



GALWAY BRANCH BIRDWATCH IRELAND

For information on or to get involved with the BWI Galway branch, e-mail Chairman Cyril Manning (cyril.manning@hotmail.com) or Secretary, Bláithín Kennedy (blaithin.kennedy@gmail.com).

BIRD BOOKS OF PAST TIMES

Sometime in the early 1980s, the late Brendan Dillon OP, then based at the Dominican Claddagh Church, was re-assigned to Rome. The evening before he left, he called and gave to me some bird books that he didn't wish to bring with him. One was *Birds of the Hill and Forest*, published by Chambers in 1935. It contains attractive and, by now, old-fashioned descriptions of the birds of those habitats. The Treecreeper is an example – a bird that regularly visits an old moss-encrusted apple tree in my Headford garden.

Treecreeper

A small bird remarkable for its mouse-like creeping habits; fairly common in all wooded districts.

Description: four and three-quarter inches long. Upper parts brown, minutely variegated with black, white and buff streak above the eye and the under parts silky white; bill long and slender, and curved down-wards. Resident.

Its name sufficiently indicates the character of this little bird. It is a tree creeper indeed, creeping up the trunks and along the stouter branches of trees in search of small insect-life lurking in the crevices of the bark. It moves with a spasmodic running gait, with trailed tail and a gliding motion resembling that of a mouse. Its path is ever upwards, and having worked its way up to the bole of one tree it drops to the base of a neighbouring tree, there to resume its spiral upward path. This creeping habit it shares with Wryneck, Nuthatch and Woodpeckers, but it is a tiny bird in comparison with any of these. Its delicate, curved bill further distinguishes it. The song is rather shrill, but a faint piping forms the ordinary note.

The nest is placed in crevices in ivy-covered trunks, between a piece of hanging bark and the trunk of a tree, and in similar places. It is made of rootlets, grass and moss and is lined with such delicate materials as feathers, moss and wool and the soft inner bark of the birch tree. The six to nine eggs are white in ground-colour, with brownish, red or purple spots, often arranged in a zone near the larger end. The female incubates, and two broods may be reared in a season.

NS

A LIST OF BIRDS IN COUNTIES

GALWAY & MAYO by

R.F. RUTLEDGE

(Continued)

Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra* L.

Rare Vagrant. In County Mayo two were obtained in Achill, one in February, the other in March 1894 and others have since been seen there in August (Clare Island Survey, *Aves*, p. 18). One said to have been seen at Bangor Erris in 1909 (Mrs Bingham *in litt.*). One Black Rock Light Station (Clare Island Survey, *Aves*, p. 18). Crossbill were observed in Blackrock in July 1929 and in the three preceding years (*List of*

Irish Birds, 1937, p. 6). Rev. P.J. Kennedy S.J. observed a large flock at Mallafranny at the end of June and in the first two weeks of July 1929. Four or five were seen by W. Rutledge at Mallaranny on June 9th 1948. For County Galway Ussher gave it as a rare and irregular breeding species. I can obtain no information that it breeds there still. Apart from irregular occurrences previous to 1900, there are the following records:- One seen at Maam Cross on April 17th and 20th 1909 (*British Birds* Vol 111, p. 163). A male shot near Kylemore on November 25th 1909. A small party seen by E.M. Nicholson near Recess on August 19th 1927.

Chaffinch. Fringilla coelebs gengleri Kleinschmidt.

Resident, common.

The most widespread finch though it becomes scarcer in the west of both counties. Plentiful around Westport and in wooded areas of Connemara such as Kylemore, Ballinahinch and near Carna. Scarce in Achill where a few breed. Appears to be absent in summer from other marine islands, appearing on them in winter occasionally, as also on the Mullet, from which it appears to be absent in summer.

Brambling. Fringilla montifringilla

Rare irregular winter visitor though many were seen in Achill in October and November 1898. Specimens have also been obtained at Killalal and Castlebar (Clare Island Survey, *Aves*, p. 16). Warren considered it to be very rare in north Mayo. On Dec. 22nd 1916 in severe weather, I saw a few feeding with Chaffinches at Bloomfield, near Hollymount, in south Mayo. One bird was present the following day. In south Mayo I have the following records in addition:- One seen at Old Head near Louisburg by W.A. Warren in January 1940. From November 29th 1944 until January 15th 1945 a male and a female, with possibly a third, were in the vicinity of Cloonee House on the shore of Lough Carra. One seen near Ballinrobe, November 11th 1945, and another in a different locality near there on December 22nd 1945. Several were seen irregularly at Cloonee, December 1947 and January 1948. One in County Galway when an adult male was killed striking the light at Slyne Head Lighthouse on November 2nd 1945.

Corn Bunting. Emberiza calandra L.

Resident. Almost entirely confined to coastal regions where they are numerous. Scarce and very local elsewhere: inland I can only trace it in a very few places. I see no sign of decrease in the coastal areas and on the marine islands in the past twenty years, with the exception of Clare Island from which it was absent in 1945. It flourishes in Inishbofin, Achill and in many uninhabited islands adjacent to the Galway coast: less plentiful in the Aran group. Lt-Col C.F. Scroope thinks it has decreased in the north-west coast of Mayo. I can nowadays find only a few pairs there, in the vicinity of Midfield. I have failed to find it in the east and south of Galway. In Connemara winter flocks may be observed in the small holdings along the coast.

To be continued

It is sad to read the entry about the Corn Bunting as it no longer breeds or is barely present at all in

Ireland. Why? It is hardly enough to simply say it is because of changes in agricultural practices – other seed-eating birds such as Goldfinches still seem to thrive. The last Corn Bunting I saw was on a branch outing to Belmullet in the late 1980s.

I just want to state again that the purpose of reprinting Rutledge's work is to pay tribute to him and all those others who pioneered bird watching and bird study in the past with far fewer resources, optical and otherwise, than we have nowadays.

NS

BREEDING CHOUGH SURVEY 2021

The Chough, which is also known as the Red-billed Chough, is an Annex 1 species listed in the EU Birds Directive. Ireland is estimated to hold 70% of the entire North-West European population. The species is normally associated with high-altitude mountains throughout Europe, North Africa and Asia. In Ireland, however, Choughs are mainly found along the coastal areas from County Wexford, along the south and west coasts, up to County Donegal. They are mainly found in areas of short-cropped grassland and are particularly associated with machair habitat (Ireland is now the only EU country where this rare coastal grassland habitat is found). The last estimate (2002/2003) for the Irish population was only 838 pairs, making it our rarest species of crow. The species was formerly found in many upland areas in Ireland but many of these areas have now been deserted, though it still persists in such areas in the south-west in particular. Choughs were once found in the Twelve Bens and Maumturk Mountains in Connemara but they have not been present there for many decades. The furthest inland breeding pairs that I have seen in Connemara were only around 1.3 kilometres away from the coast.

In Ireland, Chough have been surveyed nationally on four previous occasions. The numbers of breeding pairs for County Galway during those surveys were as follows:

1965: 45 – 52 pairs,

1982: 38 – 39 pairs,

1992: 38 pairs,

2002/2003: 20 pairs.

Pairs are now found breeding from the Aran Islands and along the Connemara coastline from Carna to Killary Harbour. They are also found on several offshore islands along this stretch. I would estimate that the current Galway population is still probably close enough to the 2002/2003 population estimate of 20 pairs.

It is notable that the Galway population nearly halved in size between the 1992 and the 2002/2003 surveys. It is hard to know what the reason for this decline really is but, like most bird declines, it is likely to be due to a combination of factors. It has been proven that the use of veterinary medication in the dosing of cattle can have severe negative effects on insect numbers that use cow pats during their larval stages because the lethal effects of the medication can persist within the cow pats. These invertebrates form an important food source for adult birds and their nestlings and Choughs can regularly be seen looking for these tasty grubs by demolishing dried cow pats.



This significant decline was not noted in the main Chough strongholds of counties Cork, Kerry and Donegal during the same period, however.

There are fourteen Special Protection Areas (SPAs) designated for Chough nationally. Due to the relatively low numbers of breeding Chough in County Galway, no Chough SPAs are found in our county.

In my experience, most of the mainland Connemara breeding Chough use man-made structures, usually old cottages or castles. I have only seen three pairs using a natural cliff site on the mainland. While there is not a huge number of suitable sections of coastline with high cliffs in Connemara, there are a few stretches that formerly did have breeding Chough but no longer do for some reason. Most of the Inishmore, Inishbofin and Inishark pairs use natural cliff sites but all other Connemara island nesters use buildings. I know of two large old buildings that hold two breeding pairs each annually.

The species is generally considered to not nest colonially, like fellow corvid species such as Jackdaw and Rook do. During the non-breeding season, family groups and non-breeding birds can form small groups and will roost together. I've rarely seen over twenty birds together in Connemara.

Under the EU Birds Directive, Ireland is legally obliged to report on the status and trends of bird populations every six years. Suffice to say, we are now well overdue a repeat national survey of this important species. A new national Chough survey will be carried out by National Parks and Wildlife Service staff this year. This will involve walking linear transects along the coastline and suitable offshore islands twice during the breeding season which begins in early April and finishes by mid-June. Any evidence of possible, probable or confirmed breeding will be looked for. For example, a visit by a single bird or pair to a potential breeding site, birds carrying nest material or the presence of fledged young. "Flock birds" (non-breeding, young, un-paired birds) will also be recorded during the survey.

If anyone reading this article has encountered any Chough during the breeding season in recent years anywhere in County Galway, I would really appreciate to receive any such sightings. I can be contacted at dermot.breen@chg.gov.ie.

BIRD REPORTS

As well as Chris Peppiatt's invaluable Galway quarterly report of bird sightings and my reprinting of Major R.F. Rutledge's *Birds in Counties Galway and Mayo*, Anghus O Donnell has also forwarded to me a link to the online availability of the entire run of *Irish Bird Reports* 1953 – 2017. They make for fascinating reads. I attach the link below.

NS

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/nreyknq6sc3nmqe/IBR%201953%20to%202017.pdf?dl=0>

BIRDS IN POETRY

Seán McCann has kindly given me permission to publish his poem below before its more formal launch in a forthcoming poetry publication. I am reminded of the time, some twenty or more years ago, when the late Séamus Heaney also gave me permission to have his poem *Flaggy Shore* published in the *Galway Newsletter* ahead of its more formal launch. So, Seán's poem is in great company.

NS

Standing on Anne Mannion's Grave

A wailing gate welcome
to the field of Colman's Bofin
(Ah, will you stop?
Breathnaigh! Do you see a coffin?)

I settled down in the long grass
among the old people,
among the stones
inscribed with their deadlines

the sun at the top of her Irish day
(Dia ár sábháil!)

Same again tomorrow, please,
we'd ask of MacAsamhlóir.

A still life hour
before a rasping
from that tourist trapper:
his hoarse voice, his looped patter

Great craic Great craic!
Great craic Great craic!

with never even a glimpse
of the Corncrake,
that plains wanderer
that Apache!

tiptoeing through the liminal grasses between
the worlds seen
and unseen
The King of Hide and Seek.

Just as my mind began to wander
(sleeping on the job, mar sin!)

he rose from his red bed
that swaggerer!

There he was, full of himself
that Joycean gallant!
standing on Anne Mannion's grave
[died 30 July 1944]

and she must have been the life and soul of the
party in her day
the way he remained there for several minutes
extolling
at the top of his voice

Great craic Great craic!
Great craic Great craic!

Seán McCann

TWEET OF THE DAY

For very early risers, and while perhaps having a 6am breakfast, there is a great opportunity to tune into the BBC Radio 4 *Tweet of the Day*. This daily 3-minutes' programme features a different bird each morning with comment and sound. There is also a book based on it by Stephen Moss and Brett Westwood. My thanks to them for their kind permission to allow me to quote from it. Here is the Sanderling entry:

Sanderling

Twinkling along the tideline, so fast that their legs become a blur, Sanderlings can be the highlight of a winter walk along a windy beach. These shoreline sprinters are tiny waders – even smaller than a Starling – and are pure white below and silver grey above, with a dark shoulder patch and beady black eyes.

But it's the Sanderling's sheer turn of speed that captures our attention, dodging the incoming waves before chasing after the waters as they retreat, frantically probing the sand for morsels of food.

In winter, when conserving energy is important, the dashing about looks like wasted effort, but Sanderlings do have a strategy. By searching the freshly disturbed sand and shingle, they increase their chances of catching the small invertebrates, which come up to the surface, to cash in on food delivered by each breaking wave.

Sanderlings may look rather cute (they are often compared to a child's clockwork toy) but they are tough little birds. The ones we see in winter have often bred in Siberia, though the species breeds virtually around the globe, on tundra mostly within the boundaries of the Arctic Circle.

On their breeding grounds Sanderlings lose their whitish winter plumage and turn rich chestnut mottled with black on their back, wings, head and upper breast, remaining white on their lower belly. They rear their young on stony areas near the water where there's a rich supply of insects, especially flies and their larvae.

You occasionally see this fly-catching behaviour from Sanderlings that have flown south to beaches in late summer, when some of them may retain a vestige of their bright summer plumage before moulting into their ghostly winter garb.

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BirdWatch Galway (Branch of BirdWatch Ireland) 1st Quadrimester 2020

QUARTERLY BIRD REPORT COMPILED BY CHRIS PEPPIATT

DATE OF ISSUE: 13th February 2022

1st January: 3 Swallow, Waterside, Galway city. (1)

1st January: Woodcock, Bearna (David O'Keeffe).

1st January: Barn Owl, Monivea (Paidi Cullinan).

2nd January: 2 Carrion Crow & 1st Win. Iceland Gull, Nimmo's Pier, Galway city (Eric Dempsey). (2)

3rd January: 11 Twite, Loughaunbeg (Cathal Forkan). (3)

4th January: Great White Egret, again present, Barranny, Lough Corrib. (4)

4th January: Male Hen Harrier & Male Marsh Harrier, Barranny, Lough Corrib (Hugh Sweeney).

5th January: 1st Win. Glaucous Gull, Lettermullan (Sean McCann).

8th January: Drake Ring-necked Duck & 15 Yellowhammer, Lough Nalareagh (Paidi Cullinan). (5)

9th January: 4 Sandwich Tern, South Park, Galway city (Paul Troake).

10th January: Snow Bunting, Kilmacshane Bog, Nr. Clonfert (Alex Copland & Michael Whelan).

12th January: 74 Greenland White-fronted Goose, Belclare turlough (Ian O'Connor). (6)

14th January: 2 (Ad. & 1st Win.) Iceland Gull, Spiddal Pier (Aonghus O'Donail).

15th January: Drake Ring-necked Duck, now present, Fahy Lough, Omev Island. (7)

15th January: 2nd yr. male Scaup, Fahy Lough, Omev Island (Dermot Breen). (8)

15th January: 2nd yr. Iceland Gull, Ross Beach (Dermot Breen). (9)

19th January: 15 Purple Sandpiper, Lettermullen (Sean McCann).

22nd January: 2 Spotted Redshank & 6 Long-tailed Duck, Tawin (Paidi Cullinan).

23rd January: Female Goosander, again present between Drumsnauv & Derryherbert, Lough Corrib. (10)

25th January: Ad. Iceland Gull, Ad. Ring-billed Gull & Peregrine, Nimmo's Pier, Galway city (Niall Keogh). (11)

26th January: Spotted Redshank, Kilcaimin (Niall Keogh).

26th January: Slavonian Grebe & 5 Long-tailed Duck, Parkmore Pier (Niall Keogh).

27th January: 2nd yr. Ring-billed Gull, Fahy Lough, Omev Island (Dermot Breen). (12)

1st February: 2 (Ad. & 1st Win.) Iceland Gull, Waterside, Galway city (Niall Keogh). (13)

3rd February: 2 Pink-footed Goose & 151 Whooper Swan, Lough Nalareagh (Paidi Cullinan). (14)

4th February: 45-50 Barnacle Goose, Birmore Island (Sean McCann).

4th February: 2 Black-throated Diver & Common Sandpiper, Ross Beach (Dermot Breen).

9th February: 17 Stock Dove, Barbersfort Farm, Nr. Tuam (Mike Hoit).

9th February: Dipper, Spiddal (Fearghas MacLochlainn).

10th February: 1st Win. Male Eider, Kilkieran Harbour (Mike Hoit).

10th February: 2nd yr. Glaucous Gull, Nr. Rossaveal (Mike Hoit).

10th February: Dipper & Ad. Little Gull, Furbo Beach (Mike Hoit).

10th February: 2nd yr. Little Gull, Waterside, Galway city (Mike Hoit).

10th February: Ad. Forster's Tern, again present, Parkmore Quay, Kinvara Bay. (15)

12th February: Ad. Iceland Gull & 1st Win. Little Gull, Spiddal (Paul Troake).

13th February: Male Hen Harrier, 6 Greenland White-fronted Goose & 110+ Golden Plover, Letterfir (Paul Troake).

13th February: 6 Purple Sandpiper & 21 Sanderling, Loughaunbeg (Paul Troake).

14th February: Ad. Glaucous Gull, Aillebrack, Slyne Head (Dermot Breen).

16th February: Ruff, South Park, Galway city (Paidi Cullinan).

16th February: 2nd yr. Little Gull, Furbo Beach (Paidi Cullinan).

18th February: Ad. Mediterranean Gull, Lettermullan (Sean McCann).

20th February: 8 Twite, Rossadillask (Dermot Breen).

20th February: 90 Whooper Swan, Bullaunagh turlough, Nr. Kilchreest (Ray Glynn).

20th February: 43 Greenland White-fronted Goose, Cregganna Marsh (John Curley).

23rd February: Ruff, Turloughmore (Dermot Breen).

24th February: 154 Barnacle Goose, Rinvyle Point (Dermot Breen).
24th February: 39 Greenland White-fronted Goose, Cregganna Marsh (John Curley).
26th February: 3 Snow Bunting & 2 Spotted Redshank, Tawin (Gordon D'Arcy).
4th March: 3 Great-spotted Woodpecker, Pollnaknockaun Wood, Woodford (Tom Murtagh).
8th March: Common Sandpiper, Clarinbridge (Niall Keogh).
10th March: 5 Manx Shearwater, Baile na hAbhainn, Nr. Inveran (Paul Troake).
18th March: Greenland White-fronted Goose, Sliabh Rua, Inchiquin (Neil Sharkey).
20th March: 2 Common Crossbill, over Knocknacarra, Galway city (Aonghus O'Donaill).
22nd March: Male Wheatear, Cleggan Head (Dermot Breen).
22nd March: Male Wheatear, Killeenaran (Paul Troake).
25th March: Drake American Wigeon & Willow Warbler, Lough Nalareagh (Paidi Cullinan).
25th March: Willow Warbler, Bearna (Cathal Forkan).
25th March: Great-spotted Woodpecker, Aughrane Woods, Ballygar (Shane Coyle).
26th March: 1st yr. Mediterranean Gull, Cahermore turlough (Paul Troake).
27th March: Marsh Harrier, over Knocknacarra, Galway city (Aonghus O'Donaill).
4th April: Swallow, Loughrea (Tom Murtagh).
5th April: Long-eared Owl, Ardahan (Martina O'Neill).
6th April: Sand Martin, Connemara National Park (Dermot Breen).
8th April: Grasshopper Warbler, Bearna (Cathal Forkan).
7th April: Male Hen Harrier, Clifden (Simon Ashe).
9th April: 2 House Martin, Tooreen West, Nr. Ballinderreen (Paul Troake).
9th April: Red Grouse, Boliska, Nr. Spiddal (Fearghas MacLochlainn).
10th April: Cuckoo, Tirellan, Galway city (Tom Cuffe).
12th April: Fem. Hawfinch, Mainistir, Inishmore (Áine Ní Fhlaithearta). (16)
14th April: 3 Whimbrel & 3 Long-tailed Duck, Kinvara Bay (Paul Troake).
15th April: Sedge Warbler & 2 Yellowhammer, Cloghballymore, Nr. Ballinderreen (Paul Troake).
15th April: Little Tern, Spiddal Beach (Aonghus O'Donaill).
15th April: Redwing, Milltown, Nr. Tuam (Chris Benson).
16th April: Common Tern & Common Sandpiper, Cleggan Bay (Dermot Breen).
17th April: Whitethroat, Pollagh, Nr. Ballinderreen (Paul Troake).
17th April: Corncrake, Rossadillisk (per Ciaran Reaney).
21st April: Corncrake, Inishbofin (per Ciaran Reaney).
22nd April: 3 (Ad. Male, Ad. Fem. & Imm. Fem.) Ring-necked Duck, Roundstone Bog (Dermot Breen).
23rd April: 77 Whimbrel, Glennnamaddy turlough (Chris Peppiatt).
26th April: 3 Spotted Flycatcher, Monivea Woods (Paidi Cullinan).
29th April: 2 Whooper Swan, Horseleap Lough (Paidi Cullinan).
30th April: Swift, Oranmore (Martin Byrnes).

NOTES:

(1) Two Swallow had been present in the Nimmo's Pier/Waterside area since the 2nd of November 2019, three birds were present at Waterside on the 1st of January 2020, while four were present from the 2nd to the 30th of January 2020 and two remained until the 20th of February 2020.

(2) A first winter Iceland Gull was also recorded at Nimmo's Pier on the 15th of January 2020.

(3) After 11 Twite were recorded at Loughaunbeg on the 3rd of January 2020, three were recorded on the 4th of January, nine on the 14th of January, 20 on the 18th of January and one on the 13th of February 2020.

(4) Great White Egret have been resident in lower Lough Corrib for some years now and birds were also recorded at Angliham, one on the 19th of January, two at Muckrush on the 25th of January, three birds in the lower lake area on the 23rd of February and one again at Angliham on the 1st of March 2020.

(5) The drake Ring-necked Duck was also present at Lough Nalareagh on the 9th of January 2020.

(6) A flock of 62 Greenland White-fronted Goose was also recorded at Belclare turlough on the 26th of January 2020.

(7) A drake Ring-necked Duck, likely the same bird as this, was recorded at Lough Namackan (on Omev island only 250 metres from Fahy Lough) on the 29th of September and the 4th of October 2019; this bird was again recorded at Fahy Lough on the 27th of January 2020.

(8) The second year male Scaup was also recorded at Fahy Lough on the 27th of January 2020.

(9) Three second year Iceland gulls were also recorded at Ross Beach on the 20th of January 2020, two second year birds were there on the 4th of February and a single second year bird was also recorded there on the 14th of February 2020.

(10) The female Goosander was originally recorded in this area on the 25th of November 2019.

(11) An adult Ring-billed Gull was also recorded at Nimmo's Pier on the 15th of February 2020.

(12) This Ring-billed Gull was also recorded at the same site on the 20th of February 2020.

(13) An adult Iceland Gull was also recorded at Watreside on the 8th of February 2020 and an adult and a first winter bird were recorded in the Waterside/South Park/Nimmo's Pier area on the 7th of March 2020.

(14) What were presumably the same two Pink-footed geese were recorded near Moylough on the 25th of March 2020.

(15) The long-staying Forster's Tern has made multiple annual returns to winter in Galway Bay, it was present from October to December 2019 and was also recorded on the 8th of March 2020, the 20th of March 2020, the 22nd of March 2020 and the 14th of April 2020, in all cases in the Kinvara Bay area.

(16) The Hawfinch was again recorded at the same site on the 14th of April 2020.

HIGHLIGHTS:

Slavonian Grebe, American Wigeon, 2 Ring-necked Duck, Goosander, 2 Carrion Crow, 28 Twite & Hawfinch. Returning long-staying Forster's Tern and 3 resident Great White Egret.

ARRIVING SPRING MIGRANTS:

Manx Shearwater (10th of March), Wheatear (22nd of March), Willow Warbler (25th of March), Swallow (4th of April; first apparent Spring migrant, wintering birds present the previous November to February, see above), Sand Martin (6th of April), Grasshopper Warbler (8th of April), House Martin (9th of April), Cuckoo (10th of April), Whimbrel (14th of April), Little Tern (15th of April), Sedge Warbler (15th of April), Common Sandpiper (16th of April; wintering bird recorded 4th February, bird recorded on the 8th of March either early migrant or wintering bird, see above), Common Tern (16th of April), Whitethroat (17th of April), Corncrake (17th of April), Spotted Flycatcher (26th of April) & Swift (30th of April).

OTHER BEASTIES:

25th January: 2 Otter, between Nimmo's Pier & Rinmore Point, Galway city (Niall Keogh).

1st February: Otter, Nimmo's Pier, Galway city (Niall Keogh).

10th March: 6-7 Bottle-nosed Dolphin, Baile na hAbhainn, Nr. Inveran (Paul Troake).