



CAIRDE EANLAITH NA GAILLIMHE BIRDWATCH GALWAY

www.birdwatchgalway.org
QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER – EDITOR: NEIL SHARKEY
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Issue No. 79 November 2012

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

On September 11th, Jamie Durrant and Niall Hatch of BirdWatch HQ organised a talk and meeting in an effort to re-establish a Galway BirdWatch branch. It was held in the Mr Waffle restaurant near the University Hospital. There was a good attendance but, unfortunately, no progress was made and we remain without a functioning branch or committee. While the HQ efforts are greatly appreciated, I feel that in the end the solution must come from among the ranks of the 300 plus members in Galway city and county. All that is needed is for three or four people to come forward and be willing to work towards a new committee. Those who have been involved up to this have indicated that they will give every help needed.

That said, the meeting did have the benefit of an excellent talk by Niall on feeding our winter birds and further on in the *Newsletter* Brendan Dunne reports on the outing held in conjunction with the talk and meeting.

In the meantime Chris Peppiatt organised the first Galway Bay count on Nov 3rd and Marianne ten Cate organised the Lower Lough Corrib count for the 10th. The latter had to be cancelled and will now take place on the 24th. Two more Galway Bay counts will take place in January and March and another Corrib count in January. Anyone interested in taking part in these counts contact Chris Peppiatt at chris.peppiatt@iol.ie and/or mariannetencate@gmail.com. Other I-WeBS counts continue by individual members.

NS

GOA, INDIA, NOVEMBER 2011

I joined a Naturetrek tour to the Indian State of Goa for 8 days last November. Goa is a former Portuguese colony and is only just slightly larger than county Clare. It is a well-known tourist spot but also has a long established reputation as being a first class birding location. I was one of seven birders on the trip. We flew in via Mumbai which is located around 200km to the north of Goa. The all important first bird of the trip was Common Myna.

We were first based along the coastal strip near Baga. After meeting our excellent guide for the trip, Loven Pereira, we took a quick walk around the immediate area around the hotel to make use of the last hour of light. During this time we saw species like Asian Koel, Little Swift, White-cheeked Barbet, White-browed Wagtail, Oriental Magpie-robin, Long-tailed Shrike, Ashy Drongo and House Crow, all of which proved to be common species during the trip.

Over the next two days we visited numerous dry woodland, grassland and coastal sites. One of the highlights was an early morning visit to Morjim Beach which produced great birds like White-bellied Sea Eagle, Small Pratincole, Lesser and Greater Sand Plover (much easier to distinguish than I would have thought), Brown-headed,

Heuglin's and Caspian Gull, Lesser crested Tern, Paddyfield Warbler, Pied Bushchat and Bay-backed Shrike. On the same day, we also visited Oivar Island which consisted of large open fields and proved very productive for raptors with numerous Montagu's Harriers on view at any one time. Surprisingly, no confirmed Pallid Harriers were seen; however, we did get Black-shouldered Kite, Red-necked and Amur Falcons here.

We moved inland next to the famous Backwoods Camp within the Western Ghat Mountains. The number of species really skyrocketed here with large numbers of species being found in the large tracts of forest. Over the next few days we were lucky to see seven kingfisher species including the massive Stork-billed Kingfisher, seven Bulbul species, six Sunbird species and six Drongo species alone. Southern Indian is home to a number of endemic and near endemic species. We connected with many of these, for example Malabar Grey and Malabar Pied Hornbill, Malabar Parakeet, Flame-throated Bulbul, Malabar Whistling Thrush, Crimson-backed and Loten's Sunbird, Ceylon Frogmouth and Malabar Trogon.

We returned to our initial spot for the remaining two days. A visit to some freshwater lakes and rice paddies resulted in some great waterbirds like Little and Indian Cormorants, Asian Openbill, Black-headed Ibis, Lesser Whistling Duck, Cotton Pygmy-goose, Indian Spotted Eagle, Watercock, Pheasant-tailed and Bronze-winged Jacana, Pacific Golden Plover and unexpected Great Knot.

I saw a total of 235 species of which 166 were new to me. The trip was a little on the short side and I would have liked to spend a few more days in Goa but I can easily see myself returning to India since at least 1,200 bird species have been recorded in the country. No better excuse for a return trip.

Dermot Breen

COLOUR-RINGED BLACK-TAILED GODWIT

On 6th May 2012, I was down at Rahasane, completing my I-WeBS counts for another season. Nothing much was happening, although a pair of Whooper Swans was still present and looking very settled indeed. Obviously, the grazing at Rahasane was more enticing than the flight to Iceland. I was about to pack up and head home when I spotted a couple of Black-tailed Godwit feeding in a small flooded area. I managed to get closer, and counted 16 birds, all of them in full summer plumage.

As I was working through the flock, enjoying the stunning spectacle these birds present in summer plumage, I noticed that one bird had coloured rings on its legs. I'd heard about the ringing project of the Icelandic Black-tailed Godwits, but had never seen a bird with rings during all my years counting at Rahasane.

I carefully noted down the sequence of the rings

– yellow on top, orange underneath on the left leg, white on top, red underneath on the right – determined to report the sighting when I got home.

Black-tailed Godwit have provided one of the success stories in the 14 years that I've been counting at Rahasane. When I started, a count in double figures was something to get excited about. By the early 2000s, counts in excess of 500 were becoming regular, with a peak of around 1200 in October 2006. Since then, peak counts have fluctuated between 100 and 750. The level of flooding at the turlough seems to play a big part in the numbers of godwits using the site.

Once I got home, I searched the internet for a web site to log my sighting. The first site I tried was the University of East Anglia's godwit page <http://www.uea.ac.uk/~b026515/colourringing.html>, but for some reason the sightings form would not submit. The second site I tried was the International School Godwit Project page <http://www.scoliosaeafnaofa.com/Godwit.htm>,

which had a contact email address for the submission of sightings. This site is well worth a visit, as it explains the different ringing schemes used. As we move into autumn and the arrival of Black-tailed Godwits once again in Ireland, familiarisation with the schemes is to be recommended. I sent off the requested details to the email address and waited to see what sort of reply I would get. I wasn't disappointed. Jim Wilson of www.irishwildlife.net replied with the following information regarding sightings of "my" individual:

11.07.05 Brautarholt, Langhús, Fljót, N Iceland (ringed as a chick that day);
21.11.05 Cork Harbour, Co. Cork, Ireland;
05.01.06 Cork Harbour, Co. Cork, Ireland;
11.01.06 Cork Harbour, Co. Cork, Ireland;
07.03.06 Ouderkerk, Noord Holland, W Netherlands;
18.01.07 Monte Novo de Palma, Sado Estuary, Setúbal, W Portugal;
06.05.12 Rahasane Turlough, Co. Galway, S Ireland.

Jim had seen this bird on the three occasions it was spotted in Cork Harbour – what a small world.

It felt great to get such comprehensive information about the bird, and it shows what a widely travelled individual it is. I estimated that the bird had travelled around 8,000 miles to complete the records listed above during the years shown. Assuming an average of 4,000 mile a year, this bird has flown approximately 28,000 miles in its life to date. Astonishing.

It's records like this that really make birding worthwhile, and it's fascinating to think of Icelandic or Portuguese (or other Irish) birders watching a bird I've seen on an ordinary I-WeBS count in May. Please, keep your eyes peeled for colour-ringed Black-tailed Godwits in the autumn migration. If you are lucky enough to see one or more, you can submit your sightings to Jim Wilson at godwits@irishwildlife.net.

Pete Capsey



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SOME RECENT EVENTS

1. During Heritage Week, outing organised by Tom Cuffe, August 18th 2012, Nimmo's Pier, 10:30 to 12:30 approx. Low tide 12:16, sunny and calm, with a little cloud.

The turnout was a touch disappointing (I didn't note how many, mea culpa!), but, having said that, there were a few who were there because it was Heritage Week. 23 species were identified - Cormorant, Grey Heron, Mute Swan, gulls: Black-headed, Common, Herring, Great and Lesser Black-backed, Oystercatcher, Turnstone, Curlew, Dunlin, Bar-tailed Godwit, Ringed Plover, Hooded Crow, Jackdaw, Rook, Mallard, Swallow, House Martin, Feral Pigeon, Starling and Greenfinch.

2. The Small Wood, Rusheen Bay, September 15th 2012, 11:30 to 12:35 approx. Low tide 11:14, cloudy (mostly), wind westerly, force 2/3.

Tom C. was there when I arrived and as we were awaiting our guests, two men came from the Small Wood. We chatted - one asked had we heard a woodpecker drumming in Barna Woods. I think Tom's tonsils were more visible than mine as our chins hit our knees - though I'm not sure if I have any - tonsils that is! As of now, (19.10.2012), I'm unaware of any investigations, or results thereof.

10 people & 18 bird species in attendance. (One of the birds possibly shouldn't count for Rusheen. I was looking over to Silver Strand and one of the bits of sunshine we had hit its wings, no mistaking - a Gannet.) The other 17 species were Cormorant, Grey Heron, Little Egret, gulls: Black-headed, Common, Great Black-backed and Herring, Sandwich Tern, Bar-tailed Godwit, Curlew, Dunlin, Greenshank, Knot, Oystercatcher, Redshank, Ringed Plover and Hooded Crow.

3. The first 'First Saturday of the Month' of 2012/13

October 6th 2012, 10:30 to 11:50 approx. High tide 09:23, blue sky.

Very noisy - a charity run was centred on the Claddagh Hall. I got there before 10:00, and had a ramble to get a preview of what was around. I'd brought my telescope, etc. - mainly to give our members/guests a point of reference among the mayhem (Tom C. wouldn't be there with his 'scope). Ian Brophy was there before me but it took a while for us to 'connect'. I think we were both looking sideways at one another for a while; he broke the ice (I'm very shy!). Before Ian broke the ice, I was toward the end of the pier and spotted unusual movement in the water toward Ballyloughane. With my 'scope I saw 3 otters, one larger than the others - 1 Adult with 2 juveniles?

We, 9 of us, identified 19 species: Cormorant, Grey Heron, Mute Swan, Mallard, Red-breasted Merganser, Black-headed, Common, Great Black-backed, Herring and Ring-billed Gulls, Turnstone, Oystercatcher, Pied Wagtail, Feral Pigeon, Rook, Jackdaw, Rock Pipit, Goldfinch and Greenfinch.

Brendan Dunne

FEEDING THE BIRDS

Winter creeps up on us and the recent wet and cold spell and the clock going back means there is now no denying its presence. So, it is time to organise the bird feeders and keep them filled.

OSPREYS AND LOUGH CORRIB

Classed as a scarce passage migrant and potential breeding bird in Ireland, the future is looking up for the Osprey. Between 2001 and 2011, there were 11 birds recorded in County Galway. In 2012, there were five birds recorded in the county. Four of these were on Lough Corrib, with a fifth bird recorded at Rahasane. The small Co. Mayo section of Lough Corrib also held an Osprey for a number of days, bringing the total recorded on Lough Corrib this year to five birds. These are the recorded and verified sightings. Anecdotal sightings have also been received from fishermen on Lough Corrib. Due to the very low observer coverage in the west of Ireland, I firmly believe that the number of Ospreys using Lough Corrib is well in excess of the recorded numbers.

Roy Dennis is a name synonymous with the Osprey. He has studied Ospreys in Scotland and worldwide for over 50 years. In his book *A Life of Ospreys*, he chronicles in painstaking detail the recolonisation of Scotland by the Osprey. It is a story of persecution, relentless nest-robbing, countless setbacks and despair on one hand, coupled with the excitement of the bird's return and Roy's unparalleled knowledge and boundless enthusiasm on the other. The recolonisation started with a single pair in Loch Garten in Strathspey in the Scottish Highlands in 1954 and increased in subsequent years as follows:

1981 – 26 pairs;
1991 – 72 pairs;
1996 – 104 pairs;
2000 – 147 pairs;
2006 – a minimum of 184 pairs reared
at least 247 young;
2011 – RSPB UK estimate 250–300 pairs.

In 1996, Ospreys bred south of the Glasgow to Edinburgh boundary for the first time in centuries. In 1999, a pair attempted to breed in the Lake District but failed. They returned the following year to successfully breed. This was the first successful breeding of the Osprey in England for at least 150 years. Since 2004, Ospreys have been breeding in Wales. It is estimated that there are 40,000 to 50,000 pairs of Ospreys worldwide.

Left unmolested, the Osprey is a highly successful bird wherever it finds suitable breeding habitat. Ospreys, like all birds of prey, need two things to allow them to breed. One is a safe place to nest. The other is a sufficient supply of food. At a cursory glance Lough Corrib would appear to be perfect Osprey habitat. Ospreys build their own stick nests and re-use them year after year. Nests

used for a number of years can become enormous structures. Pines are the tree of choice and the nest is built in the crown. While proximity to a water body with a good supply of fish is important Ospreys have been known to nest up to 10km from their fishing grounds. A dead tree overlooking the water is also an important factor in choosing a nest site. Shallower water, such as that found in the lower basin of the Corrib and in the larger bays further north, is preferred for fishing as it is easier for the birds to see their prey.

Recolonisation tends to start with increased sightings of birds, birds staying longer in areas whilst on migration, summering of birds in suitable habitat and eventually failed or successful breeding attempts. This pattern occurred in some parts of Scotland over 60 years ago and is still happening in others. The early stages of this pattern are already evident in Ireland. Sightings have steadily increased over the last twenty years. Ospreys on migration are annual at certain sites, such as Lough Beg in Derry and Broad Lough in Wicklow. Birds have summered at Lough Beg in recent years.

The majority of Osprey sightings in Ireland occur in the last weeks of August and the first few weeks of September. Crucially, records from early spring are rare. Most successfully breeding Scottish Ospreys are back on their territories by the second week in April. On page 100 of Roy Dennis's book, a map detailing the northward spring migration route of a satellite-tracked Osprey jumps out at any reader from Galway. The path the bird has taken clearly follows that of Lough Corrib and the great lakes as the bird heads north on its way to its breeding grounds in Scotland or beyond. Equally noticeable is the timing of its passage, it having flown north through the west of Ireland in the first few days of April.

The provision of artificial nest platforms for Ospreys has been used worldwide to encourage Ospreys to breed. Ospreys have a remarkable ability to locate nests from the air. An Osprey flying high over Lough Corrib en route to breeding grounds in Scotland or Scandinavia might well be encouraged to stop off at a perfectly placed, well-constructed Osprey nest along the shores of the lake. Why keep flying north when there is perfect breeding habitat and a nest available here? The theory is that if the area met the breeding criteria for another Osprey then it must be suitable. I have heard Roy Dennis state that if you can get a migrating bird – even on its southward autumn migration – to show some interest in an artificial nest, then you have a extremely good chance of the bird returning to use the nest the following year. With this in mind there are plans afoot to construct some artificial nests on Lough Corrib over the coming months. Hopefully, the next article in the *Newsletter* about Ospreys will be a celebratory one!

Aonghus O Donail

BirdWatch Galway (Branch of BirdWatch Ireland) 3rd Quarter 2012

QUARTERLY BIRD REPORT COMPILED BY CHRIS PEPPIATT

DATE OF ISSUE: 18th February 2013

3rd July: 3 Long-eared Owl chicks, Pollagh, Rosscahill (Aonghus O'Donail).

16th July: 2 Great Shearwater, 3 miles West of Inishbofin (John Brittain).

18th July: 2 Roseate Tern, Loughaunbeg, Inveran (Aonghus O'Donail).

20th July: Wood Warbler, Inishshark (Anthony McGeehan).

29th July: 24 Mute Swan, 113 Mallard, Teal, 5 Little Egret, 16 Grey Heron, 2 Coot, Kestrel, 106 Curlew, 2 Common Sandpiper, 25 Black-headed Gull & 13 Lesser Black-backed Gull, Rahasane turlough (Pete Capsey).

30th July: Barn Owl, Clonfert (Helen Carty & Chris Peppiatt).

1st August: 60 Sooty Shearwater, Leaghcarrick Pier, Slyne Head (Dermot Breen).

4th August: Ad. Ring-billed Gull & Ad. Mediterranean Gull, Nimmo's Pier, Galway City (Tom Cuffe).

6th August: 25 Mute Swan, 241 Mallard, 4 Cormorant, 15 Little Egret, 15 Grey Heron, 2 Black-tailed Godwit, 53 Curlew, 38 Black-headed Gull, 2 Common Gull & 3 Lesser Black-backed Gull, Rahasane turlough (Pete Capsey).

10th August: Common Buzzard, Luimnagh West, Lough Corrib (Deirdre Comerford).

12th August: 2 eagle sp., Clifden Bay (Joe Hynes).

14th August: 3 (2 Ad. & Juv.) Spotted Flycatcher, Rahasane turlough (Pete Capsey).

17th August: Ruff & Peregrine, Truska marsh, Slyne Head (Dermot Breen).

19th August: Knot & 2 Ruff, Rahasane turlough (Dermot Breen).

24th August: Whimbrel, Inishbofin (Dara Fitzpatrick).

25th August: Pied Flycatcher, Inishbofin (Dara Fitzpatrick).

25th August: Ad. Mediterranean Gull, Nimmo's Pier, Galway City (Brad Robson).

26th August: 4 Knot, Ruff & Common Sandpiper, Rahasane turlough (Pete Capsey).

27th August: Blue-headed Wagtail, Inishbofin (Anthony McGeehan).

28th August: Peregrine, 3 Knot, Ruff, 3 Swift & Kingfisher, Rahasane turlough (Pete Capsey).

31st August: Juv. Long-tailed Skua, Silver Strand, Galway city (Aonghus O'Donail).

31st August: Spotted Redshank, Rahasane turlough (John Murphy).

31st August: unknown crane sp., Truska marsh, Slyne Head (Dermot Breen).

1st September: Osprey, Rahasane turlough (Tim Griffin).

2nd September: Fem./Juv. type Marsh Harrier, Rahasane turlough (Tom Cuffe). (1)

2nd September: Juv. Spotted Redshank & Juv. Ruff, Garraun, Nr. Rahasane turlough (Dermot Breen).

2nd September: 2 (Sub-Ad. male & female/Juv. type) Marsh Harrier, Muckrush, Lough Corrib (Aonghus O'Donail).

5th September: 2 Grey Phalarope, Mannin Bay, Ballyconneely (Martin O'Malley).

7th September: Pectoral Sandpiper, Rahasane turlough (Aonghus O'Donail).

8th September: Sparrowhawk & 21 Chough, Doonloughan, Nr. Ballyconneely (Miryam & Michael Harris).

9th September: 2 (Ad. Fem. & 1st yr. Male) Garganey, Juv. Spotted Redshank & Juv. Ruff, Rahasane turlough (Dermot Breen). (3)

10th September: Ortolan Bunting, Inishbofin (Craig Nash). (2)

10th September: Great Northern Diver, Blackrock, Salthill, Galway City (Penny Insole).

11th September: Osprey, Ballynalty Bay, Lough Corrib, Nr. Headford (Richard Robinson).

12th September: Eagle sp., Nr. Cashel (Stephanie Nic Dhonnchadha).

13th September: Juv. Long-tailed Skua, Leaghcarrick Pier, Slyne Head (Aonghus O'Donail).

15th September: Pectoral Sandpiper, Lough Barr an Phointe, Inishmore (Dermot Breen).

15th September: Ruff, Rahasane turlough (Pete Capsey).

15th September: 5 Fieldfare, Knocknacarra, Galway City (Aoife Boyd).

16th September: 2 Juv. Curlew Sandpiper, Kilcaimin (Dermot Breen).
18th September: Ad. American Golden Plover, Juv. Grey Plover & 80 Golden Plover, Truska, Nr. Ballyconneely (Dermot Breen). (4)
18th September: 3 Light-bellied Brent Goose, Grattan Beach, Salthill, Galway City (Brendan Dunne).
18th September: Spotted Flycatcher, Rahasane turlough (Pete Capsey).
19th September: "North-western" Redpoll, Inishbofin (Anthony McGeehan).
22nd September: 3 Little Egret, Mynish, Carna (Cillian Boyd).
24th September: Lapland Bunting, Truska, Nr. Ballyconneely (Dermot Breen).
24th September: Juv. American Golden Plover, Aillebrack, Nr. Ballyconneely (Dermot Breen). (4)
24th September: Osprey, Luimnagh West, Lough Corrib (Deirdre Comerford). (5)
27th September: Pied Flycatcher, Inishbofin (Dermot Breen).
29th September: 3 Ruff, Spotted Redshank, Curlew Sandpiper & Kingfisher, Rahasane turlough (Pete Capsey).
29th September: Whinchat, Slyne Head (Dermot Breen).
29th September: 2 Spotted Redshank, Tawnagh causeway, Doorus, Nr. Kinvara (Paul Troake).
30th September: Slavonian Grebe, Lough Inch, Nr. Barna (Chris Peppiatt).

NOTES:

- (1) The female/juvenile-type Marsh harrier was again present at Rahasane turlough on the 3rd of September 2012.
- (2) The Ortolan Bunting remained on Inishbofin until the 12th of September 2012.
- (3) The adult female Garganey was again present on the 15th of September 2012.
- (4) The adult American Golden Plover was again present at Truska on the 21st of September and had moved to Aillebrack on the 24th of September, when it was in company with a Juvenile (second) bird.
- (5) This Osprey was again present on the 25th of September. It is not known if this bird was the same as seen elsewhere on Lough Corrib on the 11th of September 2012.

OTHER BEASTIES:

10th September: Otter, Nimmo's Pier, Galway City (Penny Insole).

HIGHLIGHTS:

Ortolan Bunting (first Co. Galway record), Wood Warbler, 2 Pied Flycatcher, Blue-headed Wagtail, Whinchat, Lapland Bunting, 2 American Golden Plover, 2 Pectoral Sandpiper, 2 Roseate Tern, 2 Great Shearwater, 2 or 3 Osprey.

First Winter migrants: Great Northern Diver (10th September); Fieldfare (15th September); Brent Goose (18th September).