



## CAIRDE EANLAITH NA GAILLIMHE BIRDWATCH GALWAY

www.birdwatchgalway.org  
QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER – EDITOR: NEIL SHARKEY  
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The purpose of this newsletter is to give BirdWatch Galway members and supporters news and information of a local and topical nature.

### FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

Dear members, it is Spring in Galway again! There are many signs of the change of the season in Galway. These include the breaking of the tree buds, the grass starting to grow again, the flowering of the Blackthorn, and the spring flowers (Primrose, Lesser Celandine, Dog Violet, Pignut and Bluebell) in the Small Wood.

We start to see the first migrant birds in March: Wheatear, Sand Martin, Swallow and Willow Warbler (Sandwich Tern, Chiffchaff and Blackcap winter in small numbers, so it is difficult to be sure if you are seeing or hearing a true migrant early in the year). The first Cuckoo in Galway was heard on the 14th of April. The arrivals of Spring migrants can be seen on the branch web site at

<http://www.birdwatchgalway.org/migrants.htm>

However, the first indication of the approaching breeding season in the bird world is the change in activity in our resident birds. In early March I was surprised to hear a Curlew calling from inside my chimney. Of course, what had really happened was that the Starlings had returned to nest in the chimney. Starlings are excellent mimics and this one had obviously been hanging out in the vicinity of some Curlews over the Winter. If you would like to hear some birdsong this Spring, you might attend the dawn chorus event that will be held at 4:30am on Sunday the 20th of May at the NUI Galway sports grounds at Dangan in Galway city.

Chris Peppiatt

### EASTER IN THE BUSHVELD

The harsh screeching of the Natal francolin, *Pternistes natalensis*, outside the bedroom window at 5 am on Easter morning is an effective substitute for my alarm clock, and prompts me to get out of bed shortly before sunrise. Other birds join the cacophony, making a much noisier and, to my ears, less pleasing dawn chorus than the one in Ireland. Soon after sunrise I'm ready to go out into the field, only to find the car window being attacked by a red-billed hornbill, *Tockus erythrorhynchus*, who seems to be determined that *this* morning he will win the battle against his reflection...

Although the reason I am at Loskop Dam Nature Reserve in the north-eastern region of South Africa is to study the vervet monkey, *Cercopithecus aethiops*, I am treated to daily spectacles of many other mammals and a variety of birds far beyond my identification abilities. Driving toward the home range of the vervets, a large group of helmeted guineafowl, *Numida meleagris*, swarms across the road and it takes them a few seconds to figure out that they won't be able to outrun the car. Moving further away from the entrance to the reserve, I pass herds of impala and kudu. These graceful animals become almost invisible when they stand motionless behind thorn bushes, but I sometimes spot one with a few red-billed oxpeckers, *Buphagus erythrorhynchus*, on its back. I have to stop a

couple of times on the way to allow a family of warhogs to run squealing across the road, their tails held vertically in the air.

I eventually find the monkeys near a dam where a cluster of masked weaver nests (*Ploceus velatus*) hangs over the water. On the opposite side of the dam an African fish-eagle, *Haliaeetus vocifer*, is poised as if watching for prey. After a few moments it takes off with a single harsh cry and flies majestically across the valley. The pied kingfishers, *Ceryle rudis*, seem to be having a bit more luck, as they swoop and hover over the water, occasionally plunging in to snatch a fish. A reed cormorant, *Phalacrocorax africanus*, sits on the wall of the dam, looking on.

Following the monkeys through the bushveld, I am startled by a francolin shooting out of the undergrowth right in front of me, followed by two more which were hiding nearby. It is easy to see why they have been dubbed 'heart-attack birds'! After that shock it is relaxing to watch a couple of fork-tailed drongos, *Dicrurus adsimilis*, calling to each other on a nearby bush. When I have been sitting still for a while, a crested barbet, *Trachyphonus vaillantii*, approaches close enough for me to see the intricate red and yellow patterning on its head and breast, which contrasts strikingly with the black and white feathers of its back and tail.

Suddenly the monkeys give an alarm call and race down towards the lower branches of the tree. They have spotted a bird of prey in the distance, and although I cannot tell what it is, it must be something with a taste for young monkeys! Fortunately, the bird of prey is not interested in the monkeys today, and flies off. As peace returns to the troop, I hear a rustling in the grass behind me. Thinking that it is probably another francolin foraging in the undergrowth, I ignore it for a minute or two. The monkeys make no alarm calls so I figure it isn't a leopard or a snake (sworn enemies of the monkeys). But after a couple of minutes curiosity gets the better of me. I turn to find a male white rhino quietly studying me, not six metres away.

Later, I wonder how such a huge creature could approach so quietly, but now my only thought is to get into the tree with the monkeys as fast as my legs can get me there. Although the rhino does not seem to bother the monkeys, the presence of an ape in their tree doesn't go down too well, and they race off. The rhino stays around for a few minutes more, probably wondering what all the fuss is about and not realising that a horn almost a metre long looks very intimidating to a defenceless human! After about ten minutes it wanders off in the same direction as the monkeys, as quietly as it came. I clamber ungracefully down from the tree, which I now notice is covered in inch-long thorns. I decide not to tempt fate by following the monkeys and risking meeting the rhino again, and call it a day. Walking back to the car, I'm still on edge and the sound of a golden-tailed woodpecker, *Campethera abingoni*, pecking at a nearby tree makes me jump.

Back at camp, a couple of dark-capped bulbuls, *Pyconotus barbatus*, and a few grey louries or 'go-away-birds', *Corythaixoides concolor*, fly among the trees while we prepare our Easter braai (South African barbeque). I can't help wonder whether the monkeys have recovered from the shock of being chased out of their tree and whether the rhino will be back again tomorrow. More importantly, will I ever figure out which other birds are contributing to that awful racket at dawn??!

Jenny Whilde

### EOIN & UNA O MALLEY

The recent death of Eoin O Malley and that of his wife Una Higgins O Malley some time back reminds us of the debt that BirdWatch Galway owes them both. In 1995 I received a phone call from the late Bill Sands – solicitor - acting for Eoin and Una. The proposal was to donate to us *The Small Wood* a two and a half acre plot of land overlooking Rusheen Bay at Barna. After legal formalities the site was handed over to us and became The Small Wood Bird Reserve. In an era of sky-high land prices and resultant overnight millionaires their donation of this valuable land was an act of extraordinary generosity. From this we have been able to set up a first class site for birds and their conservation. The plaque on one of the bird observation points dedicates the site to the O Malley family and it and the sanctuary itself keep alive the long connection between the family and Galway and Barna in particular. We would like to express our sympathy to the extended O Malley family on the passing on of Eoin and Una and again express our thanks and gratitude for their farsighted act of goodwill.

NS

### BIRDTRACK

Some of you will have heard of Birdtrack - if not here is a brief summary. It is an Internet site run jointly by BTO and BWI for online species recording. You can register as a recorder and then register your favourite sites. You can update counts – first migrants of the season or casual observations. It is very simple to navigate and recently you can get co-ordinates on line. Try it out by keying in 'Birdtrack' into Google and proceed from there.

NS

### A NORTH AMERICAN VAGRANT LANDS IN GALWAY

A vagrant from North America has been hanging around Nimmo's Pier since the second week of January. This stray is seen most often in the mornings about 9 in the inner harbor near other North American cousins, such as the several Ring-billed Gulls and the, now, fourth winter American Herring Gull. Less often he's out along the



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causeway near the rocks favored by his other geographic kin, the Forster's Tern.

As often seems the case with itinerant gulls, Dermot Breen was the first to make the identification, followed shortly by Michael Davis, huge camera lens in hand. Over the following weeks encounters were sporadic, but included confirmed sightings at Nimmo's by Tom Cuffe and even Killian Mullarney, who marked the occasion in his book. A wandering habit is evident, as Chris Peppiatt spotted this oddball in Salthill. Neil Sharkey found him on the Tawin 'long walk,' drenched and disheveled by a 100+ kph gale during the January Galway Bay Count, a baptism into real Irish birding. Marianne ten Cate ran into him thrice, once—remarkably—inside the Town Hall Theatre. He's apparently settled in for a long stay, waiting until the next migratory urge hits in mid-June, when the photo period and the winds are just right. Or the airfares. This nomad is not of the taxonomic class *Aves*. Rather, I'm among the far stranger order *Avid aves watcher*. I'm here from Pennsylvania for six months, family in tow, doing economic research at NUI Galway. I walk each morning with my younger son, Fergus, to his primary school, which by wonderful unplanned happenstance is in the Claddagh two block from Nimmo's. When on my morning loop past the Pier I kept meeting that who's who of Galway birders, it didn't take me long to understand the Mecca of sorts that is Nimmo's.

Indeed, the last thing I imagined doing on my very first Monday in Ireland, after I dropped Fergus at school, was to be wondering whether I could, really, be looking at a Ring-billed Gull. This puzzle was standing right between a first winter Iceland and an adult Glaucous (major up-close treats for me in themselves!). Still a bit uncomfortable with European species, I did recall that wintering Common Gulls—"Mew" to me—do show bands on their bills. Yet this ankle deep bird had an aggressive head. This bird had bright yellow eyes and legs. This bird's white tertial crescent was familiarly thin. This bird I see recycling leftovers in the McDonald's car park down the street at home in Emmaus, Pennsylvania. Now here too? An dairire ata tu?

The same sense of displacement happened again a few days later, when I introduced myself to Dermot Breen, the Irishman who, with modest injury to this Yank's pride, showed me the American Herring Gull that I'd not noticed was different from those mere European versions. Well, I rationalized, I'd been here less than a week. How was I supposed to know to look? Heck, they've not even been separate species all that long anyway. A week later near the Causeway, I watched a Forster's Tern preen in the company of three Sandwich Terns. I've spent many lazy hours watching Forster's by the dozens play kamikaze in the river behind my parents home in Maryland. But in Ireland? Where I'd hoped to find my nemesis Corn Crake?

I now understand that these vagrants from my side of the pond are regulars at Nimmo's. And now, so

am I, with—thanks to a kind introduction by Michael Davis—my newly Mullarney-signed copy of the Collins *Bird Guide* in hand. I'll be sure to say howdy if you too spot me there at 9 many weekdays. For me, from the friendly birders of Galway it has indeed been Cead Mile Failte.

Todd A. Watkins

### BIRDS IN POETRY

Ted Kooser, an American Poet Laureate, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry for the volume *Delights & Shadows*, which contains this poem. His deserved reputation for clarity and accessibility can be appreciated in this simple but carefully crafted poem.

Pat Finnegan

#### The Early Bird

Still dark, and raining hard  
on a cold May morning

and yet the early bird  
is out there chirping,

chirping its sweet-sour  
wooden-pulley notes,

pleased, it would seem,  
to be given work,

hauling the heavy  
bucket of dawn

up from the darkness,  
note over note,

and letting us drink.

Ted Kooser

From *Delights and Shadows*,  
published by Copper Canyon Press (2004)

### GARDEN BIRD SURVEY

Let me begin by thanking those who sent in copies of their BWI Garden Bird Surveys to me. Of the eleven who did it seems to me that all but one were from rural parts. I say 'seems' as two of the surveys returned did not include the page with details of the location and size of the garden.

The first thing to say is that because of the small sample this could not be called a scientific survey. For this reason I am confining results to more or less narrative comment – no graphs or conclusive statistical conclusions.

A total of 47 species was recorded. Robin, Blackbird, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Chaffinch, Greenfinch and Goldfinch were present at all of the eleven sites. Song Thrush, Wren, Dunnock, Magpie, Pied

Wagtail and Great Tit were missing from just one site each and House Sparrow was recorded in seven. Pheasants were present at five sites reflecting the rural bias of the survey, as did the recording of Reed Bunting. Interesting sightings include Yellowhammer (Ian Brophy), Treecreeper (NS), Jay and Brambling (Anon). Hen Harrier, Sparrowhawk, Merlin and Kestrel were also noted. Blackcaps were present on five of the sites with Deirdre Comerford having a peak of 3 present. Goldcrest were recorded on seven sites. Despite the much talked about dearth of Siskins this year they turned up at seven of the eleven sites with Marian Bushell having a peak of 9.

As would be expected the 'champions' of presence and numbers were the finches. By my rather crude statistical methodology Greenfinches totalled 13% of all birds seen, Chaffinches 12 %, Goldfinches 9%. These three birds make up a very high percentage of all birds recorded. Of course, total numbers tell very little – one does not expect to see large numbers of solitary birds like Dunnock or Wren.

As I said at the beginning I can be only sure of one city garden, that of Peadar O Dowd. It is all the more interesting as Peadar lives within 300m of Eyre Square, right in the centre of Galway City and all the usual garden species were present – Dunnock, Robin, Blackbird, all three tits, all the finches and good numbers of House Sparrows.

I am most grateful to all who took the trouble to send me their returns. Thanks especially to Marian & Roger Bushell for their interesting letter which I may publish later as an item in its own right. Thanks too to Alan Lees for his trend graphs which I hope to examine in more detail later. Overall this was a good exercise in reader participation, something that I have always had as an objective of this local newsletter.

NS

### COMING EVENTS

**Wednesday 16 May**, committee/members meeting, Anno Santo Hotel, Threadneedle Road, Salthill, 8pm. All branch members are welcome to attend!

**Sunday 20 May**, National Dawn Chorus Day. Meet in the car park of the NUIG Sports Grounds in Dangan at 4.30am.

**Sunday 27 May**, Connemara National Park Biodiversity Family Day, supported by BirdWatch Ireland.

**Weekend 1-4 June**, Outing to Tory Island and Glenveagh National Park. A Galway Naturalists' Field Club event. For details and/or to book a place, contact Chris Peppiatt at 091-862566 or 086-3125356.

**Wednesday 13 June**, committee/members meeting, Anno Santo Hotel, 8pm. Again, feel free to come along.

**Sunday 26 August**, Portumna Forest Park Biodiversity Family Day, supported by BirdWatch.

**Saturday 1 September**, short outing on Nimmo's Pier with Tim Griffin *et al.*, 10.30am.

# BirdWatch Galway (Branch of BirdWatch Ireland)

A QUARTERLY BIRD REPORT BY TIM GRIFFIN & CHRIS PEPPIATT

1st Quarter 2007

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

DATE OF ISSUE: 9th May 2007

Species	Location	No	Date	Observer	Species	Location	No	Date	Observer
Common Sandpiper	Lough Atalia, Galway City		1 01.01.07	Many obs. (1)	Little Gull	Nimmo's Pier, Galway Ci	4	04.03.07	TG & TC
Slavonian Grebe	Angliham, Lough Corrib		1 01.01.07	TC (2)	Mediterranean Gull	Waterside, Galway City	1stW	04.03.07	MD
Hen Harrier	Angliham, Lough Corrib		F 02.01.07	TG	'Argentatus' Herring Gull	Nimmo's Pier, Galway Ci		1 04.03.07	TG
Red-necked Grebe	Traught		1 02.01.07	TG (3)	Mediterranean Gull	Nimmo's Pier, Galway Ci	1stW	05.03.07	TG
Grey Phalarope	Traught		1 02.01.07	TG	Little Gull	Nimmo's Pier, Galway Ci		1 06.03.07	TC
Little Egret	Rusheen Bay, Galway City		1 02.01.07	TG	Mediterranean Gull	Waterside, Galway City	1stW	08.03.07	TG
Scaup X Tufted Duck Hyb.	Lough Atalia, Galway City		1 02.01.07	TG	Little Gull	Nimmo's Pier, Galway Ci	4	10.03.07	TC
Glaucous Gull	Nimmo's Pier, Galway City		2 02.01.07	TG	Kittiwake	Nimmo's Pier, Galway Ci		1 10.03.07	TC
Iceland Gull	Nimmo's Pier, Galway City		2 02.01.07	TG	Mediterranean Gull	Pier at Newtownlynch	1stW	10.03.07	TG
Ring-billed Gull	Nimmo's Pier, Galway City		3 02.01.07	TG	Manx Shearwater	Baile na hBhann	11	12.03.07	TG
Blackcap	Salthill, Galway City		2 04.01.07	MD	Sand Martin	Rahasane Turlough	19	14.03.07	JM
Little Gull	Silver Strand, Galway City		2 04.01.07	TG	Crossbill	Cloosh Wood	3	15.03.07	TG
Whooper Swan	Belclare Turlough	17 (6 Juv.)	05.01.07	CK	Little Egret	Rossaveal	2	15.03.07	TG
Purple Sandpiper	Inveran		24 05.01.07	TG	Mediterranean Gull	Pier at Newtownlynch	1stW	17.03.07	TG
Iceland Gull	Furbo		AW 05.01.07	TG	Ring-billed Gull	Nimmo's Pier, Galway	4	18.03.07	TC
Forster's Tern	Nimmo's Pier, Galway City		AW 06.01.07	CC & TN (4)	Purple Sandpiper	Inveran	63	19.03.07	TG
Kumlien's Gull	Mutton Island, Galway City		2ndW 09.01.07	MD (5)	Crossbill	Cloosh Wood	2	19.03.07	TG
Herring Gull X Glaucous Gull Hyb.	Nimmo's Pier, Galway City		1 09.01.07	Many obs. (6)	Iceland Gull	Rossaveal	12	20.03.07	TG
Mediterranean Gull	Mutton Island cswy, Galway City		AW 09.01.07	TG	Little Egret	Treanlaur Bay, Maree	12	22.03.07	TGi
Red Grouse	Nr. Moycullen		1 10.01.07	PK	Wheatear	Cashel, Connemara	1	22.03.07	AO'D
Goshawk	Nr. Moycullen		1 10.01.07	PR	Little Gull	Nimmo's Pier, Galway Ci	2	24.02.07	TG
Mediterranean Gull	Nimmo's Pier, Galway City		1 12.01.07	TG	Kingfisher	Millenium Park, Galway	1	25.03.07	AO'D
'Argentatus' race Herring Gull	Nimmo's Pier, Galway City		1 13.01.07	MD	Whooper Swan	Rahasane Turlough	105	26.03.07	PC
Little Gull	Nimmo's Pier, Galway City		4 13.01.07	TG & TC	Wigeon	Rahasane Turlough	2,000	26.03.07	PC
American Herring Gull	Nimmo's Pier, Galway City		4th yr. 15.01.07	MD, DB, TG (7)	Little Egret	Rahasane Turlough	2	26.03.07	PC
Iceland Gull	Mutton Island, Galway City	3 (2AW & 3rdW)	16.01.07	MD	GmInd Whitefront Goose	Rahasane Turlough	99	29.03.07	CP
Mediterranean Gull	Rossaveal		AW 17.01.07	TG	Greytag Goose	Rahasane Turlough	1	29.03.07	CP (10)
Common Buzzard	Newbridge		1 21.01.07	PT	Kumlien's Gull	Rossaveal	2ndW	31.03.07	MD
Kumlien's Gull	Rossaveal		1stW 21.01.07	TG	Common (Mealy) Redpoll	Nr. Milltown, Tuam	1 ringed	31.03.07	CB
Black-headed Gull	Nimmo's Pier, Galway City		Leuc. 22.01.07	TG	Hen Harrier	Curraghline, Nr. Lough Corrib	F	31.03.07	AO'D
Little Gull	Nimmo's Pier, Galway City		AW 24.01.07	DO'K	GmInd Whitefront Goose	Curraghline, Nr. Lough Corrib	71	31.03.07	AO'D
Whooper Swan	Rahasane Turlough		22 28.01.07	PC					
Greenland Whitefronted Goose	Rahasane Turlough		55 28.01.07	PC	<b>OTHER BEASTIES</b>				
Wigeon	Rahasane Turlough	2,500	28.01.07	PC					
Golden Plover	Rahasane Turlough	2,500	28.01.07	PC	Otter	Rahasane Turlough	1	26.03.07	PC
Siskin	Loughrea		3 28.01.07	PC					
Hen Harrier	Luimnagh, Lough Corrib		F 29.01.07	DC					
Mediterranean Gull	Rossaveal		AW 30.01.07	TG					
Long-eared Owl	Moycullen		Pair 31.01.07	AO'D	<b>ABBREVIATIONS</b>				
Glaucous Gull	Nimmo's Pier, Galway City		5 31.01.07	TG					
Ring-billed Gull	Nimmo's Pier, Galway City		4 31.01.07	TG	Juv. = Juvenile; A = Adult; W = Winter; M = male; F = female;				
Swallow	Merlin Park, Galway City		1 02.02.07	DO'K	Hyb. = Hybrid; cswy = causeway; Leuc. = leucistic; GmInd = Greenland.				
Little Gull	Nimmo's Pier, Galway City		1 02.02.07	TG					
Little Egret	Rusheen Bay, Galway City		1 03.02.07	AB	<b>NOTES</b>				
Greenland Whitefronted Goose	Inveran		29 06.02.07	AO'D					
Little Egret	Renville, Oranmore		13 07.02.07	FF	1 = The wintering bird from the last quarter was present until 19.03.07 at least.				
Mediterranean Gull	Rossaveal		AW 08.02.07	MD	2 = Seen again on 02.01.07.				
Ring-billed Gull	Rossaveal		AW 08.02.07	MD	3 = This bird was present nearby at the Newtownlynch pier until 20.03.07 at least..				
Greenland Whitefronted Goose	Rahasane Turlough		98 09.02.07	CP	4 = This bird was still present in the area until the end of the quarter.				
Siskin	Rahoon, Galway City		25 11.02.07	CP	5 = Present gain on 14.01.07.				
Hen Harrier	Curraghline, Nr. Lough Corrib		6 ringtail 11.02.07	AO'D	6 = This bird was present off and on until 25.03.07.				
Iceland Gull	Nimmo's Pier, Galway City		20+ 11.02.07	TG	7 = This bird was present in the area until 25.03.07 at least.				
Little Gull	Mutton Island cswy, Galway		2 13.02.07	TG	8 = This bird was seen again on 18.02.07.				
Mediterranean Gull	Rossaveal		1 13.02.07	TG	9 = This bird was present in the area until 20.03.07 at least.				
Slavonian Grebe	Lough Rea		1 17.02.07	SG (8)	10 = This bird was wary and with a Greenland Whitefront flock rather than in a feral flock.				
Velvet Scoter	Pier at Newtownlynch		M 20.02.07	TG (9)					
Little Gull	Grattan Road, Salthill, Galway		1stW 20.02.07	TG					
Long-tailed Duck	Traught		7 20.02.07	TG					
Iceland Gull	Nimmo's Pier, Galway City		14 20.02.07	TG					
Little Egret	Rusheen Bay, Galway City		2 23.02.07	PCo					
Iceland Gull	Galway City		20 23.02.07	MD					
Iceland Gull	Rossaveal		16 23.02.07	MD					
Iceland Gull	Spiddal		AW 23.02.07	MD					
Ring-billed Gull	Nimmo's Pier, Galway City		4 (2A & 2-2ndW) 23.02.07	MD					
Mediterranean Gull	Nimmo's Pier, Galway City		1stW 23.02.07	MD					
Glaucous Gull	Nimmo's Pier, Galway City		1 25.03.07	CP	<b>CONTRIBUTORS</b>				
Purple Sandpiper	Inveran		22 28.02.07	TG	MD = Michael Davis; TG = Tim Griffin; TC = Tom Cuffe; CB = Chris Benson				
Little Gull	Nimmo's Pier, Galway City		AW 28.02.07	TG	PC = Pete Capsey; PK = Pádraig Keirns; CK = Christian Kubernat;				
Sanderling	Inveran		3 28.02.07	TG	DC = Deirdre Comerford; NS = Neil Sharkey; AO'D = Aonghus O'Donail;				
Little Egret	Silver Strand, Galway City		2 28.02.07	TG	CP = Chris Peppiatt; JM = John Murphy; DB = Dermot Breen; TN = Tyrone Nelson;				
Jack Snipe	Mutton Island, Galway City		1 03.03.07	MD	FF = Frank Flanagan; AB = Aoife Boyd; PT = Pete Tyndall; CC = Chris Cullen;				
Common Scoter	Pier at Newtownlynch		32 03.03.07	TG & JM	PR = Pádraic Reaney; DO'K = David O'Keefe; TGi = Tony Gibson; PCo = Patrick Costello;				
Mediterranean Gull	Rusheen Bay, Galway City		1stW 03.03.07	MD, NS & TG	SG = Sean Geraty.				