway	2ndW	17.12.04	MD
Wheatear	Salthill		1 14.10.04	MC					
Ruff	Rahasane Turlough		2 15.10.04	MD					
Common Sandpiper	Rahasane Turlough		1 15.10.04	MD					
Kingfisher	Rahasane Turlough		1 15.10.04	MD					
Hen Harrier	Nr. Milltown, Tuam		M 16.10.04	CB					
Merlin	Nr. Milltown, Tuam		F 16.10.04	CB					
Black-tailed Godwit	Rahasane Turlough		1,150 17.10.04	MD					
Black-throated Diver	Durras Pier		1 18.10.04	TG					
Water Rail	Shantalla, Galway		1 dead 20.10.04	BS					
Curlew Sandpiper	Inverin		1 22.10.04	TG					
Greenland Whitefronted Goose	Rahasane Turlough		74 23.10.04	MD & CP					
Little Egret	Kilcaimin		2 23.10.04	MD & CP					
Whooper Swan	Nimmo's Pier		3 23.10.04	BD					
Black-throated Diver	Durras Pier		2 23.10.04	TG					
Ring Ouzel	Glenard Crescent, Salthill		prob. 1stW 24.10.04	BD	OTHER BEASTIES				
Curlew Sandpiper	Rahasane Turlough		1 25.10.04	MD	Otter	Nimmo's Pier	1	30.10.04	BD
Ruff	Rahasane Turlough		2 25.10.04	MD	Otter	Mutton Island	1	17.12.04	MD
Green-winged Teal	Bell Harbour, Co. Clare		M 25.10.04	TG					
Glaucous Gull	Rossaveal		1stW 26.10.04	MD	ABBREVIATIONS				
Arctic Skua	Nimmo's Pier		1 27.10.04	CB					
Merlin	Knockdoe		1 27.10.04	CB	Juv. = Juvenile; A = Adult; W = Winter; S = Summer; F = Female; M = Male;				
Merlin	Grattan Road, Salthill		1 28.10.04	MD	Imm. = Immature; Leuc. = Leucistic; hyb. = hybrid.				
Little Gull	Nimmo's Pier		1stW 29.10.04	DB					
Long-tailed Duck	Nimmo's Pier		2 29.10.04	DB	NOTES				
Common Scoter	Nimmo's Pier		4F 29.10.04	DB					
Spotted Redshank	Kilcaimin		3 29.10.04	MD	* Bird from previous quarter.				
Merlin	Ballyloughaun		1 31.10.04	NE					
Sanderling	Barna		2 05.11.04	MC					
Little Gull	Nimmo's Pier		20+ 06.11.04	Many obs.					
Scaup	Annaghdown		F 06.11.04	DB & CP					
Magpie	Cappagh Road, Galway		18 06.11.04	KO'L	CONTRIBUTORS				
Barn Owl	Menlo		1 07.11.04	TS					
Little Egret	Traught		2 07.11.04	TG	AOD = Aonghus O'Donail; JeM = Jena Murphy; JM = Joe Murphy;				
Kingfisher	Galway Docks		1 07.11.04	TG	CP = Chris Peppiatt; DB = Dermot Breen; BD = Brendan Dunne				
Little Gull	Nimmo's Pier		14 10.11.04	TG	GG = Graham Gordon; PG = Paddy Greally; GD = Gordon Darcy				
Sandwich Tern	Nimmo's Pier		2 10.11.04	TG	GO'D = Ger O'Donnell; CB = Chris Benson; BS = Billy Smith;				
Iceland Gull	Rossaveal		1 10.11.04	TG	MC = Michael Connolly; MD = Michael Davis; PD = Pam Davis;				
					PC = Peter Capsey; PK = Pádraig Keirns; SN = Stan Nugent				
					NE = Neil Ellis; TG = Tim Griffin.				