



This is a local forum newsletter – contributions and comments are most welcome.
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BRANCH MATTERS

The Galway County Heritage Plan 2004-2008 has more or less run its course and it is now time to review the actions undertaken during the last four years and plan for the period 2009-2014. The 'Plan covers three key areas – promoting awareness and enjoyment of our heritage, acquiring knowledge and protecting our heritage. It goes without saying that BirdWatch underwrites these objectives, particularly where birds and their habitats are concerned. And during the last few years BirdWatch Galway has contributed to the Birds in Schools project, commissioned an inventory of important sites for breeding birds and produced a booklet on *Bird Watching in County Galway*, all actions of the 2004-2008 'Plan.

For the new Heritage Plan 78 submissions from all over the county were received and these are being assessed by the Heritage Forum to decide on priority issues to be incorporated in the 'Plan. The Heritage Forum comprises three active working groups, dealing with built, cultural and natural heritage respectively. BirdWatch Galway is represented on the natural heritage working group.

Of the submissions almost half relate to the natural heritage of County Galway. I am not sure whether to be glad about that or not. On the one hand, it is heartening that so many people are concerned about our natural environment and have even taken the trouble to put pen to paper and voice their concern. On the other hand, it is worrying that there are still so many issues relating to the environment and its biodiversity that are cause for concern and need to be addressed - in many cases - urgently.

But, at least in County Galway we have a Heritage Forum, a Heritage Plan that is put together on the basis of input from all possible stakeholders and a Biodiversity Plan that has been adopted by the County Council. Apart from working within the national legislative framework and policies at county level there is not an awful lot more we can do, apart from trying to influence the decisions made by the County Council in relation to planning and zoning.

And that is something we can all play a part in by keeping an eye on our local patch and our local representative(s). So, if you have any concerns, make sure you voice them into the right ear!

Marianne ten Cate

BIRDS IN POETRY

George Mackay Brown was born in Stromness in the Orkney Islands in 1921. In his teens he developed tuberculosis and he suffered a recurrence in 1952 but survived to graduate from Edinburgh University. Following a period of postgraduate study he returned to Orkney and life as a writer and one of the finest Scottish lyric poets.

Until his death in 1996 he celebrated the place and the people of Orkney and its complex history; the fishermen, the farmers and the daily lives of the people. The publication of the *Collected Poems* in 2005 is a fitting tribute to his love for 'the small green world' of the Orkney Islands, his birthplace and home.

Pat Finnegan

THE HAWK

On Sunday the hawk fell on Bigging
And a chicken screamed
Lost in its own little snowstorm.
And on Monday he fell on the moor
And the Field Club
Raised a hundred silent prisms.
And on Tuesday he fell on the hill
And the happy lamb
Never knew why the loud collie straddled him.
And on Wednesday he fell on a bush
And the blackbird
Laid by his little flute for the last time.
And on Thursday he fell on Cleat
And peerie Tom's rabbit
Swung in a single arc from shore to hill.
And on Friday he fell on a ditch
But the rampant rat,
That eye and that tooth, quenched his flame.
And on Saturday he fell on Bigging
And Jock lowered his gun
And nailed a small wing over the corn.

George Mackay Brown

Acknowledgements to John Murray, Publishers.

BIRD ATLAS

While August is hardly the month to be thinking of winter and its activities, can we again encourage members and others to get involved in the BTO/BWI Atlas. November sees the start of Year 2 of this important 4-year project.

You can help in many ways – registering and undertaking to survey one or more 2km tetrads, registering and just submitting Roving Records of birds (usual and unusual) seen by you or just getting involved with BWI Galway Branch counts and projects such as I-WeBS and Galway Bay Counts.

You can get involved by contacting via the web site www.birdatlas.org or phoning Brian Caffrey, the national organiser, at 05791 51676.

The Galway branch will be organising a couple more sessions of tetrad surveying over the winter months to help those who wish to get involved become familiar with the methodology. See next issue or contact any committee member for details of these.

NS

EDUCATING THE BIRDERS OF THE FUTURE

As some of you may know, I am the Irish Wetland Bird Survey (I-WeBS) counter for Rahasane Turlough, and have just completed my 10th count season. Rahasane, for those of you unfamiliar with the site, is the largest remaining turlough in Ireland. It is situated in the east of the county, south-west of Craughwell.

A couple of years ago I was contacted by a young lady, Karen Moore, who was running some environmental workshops in Loughrea, Peterswell and Craughwell. She was planning to cover local birdlife as part of the workshops and wondered if I'd be willing to help out. BWI had given Karen my name due to my association with Rahasane and its proximity to Craughwell. I admit to being hesitant at first – standing up and talking in front of people is not my favourite pastime – but once I'd met Karen I agreed to get involved. I ended up leading 3 birding walks for each workshop, ably supported by other local BWI members. The last one at Rahasane was attended by over 60 people!

One thing that became obvious during the walks at Rahasane was the ignorance about turloughs in general and Rahasane in particular. I was asked by one lady, who had lived opposite Rahasane all her life, what exactly a turlough is. I found it ironic and sad that, as an Englishman, I seemed to know more about this particularly Irish landscape than the locals. I had no idea what a turlough was before starting as I-WeBS counter, and had read up so that I could at least try to answer questions at the workshops.

Any way, on the last walk at Rahasane, I was approached by another lady, a teacher at one of the local national schools. She wondered if I would be prepared to lead a walk for pupils from her school. Again I was hesitant (loads of kids, trying to get their grubby hands on my precious scope – perish the thought!), but I reflected that if we don't get kids interested, the ignorance will remain. I agreed to do the walk and it was a resounding success, with pupils from two years going over to Rahasane on a frosty and misty morning that November.

I thoroughly enjoyed the walk. The kids were like a breath of fresh air, interested in what I had to say but also questioning things in the way that only kids do. I was fortunate that the birds performed for me as well, with Whooper Swans appearing majestically out of the mist, their calls adding to the slightly spooky atmosphere. The Peregrine was in residence, sitting in her usual spot near the riverbank. As the mist lifted, I found her in the scope, gave her a big build-up ("fastest bird in the world", "fierce predator", "magnificent to look at") and let the kids loose on the scope. One girl stepped back from the scope looking disappointed, so I asked her if she'd seen the bird. Yes, she assured me, but she thought it looked more like a Penguin than the wonderful bird I had described! (I hate to admit it, but she was right!)



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I have subsequently been contacted by two other national schools local to Craughwell and Rahasane, and have led walks for both of them. The latest was in January this year, when water levels were so high that we couldn't get into the turlough at the middle gate opposite the Poet's Graveyard. We ended up going in at the southern entrance, but the birds were few and far between. Still, the kids enjoyed it and that was what mattered. We had a question-and-answer session about all things bird-related back at the classroom, with the kids wanting to stay in through their usual lunch break. I ended up chatting to them for nearly 2 hours – I was exhausted at the end, but their enthusiasm and interest made it worthwhile.

I have now led 6 walks at Rahasane, three for the workshops and three for schools. The second school walk was attended by over 90 pupils and parents, which means I have probably talked to over 200 people on these walks. The most disappointing thing is that I haven't seen any new birders out at Rahasane. Of course, it may be that they are visiting during the week, whereas I generally visit at the weekend. It does make me wonder, though, just how willing parents are to take the kids out into the country and to learn about our environment with them.

So what's next? Well, I'm always willing to lead walks at Rahasane for schools or other groups that may be interested. I feel that I have a responsibility to try and educate people about Rahasane. It is a wonderful place, invigorating and frustrating in equal measure, and I find it hard to imagine not having Rahasane as a place to visit. If any of you know of a school or group that may be interested, please feel free to contact me and if I can, I'll happily arrange something.

I do feel that we, as birders, could do more to help educate the birders of the future. I understand that leading walks and giving talks isn't for everyone, but it is extremely rewarding. If any of you have the chance to do something similar at your local patch or I-WeBS site, I would encourage you to grab the opportunity with both hands! I'm sure you'll receive as much support from BWI as I have.

I would like to express my thanks to all of the other volunteers at Galway BWI who helped me lead these walks and offered their support (and scopes!). Oh, and my scope survived the mauling by grubby fingers!

Pete Capsey

BOTANY AND BIRDING – MENORCA 2008

Botanists and Birders share a common pleasure in being out and about and keen observational powers. However, there is one major difference between them, botanists talk all the time. Despite this drawback I did manage to see quite a few bird species in a week, in May, on Menorca. The island is small, 700 square kilometres. And very flat, the highest point, Monte Toro, a mere 357metres. Away

from the coast there are holm oak groves on the better soil and the poorer soils support wild olive woods. In between lie small meadows, many grazed by Friesian cattle introduced by the English.

This mixed terrain supports a mixture of familiar birds such as blackbirds, chaffinches, goldfinches, greenfinches, linnets and stonechats, together with woodchat shrikes and Sardinian warblers. The most exciting raptor to be seen was the ubiquitous Egyptian vulture. There are 70 breeding pairs on the island. I also saw a red kite and many kestrels.

Unfortunately, the honey buzzard, harriers, red-footed falcon and the black kite were not to be seen, or I was hunkered down over a *Centranthus calcitaropae*, or some such when they flew over - the peril of trying to do two things at once.

New to me were thekla lark and tawny pipit and the corn bunting. A pallid swift flew low enough to allow one to see the white throat patch and swallows were everywhere. A nightingale sang in the oak grove one day. A highlight was the sighting of a multi-coloured display by a small flock of bee-eaters flashing in the sunlight. Hoopoes appeared from time to time and were to be heard often. A yellow-legged gull patrolled a roof in the hotel garden each day and the shrubbery was full of house sparrows. There did not seem to be any decline in them in Sicily either, earlier in the year.

On a fenced off area on a shingle beach little ringed plovers were breeding and a little stint was taking advantage of the protection offered. Turtle doves in a car park completed my short list of species seen.

Deirdre Comerford

LICENCE TO TWITCH

The name's Bond, James Bond...Ornithologist! Many of you will know this already, but Ian Fleming named his now famous character after the author of a field guide to birds of the West Indies. Thinking the name was quite plain and unobtrusive he opted for James Bond as the title for his secret agent. How strange to think that what Fleming regarded as rather "normal" is now associated with *full on* action and adventure. Ian Fleming himself was an avid birder. So all in all - a birder named his character after a birder who, in turn, turned out to be a *real* birder (not of the feathered kind!). Funny how ornithology floats through everyday life without anyone really noticing. I mean, even Bond had to avoid Booby traps! The trap, of course, named after the birds which sailors in the South Seas would trap for meat.

Throughout the cold war, several of the CIA's top operatives were very accomplished ornithologists. The cover was perfect. A seemingly harmless gent with a pair of bins, a notebook and maybe even a camera could surely do no harm..... It is rightly suggested that the Cuban

missile crisis may have been recorded by several CIA agents posing as twitchers in the West Indies. I always wonder did they use Bond's field guide? Seems like good karma if they did!

Another movie reference which springs to mind includes the rather zoologically named *Dogs of War*. It stars a young Christopher Walken as an American mercenary who goes to a fictitious central African country to eliminate its despot leader (no, I do not plan to visit Zimbabwe this year). Walken poses as an ornithologist to gain entry to the country. An interesting scene in the movie is when he is confronted in his hotel by one of the local generals who tests his knowledge of binomial nomenclature. Walken shoots from the hip with marvellous Latin to confirm his twitch status and leaves the local general clambering for his binocs.

To sum it up for you all - Ornithology in all its forms is a noble hobby, one which is free to all and requires little more than time, and a love of nature in her purest form. It provides moments of great joy and excitement. It brings comfort to those who pursue it and memories to those who no longer can..... On occasion, it is also involved in saving the world from lunatic geniuses and madcap billionaires hell bent on global domination.

Could Ornithology be the new Rock and Roll? Let's hope not; I prefer it the way it is.

John Carey

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMME

Saturday 6 September, Short outing with Tim Griffin *et al.* at Nimmo's Pier, 10.30am.

The short outings are suitable for children provided they are supervised by an adult.

Wednesday 17 September, branch meeting, Anno Santo Hotel, Threadneedle Road, Salthill, 8pm. All members are very welcome to attend the monthly branch meetings!

Saturday 4 October, Short outing with Tim Griffin *et al.* at Nimmo's Pier, 10.30am.

Friday 10 October, Talk by Pete Capsey – *The Magic of Rahasane*, Anno Santo Hotel, 8pm.

Wednesday 15 October, branch meeting, Anno Santo Hotel, 8pm. Please come along!

Saturday 1 November, Short outing with Tim Griffin *et al.* at Nimmo's Pier, 10.30am.

Wednesday 12 November, branch meeting, Anno Santo Hotel, 8pm. All members welcome!!

Friday 21 November, Talk by Sarah Clarke - *Antarctic Oasis*. Anno Santo Hotel, 8pm

BirdWatch Galway (Branch of BirdWatch Ireland)

A QUARTERLY BIRD REPORT BY CHRIS PEPIATT & TIM GRIFFIN

2nd Quarter 2008

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

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Species	Location	Number	Date	Observer
Kumlien's Gull	Nimmo's Pier, Galway City		2ndW 01.04.08	TG & TC
American Herring Gull	Docks, Galway City		1stW 01.04.08	TC & TG (1)
Forster's Tern	Nimmo's Pier, Galway City		A 01.04.08	TG (2)
Glaucous X Herring Gull Hyb.	Nimmo's Pier, Galway City		1 01.04.08	TG
Glaucous Gull	Nimmo's Pier, Galway City		A 02.04.08	TG
Ring-billed Gull	Waterside, Galway City		A 02.04.08	TG
Surf Scoter	Nimmo's Pier, Galway City		2-1stW 02.04.08	Many obs. (3)
American Herring Gull	Docks, Galway City		2 (A & 1stW) 02.04.08	TC
Jack Snipe	Loughrea Business Park		1 03.04.08	JC
White-tailed Eagle	Angliham, Lough Corrib		Juv. 03.04.08	TG (4)
Iceland Gull	Nimmo's Pier, Galway City		12 03.04.08	TG
Scaup	Angliham, Lough Corrib		136 03.04.08	TG
Marsh Harrier	Rockhill, Headford		1 04.04.08	KH
Willow Warbler	Angliham, Lough Corrib		1 04.04.08	TG
Bittern	Kileany Bay, Inishmore		1 05.04.08	? (5)
Hen Harrier	Angliham, Lough Corrib		F 05.04.08	TG
Greenland White-fronted Goose	Rahasane Turlough		84 06.04.08	PC
Greylag Goose	Rahasane Turlough		1 06.04.08	PC
Whooper Swan	Rahasane Turlough		29 06.04.08	PC
Greenland White-fronted Goose	Rahasane Turlough		5 12.04.08	TCh & JC
Little Egret	Rahasane Turlough		3 12.04.08	TCh & JC
Manx Shearwater	Silver Strand & Galway Bay		3 12.04.08	TCh, JC & TG
Whimbrel	Silver Strand, Galway City		37 12.04.08	TG
Cuckoo	Bushypark, Galway City		1 14.04.08	AM
Little Tern	Rusheen Bay, Galway City		1 17.04.08	TG
White Wagtail	Mutton Island, Galway City		1 20.04.08	TC
Sedge Warbler	Dyke Road, Galway City		1 20.04.08	TG
Grasshopper Warbler	Cappagh, Galway City		1 23.04.08	LP
Greenland Wheatear	Mutton Island, Galway City		1 23.04.08	TC
Greylag Goose	Muckrush, Lough Corrib		2 26.04.08	TG
Brent Goose	Barna Pier		48 28.04.08	BF
Common Sandpiper	Lough Inch, Barna		1 01.05.08	BP
Whinchat	Bishop's Island, Clonfert		3 (2M&F) 04.05.08	TCh
House Martin	Kilchreest		1 04.05.08	JC
Black-throated Diver	Newtownlynch Pier		1 05.05.08	TG
Arctic Skua	Newtownlynch Pier		1 05.05.08	TG
Swift	Ballinasloe		1 06.05.08	PC
Arctic Tern	Nimmo's Pier, Galway City		3 06.05.08	TC
Hobby	Loughrea Business Park		1 06.05.08	CC & GO
Arctic Skua	Silver Strand, Galway City		1 09.05.08	TG
Common Scoter	Silver Strand, Galway City		8 09.05.08	TG
Whimbrel	Silver Strand, Galway City		43 09.05.08	TG
Corncrake	Omey Island		1 10.05.08	per TGo
Spotted Flycatcher	Knockmaigh Hill, Tuam		1 11.05.08	MOM
Peregrine	Newtownlynch Pier		1 11.05.08	TG
Corncrake	Aughrus		1 12.05.08	per TGo
Corncrake	Inishbofin		4 12.05.08	per TGo
Corncrake	Inishturbot		5-6 12.05.08	per TGo
Whitethroat	Ballybrit Business Park, Galway City		1 13.05.08	MOM
Storm Petrel	Silver Strand, Galway City		20 22.05.08	TG
Storm Petrel	Mutton Island, Galway City		4 27.05.08	MD
Marsh Harrier	Menlo, Lough Corrib		Imm/F 27.05.08	TG
Hen Harrier	Angliham, Lough Corrib		F 27.05.08	TG
Glaucous Gull	Inishbofin		1stW 28.05.08	JB
Canada Goose	Lough Oorid, Nr. Maam Cross		Pair 31.05.08	CP
Glaucous X Herring Gull Hyb.	Long Walk, Galway City		1stS 31.05.08	MD
Teal	Lough Naboley, Nr. Recess		Pair 01.06.08	CP
Marsh Harrier	Menlo, Lough Corrib		Imm/F 02.06.08	TG
Corncrake	Omey Island		1-2 03.06.08	per TGo
Corncrake	Inishbofin		6 03.06.08	per TGo
Corncrake	Inishturbot		3 03.06.08	per TGo
Black-browed Albatross	100 nautical miles off Galway		Juv. 04.06.08	RG
Peregrine	Menlo/Angliham, Lough Corrib		1 05.06.08	JC
Snipe	Menlo/Angliham, Lough Corrib		Drumming 05.06.08	JC
White-tailed Eagle	Dún Eochla, Inishmore		1 10.06.08	DOC
Mediterranean Gull	Mutton Island, Galway City		1stS 10.06.08	MD
Long-eared Owl	Moycullen		Pair 12.06.08	AOD
Barn Owl	Moycullen		1 12.06.08	AOD
Crossbill	Cnoc an Tí		25+ 13.06.08	AOD
Crossbill	Moycullen		7 14.06.08	AOD
Red-throated Diver	Silver Strand, Galway City		2 18.06.08	TG
Iceland Gull	Nimmo's Pier, Galway City		2ndW 19.06.08	TC
Dipper	O'Brien's Bridge, Galway City		1 21.06.08	MK
Iceland Gull	Nimmo's Pier, Galway City		1stW 21.06.08	per Irishbirding
Arctic Skua	Silver Strand, Galway City		2 23.06.08	TG
Storm Petrel	Silver Strand, Galway City		20 23.06.08	TG
Merlin	Claregalway		M 23.06.08	JG
Long-eared Owl	Nr. Moycullen		Pair + three chicks 26.06.08	AOD

