

BirdWatch Galway Annual Report (01.01.2009 – 31.12.2009)

BirdWatch Ireland is, with over 14,000 members, without a doubt the most influential non-governmental environmental organisation in Ireland. Through its network of branches around the country there is a lively exchange of information between local birdwatchers and BirdWatch Headquarters. To a large extent the data that the professional staff use to inform their conservation policies and interventions are provided by the members of the branches. In this respect, the 282 members of BirdWatch are no exception. Many of them do not only contribute their subscription fees to BirdWatch Ireland but also generously give of their time and effort to make the branch as active as it is. It cannot be stressed enough that both the staff at Headquarters and the local committee greatly appreciate each and everyone's support and we hope that our present members will continue their input and will encourage new members to get involved with our activities. The following gives an overview of these.

Meetings

The ten monthly meetings (none during July and August) on mid-month Wednesday nights at the Anno Santo Hotel were attended by 3 to 12 members. The monthly meeting is a members' forum where all matters relating to the activities of the branch, birdwatching and the conservation of wild birds and their habitats can be discussed.

At the February meeting Brian Caffrey presented an overview of the BTO/BWI *Atlas of Birds of Britain and Ireland 2007-2011* project to recruit participants for this very important undertaking.

Committee

The officers of the committee consisted of Pat Finnegan (Meetings' Chair and Talks), Marianne ten Cate (Secretary, Outings and Merchandise), Deirdre Comerford (Treasurer & Merchandise), Chris Peppiatt (Recorder and Web-site), Tim Griffin (Nimmo's Pier Outings) and Neil Sharkey (Newsletter and Accounts). Several other members are regularly in attendance at the meetings, which is much appreciated.

Talks

Interesting and very well presented talks were given by Barry O'Donoghue on *The Hen Harrier in Ireland*, Sinéad Cummins on the *Red Grouse in Ireland*, John Carey on *Birds of the Bushveld* and John Murphy on *The Birds of British Columbia*. Tom Cuffe presented a comprehensive video show of *Galway birds seen in 2009* at our annual Christmas gathering. The talks were attended by 28 to 31 people, slightly up from the previous year.

Mary Finnegan made sure that all who attended signed the attendance book.

Many thanks to all the speakers and also to the audiences who expressed their appreciation most generously.

Marianne ten Cate presented a number of talks to 180 pupils in St. Annin's National School in Roscahill at the request of member Kay Sinnott and the teachers of the school.

Outings

Tim Griffin again led most of the 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, with the helpful assistance of Tom Cuffe and Brendan Dunne, who keeps the records of these outings and compiles an annual overview of species seen.

Brendan also keeps records of the species seen during the annual National Dawn Chorus outing in May. This year 33 species were heard and/or seen by 22 participants. Thanks again to NUI Galway and Mr. Gar Hartigan for their co-operation with the dawn chorus event.

In February we held the fourth Bird Atlas outing/workshop at Ballyloughan in Galway, attended by 6 participants.

Our weekend outing of the year was to north Dublin, kindly facilitated by local members of the Fingal and Tolka branches who made the twelve of us feel very welcome and were extremely helpful in many ways.

In August 8 members travelled to the Shannon for an enjoyable day of relaxed birdwatching around the Lagoon and on the shore of the Shannon. We saw 50 species and heard another one – the elusive Water Rail – twice!

Surveys

Branch members have continued to contribute their time and efforts to the Irish Wetland Birds Survey (I-WeBS), the Countryside Bird Survey (CBS), the Garden Bird Survey and the Brent Goose census. Several members regularly surveyed tetrads for the new BTO/BWI Atlas of the birds of Britain and Ireland and many more sent in roving records. It is not easy to cover a big county like Galway so if you have some time to spare, please help.

Sightings

The quarterly bird report (included with the *Newsletter*) continued to be compiled by Chris Peppiatt and Tim Griffin. The way records are stored now will greatly facilitate the compilation of the next issue of *Birds of Galway*. But, records in your notebooks will not make it into the official reports so, please, keep sending the records in!

Web-site

Our web site at www.birdwatchgalway.org attracted 4,855 visits during 2009, nearly the same number as the previous year. Interestingly, they originated from 22 countries which illustrates how wide-spread birdwatching is. 181 records were submitted via the web-site by 50 people. Thanks to Chris Peppiatt for administering the site and supplying these figures.

Media

We tried to get all our events publicised in the local papers and on Galway Bay FM. Posters were displayed in outlets in Galway city and county. Tom Kenny and Peadar O'Dowd mentioned most of our talks in their regular articles in the *Galway Advertiser* and the *Connacht Sentinel* respectively. We very much appreciate their help. E-mail was used extensively to make announcements of talks and outings and one can also access the forthcoming programme in our *Newsletter* via download from the web site.

Conservation

The Small Wood required more maintenance and additional planting this year. Thanks to Pdraig Keirns who coordinated a few sessions of briar-bashing and topped up the planting and Michael Davis who also looked after weed control and general maintenance. The bat box scheme hosted Leisler's Bats in three of the boxes. Maintenance of the hide at Rostaff Lake was arranged through the Galway Civic Trust and its support and the work of the FÁS team involved are gratefully acknowledged.

Publications

Neil Sharkey has continued to edit and distribute the Branch *Newsletter*. Four issues (also including the bird reports for the end of 2008 and the first three quarters of 2009) were published during 2009. There are some regular items in the *Newsletter* such as *Branch Matters*, *Birds in Poetry* and *Forthcoming Programme* but most of the *Newsletter* is filled with contributions from members. **All members** are encouraged to submit observations at home or further afield, a piece on their favourite bird or site, reports about outings or anything else related to bird watching.

Liaison

Chris Peppiatt represented BirdWatch Galway on the Galway City Community Forum and on the Terryland Forest Park steering committee. Marianne ten Cate represented us on the Natural Heritage Working Group of the County Galway Heritage Forum and its Biodiversity Steering Group. We made a submission for Forum-funded activities. Several BirdWatch Galway members attended the launch of the *Biodiversity Action Plan for County Galway 2008-2013* and the ceremony of the Galway County Heritage Awards for which we submitted one of our long-standing members, Pdraic Reaney who has our cultural, built and natural heritage close at heart.

In April a few members helped Brian Caffrey, National Organiser of the Atlas 2007-2011 project, man a stand at the NUIG Ecology Forum and run a successful workshop in the grounds of NUIG.

We received and responded to communications from Galway County Council, Galway City Council, environmental consultants, the Galway Naturalists' Field Club, the Galway Bat Group, other branches of BirdWatch Ireland, staff members of the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Coole Park, Connemara Community Radio, Athenry Environmental Network, several historical/archaeological societies, Age Action West, Volvo Race committee, Orchid Ireland 2008-2011, Slógadh Eachta, Corrin Hill School Gardens Project, Raptor Conservation Seminar and the Burren Life programme. Needless to say, our BirdWatch remit and limited manpower dictate to what extent we liaise and cooperate with other organisations.

We received several requests for bird and habitat photographs for publications and local member Tom Cuffe and Clare member John Murphy obliged more than once.

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. Deirdre Comerford and Marianne ten Cate looked after the merchandise which we sold all through the year at talks and local events.

Conclusion

As last year, one of our main concerns remains that it is getting harder to find members willing to serve on the committee, attend meetings and contribute on the hard slog of survey work. Having said that, we kept up our side with regard to commitments to national and international surveys and served those members who are mainly interested in short outings and/or talks. The fact that meetings are not so popular anymore is partly due to a change in communication channels in our society as more gets publicised, organised, teased out and decided via the internet. However, not all our members are linked into this cyberworld and we remain keen to cater for all – including those who do not communicate through the internet. And, of course, we also keep trying to cater for all different interests represented in BirdWatch Galway, be it indoor or outdoor activities, common birds or rare birds, regular counts or occasional surveys, short outings or weekend outings, BirdWatch business meetings or social gatherings. If anybody feels their interest is not catered for, we would welcome their suggestions to remedy this.

20 January 2010
Marianne ten Cate
Secretary