



CAIRDE EANLAITH ÉIREANN 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

LOCAL MATTERS

Not a lot to report. The branch still awaits a 'saviour' and reviver. Many calls for this have been made by me and others but we must keep waiting and hoping. In the meantime, we do the best we can and one important activity is the resumption of our monthly **Nimmo's Pier** Saturday short outings. The first of these will be on Saturday **September 3rd** at the usual time: **10.30 am**. The October one will be on Saturday **October 8th**, not October 1st as in *Wings* magazine. This is to avoid the annual Galway marathon on October 1st which usually takes over all of Nimmo's Pier and its surrounding areas. During the autumn and winter there will also be Galway Bay counts and Lower Lough Corrib counts plus the general I-WeBS wetlands counts. Anyone interested in becoming involved with this, just e-mail as above and I will steer you in the right direction.

Finally, continuance of the *Newsletter* depends on contributions from readers and supporters – this edition is shortened due to difficulty of getting content. So this is yet another request to all readers to put pen to paper so to speak and help keep the *Newsletter* going. Thanks.

NS

AUGUST BIRD PASSAGE

If you have a Birdtrack app. on your phone which, in my view, even a moderately serious birdwatcher should have, you can look up a map of the west of Ireland, showing by location all birds recorded at any given time. You can then click on the place shown to see what has been recorded over the previous days. From about mid-August into early/mid-September, it is fascinating to look up the location marks at or near Loop Head in Co. Clare. At this time of the year, that headland becomes a mecca for serious seawatching birders. There can be upwards of forty or fifty of these intrepid people descending on the area, many, if not the majority, from Britain. It involves mainly seawatching as the great autumnal migration of seabirds passes along our west coast headlands.

I've visited Loop Head in the past but, really, it is no place for a division-two birdwatcher. You need to be the type of birder who can instantly distinguish between a Cory's Shearwater and a Balearic one at a hundred or more meters out to sea, often in near-gale conditions! At their favoured location – The Bridges of Ross adjacent to Loop Head – they sit for hours on end in low chairs in front of high-power telescopes. They have bird identification abilities and powers of staying the course that the rest of us only dream of. Looking at the Loop Head list this mid-August, the following is a small sample of birds that were recorded: Cory's Shearwater, Great Shearwater, Grey Phalarope, Pomerine Skua, Balearic Shearwater and Least Sandpiper. Storm Petrel, Solitary Sandpiper and Leach's Petrel. Truly, Autumn migration is one of the great and unique events of the Irish birdwatching year.

NS

BIRDS OF THE BORDER

Just upstream from Meelick church, the River Shannon flows fiercely under red sluice gates, pours over a long curving weir and leads boats gently

towards Victoria Lock. The county boundary is crossed halfway along the weir. I had occasion to stand hidden one May on the Galway side for hours at a time and, amid the constant noise of rushing water, three 'birds of the streamside' presented themselves.

Grey Wagtails were almost constantly present. This pair probably had a nest under the parapet where the sluice structure meets the land and perhaps they were continuing a long line of grey wagtails, for there have been about 170 nesting seasons since the structure was built. But it was too dangerous even to try to peer down and around the ivy-clad wall of massive stones. A female bird was standing on the railing with its back windward to a strong breeze. Its long tail was blown over its back showing the most vivid yellow part of its plumage under the base of its tail.

A Kingfisher was also there. This bird only gives two seconds or so to notice it as it flies past but, despite this, its vivid light blue back and its seemingly attention-seeking *ziit* as it passes by does not allow you to miss it. I saw a Kingfisher here several times - flying down the opposite side of the river one hundred and eighty metres away, flying over the weir, flying under the sluice gates, flying through a willow bush and once flying with a beakfull of fish over the turbulent water into a tangle of old willows with branches extending out over the water. There is only one situation for a Kingfisher's nesting tunnel in this vicinity and that is in the banks of the ancient alluvium that joins together some of the appropriately named 'Scrubby Islands' below the weir – a metre or so of exposed alluvium topped by a metre or so of lush Meadowsweet, Nettles, Canary Grass and Bindweed from which Sedge Warblers sing and in which Mallards nest.

There is a Grey Heron colony of seven or eight nests in the tall ash trees on the Offaly side and the herons went to and fro, planing and parachuting down to disappear into the trees and flying ponderously out through the canopy. Finally, a Chaffinch flew across the water to sing on both sides of a noisy torrent and a Cormorant perched with wings outstretched at the very top of a long-dead, skeletal ash tree.

Stephen Heery, June 2016

CORNCRAKES IN GALWAY & MAYO

Samuel Birch advises that there were 60 calling birds in Galway and Mayo this summer. Over 50% of these were in the Mullet and about 30% on Connemara Islands – mainly Inisbofin, I assume. The remaining few were scattered in west Mayo and Galway. This count is a 10% improvement on 2015 and it is good to see this positive trend.

NS

A NOT SO COMMON COMMON BIRD – THE STONECHAT

Consult any of our bird books or atlases and you will see that the Stonechat seems widely present all over Ireland – yet it is a bird that the average birdwatcher is lucky to see only occasionally. Undoubtedly, it suffered big losses in numbers during the cold winters of 2009 and 2010 but since then numbers

seem to be recovering. Franceska Greenoak, in her book *All the Birds of the Air*, gives the following description of the Stonechat:

'A restless bird', Wordsworth called it, aptly, for it rarely stays still for more than the space of a few seconds, but will fly, usually a short distance, along a hedge or fence, pose there a few moments, then make another short hop. Every time it halts, it flicks its tail and shrugs itself a little, and often utters a short burst of song or its sharp alarm call which sounds just like two pebbles striking each other. Stonechats are very open in their habitats.

If you miss the 'chat' no doubt your eye will be caught by its restiveness, and it perches conspicuously upon bushes or posts showing off its bold plumage. It has a glossy black head set off by a white collar and shoulder patch and rich chestnut coloured breast.

Certainly a bird that all birdwatchers should seek out and add at least once to their annual list.

NS

AN 80TH SEABIRD OUTING

For family reasons, the marking of my passing the 80th milepost was based in the north Co. Dublin seaside town of Skerries. Part of the reason was the inspired idea of organising a birdwatching sea trip to nearby Rockabill and Lambay Island, using local Skerries Sea Tours, lead by Eoin Grimes.

Thus on the morning of July 23rd a family party of 13 of us set off in Eoin's Redbay Rib with the full safety of individual seats and life jackets. The day was fine and the sea calm and the rib bounced along first towards Rockabill at a fast, exciting pace.

Rockabill is a substantial islet of rock, dominated by a lighthouse built in 1855 – it is a principal Irish and European breeding site of the rare Roseate Tern and for that reason it is of international importance. For the past twenty or more years Birdwatch Ireland has maintained a monitoring presence there during the breeding season. The birdviewing from our boat offered an impressive sight – the air and the rock-face nesting sites were alive with terns – but the main thrill was seeing Roseate Terns in such numbers – there are few places where this is possible. The site also teemed with Puffins, Turnstones, Kittiwakes and Guillemots.

We then went on to Lambay Island. This is an island of about 600 acres, mostly a place of high cliffs but with a good bit of fertile land and fields. It is privately owned by the Baring family (of banking origin) who reside there full-time. The birds on the cliffs present an amazing spectacle. In summer it is home of over 50,000 Guillemots, 5,000 Razorbills, a similar number of Kittiwakes and thousands of Cormorants and Shags. Also present are Puffins, Fulmars and a large, increasing colony of Gannets.

Thus, between the two sites, you have before you the perfect sighting of all the main Irish seabirds – indeed you could say those of northern Europe. If you ever find yourself in or near Skerries, do avail of this unique opportunity to see our seabirds in a very special way.

NS

BirdWatch Galway (Branch of BirdWatch Ireland) 2nd Quarter 2016

QUARTERLY BIRD REPORT COMPILED BY CHRIS PEPPIATT

DATE OF ISSUE: 5th May 2017

2nd April: 50 Scaup, Angliham, Lough Corrib (Neil Ellis).

2nd April: 21 Pintail, 25 Black tailed Godwit, 15 Little Egret, Rahasane turlough (Neil Ellis).

3rd April: Male Green-winged Teal, Kiltiernan turlough.(1)

3rd April: Willow Warbler, Tullaghnafrankagh Lough, Kiltiernan, Ardrahan (Paul Troake).

4th April: Greenland White-fronted Goose, Truska, Ballyconneely (Steve Bierley).

6th April: Great Skua, inland at Lough Corrib, Nr. Maam (Dermot Breen).

6th April: Fulmar, Mutton Island, Galway city (Niall Keogh).

8th April: 2-2nd yr Glaucous Gull, 2-2nd yr Iceland Gull & 3rd yr Ring-billed Gull, Nimmo's Pier, Galway city (Niall Keogh). (2)

9th April: Peregrine, Traught, Kinvara (John Keogh).

9th April: 4 Sandwich Tern, Murlach, Ballyconneely (Miryam & Michael Harris).

9th April: Little Auk, Mutton Island, Galway city (Marcin Pisula).

11th April: Wheatear, Lough Inch, Bearna (Brendan Power).

12th April: White-tailed Eagle, Whooper Swan, 16 Greenland White-fronted Goose, Pink-footed goose, 27 Black-tailed Godwit & 8 Pintail, Rahasane turlough (Neil Ellis).

14th April: Peregrine, Kinlough, Headford (Neil Sharkey).

14th April: Common Buzzard, Knocknacarra, Galway city (Aonghus O'Donail).

17th April: 4 Common Tern & 8 Whimbrel, Kinvara Bay (Paul Troake).

17th April: Ruff, Ballinderreen turlough (Paul Troake).

20th April: House Martin, Ellagh, Headford (Neil Sharkey).

20th April: Common Sandpiper, Inchiquin, Lough Corrib (Neil Sharkey).

20th April: Grasshopper Warbler, Renmore, Galway city (Neil Ellis).

20th April: White-tailed Eagle, Raughillaun, Lough Corrib (Ted Mustard).

23rd April: Peregrine, Angliham, Lough Corrib (Neil Ellis).

23rd April: Imm. Little Gull, Mutton Island, Galway city (Marcin Pisula).

25th April: White-tailed Eagle 'Star', Angliham, Lough Corrib (Aonghus O'Donail).

25th April: Pink-footed Goose, Truska, Slyne Head (Dermot Breen).

27th April: Osprey, Lough Fee (Anne & Matt Wheeler).

29th April: 3 calling Corncrake, Knock, Inishbofin (David O'Keeffe & Fiona McGowan).

30th April: 3-1st Win. Iceland Gull & 2-1st Win. Glaucous Gull, Nimmo's Pier, Galway city (Tom Cuffe).

1st May: 3 Arctic Tern, Bearna (Cathal Forkan & Dylan Storey Branagh).

3rd May: 50 Black-tailed Godwit & Whimbrel, Lough Atalia, Galway city (Hugh Sweeney & Niall Keogh).

4th May: White-tailed Eagle, Barranny/Muckrush, Lough Corrib (Neil Ellis).

4th May: 2 Shoveler, Teal & Little Egret, Angliham, Lough Corrib (Neil Ellis).

5th May: 4 Swift, Kinlough, Near Headford (Deirdre Comerford).

8th May: Whitethroat & Sedge Warbler, Rusheennamanagh, Nr. Kilkieran (Chris Peppiatt).

10th May: Short-eared Owl, Coolanillaun, Lough Corrib (Aonghus O'Donail).

11th May: Common Scoter, Lough Corrib (Peter Wolstenholme).

14th May: 2 Yellowhammer, Grange East (Chris Peppiatt).

16th May: Summer plumaged Black-throated Diver, Renvyle Head (Dermot Breen).

18th May: Arctic Tern, Ballyloughaun, Galway city (Neil Ellis).

26th May: Spotted Flycatcher, Loughrea town (Pete Capsey).

26th May: 2 Little Tern, Inishlackan, Nr. Roundstone (Niall Keogh).

27th May: 2 Male Eider, Duck Island, Slyne Head (Niall Keogh).

27th May: Fem. Eider, Illaunamid, Slyne Head (Niall Keogh).

28th May: Ad. Forster's Tern, Tawnagh, Doorus & Corranroo Bay. (3)

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| 28th May: 3 Dunlin, 2 Gadwall, Common Tern & Ringed Plover, Anliham, Lough Corrib (Neil Ellis). |
| 5th June: 11 calling Corncrake, Inishbofin (6 Middlequarter, 3 Knock, 1 Westquarter & 1 Fawnmore; Fearghas Mac Lochlainn). |
| 6th June: 4 (2 pairs) Common Scoter & 2 Gadwall, Barrusheen, Lough Corrib (John Meade). |
| 21st June: Carrion Crow x Hooded Crow hybrid/intermediate, Renvyle Head (Dermot Breen). |
| 21st June: Ad. Sum. Mediterranean Gull, Corranroo Bay (Tom Murtagh). |
| 22nd June: 5 Storm Petrel, Mutton Island, Galway city (Marcin Pisula). |
| 24th June: 4 (pair & 2 young) Long-eared Owl, Gortnahultra, Nr. Gorteen (Pat Roberts). |
| 25th June: 12 (2 pairs & 8 ducklings) Shelduck, Kilcaimin (Neil Ellis). |

NOTES:

- (1) This Green-winged Teal was present at the same place in the previous quarter (i.e. March 2016).
- (2) The two Glaucous and two Iceland gulls were again present here on the 10th of April.
- (3) The long-staying Forster's Tern was seen again in Corranroo Bay on the 12th of June.

HIGHLIGHTS:

Little Auk, Green-winged Teal and Osprey, as well as the long-staying Forster's Tern.

SPRING ARRIVALS:

Willow Warbler (3rd April); Wheatear (11th April); Common Tern (17th April); Whimbrel (17th April); Common Sandpiper (20th April); Grasshopper Warbler (20th April); House Martin (20th April); Osprey (27th April); Corncrake (29th April); Swift (5th May); Sedge Warbler (8th May); Whitethroat (8th May); Spotted Flycatcher (26th May).

OTHER BEASTIES:

8th April: Bottle-nosed Dolphin, Nimmo's Pier, Galway city (Niall Keogh).