



## CAIRDE EANLAITH ÉIREANN GALWAY

[www.birdwatchgalway.org](http://www.birdwatchgalway.org)

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER – EDITOR: NEIL SHARKEY

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Issue No. 90 - August 2015

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

### LOCAL MATTERS

In many ways September is the start of the birdwatching year with the departure of summer migrants and the arrival of winter visitors. It also is the commencement of our Nimmo's Pier outings, with the first on **Sat September 5<sup>th</sup>** and the next on **Sat October 10<sup>th</sup>** (to avoid the annual road race on the 3<sup>rd</sup>!) back to the first Saturday of the month on **Sat November 7<sup>th</sup>**. There will also be various I-WeBS counts getting under way.

Apart from these there is Heritage Week from 22<sup>nd</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> August – look it up on [www.heritage-week.ie](http://www.heritage-week.ie). There are lots of Galway events.

NS

### BIRDS OF ARMENIA

Most will have heard of Armenia at least by name and probably, even if only vaguely, of the 'Armenian massacres' - a consequence of Turkey's involvement in WW1. An ancient people and early adopters of Christianity, although separate from the Roman or Orthodox churches, in Roman times and up to early Middle Ages it was a large important nation but the 1916 massacres were a terrible final low point in a long long decline from their periods of greatness. After WW1 the heartland part of greater Armenia became a small Soviet republic firmly in the grip of Moscow. Circa 1990, with the USSR break-up, it became an independent state, although it retains strong and friendly links with Russia. Following independence it fought a bitter war with its neighbour Azerbaijan over disputed territory and although there is a truce it is still very much unresolved. Thus the long borders with that country and, for historical reasons, also with Turkey are strictly closed. So Armenia's only open borders are to Georgia to the north and a small single road opening to Iran in the south-east. In our terms, Armenia is about the size of Munster with a population of about three million, although there is a huge Armenian diaspora of between five and seven million world-wide, particularly in Russia, Iran, France and the United States. It is relatively poor with few resources and a GDP per head about one twentieth of that of Ireland. This is not helped by its essentially mountainous, upland terrain with overall an average elevation of 1,800 metres.

It was here that a small group us went in May 2014, mainly with the purpose of visiting the early and later Christian churches and monasteries for which Armenia is rightly famous. Thus birds were not at all to the fore as the rest of the party had only a passing interest, although they always supported my effort to build up a list as we went from place to place.

So I had to grab opportunities when they arose, with a pair of binoculars and a *Birds of Armenia* guide book.

We arrived from Dublin, via Paris, in the capital Yerevan. This city of about one million belies the underdeveloped state of the rest of the country. It was laid out in 'Soviet' style grandeur in the 1920s with wide splendid plazas, many magnificent buildings and statues everywhere. The general ambience of the place is one of friendliness and informality. Shops are modest and of course you are totally free of world brand businesses – no McDonald's or the like. Food and dining out is very good value - an evening meal of three or four courses costing about ten euro.

Nationally, Armenia has an interesting bird list and because of its compact size is an excellent place to see near-eastern or Caucasian species especially up-land birds and raptors. However, that was not my lot; as I have already said, it was a matter of here and there opportunities. In fact, many on my list were our own everyday birds – Blackbirds, House Sparrows, Swallows etc. Especially numerous were Swifts, including Alpine Swifts, and also Crag Martins. On one outing, walking through a long ravine bounded by spectacular cliffs, there were House Martins in their thousands. I've never seen anything like it for numbers - five thousand! ten thousand! – impossible to say and I'm not exaggerating! They were obviously nesting in the cliffs – an incredible sight. A lot of our travels were through high mountains and uplands where I saw an Imperial Eagle, Long-legged Buzzard, Lesser Kestrel, Red Kite, Peregrine Falcon and a Griffon Vulture. I also had Common and Black Redstart, Black-eared and Isabelline Wheatear and Red-backed Shrike. A particularly good tick was an Alpine Accentor on the edge of a high mountain lake. Waterbirds included White Stork, Little Egret, Lapwing and Pygmy Cormorant. I also recorded at Lake Sevan big numbers of Armenian Gulls, the country's only indigenous species. It is one of the many variations of the Herring Gull and to tell you the truth, only because it was in its 'home' location I would have found it hard to separate it from our every-day Galway Herring Gulls! A final twitch was a splendid flock of European Bee-eaters.

Overall, I recorded sixty-one species: not bad for birdwatching just as opportunity arose and I think that anyone on a serious birding holiday could at least double that.

NS

### NIMMO'S PIER OUTINGS

With the resumption of the Nimmo's Pier short outing in September, Brendan Dunne has let me have a list of last year's sightings. Over the

nine months he recorded a total of fifty-five species. Birds of note seen were:

Gannet  
Great Northern Diver  
Peregrine Falcon  
Iceland Gull  
Little Gull  
Forster's Tern  
Sanderling

These and the other 'ordinary' birds that we saw show that these outings are an ideal way to learn about birds and, in addition, see unusual birds such as those listed above. Many birdwatchers would travel long distances to see some of these! On behalf of all who take part, I would like to thank Tom Cuffe for leading the outings and sharing his expertise and enthusiasm. Thanks, too, to Brendan for keeping the records.

NS

### STARLINGS OVER THE FIELDS OF ATHENRY



Thanks to Peter Brennan who sent me these photographs which he took last winter. These small reproductions of them do not at all do his photographs full justice.

NS

### CORNCRAKE UPDATE 2015

The final count for the 2015 West Connacht Corncrake Census is as follows:

Mullet Peninsula	34 (37)
Connemara Islands	13 (25)
SW Mayo inc. Turk N.	8 (5)
Achill Island	0 (1)
Connemara Mainland	0 (3)
North Mayo Mainland	0 (1)
Total	55 (72)



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As you can see, Mayo has fared better than Galway, with the reduction in overall numbers mainly due to the drop in Connemara. The 2014 numbers are in brackets. The birds that were in Achill and Connemara last year may have been a bit of a fluke as it was the first time Corncrakes were recorded in 20 years in Achill and 40 years for Claddaghduff, according to farmers in the area!

2015 was a difficult year for surveying as the weather was not very suitable during the peak months of May and June. The vegetation was also very poor this year. It was difficult to get out to the islands to hear calling birds while the weather was bad. This may be a factor in the lower Connemara figure but, if so, it is only a small part of the reason.

I don't have the numbers for Donegal yet, but I heard numbers were down there also. Overall, the Mullet peninsula returned the best West Connacht figures with only 3 birds fewer than last year. It is important to bear in mind that we are comparing this year's census to 2014, which was the most successful year since the project started.

**Samuel Birch**

### MY CBS EXPERIENCE

When the CBS (Countryside Bird Survey) started about twenty years ago I did a square in south Galway for 10 years but, on moving to Headford, distance and other reasons obliged me to give it up. However, at a recent joint CBS-I-WeBS seminar in Galway Dick Coombes, who runs the project, enthused and encouraged me to take on a new square.

What is CBS? Well, the title mainly explains its purpose – it is to monitor the population trends of Ireland's common birds. It seeks to achieve this by annual surveillance of specific 1km squares of the national grid. Let me say that the counting methodology is complex – visits are no mere pleasant wander about at will spotting birds as you go. However, if you agree to get involved you just have to 'not reason why' but grit your teeth and get going.

Dick assigned me the square M4060 around the townland of Kilgrevin which is hidden away in north-east County Galway somewhat north of Tuam and west of the N17. It is completely rural and a combination of only moderately good to poor pasture land and part cut-away bog. For all that, it is pleasing terrain. One of the nice features for me is that the 40km drive from Headford is through a completely rural landscape along a series of minor roads totally free of any towns or major traffic concentration.

So this is our new 'fief' to be surveyed and counted twice by my wife Peggy and myself. The initial surveying took two visits, measuring out two separate 1km transects within the

square each divided into 100m subsections. Quite a bit of work! That done we undertook our counts - one in April and the second in June. The rule is to walk slowly along the transects and observe the birds you see and hear, recording them within each 100m sub-transect and by distance from your central walk line. So, it is a combination of ordinary birdwatching and a major input of the scientific and statistical. The birds we recorded were those you would expect to see in rural Galway – Swallows, Sand Martins, Warblers, Stonechat, Meadow Pipit, a lone Cuckoo and many more. In total we saw over 30 species between the two counts.

Is it worthwhile? Well, once you accept that undertaking it is a bit more than an everyday bit of birdwatching, yes it is. You have to do this specific type of recording but the payoff is knowing that your input is part of an important effort to monitor and help foster the wellbeing of Ireland's birds. I would recommend it – if you would like to get involved contact Dick Coombes at BirdWatch HQ. **NS**

### CONNEMARA GOLDEN PLOVER SURVEY

The Connemara Bog Complex SPA (Special Protection Area) was designated primarily for European Golden Plover and Merlin, which are listed in Annex 1 of the EU Birds Directive. Breeding Common Gull and Cormorant are also listed as "features of interest". To monitor priority species such as Golden Plover we undertook a survey to estimate the population within the SPA which measures 19,210 hectare. The SPA consists of three separate areas – one "polygon" north of Roundstone, one south of Recess and one north of Spiddal.

It wouldn't be possible to survey every square kilometre of such a huge site so, for each of the three areas 12 separate 1-kilometre squares were picked randomly provided they had suitable Golden Plover habitat, of course. We concentrated on one area/polygon each summer which took the last three years to survey. In each of these 1-km squares there were five parallel transect lines. All of these squares also required two visits - an early and a late visit. When all the transects are added up it comes to a total of 360km and that doesn't include getting into and out of these squares!

While we haven't yet come up with an overall population estimate for the SPA it does look like the plovers are probably holding their own. It will be difficult to determine if there has actually been a long term increase or decrease as a similar survey of this kind hasn't been previously undertaken. While doing the survey over the last three summers we found that breeding plover tended to be very quiet during the early visits when they are usually on eggs but on the later visits, when the chicks hatched,

the parents were much more obvious, standing up on hummocks and constantly alarm calling whenever we came near unseen chicks. Many of the squares which appeared to hold no breeding birds during the early visit would reveal pairs during the late visit.

During our time on the bog we sometimes came across other notable breeding bogland species. In 2013 we were very lucky to find two breeding pairs of Merlin on Roundstone Bog. This summer we managed to locate two breeding Dunlin in a single square which were nesting right beside nesting Golden Plover. A single Dunlin was seen in 2013 and was most likely a nesting bird too. These are probably the first breeding records of this species in the county since the early 1990s. They were never a common breeding bird here anyway. Other breeding species included Common Sandpipers (extremely common breeder on the numerous bog loughs), Snipe, Teal (common breeder), Red-breasted Merganser and Red Grouse.

**Dermot Breen**

### WE ARE SWIFTS - WE ARE IN TROUBLE

This is the title of a recently produced 27-page booklet on Swifts. It tells the story of the birds' history and is packed with facts on their habits, habitats and dramatic decline. It is concise, beautifully illustrated and very motivating to (start) work on Swift conservation. It was put together by Lynda Huxley, an amateur Swift expert who has taken the birds' plight to heart and is promoting the preservation of their breeding locations in every way possible – as time is of the essence!

It is heartening to see how many institutions and organisations have supported or sponsored the publication, underwriting its urgency.

Lynda visited Galway in June and freely shared her knowledge and enthusiasm to encourage Galway members of BirdWatch to look out for Swifts, locate their nest sites and try to safeguard particularly those nests that are on/in public buildings. Lynda and her husband Chris have both been surveying Co. Mayo and come up with vital information and many a helpful tip (all in the booklet).

Lynda has offered to give a public talk on Swifts in the autumn so that she can encourage even more people to get involved with a Galway survey next summer. All Galway members of BirdWatch Ireland will be notified of the talk but, in the meantime, you may like to get a copy of the booklet from Lynda at 094-9032422 or via [swiftconservationireland@gmail.com](mailto:swiftconservationireland@gmail.com). And, of course, all sightings of nest sites will be welcome so that the monitoring of them can get started as soon as the Swifts are back in town in 2016.

**Marianne ten Cate**  
(with many thanks to Lynda)

## BirdWatch Galway (Branch of BirdWatch Ireland) 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 2015

QUARTERLY BIRD REPORT COMPILED BY CHRIS PEPIATT

DATE OF ISSUE: 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2016

2nd April: Cuckoo, Bearna (Denis Cody).

2nd April: 4-5 1st year Mediterranean Gull, Traught (Paul Troake).

6th April: Willow Warbler, Angliham, Lough Corrib (Aonghus O'Donail).

6th April: Scandinavian (ssp. *littoralis*) Rock Pipit, Bearna Pier (Dylan Storey-Branagh).

7th April: Gyrfalcon, 1st Win. white phase, again present, Inishbofin. (1)

7th April: Ad. White-tailed Eagle, Lough Corrib (Marcin Pisula).

8th April: Hoopoe, Muighinis Island, Carna (Paula Ní Chualáin).

8th April: Fem. Peregrine, Ballymore turlough (Paul Troake).

8th April: Common Buzzard, Tooreen (Paul Troake).

8th April: Ad. Little Gull, Salthill, Galway city (Marcin Pisula).

8th April: Glaucous Gull & Iceland Gull, Mutton Island, Galway city (Marcin Pisula).

9th April: 2 Common Buzzard, Cloghballymore (Paul Troake).

10th April: Hoopoe, Corrandulla (Thomas Ruane).

12th April: 3 Common Buzzard, Glenloughaun, Nr. Aughrim (Paul McLoughlin).

12th April: 3 Greenland White-fronted Goose, Rahasane turlough (Paul Troake).

16th April: 14 Whimbrel, Tarrea Pier (Paul Troake).

16th April: Common Buzzard, Ballymore (Paul Troake). (2)

17th April: House Martin, Oranmore Bridge (Neill Butterfield).

18th April: 2 Pintail, Rahasane turlough (Neil Ellis).

18th April: Ruff, Ballinderreen turlough (Paul Troake).

19th April: Whitethroat, Nr. Milltown, Tuam (Chris Benson).

19th April: 2 Common Sandpiper, Lough Inch, Bearna (Cahal Forkan).

19th April: Great White Egret, Muckrush, Lough Corrib. (3)

20th April: 9 Common Tern, Puffin & 43 Great Northern Diver, Galway Bay, from RV Celtic Explorer out of Galway docks (Niall Keogh).

20th April: Barn Owl, Burnthouse, Rosscahill (Jim Bailey).

21st April: Wilson's Petrel, 52 Great Skua & 3 Arctic Tern, from RV Celtic Explorer, 60 nautical miles WSW Slyne Head (Niall Keogh & Ashley Bennison).

22nd April: 4 Grasshopper Warbler & 2 Sedge Warbler, Killymongaun, Nr. Clifden (Chris Peppiatt).

22nd April: Sedge Warbler, Rooanmore, Nr. Ardrahan (Paul Troake).

22nd April: Yellowhammer, Ballymore (Paul Troake).

22nd April: 2 Yellowhammer, Cloghboley (Paul Troake).

23rd April: 4 (2 Fem. & 2 Male) Dotterel, Aillebrack, Ballyconneely (Dermot Breen). (4)

24th April: 4 (Ad., 2nd Sum. & 2-1st year) Mediterranean Gull, Corranroo Bay (Paul Troake).

24th April: Turtle Dove, Lesser Whitethroat & Great Skua, Inishbofin (Anthony McGeehan).

26th April: 20 White Wagtail, Kilcolgan Point, Tawin (Paul Troake).

26th April: 7 Lapwing (inc. nesting pair), Ballinderreen turlough (Paul Troake).

3rd May: Swift, Angliham, Lough Corrib (Aonghus O'Donail).

3rd May: Swift, Portumna Forest Park (Tom Tarpey).

3rd May: Corncrake, Inishbofin (Frank Wedgeworth).

5th May: 50 Manx Shearwater, Baile na hAbhann (Michael Nolan).

6th May: White-tailed Eagle, Curraghline, Lough Corrib (Michael Nolan).

7th May: 7 Common Scoter, Inchiquin, Lough Corrib (Neil Sharkey).

7th May: Corncrake, Woodville, Kilchreest (Geraldine Brett).

8th May: 3 Common Scoter, Inchiquin, Lough Corrib (Neil Sharkey).

8th May: Tree Pipit, Inishark (Dermot Breen).

10th May: Iceland Gull, Spiddal (Stephen Bierley).
13th May: Common Buzzard, Portumna Forest Park (Tom Tarpey).
13th May: Marsh Harrier, Curraghline, Lough Corrib (Michael Nolan).
17th May: Cory's Shearwater, Salthill, Galway city (Marcin Pisula).
18th May: Ad. Sum. Little Gull & 2-1st Yr. Mediterranean Gull, Corranroo Bay (Paul Troake).
23rd May: 2 Spotted Flycatcher, Recess (Eamonn Delaney).
23rd May: Light-bellied Brent Goose, Ballynacloghy (Paul Troake).
23rd May: Puffin, Tawin (Paul Troake).
25th May: Bee-eater, Roundstone (Stephen Baker).
26th May: 8 calling Corncrake, Inishbofin (Dermot Breen & Sam Birch).
26th May: 4 Common Scoter, Oughterard, Lough Corrib (John Meade).
30th May: Canada Goose (feral), Truska, Ballyconneely (Dermot Breen).
2nd June: Ad. Long-tailed Skua, Ballyconneely golf course (Michael Badley).
5th June: Ad. Forster's Tern, Fiddaun Island, Nr. Killeenaran (Paul Troake). (5)
12th June: 3 (Pair with chick) Long-eared Owl, Gortnahultra (Pat Roberts).
12th June: Ad. Male Common Rosefinch, in song, Inishbofin (Anthony McGeehan).
13th June: Ad. Franklin's Gull & 2 (Ad. & 1st Sum.) Little Gull, Rusheen Bay, Galway city (Michael Davis).
13th June: Long-tailed Skua, High Island (Ashley Bennison).
15th June: 4-5 (Pair with 2-3 chicks) Long-eared Owl, Athenry (Suzanne Greaney).
17th June: Marsh Harrier, Curraghmore, Lough Corrib (John Meade).
22nd June: Balearic Shearwater & Little Tern, Bearna Pier (Cathal Forkan).
22nd June: 2 (Ad. & 1st Sum) Little Gull, Lacknaloy Creek, Nr. Tawin (Paul Troake).
22nd June: Kingfisher, Cloondroon Lake, Milltown (per Irish Birding).
24th June: 3 (Pair with chick) Long-eared Owl, Rosscahill (Caitriona Carlin).

#### NOTES:

- (1) This bird is considered to be the same individual that was seen at the same location on the 21<sup>st</sup> of February 2015.
- (2) Common Buzzard was also present at this site on the 20<sup>th</sup> of April 2015.
- (3) The Great White Egret, which was present in the Lough Corrib area throughout the first quarter of 2015, was also recorded at Muckrush on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 2015.
- (4) This trip of Dotterel had increased to six birds and was present at Truska, Ballyconneely on the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> of April 2015. By the 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of April 2015 eight birds were present at Truska.
- (5) The adult Forster's Tern was recorded through the winter of 2014/2015 and is a long-staying individual that has been present in Galway Bay for a number of winters now.

#### OTHER BEASTIES:

30<sup>th</sup> April: Otter, Clochog, Oranmore (Paula Hynes).

#### HIGHLIGHTS:

Wilson's Petrel, Cory's Shearwater, Balearic Shearwater, Gyr Falcon, trip of 8 Dotterel, Franklin's Gull, 2 Long-tailed Skua, Bee-eater, 2 Hoopoe, Turtle Dove, Common Rosefinch, Tree Pipit and Lesser Whitethroat, as well as the long-staying Forster's Tern and Great White Egret.

First Spring migrants: Cuckoo (2<sup>nd</sup> April); Willow Warbler (6<sup>th</sup> April); Hoopoe (8<sup>th</sup> April); Whimbrel (16<sup>th</sup> April); House Martin (17<sup>th</sup> April); Common Sandpiper (19<sup>th</sup> April); Whitethroat (19<sup>th</sup> April); Common Tern (20<sup>th</sup> April); Arctic Tern (21<sup>st</sup> April); Grasshopper Warbler (22<sup>nd</sup> April); Sedge Warbler (22<sup>nd</sup> April); Dotterel (23<sup>rd</sup> April); Great Skua (24<sup>th</sup> April); Lesser Whitethroat (24<sup>th</sup> April); Turtle Dove (24<sup>th</sup> April); White Wagtail (26<sup>th</sup> April); Corncrake (3<sup>rd</sup> May); Swift (3<sup>rd</sup> May); Manx Shearwater (5<sup>th</sup> May); Tree Pipit (8<sup>th</sup> May); Spotted Flycatcher (23<sup>rd</sup> May).

Latest wintering birds: Greenland White-fronted Goose (12<sup>th</sup> April); Light-bellied Brent Goose (23<sup>rd</sup> May).