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BIRDWATCH GALWAY
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QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER – EDITOR: NEIL SHARKEY
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THOUGHT FROM THE CHAIR

The BirdWatch Ireland National Dawn Chorus Day will be held on Sunday the 15th of May this year. The event is part of a wider International Dawn Chorus Day organised by bird and wildlife conservation groups in many countries for the first or second Sunday in May. Dawn Chorus Day has been going on for some years now and past events in Co. Galway have been held at places as diverse as Portumna Forest Park, Coole Park, Clifden, Terryland Forest Park, Merlin Park and Dangan. This year the Galway Branch will again be holding an event at Dangan in Galway City. People wishing to attend should make their way the NUI Galway sports grounds at Dangan, where car parking will be available. The event will start at 5 AM and people knowledgeable about birdsong will be around to help all present to identify the birds that will be singing. Books and BirdWatch Ireland gifts will also be available on the day. Birdsong is at its loudest and clearest in the spring at dawn. Not only this, but the amount of human noise and disturbance is at its least at dawn. You may think that you can hear birds singing at any time, but, if you have not heard a good spring dawn chorus recently, you would be surprised at the difference between the dawn chorus and daytime birdsong. Not only do I always get great pleasure from a dawn chorus, but feel a great sense of satisfaction at having got out of bed in time! You will also find that early rising will make your Sunday last much longer than normal, so why not come along?

Chris Peppiatt

BIRDS IN POETRY

Paul Muldoon is one of the distinguished poets reading at this year's Cúirt Festival. He was born in 1951 and has lived in the U.S.A. since 1987. In 1999 he became Professor of Poetry at Oxford University and is currently Clark Professor in the Humanities at Princeton University.

The poem features the spring migration of the Red Knot from Chile to its breeding grounds in the Arctic.

Redknots

Pat Finnegan

The day our son is due is the very day the redknots are meant to touch down on their long haul from Chile to the Arctic Circle, where they'll nest on the tundra within a few feet of where they were hatched. Forty or fifty thousand of them are meant to drop in along Delaware Bay.

They time their arrival on these shores to coincide with the horseshoe crabs laying their eggs in the sand. Smallish birds to begin with, the redknots have now lost half their weight. Eating the eggs of the horseshoe crabs is what gives them the strength to go on, forty or fifty thousand of them getting up all at once as if for a rock concert encore.

From *Moy Sand and Gravel* by Paul Muldoon, published in 2002 by Faber & Faber.

OF CHABUTARAS, CRANES & CORMORANTS

Northwest India – from an amateur birder's perspective
Before this trip, all I ever connected India with, in birding terms, was the Indian House Crow, which has become a seriously damaging invasive pest in Tanzania where I live. It competes with several native small birds and wins. But his hop north eastwards across the Indian Ocean, to Gujarat and Rajasthan, gave a chance to open the mind to other avian delights and issues of the Indian subcontinent. Having seen the heaviest flying bird in the world, the Kori Bustard, in Tanzania it was great to see another record breaker, the Sarus Crane (*Grus antigone*), which is the tallest flying bird in the world. It is over five feet high! Sheer numbers of migrating water birds and the ubiquitousness of some birds – especially Red-wattled Plovers, Rosy-ringed Parakeets and two kinds of Minah - amongst the dense and polluted human settlements also made a big impression.

At Thol Sanctuary, which is an irrigation dam, the morning air honks with the grunts of Greater Flamingos, Greylag Geese (*Anser anser*), Cranes (Common and Sarus), Black-tailed Godwits, Greater White Pelicans, Black-winged Stilts (*Himantopus himantopus*), Painted Storks (*Myceteria leucocephala*), Darters (*Anhinga melanogaster*), Indian Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*), Northern Shovellers (*Anas querquedula*) Asian Open-billed Stork (*Anastomus oscitans*), Herons, Purple and Grey (*Ardea purpurea* and *cinerea*) and River Terns (*Sterna aurantia*) to name just some of the thirty one bird species we saw in a one hour visit at dawn. The surrounding fields are intensively cultivated and a large factory blasts out smoke into the morning air.

The migrations of Demoiselle Cranes (*Anthropoids virgo*) must mirror the wildebeest one in Tanzania's Serengeti, as they flock in their thousands in the Saurashtra Peninsula. We counted over a thousand in just one group a few miles from the westernmost point of India (Dwarka)!

Even in Ahmedabad, the most polluted city in India, there are lots of birds to be seen. Four hundred years ago ornate bird feeders (Chabutaras) were constructed in the town squares and special personnel were designated fulltime to feed the birds. This tradition still continues and Rosy-ringed Parakeets feed here and live in the special tunnels that were constructed for birds in the walls of the houses. Peafowl are everywhere too. If such large meaty birds were hanging about settlements in Tanzania they would not avoid the pot for long. The new Important Bird Area book for India (Birdlife International) claims that the vegetarianism of the people of Gujarat state where Ghandi's influence is still strong helps to preserve wildlife. Some dispute this point saying that the poorer people do not have the choice to avoid eating whatever protein comes their way, but there seems to be a reverence for birds that is not found elsewhere. On a fast journey by tarred road (most of the roads are in very good condition) my Driver/Guide Sultan screeched to a halt, jumped out of the car and ran back the road. He had seen a Red-vented Bulbul – very common in this area - lying on the road and was impelled to rescue it. It got the best of drinking water and was put in the shade and observed for a while until certain that it was recovered before departure. How many drivers in Ireland or Tanzania would do the same? In the national parks there were many birds of prey and also some grassland / woodland birds of which the favourite was the Indian Sandgrouse whose exquisite camouflage against the dry leaf litter makes it very difficult to spot. The white version of the Paradise Flycatcher also delighted us as it carried its awkwardly long tail from

branch to branch in its insecting forays in Sasan Gir National Park.

Spiritual worship usually helps to protect habitats, for example, in Tanzania, forests which are deemed to have spirits are not visited except for sacrificial events and harvesting is avoided because there is fear of spirit anger by potential loggers. In India, because temples occur in forests and thousands of pilgrims visit temples each year, such habitats are under threat from human disturbance. The demand for agricultural irrigation water from surface waterbodies rich in fertility, as opposed to deep wells which tend to be saline, is also a threat to bird habitats.

Rose Hogan

EXPLORING THE EBRO

Recently MI Casey of the Sligo Branch and I flew from Dublin to Reus on a short birdwatching trip to explore the Ebro delta and Tarragona in north-east Spain. We were met by Albert Torrell, a local who had visited Galway last January and whom we had met on Nimmo's Pier. The first bird we saw in Spain was the inevitable House Sparrow but we were soon on to better things seeing a Bonelli's Eagle - one of many 'firsts' for me. The Ebro delta is a vast river plain almost the size of south Co. Galway. It is intensely cultivated and flooded for rice growing. On the first day strong gales were blowing from the mountains so we did most of our watching from the car. Gull-billed and Caspian Terns were feeding on the flooded fields. On the seashore we saw Caspian, Common, Sandwich and Little Terns and numerous waders, inc. Kentish and Little Ringed Plovers and Little Stints. My highlight was the beautiful Slender-billed Gull. We also had a Purple Heron with Black Kite overhead. On the south side of the Ebro we saw Glossy Ibis and Purple Gallinule.

On day two we got lost on our way to Tarragona and missed a pelagic trip planned by some local birdwatchers. This was somewhat compensated for by seeing Audouin's Gulls, said to be the world's rarest gulls. On their return from the pelagic the locals kindly took us on a trip to the mountains - poppies, borage and brambles in abundance! Highlights were Scops and Little Owls and two Cetti's Warblers. We also had Black Kites, Short-toed Eagles, Blue Rock Thrush, Red-legged Partridge, Alpine Swift and Crag Martins. Back towards sea level we picked up Tawny Pipit and Short-toed Lark at a seaside marsh. On the third day we visited El Garascot Lagoon to see Marsh Harriers, Black-winged Stilts, Red-crested Pochard, Egrets and Ibis. Three Black-winged Pratincoles were the highlight. At La Tancoda we had Flamingos and the only Teal and Common Pochard of the trip. In the salt marshes we saw Little Stints, Curlew Sandpipers, a Wester Reef/Little Egret hybrid and Spotted Redshanks in breeding plumage. There were a lot of Slender-billed Gulls, too. Finally, on the way to the airport, we spotted a Squacco Heron and a Green Sandpiper.

One thing I learned was the importance of knowing the scientific names of birds which made it so much easier to communicate with our Spanish friends. We thank them for giving so generously of their time and knowledge.

Michael Davis

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Sunday 15 May, Dawn Chorus Day, meet at the car park of the NUIG Dangan Sports Grounds, 5am.
Wednesday 18 May, members/committee meeting, 8pm.
Saturday 4 June, short outing, Nimmo's Pier, 10.30am.
Wednesday 15 June, members/committee meeting, 8pm

Last Call: The next issue will be the last on 'general post' delivery – do give us your e-mail address if at all possible.

BirdWatch Galway (Branch of BirdWatch Ireland)

A QUARTERLY BIRD REPORT BY TIM GRIFFIN & CHRIS PEPPIATT

1st Quarter 2005

TEL. (091) 590154 or at www.birdwatchgalway.org

DATE OF ISSUE: 6th May 2005

Species	Location	No	Date	Observer	Species	Location	No	Date	Observer
Black Redstart	Harbour Docks, Galway	1	01.01.05	AK	Glaucous Gull	Rossaveal	6	18.02.05	DB
American Herring Gull	Nimmo's Pier	2ndW	01.01.05	TG (1)	Smew	Lough Rea	F/Imm.	19.02.05	AO'D (11)
Ferruginous Duck	Coole Lough	M	01.01.05	TG (2)	Ferruginous Duck	Blackrock Turlough	M	20.02.05	MD (12)
Ring-necked Duck	Coole Lough	F	01.01.05	TG (2)	Black-headed Gull	Ballyloughaun, Galway	Leuc.	21.02.05	TG
Common Sandpiper	Lough Atalia	1	02.01.05	NE	Goshawk	Drumaveg, Moycullen	1	22.02.05	PR
Chiffchaff	Lough Atalia	1	02.01.05	NE	Little Gull	Nimmo's Pier	5	23.02.05	TG
Scaup	Lough Atalia	18	02.01.05	NE	Black-throated Diver	Durras Pier	7	23.02.05	TG
Little Egret	Rossaveal	1	02.01.05	JOC	Peregrine	Rahasane Turlough	Leuc.	26.02.05	TG
Tree Sparrow	Glenamaddy	2	03.01.05	MM	Russian White-fronted Goose	Rahasane Turlough	2	26.02.05	TG
Glaucous Gull X Herring Gull hyb.	Waterside, Galway	1	03.01.05	MD (3)	Barnacle Goose	Rossaveal	1	26.02.05	TG
Iceland Gull	Nimmo's Pier	2-1stW	03.01.05	MD	Yellowhammer	Termon, Nr. Gort	6	27.02.05	CP
Glaucous Gull	Nimmo's Pier	4-1stW	03.01.05	MD	Ring-billed Gull	Nimmo's Pier	2A	27.02.05	DB
Long-tailed Duck	Traught	3	03.01.05	TG	Little Gull	Nimmo's Pier	1stW	27.02.05	DB
Scaup X Tufted Duck hyb.	Lough Atalia	1	03.01.05	TG	Little Egret	Kilcaimin	4	27.02.05	DO'K
Sandwich Tern	Durras Pier	4	03.01.05	TG	Little Gull	Nimmo's Pier	3	01.03.05	TG
Ring-billed Gull	Nimmo's Pier	3A	04.01.05	TG	Mediterranean Gull	Salthill Promenade	AW	02.03.05	MC
Iceland Gull	Nimmo's Pier	4(3-1stW & 2ndW)	04.01.05	DB	Mediterranean Gull	Nimmo's Pier	1stW	05.03.05	DB
Glaucous Gull	Nimmo's Pier	5 (3-1stW, 2ndW & 3rdW)	04.01.05	DB	Slavonian Grebe	Lough Rea	S	05.03.05	DB
Purple Sandpiper	Inverin	12	05.01.05	TG	Greenland White-fronted Goose	Nr. Rostaff, Co. Mayo	52	05.03.05	CK (13)
Iceland Gull 'kumlieni'	Rossaveal	1stW	05.01.05	TG	Common Buzzard	Cregg Castle, Corrandulla	1	06.03.05	IB (14)
Ross' Gull	off Galway Docks	1A	06.01.05	TG	Chiffchaff	Nr. Ceann Station, Galway	1	06.03.05	DB
Iceland Gull	Nimmo's Pier	7-1stW	06.01.05	DB (4)	Waxwing	Glenard Crescent, Salthill	10	06.03.05	BD
Glaucous Gull	Nimmo's Pier	5 (3-1stW & 2-2ndW)	06.01.05	DB	Jack Snipe	Corrandulla	1	13.03.05	IB
Little Gull	Nimmo's Pier	7	07.01.05	TG	Yellowhammer	Roscahill	1	15.03.05	PR
Scaup	Lough Atalia	21	08.01.05	NE	Siskin	Drumaveg, Moycullen	20	15.03.05	PR
Long-tailed Duck	Carraroe	3	14.01.05	TG	Greenland White-fronted Goose	Rahasane Turlough	85	18.03.05	CP
Black-throated Diver	Durras Pier	4	15.01.05	TG	Sand Martin	Waterside, Galway	1	19.03.05	JG
American Herring Gull	Rossaveal	2ndW	15.01.05	DB (5)	Purple Sandpiper	Blackrock, Salthill	11	25.03.05	CP
Iceland Gull	Rossaveal	7	15.01.05	DB	Peregrine	Nimmo's Pier	1	26.03.05	Many obs.
Glaucous Gull	Rossaveal	3	15.01.05	DB	Long-tailed Duck	Finavara, Co. Clare	10	27.03.05	TG
Iceland Gull	Nimmo's Pier	12+	15.01.05	DB (6)	Black-throated Diver	Finavara, Co. Clare	14	27.03.05	TG
Twite	Nimmo's Pier	1	15.01.05	DB	Little Gull	Nimmo's Pier	1	28.03.05	TG
Forster's Tern	Durras Pier	AW	16.01.05	TG (7)	Crossbill	Cloosh Wood	8	28.03.05	TG
Little Egret	Traught	1	16.01.05	TG	Wheatear	Máméan	1	28.03.05	MtC
Blackcap	Glenard Crescent, Salthill	2	17.01.05	BD	Ring-billed Gull	Nimmo's Pier	2	29.03.05	TG
Waxwing	GMIT, Galway	24	22.01.05		Willow Warbler	Rossaveal	1	30.03.05	TG
Common Sandpiper	Nimmo's Pier	1	22.01.05	DB	Iceland Gull	Nimmo's Pier	12	31.03.05	DB (15)
Iceland Gull	Nimmo's Pier	10-1stW	22.01.05	DB (8)					
Glaucous Gull	Nimmo's Pier	7 (5-1stW & 2-2ndW)	22.01.05	DB					
Iceland Gull	Nimmo's Pier	20	23.01.05	DB					
Sandwich Tern	Nimmo's Pier	1	23.01.05	DB	Juv. = Juvenile; A = Adult; W = Winter; S = Summer; F = Female; M = Male;				
Glaucous Gull	Nimmo's Pier	8	23.01.05	DB	Imm. = Immature; Leuc. = Leucistic; hyb. = hybrid.				
Black Redstart	Ballyloughaun, Galway	1 F/1stW	23.01.05	DB					
Waxwing	Merlin Park, Galway	12	28.01.05						
Waxwing	Glenburren Park, Galway	24	28.01.05	IB					
Common Buzzard	Athenry	1	29.01.05	PR	(1) Bird from previous quarter, remained in area until end of 1st Quarter 2005.				
Red-necked Grebe	Ballinacourty	1	29.01.05	DB	(2) Bird from previous quarter..				
Wigeon	Rahasane Turlough	leuc.	29.01.05	TG	(3) Remained in area until end of 1st Quarter 2005.				
Black-throated Diver	Finavara, Co. Clare	14	29.01.05	TG	(4) Including one bird of 'kumlieni' race.				
Forster's Tern	Nimmo's Pier	AW	30.01.05	DB (9)	(5) Same bird as at Nimmo's Pier.				
Waxwing	Glenburren Park, Galway	32	30.01.05	TG	(6) Including 2-1stW 'kumlieni' types.				
Iceland Gull	Waterside, Galway	1stW	30.01.05	DB	(7) Present in area until 26.03.05.				
Chiffchaff	Waterside, Galway	2	30.01.05	DB	(8) Including 3 'kumlieni' types.				
Glaucous Gull	Nimmo's Pier	5	30.01.05	TG	(9) Same bird as at Durras Pier.				
Chiffchaff	NUI Galway	1	31.01.05	PD	(10) Present until 26.02.05				
Hen Harrier	Ballindiff Bay, Luimnagh	F	01.02.05	DC	(11) Present until 05.03.05				
Hen Harrier	Maam Cross	M	01.02.05	GO'D	(12) Present until 26.02.05				
Sanderling	Spiddal	4	02.02.05	TG	(13) Birds in Co. Galway, present again on 10.03.05.				
Purple Sandpiper	Inverin	6	02.02.05	TG	(14) Found dead.				
Crossbill	Cloosh Wood	12	02.02.05	TG	(15) 12(11-1stW & 2ndW), including 1stW 'kumlieni' type.				
Iceland Gull	Nimmo's Pier	15	05.02.05	TG					
Mediterranean Gull	Grattan Road, Salthill	1stW	05.02.03	HD					
Iceland Gull	Rossaveal	8-1stW	06.02.05	DB & PL					
Glaucous Gull	Rossaveal	4-1stW	06.02.05	DB & PL					
Little Egret	Traught	4	06.02.05	MM					
Eider	Finavara, Co. Clare	F	06.02.05	TG					
Long-tailed Duck	Finavara, Co. Clare	8	06.02.05	TG					
Little Gull	Nimmo's Pier	1	07.02.05	TG	AK = Aidan Kelly; TG = Tim Griffin; NE = Neil Ellis;				
Blackcap	Shantalla, Galway	1	10.02.05	TG	JOC = John Ó Cathniadh; MM = Mrs. Mallen; MD = Michael Davis;				
Sandwich Tern	Durras Pier	8	12.02.05	TG	DB = Dermot Breen; BD = Brendan Dunne; IB = Ian Brophy;				
Spotted Redshank	Kilcaimin	1	13.02.05	TG	PR = Padraic Reaney; PD = Patrick Delaney; DC = Deirdre Comerford;				
Red-necked Grebe	Lough Rea	S	16.02.05	MF & PF (10)	GO'D = Ger O'Donnell; HD = Hugh Delany; PL = Pat Lonergan;				
Caspian Gull	Rossaveal	1stW	18.02.05	HD	MF = Mary Finnegan; PF = Pat Finnegan; AO'D = Aonghus O'Donail;				
Little Gull	Nimmo's Pier	6 (2A & 4-1stW)	18.02.05	DB	CP = Chris Peppiatt; DO'K = David O'Keefe; MC = Michael Connolly;				
Iceland Gull	Rossaveal	12	18.02.05	DB	CK = Christian Kubernat; JG = Joe Greeney; MtC = Marianne ten Cate.				