

BirdWatch Galway Annual Report (01.01.2007 – 31.12.2007)

There are currently 312 paid up members of the Galway Branch of BirdWatch Ireland, unfortunately 20 less than at this time last year. However, the core of active BirdWatch Galway membership has held steady at approximately 35-40 people (including the ones who come to members meetings, trips or talks, or who regularly take part in programmes like BWI counts and surveys). This report details the branch's activities in 2007, mentioning the contributions that members have made. All of our 300-plus members are most welcome to become more involved at the local level during 2008.

Meetings

The ten monthly meetings (we have a break for July and August) were again held at 8PM on mid-month Wednesday nights at the Anno Santo Hotel. These meetings were attended on average by from 9 or 10 members per meeting. Increased member attendance and participation at these meetings would be welcomed, although (encouragingly) several new members became regular attendees in 2007.

Committee

The officers of the committee again consisted of Marianne ten Cate (Secretary & Merchandise), Deirdre Comerford (Treasurer & Merchandise), Pat Finnegan (Talks), Tim Griffin (Recorder & Nimmo's Pier trips), Neil Sharkey (Newsletter and Accounts) and Chris Peppiatt (Chair).

Talks

We held five successful talks during the year at the Anno Santo- 'Irish brent geese – international research programme' by Kendrew Colhoun on the 16th of February (29 attendees), 'Out for the count – Galway's birds and how we count them' by Helen Boland on the 23rd of March (29 attendees), 'Waterfowl of Alaska' by John Reed on the 21st of September (18 attendees), 'Hawks and owls in Ireland' by Aonghus O'Donail on the 19th of October (24 attendees) and 'Panama – a tale of two continents' by Niall Hatch on the 16th of November (25 attendees). Many thanks to Pat Finnegan for organising these talks and to Mary Finnegan for again keeping the attendance book. Local member Tom Cuffe presented a picture show at our Annual Christmas gathering which was attended by our most active members. Branch Secretary Marianne ten Cate also gave talks to 19 GMIT students and to 26 members of an Active Retirement Group in Galway in December. East Galway member Peter Capsey worked with the National School at Rahasane Turlough and hosted a walk at the Turlough for pupils, parents and other local residents (92 people attended).

Outings

Tim Griffin again kindly and most expertly led nine short outings at Nimmo's Pier on the first Saturday of the month from January to May inclusive and from September to December inclusive.

Our first other trip was on the 23rd – 25th of February, when 12 members visited Northern Ireland (including Lough Neagh, Portmore Lough RSPB reserve, Oxford Island, Belfast Harbour RSPB reserve and Castle Espie WWT reserve). We saw a variety of birds, notable amongst which were very close views (a couple of feet!) of Black-tailed Godwit and a vagrant Green-winged Teal. Many thanks are due to Marianne for driving and organising the accommodation and other arrangements for this weekend. Several members joined the Galway Naturalists Field Club on their bank holiday weekend (1st – 4th of June) trip to Tory Island and Glenveagh National Park, Co. Donegal. Highlights included Corncrake (everyone had several views), Chough, Peregrine, Puffin, breeding terns (Common, Little and Arctic), breeding waders (Snipe, Redshank, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Lapwing and Dunlin) and Tree Sparrow, as well as several uncommon plants and butterflies. The branch was represented at the World Ocean day events at the Atlantaquaria in Galway on the 10th of June. Two members also represented the branch at the biodiversity family day in Portumna on the 26th of August and 4 members joined the Clare branch on their trip to the Shannon Airport Lagoon on the 15th of September. Marianne kindly arranged another weekend trip to Co. Sligo from the 30th of November to the 2nd of December. Flocks of Barnacle Goose and a Cackling Goose (wild Canada Goose vagrant subspecies from America) were amongst the highlights and 11 members braved the weather to take part.

The branch's contribution to the National Dawn Chorus day event was again held at the NUI Galway sports grounds at Dangan, this time on the 20th of May. The event was attended by 13 people. Thanks are due to NUI Galway and Mr. Gar Hartigan for their cooperation with the dawn chorus event. A Bird Race was held on the 1st of April. Seven people competed and the winning team recorded 98 species. Neil Sharkey also led an outing for Headford Ladies Group.

Publications

In conjunction with Galway County Council, under the auspices of the Heritage Forum, BirdWatch Galway produced a booklet on '*Bird watching in County Galway*', written by Deirdre Comerford and Marianne ten Cate. Neil Sharkey has continued his excellent work with the branch's Newsletter. Four editions (also including the bird reports for the end of 2006 and the first three quarters of 2007) were published during 2007. Thanks to Neil for the editing, Pat Finnegan for his regular poetry spot and to all of the other contributors during 2007.

Web-site

Our web site at www.birdwatchgalway.org, attracted 4,882 visits during 2007, an increase of 18% on the year 2006.

Sightings

The quarterly bird report (included with the Newsletter) continued to be compiled by Chris Peppiatt and County Recorder Tim Griffin (thanks Tim!). A total of 60 people contributed sightings (including a total of 148 e-mails via the web site) of 131 species. New birds to the county in 2007 included Mourning Dove, Water Pipit, Cattle Egret and Surf Scoter.

Surveys

Branch members have continued to put in work on national schemes like the Irish Wetland Birds Survey (I-WeBS), the Countryside Bird Survey (CBS), the Garden Bird Survey, the Brent Goose census, Barn Owl project, Red Grouse census and ringing surveys. As part of the I-WeBS survey, both Inner Galway Bay (three times) and Lough Corrib (also three times) were counted this year. Survey work for the Non-estuarine Wetland Bird Survey (NEWS) continued from 2006 into January. There was some continuing coverage of survey tetrads (2 km by 2 km squares) within Galway City as part of the breeding bird survey that began in 2004 and, from November, members began to supply both roving records and to survey tetrads for the 2007-2011 BTO/BWI atlas project.

Conservation

The Galway Civic Trust/FAS group scheme has again carried out valuable maintenance work at our local reserve, the Small wood at Lough Rusheen. Fifteen bat boxes were purchased by the branch and were positioned by 3 members in five of the mature trees in the wood on the 1st of April. At the same time the same members replaced the gate padlock and some of the barbed wire fencing on the boundary by the entrance track which had been damaged by vandals. Further planting is proposed to take place in early 2008, with the intention of improving the connectivity between the Small Wood and the City Council woods. Maintenance and cleaning at the Belclare turlough hide was carried by 3 members on the 10th of March.

Media

We made sure that all our events were publicised in the local papers and on Galway Bay FM. Posters were displayed in outlets in Galway city and county. E-mail was used extensively to make announcements of talks and outings and the Newsletter is now distributed by this means and via download from the web site.

Liaison

Marianne ten Cate represented us on the Natural Environment and Waterways Group of the Galway City Development Board and the Natural Heritage Working Group of the County Galway Heritage Forum. Jo Gordon and Chris Peppiatt represented BirdWatch Galway on the Galway City Community Forum. Chris Peppiatt represented the Branch at Galway City Council on the Terryland Forest Park steering committee. We also received communications from Galway County Council, Galway City Council, the Galway Naturalists' Field Club, other branches of BirdWatch Ireland, staff members of the National Parks and Wildlife Service, GMIT, the ESB, An Taisce, Coole Park, the Atlantaquarium and Craughwell Residents Association.

Finance

The financial statement is presented separately. Thanks are due to our Treasurer Deirdre Comerford and to Neil Sharkey, who helped to put together the annual statement. The collection box hosted by Martin Brynes again provided valuable extra funds. Marianne ten Cate looked after the merchandise and we sold this all through the year and at our events.

Conclusion

A big 'thank you' to all local members of BirdWatch Ireland and to all members from adjoining counties and nationally who visited Galway and submitted records etc. I would like to wish all of you a happy and successful 2008 and hope see as many of you out birding as possible this year.

Chris Peppiatt, 14th January 2008