



CAIRDE EANLAITH NA GAILLIMHE BIRDWATCH GALWAY

www.birdwatchgalway.org
QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER – EDITOR: NEIL SHARKEY
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This is a local forum newsletter –
contributions and comments are
most welcome.
Distributed by e mail only

BRANCH MATTERS

We struggle on without a branch structure despite our many pleadings and expression of the need to get the branch going again to you, our Galway members, and to head office. In the meantime, we will continue with the first-Saturday-of-the-month Nimmo's Pier outings (first on Sat Sept 7th) and the I-WeBS counts, inc. those of Inner Galway Bay and Lower Lough Corrib.

Keep the faith!

NS

NIMMO'S STATISTICS

Brendan Dunne has sent me a partial list of species recorded during the winter just past. This list is attached. Brendan also asks if anyone has a list for some of the outings he missed. Thanks to Tom and Brendan for keeping those outings going. The first outing of the coming season will be at the usual 10.30 start on Saturday Oct 5th.

NS

HEADFORD'S FIRST DAWN CHORUS

To mark Biodiversity Week 2013 a group of brave souls dragged themselves out of bed to meet up at 5am at Greenfields, close to the causeway to Inchiquin Island. These intrepid bird watchers had by 7am a total of 33 different bird species, either been heard or seen. The small but varied area searched by the group yielded familiar summer visitors such as the Swallow but also three secretive warblers, two wading species and a tern. There were five species of corvids, four different finches, and even a goose! All 33 species are listed below.

Neil Sharkey pointed out the difference between the calls of the three warblers; the rich melodic, soft, clear warbling notes of the Blackcap, the loud, fast sequence of harsh grating chattering notes of the Sedge Warbler, and the thin, pleasant liquid notes of the Willow Warbler, which starts out softly, rises in pitch and then fades away. The calls of the Cuckoo and the Wood Pigeon were distinguished by listening carefully for the Cuckoo's 'cuc-coo' and the pigeon's 'cooo-cooo'.

The most exciting twitching moments were spotting a group of Whimbrel flying along the horizon and a Common Sandpiper. The Whimbrels were on their spring migration, moving north from wintering grounds in Africa to breeding grounds in Iceland and northern Europe. The sandpiper is a small wader that is at home on the edges of rocky water bodies, and was spotted resting on rocks but also flying low over the surface of the water.

Just as the group started to make its way back to the cars, an Arctic Tern was spotted making shallow dives into the water, presumably feeding on small fish. To reinforce the fact that it is generally much easier to watch birds than mammals, the only hint of the latter was the very strong fox scent picked up at one spot along the walk.

The event was enjoyably rounded off with a hot cup of tea.

Common Gull; Black-headed Gull
Willow Warbler; Sedge Warbler; Blackcap
Blackbird
Pheasant
Chaffinch; Greenfinch; Goldfinch; Linnet
Woodpigeon
Mallard
Wren
Goldcrest
Blue Tit
Cuckoo
Raven; Jackdaw; Hooded Crow; Rook
Starling
Greylag Goose
Cormorant
Whimbrel
Swallow
Mute Swan
Robin
Curlew
Common Sandpiper
Magpie
Pied Wagtail
Arctic Tern

The target for next year's Headford dawn chorus is 40 species!

Kate McAney
Headford Environment Group

LOOKING FOR THE UUGGHH FACTOR

As a Bird Watching Heritage Specialist visiting schools I come across a lot of children regarding some aspects of nature as "uugggh, that's disgusting". I try to get them to think in the opposite direction and say WOW rather the UGH and that all nature has the WOW factor. I am on the scrounge, believe it or not, and looking for a some UGH items.

What I am looking for is the **skulls of birds** to bring around to the class room. If you have any; great and even better if you know the species; if not, that's ok too. I'm also looking for **owl pellets**; if you come across any put them into a brown paper bag for storage. I can arrange collection.

Hopefully, the funding will remain in place through the Heritage Council and there are no more cuts to the Heritage in Schools Scheme, which will allow me to visit the schools of Galway and spread the good word about our avian fauna - with the WOW factor!

1Thank you and hope to see a few of ye at the next Nimmo's walk on October the 5th.

Tom Cuffe

ARCTIC MISSION

I work as a fisheries scientist with the Marine Institute in Oranmore. Part of my job involves taking part in acoustic surveys, usually on the RV *Celtic Explorer*, around Ireland and Scotland, and out to Rockall. These surveys use echo-sounding equipment to count shoaling fish such as herring and blue whiting. This May the opportunity arose to take part in a similar survey in the Norwegian

and Barents Seas. I was to join the Danish research vessel, the RV *Dana* in Tromso, Norway and spend two weeks at sea, generally heading North and West. I've been to Norway before, but this would be my first time above the Arctic Circle, 66° North. This would be a unique opportunity for some Arctic birding.

I had arranged for a colleague from the Norwegian Institute of Marine Research, the IMR, to give me a tour of Tromso. The northernmost city in the world, Tromso officially has the same population as Galway, but this is very spread out and includes the populations of nearby villages. There were a lot of gulls, as expected in any port town; however, there was a lot less variety than further south, with only **Common Gulls** and **Glaucous Gulls** to be seen. Several **Red-throated Divers** could be seen close to shore, along with **Mallard** and **Eiders**. There were also **Black Guillemots** close to the bridge. The usual House Sparrows, Blackbirds, Starlings and feral pigeons filled the streets, but there are fewer passerines in the North than in the rest of Europe. In the hills outside the city I saw some reindeer. Things felt very Arctic at that point!

The survey began the following afternoon. 24 hour sunlight meant birding could be carried out at any time. The trip began well with over a thousand **Puffins** at the mouth of the fjord as we departed. The sea was covered with them for hundreds of metres in every direction. Also coming from the cliffs and in the seas around were lots of other auks – **Razorbills**, **Guillemots**, and large numbers of **Little Auks**. Continuing out to sea we were joined by more Glaucous and Common Gulls, **Great and Lesser Black-backed Gulls**, **Kittiwakes** and **Fulmars**. About 30% of the Fulmars were blue phase birds, much more common than in the Irish population.

The next day, around 20 **Pomarine Skuas** circled the boat, later joined by two **Arctic Skuas**, less common than I would have expected. Several flocks of **Barnacle Geese** migrated past. **Whimbrel** flew by every couple of hours, and one **Merlin** joined us and stayed on board for three days before flying off.

Assorted gulls accompanied the boat as we continued surveying, occasionally joined by Pomarine and **Great Skuas**. The weather was very fine, with almost no wind. This meant we were ahead of schedule as we approached Bjornoya, Bear Island. We took the unique opportunity to go ashore. This island is part of the Svalbard archipelago. It is uninhabited, apart from a team of nine Norwegian meteorologists who spend six months at a time maintaining the weather station there. We brought them beer and they baked muffins for us. Visitors are rare, mostly from the Norwegian coastguard. There are very large auk colonies on the island, particularly of Guillemots and Puffins. Even though they nest in their thousands on the cliffs, we just saw one **Brunnich's Guillemot**; this was a first ever sighting for me. Although there are no trees or shrubs, there are **Tree Sparrows** on the island, and **Snow-Buntings** are as common as Robins are here. Also seen were **Rock Pipit**, **Meadow Pipit**, **Purple Sandpiper** and **Turnstone**. There



are **Red Phalaropes** on the lakes, but unfortunately, we didn't have time to explore this much of the island.

Back on the ship we were joined by a Snow Bunting and a Whimbrel, these stayed with the ship for 6 days until we finished in Hirtshals, Denmark, an unexpected migration of over 2000 km for them!

The return journey added **Long-tailed Skua**, **Gannet** and **Common Buzzard** (seen over land as we approached the Danish coast) to the trip.

Apart from birds there was plenty of marine mammal activity. Although there was just one sighting of a Minke Whale, we had multiple encounters with White-beaked and Bottlenose Dolphins, Orcas, Humpback Whales and Fin Whales.

While it may be thought that there were not many different bird species seen, the sheer number of some of them, e.g. thousands of Puffins on the water, is very different to what I usually see around the British Isles

Graham Johnston

MY BIRD GUIDES DOWN THROUGH THE YEARS

The date on which I acquired my first bird guide is quite fixed. It is inscribed on the inside cover of a gift from an aunt on the occasion of my confirmation on the 2nd of May, 1948. It is a thin volume of about 50 pages entitled:

*How to recognise British Wildbirds –
The Young Naturalist Series.*

For a book produced at the time of post-WW2 paper scarcity it is an excellent effort. Birds are divided by location 'Garden, Field and Wood' etc and there are four nicely coloured birds per page with about 150 birds in all described. The descriptions, in a lovely script typeface, are short and many a bit quaint by modern standards such as: *The Song Thrush and Blackbird are well known and need no description, but many people do not know that the hen Blackbird is brown and the young ones also.* The late Eamon de Buitléar in his autobiography *A Life in the Wild* mentions this book as being his earliest also – so I was in good company from the start!

Shortly afterwards, in or about the early 1950s, I acquired a copy of

The Observers Book of British Birds.

This is the guide that most of my generation of birdwatchers recall with nostalgia and great affection. It was the first 'proper' guide with a page per bird with a photograph of each bird and well set out description. There is no publication date but again WW2 print constraints are evident as only every other bird photo was in colour. Thus you had two pages with birds in colour and the following two in black and white. For many years I was better at identifying those birds that were the 'colour' ones in my *Observers* guide.

There followed a gap in my birdwatching until the early 1970s, at which stage I acquired two further guides:

*The Birds of Britain and Europe
by Heinzel, Fitter and Parslow (Collins)*

*The Hamlyn Guide to Birds of Britain and Europe
by Bruun, Campbell and Singer*

Both these guides are somewhat similar – soft covers, approx. four birds per page described, together with a European distribution map on one side and the bird drawings opposite. These were the first guides set out in what has become the now traditional bird guide format. The Collins guide has additional detailed distribution maps of England and Ireland at the back. Birds are listed in the sequence used by a Dutch ornithologist, Professor K.H. Voous, in his *List of recent holarctic bird species* (recent being 1977!), published by the British Ornithologists' Union.

My Hamlyn and Collins guides bear witness to long usage, both being battered and worn, with lots of sticky tape holding them together!

By the mid/late 1970s the guide to have was

*A Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe
by Roger Peterson, Guy Mountfort and P.A.D Hollom*

This was the serious birdwatcher's 'bible' with good definitive illustrations and descriptions of a high standard. My 1974 edition was, however, not a favourite with me – the bird illustrations and descriptions were in different places and the indexing was totally confusing. Thus, when you spotted your bird, consulting the Peterson was likely to cause a location crisis! This 3rd edition still had many of the bird illustrations in black and white whereas the 4th in 1983, proudly proclaimed 'All Birds in Colour!' For all this, it remained an excellent reference guide - the best of its period (provided you were not in a hurry locating a species!).

1979 saw the publication of my favourite guide of all time:

*The Mitchell Beasley Birdwatcher's Guide (RSPB)
by Peter Hayman*

This guide's plus is its compactness – it fits easily into a pocket, a rucksack or in Ryanair-constrained luggage – no small advantage. The illustrations are concise and imaginative, although the order in the early edition was a bit baffling. Birds were in the order of perching birds, game birds, predators and water birds and then by size within each category. The new 2002 edition – edited by Peter Hayman and Rob Hume - changed this to taxonomic order and this and its generally improved presentation made it, in my view, the ultimate portable guide.

In 2000, like the vast majority of serious birdwatchers, I acquired

Collins Bird Guide

by Mullarney, Svensson, Zetterstrom and Grant.

It is subtitled *The most complete field guide to the birds of Britain and Europe* and this is no idle claim. In many respects it quickly became the ultimate guide. No previous publication had come near it in comprehensiveness, standards of narrative and, above all, the excellence of its bird illustrations. It remains the standard book of reference in the birding world.

Finally, the digital era arrived and on my recently acquired smart phone I downloaded

The RSPB eGuide to British Birds

This excellent portable guide has first class illustrations, superb descriptions, maps, search facilities and bird song. What more can you ask for! If you have a smart phone consider getting it.

NS

CORNCRAKE

The count for calling Corncrakes in Galway-Mayo this years was:

North Mayo	28,
SW Mayo	5,
Connemara	27.

These encouraging figures are well up on 2012 and it is indeed welcome news from **Samuel Birch**

(Corncrake fieldworker).

I-WeBS

Just to remind I-WeBS counters that the 'season' starts again in September and runs on until March. Good luck with the counts!

To those of you who have not yet submitted last winter's records, **please** do so as soon as you have finished reading this *Newsletter* – the final analysis is waiting for YOUR count results.

I'm sure all of us are also looking forward to the publication of the new Atlas which, hopefully, will illustrate the benefits of all that counting effort.

NS

BirdWatch Ireland, Galway branch
'First Saturdays' - 'Winter' 2012/13

Nimmo's Pier, 10.30, for 1 hour approx.

(Compiled by Brendan Dunne, who missed **HALF !** the 8 outings . . . OOPS)

Total Species	41	6 Oct.	3 Nov.	5 Dec.	5 Jan.	2 Feb.	2 Mar.	6 Apr.	4 May	Days seen
People	per outing	9	6				26		17	
Nearest	Low tide to	1030	1324				1350		1355	
Species	per outing	19	28	0	0	0	27	0	23	
Red-throated diver			●							1
Great northern diver							●		●	2
Great crested grebe			●						●	2
Gannet									●	1
Cormorant		●	●				●		●	4
Shag			●						●	2
Grey heron		●	●				●			3
Mute swan		●	●				●		●	4
Brent goose			●				●			2
Mallard		●	●						●	3
Wigeon			●				●			2
Red-breasted merganser		●								1
Oystercatcher		●	●				●		●	4
Ringed plover			●				●			2
Turnstone		●	●				●			3
Dunlin							●			1
Redshank			●				●			2
Bar-tailed godwit			●				●			2
Curlew			●				●			2
Black-headed gull		●	●				●		●	4
Common gull		●	●				●			3
Mediterranean gull							●			1
Herring gull		●	●				●		●	4
Ring-billed gull		●	●							2
Great black-backed gull		●	●				●		●	4
Glaucous gull			●							1
Sandwich tern							●		●	2
Guillemot									●	1
Razorbill									●	1
Feral pigeon		●	●				●		●	4
Rock pipit		●	●				●			3
Pied wagtail		●					●		●	3
Magpie									●	1
Jackdaw		●	●				●		●	4
Rook		●	●				●		●	4
Hooded crow			●				●		●	3
Starling			●				●		●	3
House sparrow							●		●	2
Goldfinch		●								1
Greenfinch		●	●							2
Arctic tern									●	1
Otter		×								1

IFF anyone, who was on the outings I missed, has a list of species seen I would love to get a copy to fill in the blanks. jbrendunne@gmail.com

BirdWatch Galway (Branch of BirdWatch Ireland) 2nd Quarter 2013

QUARTERLY BIRD REPORT COMPILED BY CHRIS PEPIATT

DATE OF ISSUE: 20th November 2012

1st April: House Martin, Coole Lough, Nr. Gort (Chris Peppiatt).

1st April: 1st Win./Ad. Fem. Smew, Ballynakill Lough, Nr. Gort (Chris Peppiatt). (1)

1st April: Manx Shearwater, Inishmore ferry (Penny Insole).

1st April: 2 (Ad. & 1st win) Iceland Gull & Ad. Ring-billed Gull, again present, Nimmo's Pier.

5th April: American Coot, again present, Murlach, Nr. Ballyconneely. (2)

12th April: Cuckoo & Willow Warbler, Derreen, Maam (Dermot Breen).

12th April: Dipper, Boleyneendorrish River, Drumminacoosaun (Paul Troake).

13th April: 13 Crossbill, Sonnagh, Slieve Aughties (Paul Troake).

14th April: 3 Swallow, Williamstown (Liam O'Donohue).

18th April: 2 Wigeon, 10 Pintail, 5 Shoveler, Spotted Redshank (Summer plumage) & 125 Black-tailed Godwit, Rahasane turlough (Paul Troake).

19th April: 3 Whimbrel, Rusheen Bay, Galway City (Lucian Fasola).

20th April: Common Sandpiper, Lough na bhFaoilean Beag, Nr. Moycullen (Chris Peppiatt).

20th April: Corncrake, Middlequarter, Inishbofin (John Mercer).

20th April: 100 Manx Shearwater, Little Tern & 11 Purple Sandpiper, from Gentian Hill, Galway city (Lukasz Czajka).

22nd April: Male Golden Oriole, Inishbofin. (3)

23rd April: Swift, Coolanillaun, Menlo (Aonghus O'Donail).

23rd April: Grasshopper Warbler, Toormacnevin, Slieve Aughties (Paul Troake).

24th April: Sedge Warbler, Terryland, Galway City (Penny Insole).

26th April: Peregrine, Ballymore (Paul Troake).

27th April: 2 Barn Owl, Moyglass (Robin Leen).

28th April: Balearic Shearwater & Juv. Sabine's Gull, from Gentian Hill, Galway city (Lukasz Czajka & Marcin Pisula).

28th April: 2 Dipper (Ad. with chick), Ballynahinch Castle (Miryam & Michael Harris).

1st May: 2 White-tailed Eagle, Nr. Esker (Stephen Heery).

2nd May: Whitethroat, Toureen (Paul Troake).

2nd May: Yellowhammer, Cloghboley (Paul Troake).

3rd May: Great Skua, Salthill, Galway city (Brendan Dunne).

4th May: Corncrake, calling on Inishbofin (Des Higgins).

5th May: 5 (1 on nest & 2 pairs mating) Lapwing, Ballinderreen turlough (Paul Troake).

6th May: Reed Warbler, Ballyconneely (Miryam & Michael Harris).

7th May: Corncrake, calling on Inishbofin (Manus Curran).

9th May: 40 Whimbrel, Inchiquin, Lough Corrib (Neil Sharkey).

16th May: 8 (4 pairs displaying) Common Scoter, Lough Corrib, Nr. Oughterard (John Meade).

17th May: 14 Brent Goose, Mannin Bay, Nr. Ballyconneely (Miryam & Michael Harris).

17th May: 6 Lapwing (Pair & 4 chicks), Aillebrack, Ballyconneely (Miryam & Michael Harris).

17th May: Spotted Flycatcher, Oughterard (Steve Bierley).

18th May: Corncrake, Inverin/Indreabhán (Labhaoise & Ruaidhrí Ó Béarra). (4)

18th May: Jack Snipe, Oughterard (Miryam & Michael Harris).

18th May: White-billed Diver, one mile South of Inishbofin (John Brittain). (5)

19th May: Pair Red-breasted Merganser, Lough Aughwoolia (Chris Peppiatt).

26th May: Great Northern Diver & 100+ Manx Shearwater, Spiddal (Neil Ellis).

31st May: Pair Red-breasted Merganser, Lough Glenicmurrin (Chris Peppiatt).

2nd June: 3 Great Northern Diver, 130 Manx Shearwater, 4 Storm Petrel, Arctic Skua & 2 Arctic Tern, Gentian Hill, Galway city (Lukasz Czajka).

9th June: Corncrake with 13 chicks, Doorus, Kinvara (Micheál Ó Mainín).

12th June: Male Common Scoter, Lough Corrib, Nr. Inchiquin (Neil Sharkey).
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30th June: Great Shearwater & Blue-phase Fulmar, off Inishbofin (John Brittain).
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NOTES:

(1) The Smew was again present on the 9th of April.

(2) The American Coot from November 2012 was present throughout the first quarter of 2013 and was present at the Murlach until at least the 13th of April.

(3) The Golden Oriole was again seen on the 23rd of April and was later picked up dead on the 1st of May (John Mercer).

(4) This Corncrake was calling until the 23rd of May at least.

(5) The White-billed Diver was also seen on the 21st-23rd May.

HIGHLIGHTS:

American Coot, Golden Oriole, Balearic Shearwater, Sabine's Gull, White-billed Diver, Great Shearwater.

First Summer migrants: House Martin (1st April), Manx Shearwater (1st April), Cuckoo (12th April), Willow Warbler (12th April), Swallow (14th April), Whimbrel (19th April), Common Sandpiper (20th April), Corncrake (20th April), Little Tern (20th April), Swift (23rd April), Grasshopper Warbler (23rd April), Sedge Warbler (24th April), Whitethroat (2nd May), Great Skua (3rd May), Reed Warbler (6th May), Spotted Flycatcher (17th May), Arctic Skua (2nd June), Arctic Tern (2nd June).

OTHER BEASTIES:

25th April: 2 Otter, Lough Inch, Nr. Bearna (Brendan Power).

28th May: Beaked Whale, female, possibly Sowerby's or True's, beached dead at Aillebrack, Ballyconneely (Dermot Breen).