



**BIRDWATCH IRELAND - GALWAY BRANCH**  
**QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER**  
**Editor Neil Sharkey 086 1680856**

This is a local forum newsletter – contributions and comments are most welcome.  
Distributed by e mail only

**GENERAL MATTERS**

Welcome to the latest BirdWatch Galway newsletter. More by chance than design it could well be described as an American Special Edition. Kansas birdwatching is well described by Ronan O Carra who honed his early birdwatching skills with Galway Young Birdwatchers many years ago – it was really encouraging that he should contact me and offer to contribute. Mark O Mahony did not take it amiss when I 'ambushed' him in a city coffee shop to write up a piece on his Florida and other US locations. Finally, Dermot Breen covers warblers in Ohio and Michigan and for his constant support in issue after issue I am most grateful.

As for other matters – we have already held three Nimmo's outings, with circa 20 people the average attendance. There is a notification e-mail list for these monthly outings; if you would like to be included just mail me. Why not join us at the pre-Christmas one on December 6<sup>th</sup>.

The Corrib and Galway Bay counts are due on Saturday 15 and Sunday 23 November respectively; if you would like to help with these, again, just mail (for the Corrib) Marianne at [marianntencate@gmail.com](mailto:marianntencate@gmail.com) and/or (for Galway Bay) Chris at [chris.peppiatt@iol.ie](mailto:chris.peppiatt@iol.ie).

Finally, early as it may be, it is my only opportunity to wish all a very happy Christmas and good birdwatching into 2015.

NS

**BIRDING IN THE USA**

My wife is from the USA and each year or so we make the trip over to visit the in-laws. The USA teems with so much wildlife that you almost begin to tire of it. This year's trip brought me close to Ospreys, Bald Eagles, the magnificent Frigatebird (which looks more like a batman emblem floating in the sky than a real bird), the gorgeous Eastern Bluebird, Yellow-billed Cuckoos, Red-bellied & Golden-fronted Woodpeckers, Shrikes, Egrets, Ibis, Hawks, Tree frogs, Cicadas, Alligators, almost the entire list of herons and seabirds, as well as a beautiful new addition to my list: the Sandhill Crane. I should note here that, ironically, I am a birdwatcher who does not get to spend too much time bird watching - especially in Ireland where life for me has become so busy. However, I find a trip to the US offers the opportunity to merge birding into everyday life because there is so much to see in so many ordinary places. Every bird I saw on this trip was observed not in conservation resorts but in the everyday company of a host of family members who wouldn't necessarily be considered the bird-watching type. We sat in a restaurant one afternoon on a pier in Cape Canaveral, Florida, and I watched Ospreys fish while eating lunch. Later, I lay on the beach while observing a soaring Frigatebird among the pelicans. In Georgia, I sat on the front porch in a swing chair and watched woodpeckers, bluebirds and cuckoos in front of the house, while in the evening time, tree frogs came up out of the garden and surrounded us. There are birds everywhere. In Disneyworld, Great Egrets and White Ibis will hassle you for crumbs at your restaurant table, while the sky is rarely free from the silhouettes of vultures, hawks and eagles. If you keep your eyes peeled to the skies you may even spot a flock of hawks migrating, which they do in huge numbers in the Americas. Sibley's guide was both a

masterpiece of artwork as well as an excellent guide. Put the US on your bucket list!

Mark O Mahony

**ADMISSIONS OF A BAD BIRDWATCHER**

Looking out my window with my early morning cuppa last week I watched two Little Egrets fly past on their way to somewhere. I reflected on my good fortune to be living close to the sea and remembered the excitement about 8 years ago when I first saw a Little Egret in Tawin. A passing squad car pulled alongside to ask what was I up to. My excited account of this then uncommon bird failed to grab the guards' attention and with a hohum "whatever" they drove away. These days I get most of my birding enjoyment watching everyday events around my home. The past winter saw regular murmurations of starlings over Maree and the kind spring and summer produced many clutches of LBJs (Little Brown Jobs) in the garden. I have a feeding tray atop a tall pole where gulls and Hooded Crows are daily visitors to avail of a free disposal service for food waste that cannot go in my compost heap. These huge birds show extraordinary flying skills as they manoeuvre to land on the small tray. Our garden pond is busy every day with bathing Blackbirds, finches and Starlings which I can watch close up by sitting very still. Out on the sea Cormorants, divers, Red-breasted Mergansers and terns go about their business and come September we get great pleasure from the first flights of Brent Geese. I will never get a mega rarity and I really don't care .....I probably could not identify it anyway, even if it landed on my lap.

Joe Smith

**BARN OWL**

Possibly because of my long involvement with birdwatching in Galway, hardly a week goes by without getting some query or bird-related question. Of all birds the Barn Owl comes up most often – 'I saw one while driving late at night' or 'Where can I see one?' Sadly, to the second question I can only say that in these parts seeing one is not an everyday happening, although we are lucky to have John Lusby to keep us informed and up to date on this unique bird here in Galway and elsewhere in Ireland. However, as a consolation, here is a beautiful and poetic description of this elusive bird from my recently rediscovered book '**Birds of the Wayside and Woodland**', published first in 1937. It is a bit old-fashioned in description in places but none the worse for that.

*Barn Owl – Tyto alba alba*

*The White or Barn Owl is a resident. It is the best known of all the owls, for it is more frequently associated with human habitations than other species. It is often described as white, the underparts being mostly noticeable when, with desultory flight, it reels and wavers through the dusk. Crepuscular and nocturnal in its habits, it eludes observation: it appears, a noiseless shadow, and vanishes at once, for its soft pinions make no sound. The ordinary note is a hiss, first heard when the downy young, perched outside the nesting hole, continually call for food. In young the*

*hiss deepens into a snore, but the usual call of the adult bird is a loud weird scream or screech, from which the birds gets the name of Screech Owl. During its nightly rounds, for it has regular beats, it screeches repeatedly, a habit calculated to discount the advantage gained by its silent flight. No nest is made, but four to eight, or even more, white eggs are often placed on a layer of dry pellets among the rafters of a barn, house, church tower or other building, or in a hollow tree, or crevice in a rock. They are laid usually in April, and although laid at intervals of several days are incubated at once; thus eggs and young of varying age are found in the nest at the same time. A second brood is usual, and eggs in December are recorded. The young at first are clad in thick white down.*

*The colour of the upper parts is orange-buff, vermiculated with grey, and spotted with a few grey spots. Round the eyes the facial disc is rusty, and the white bill is almost hidden by a double ridge of white feathers. The legs are clothed down to the feet with white hair-like feathers; the toes are dusky, the claws brown, the irides almost black.*

NS

**OHIO & MICHIGAN 2014**

I decided to take myself State-side for a little bit of warbler watching to the self-titled "Warbler Capital of the World" - Magee Marsh in Ohio. I joined a Birdfinders Tour group which would be visiting the area at the peak time of warbler migration. While on my first trip to the States in Florida back in November 2012 I had seen a respectable thirteen species of warbler that were either wintering or just late in departing for more southern climes for the winter. I wanted to catch up on some of the other east coast warbler species and to see them in all their summer finery - I wasn't to be disappointed. A birding festival was being run at the same time, called "The Biggest Week in American Birding". This attracted hundreds of birders daily to Magee; in fact, I've never seen so many birders in one spot before.

I flew from Dublin to Cleveland via Philadelphia where I met up with four English birders and our tour leader James P. Smith. James is originally from Sheffield, UK, but has been living in the States for a number of years. We spent the next five nights in the nearby small town of Port Clinton which is along the southern shore of Lake Erie. It was only a short drive to Magee Marsh from there. Magee Marsh consists of a small wet woodland along the shore of the lake where large numbers of migrants rest and feed up before covering the 45km lake-crossing. The warblers can be seen extremely well and at close range along the wooden boardwalk or in the vegetation along the beach.

In Galway, on a good Spring day, you might be lucky to see at most six species of, let's be honest, very drab and boring looking warbler species. On our first full day at Magee we managed to see twenty-three species! More impressive of all though was the range and intensity of the colours. Some of the warbler highlights for me there included Magnolia, Blackburnian, Blue-winged, Black-throated Green, Wilson's and Canada Warblers. Of course, warblers weren't the only birds on migration with species like Black-billed Cuckoo, Warbling Vireo, Veery, Swainson's Thrush, Scarlet Tanager and Grey Catbird all on



**BIRDWATCH IRELAND - GALWAY BRANCH  
QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER  
Editor Neil Sharkey 086 1680856**

This is a local forum newsletter – contributions and comments are most welcome.  
Distributed by e mail only

the move at the same time. At times, the trees and bushes along the boardwalk would be so full of birds it could be difficult to know where to start looking.

On the other end of the colour spectrum were the ten species of flycatchers and thirteen species of sparrows seen during the trip which took a little bit of work to figure out. Another highlight from Magee were the nesting American Woodcock. Two females were sitting on eggs within metres of the car park. They had a five metre buffer zone marked off around them but were perfectly satisfied to sit right there in front of large admiring crowds. The “parking lot” even had its own breeding pair of Bald Eagles which afforded great views.

Visits to nearby parks and reserves produced a great variety of birds like Trumpeter Swan, Wood Duck, Sandhill Crane, Solitary Sandpiper, Red-necked Phalarope, Bonaparte’s Gull, Caspian Tern, Eastern Screech Owl, Chimney Swift, Hairy Woodpecker, Marsh Wren, White-breasted Nuthatch, Buff-bellied Pipit and Cedar Waxwing. After five days we left Ohio and headed north to Michigan for two nights with the main aim of seeing the near-threatened Kirtland’s Warbler. This species is largely confined to its breeding grounds in Michigan but winters in the Bahamas. Its two main threats are loss of its specialised habitat of small Jack Pines and nest parasitism by Brown-headed Cowbirds. It has made a decent recovery in recent years and now has a world population of 5,000. We managed to get excellent views of several birds near the town of Grayling. We had a light dusting of snow on the same morning which must have been a shock to the freshly arrived Kirtland’s only back from the balmy Bahamas!

Another brilliant migration hotspot that we visited while in Michigan was Tawas Point on the western shore of Lake Huron. This area was in middle of its own birding festival at the time as well. More great warblers were seen here, including species that were only seen in very low numbers at Magee but were quite common here, i.e. Nashville and Orange-crowned Warblers. We saw our only Golden-winged Warbler of the trip at this site, another highlight.

Our last day of the trip saw us back down south again at Magee Marsh for one last look at this fantastic site. It was nice to bird the area with much reduced numbers of birders as “The Biggest Week” was now over. We finished up the trip here with a very late Fox Sparrow which was our last addition to the trip list. In total I saw 169 species, 30 of which were warblers. I took plenty of photos on the trip which can be seen by accessing [dermotbreen@blogspot.ie](mailto:dermotbreen@blogspot.ie)

**Dermot Breen**

**I-WeBS**

The I-WeBS wetland counts are now under way, even if water levels so far have resulted in low or nil counts. Helen Boland from BWI HQ has recently mailed all involved a detailed summary of last year’s results which makes very interesting reading. If for any reason anyone involved, including Galway Bay and Corrib counters, has not received this, you might contact me and I will let Helen know. In the meantime, good counting!

**NS**

**LETTERS FROM THE OTHER MID-WEST**

Having been birdwatching most of my life in the confines of County Galway, I now find myself living in the hinterland of the United States. Kentucky is about the same size as Ireland but seemingly without a natural lake to its name (although they do have a number of dammed rivers) and it’s an eight hour drive to the coast. It can be divided into three parts. The eastern parts are on the edge of the Appalachian Mountains, the central area has the rolling bluegrass landscape and the western state contains the lowlands that are greatly influenced by the Mississippi and Ohio rivers. These allow for a good variation in birdlife with Kentucky playing host to over 350 species of which approximately 150 breed in the state.

The best times for birding here are during the spring and fall migration. For one, the weather is then conducive to birding, not like the extremes of winter (-15 C) and summer (40 C); secondly, it is when the greatest variety of birds can be seen. The big difference in comparison to home is that one spends time preparing for the oncoming of spring by familiarizing oneself with the songs of the birds. There is quite a lot of tree coverage so you may only get to see birds for a few seconds; therefore, you need to depend on the songs that are sung. As the warblers can be high in the trees you also have to learn undertail patterns as this can be the only view you have.

There is a lot of weather watching during spring migration where you look for winds from the south hitting in to bands of rain from the north. This can lead to the much sought after “fall-outs”: migrating birds flying north hit a wall of bad weather and drop down to any available tree. This spring I happened on to one of these occasions where I had trees full of spectacularly coloured Scarlet Tanagers, six males on one branch, numerous Baltimore Orioles and multiple species of warblers. I had 40 species from the one spot. It was a sight to behold.

With birding over here one comes to use a vernacular, although I more tolerate it than use it, that I was not used to. The terms life list, lifer (bird never seen before), FOY (first of the year), FOS (first of the season) and state/county bird were not something I had much interest in remembering but for some it seems to be a competitive thing. eBird does all my recording for me now, which is just as well as I was never a good note taker so all I need to do is try and remember all those birds that I saw back home over all my years of birdwatching so I can add them to my life list.

Birding here has been very different, from the back garden birds, who won’t touch bread you put out (maybe that says more about the bread), to being on a flyway where the majority of migrants pass through where you only get to see them for a couple of weeks in the year. There will be more detail on those differences and what birds I am seeing in future articles.

**Ronan O Carra**

**BIRDS IN DISTRESS**

Other queries I regularly get are from callers who have found a wounded or sick bird. For help with such issues I recommend the site [www.irishwildlifematters.ie](http://www.irishwildlifematters.ie). This site has a wide range of information on sick birds and indeed all common mammals. It also has contact details for

NPWS and other conservation- oriented bodies. It is overall an excellent source of information and reflects great credit on those who organised it.

**PHOTOGRAPHS**

In the final column I have included some photographs taken by Dermot Breen during his visit to Ohio and Michigan. It must have been warbler heaven, Dermot. Many thanks and well done!

**NS**



**SCARLET TANAGER**



**GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLER**



**WILSON'S WARBLER**



**KIRTLAND'S WARBLER**



**BALTIMORE ORIOLE**

## BirdWatch Galway (Branch of BirdWatch Ireland) 3rd Quarter 2014

QUARTERLY BIRD REPORT COMPILED BY CHRIS PEPIATT

DATE OF ISSUE: 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2015

9th July: 2 Roseate Tern, Mutton Island, Galway city (Tom Cuffe).

9th July: 1st yr. Little Gull, Caranavoodaun turlough (Paul Troake).

11th July: near albino Great Northern Diver (presumed returning bird), Tully Pier, Renvyle (Dermot Breen).

16th July: Balearic Shearwater & Storm Petrel, between Silver Strand and Bearna Pier (Chris Peppiatt).

17th July: Fem. Red-breasted Merganser & 10 chicks, Lough Corrib, Inchiquin, Nr. Headford (Neil Sharkey).

18th July: 4-5 Spotted Flycatcher (3 Juv. & 1-2 Ad.), Toureen (Paul Troake).

31st July: 2 Little Tern & Sanderling, Traught (Cathal Forkan).

2nd August: Ad. Ring-billed Gull & Ad. Mediterranean Gull, Nimmo's Pier, Galway city (Cathal Forkan).

4th August: Juv. Mediterranean Gull, Nimmo's Pier, Galway city (Tom Cuffe).

4th August: Sooty Shearwater, Bearna Pier (Cathal Forkan).

15th August: 2 Garganey, 8 Swift, Kingfisher & Ruff, Rahasane turlough (Paul Troake). (1)

16th August: 2 Ruff, Muckrush, Lough Corrib (Cathal Forkan & Dermot Breen).

16th August: 13 Ruff, Glenamaddy turlough (Cathal Forkan & Dermot Breen).

18th August: 2 Grey Plover, Black-tailed Godwit & Whimbrel, Rusheen Bay, Galway city (Neil Ellis).

19th August: 25 Ruff, Glenamaddy turlough (Graham Mitchell).

20th August: Slavonian Grebe (moulting out of summer plumage), Ardfry (Paul Troake).

22nd August: 2 Common Buzzard, Oranmore (Martin O'Malley).

24th August: Green Sandpiper, Lydacan turlough (Paul Troake).

24th August: Green Sandpiper & Whooper Swan, Caherglassaun turlough (Paul Troake).

26th August: Juv. Sabine's Gull, between Silver Strand and Bearna Pier (Chris Peppiatt).

29th August: 6-10 Storm Petrel, Silver Strand, Galway city (Paul Troake).

30th August: Ad. Win. Mediterranean Gull, Nimmo's Pier, Galway city (Cathal Forkan).

30th August: Juv. Mediterranean Gull, Grattan Road, Salthill, Galway city (Cathal Forkan).

30th August: Juv. Sabine's Gull, Gentian Hill, Galway city (Marcin Pisula).

1st September: Spotted Redshank, Ardfry (Martin O'Malley).

2nd September: Black Tern, Claddaghduff (Susan Flynn).

3rd September: Yellow Wagtail, Aillebrack Lough, Ballyconneely (Dermot Breen).

3rd September: Curlew Sandpiper, Crompaun Bay, Ballyconneely (Dermot Breen).

3rd September: Spotted Redshank, Whimbrel, Grey Plover, Black-tailed Godwit & 3 Greenshank, Rusheen Bay, Galway city (Neil Ellis).

5th September: 10,000 Swallow, roosting at Angliham, Lough Corrib (Aonghus O'Donail).

5th September: Leach's Petrel, Inishmore (Paul & Andrea Kelly).

6th September: Ortolan Bunting, Murlach, Ballyconneely (Julien Mazenauer). (2)

6th September: Juv. Little Gull, 1st Win. Mediterranean Gull & Sanderling, Bearna Pier (Cathal Forkan).

6th September: Great White Egret, Angliham, Lough Corrib (Aonghus O'Donail & Michael Davis).

6th September: Hoopoe, Inis Meáin (Ruth & John-Robert Grogan).

7th September: Juv. Pectoral Sandpiper & Lapland Bunting, Crompaun Bay, Ballyconneely (Dermot Breen).

7th September: Curlew Sandpiper, Rusheen Bay, Galway city (Marcin Pisula).

8th September: White-tailed Eagle, Clydagh, Lough Corrib (Pat McGrath).

8th September: Common Buzzard, Kilkerrin, Ballinasloe (Cathal Divilly).

10th September: Juv. Little Gull, 1st Win. Mediterranean Gull & Sanderling, Bearna Pier (Cathal Forkan).

10th September: Fem. & Imm. Red Grouse, Bunnagippaun, Nr. Oughterard (Marianne ten Cate).

|  |
|--|
| 10th September: Green Sandpiper, Greenshank & Ruff, Caranavoodaun turlough (Paul Troake).  |
| 10th September: 2 Ruff & Common Buzzard, Rahasane turlough (Andrew McKeever).  |
| 12th September: Little Stint & 2 Ruff, Muckrush, Lough Corrib (Paul Troake).   |
| 12th September: Grey Phalarope, Spiddal (Ruairi Ó Beára).  |
| 12th September: 2 Juv. Curlew Sandpiper, Lough Rusheen, Galway city (Aonghus O'Donaill).   |
| 12th September: Juv. Little Stint (ringed) & 1st Win. Mediterranean Gull, Bearna Pier (Cathal Forkan). (3)   |
| 12th September: 3,000 Starling, roosting near Menlo Pier, Lough Corrib (Chris Peppiatt).   |
| 13th September: 2 (Juv. & Ad.) Spotted Redshank & 5 Juv. Curlew Sandpiper, Kilcaimin (Dermot Breen).   |
| 13th September: 4 Juv. Ruff, Rahasane turlough (Dermot Breen).   |
| 13th September: Juv. Curlew Sandpiper, Bearna Pier (Cathal Forkan).  |
| 13th September: Lapland Bunting & Short-eared Owl, Brannock Island, off Inishmore (Sean Pierce).   |
| 14th September: Juv. Curlew Sandpiper, Lough Rusheen, Galway city (Cathal Forkan).   |
| 15th September: 3 Yellowhammer, Cloghboley (Paul Troake).  |
| 15th September: Kingfisher, Bridge Lough, Nr. Traught (Paul Troake).   |
| 15th September: Yellowhammer, Owenbristy, Nr. Ardrahan (Paul Troake).  |
| 15th September: Wood Warbler, Inishbofin (Anthony McGeehan). (4)   |
| 16th September: 3 Pectoral Sandpiper, Truska, Slyne Head (Dermot Breen).   |
| 17th September: Little Stint, Lough Rusheen, Galway city (Cathal Forkan).  |
| 17th September: Yellow-browed Warbler, Coolagh, Nr. Menlo, Galway city (Clive Mellon & Dave Allen).  |
| 17th September: 1-2 Green Sandpiper, Greenshank, Black-tailed Godwit, 34 Wigeon, 63 Teal & 2 Grey Wagtail, Caranavoodaun turlough (Paul Troake).   |
| 18th September: Wilson's Petrel, Pomarine Skua, Great Shearwater, 10 Meadow Pipit, 3 Wheatear & White Wagtail, from the R.V. Celtic Explorer, 170 nautical miles west of Slyne Head on the Porcupine Bank (Niall Keogh). |
| 19th September: 2 Spotted Redshank & Juv. Curlew Sandpiper, Kilcaimin (Paul Troake).   |
| 20th September: 5 Ruff, Little Stint, 2 Curlew Sandpiper & Spotted Redshank, Lough Rusheen, Galway city (Ted Little & Neil Ellis).   |
| 21st September: Pied Flycatcher & 2 Curlew Sandpiper, Inishmore (Dermot Breen).  |
| 21st September: Whinchat, Inishbofin (Anthony McGeehan).   |
| 21st September: 2 Little Stint, 2 Curlew Sandpiper, 2 Ruff & 2 Knot, Muckrush, Lough Corrib (Aonghus O'Donaill).   |
| 21st September: Grey Phalarope & Little Gull, Silver Strand, Galway city (Marcin Pisula).  |
| 23rd September: White-tailed Eagle, Clydagh, Lough Corrib (per Andrew Gregory).  |
| 23rd September: Juv. Pectoral Sandpiper, Doonloughaun Bridge, Ballyconneely (Dermot Breen).  |
| 23rd September: Short-toed Lark, Truska, Ballyconneely (Dermot Breen). (5)   |
| 24th September: Pectoral Sandpiper, 2 Little Stint & 2 Curlew Sandpiper, Muckrush, Lough Corrib (Aonghus O'Donaill).   |
| 24th September: 2 Common Buzzard, Tynagh (Conor O'Brien).  |
| 25th September: Ad. Mediterranean Gull, Waterside, Galway city (Marcin Pisula).  |
| 26th September: Yellow-browed Warbler & Pied Flycatcher, Conneely's Garden, Slyne Head (Aonghus O'Donaill).  |
| 28th September: Reed Warbler & Pied Flycatcher, Slyne Head (Dermot Breen).   |
| 28th September: 2 Curlew Sandpiper, Rusheen Bay, Galway city (Tom Cuffe).  |
| 28th September: Pectoral Sandpiper, Curlew Sandpiper, 3 Ruff & Fem. Hen Harrier, Muckrush, Lough Corrib (Aonghus O'Donaill).   |
| 28th September: Yellow-browed Warbler, Menlo, Galway city (Marcin Pisula).   |
| 30th September: 3 Spotted Redshank, 4 Knot & 2 Curlew Sandpiper, Kilcaimin (Paul Troake).  |

**NOTES:**

- (1) The two Garganey were also present at Rahasane turlough on the 24<sup>th</sup> of August.
- (2) This Ortolan Bunting was also present on the 7<sup>th</sup> of September; second Co. Galway record.
- (3) The ringed Bearn Pier Little Stint was also present on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> of September.
- (4) The Wood Warbler was also present on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September.
- (5) The Short-toed Lark was the first record for Co. Galway.

**HIGHLIGHTS:**

Short-toed Lark, Ortolan Bunting, Hoopoe, Wood Warbler, Wilson's Petrel, Balearic Shearwater, Great Shearwater, 2 Sabine's Gull, 2 Garganey, Reed Warbler, Lapland Bunting, 4-7 Pectoral Sandpiper & 3 Yellow-browed Warbler.