



## CAIRDE EANLAITH ÉIREANN GALWAY

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

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER – EDITOR: NEIL SHARKEY

Telephone: 086 1680856 e-mail [neiljsharkey@gmail.com](mailto:neiljsharkey@gmail.com)

Issue No. 94– August 2016

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 3<sup>rd</sup>** at the usual time: **10.30 am**. The October one will be on Saturday **October 8<sup>th</sup>**, not October 1<sup>st</sup> as in *Wings* magazine. This is to avoid the annual Galway marathon on October 1<sup>st</sup> 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 80<sup>TH</sup> SEABIRD OUTING

For family reasons, the marking of my passing the 80<sup>th</sup> 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 23<sup>rd</sup> 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