



CAIRDE EANLAITH NA GAILLIMHE
BIRDWATCH GALWAY
www.birdwatchgalway.org
SPECIAL 75TH EDITION

Telephone: 086 1680856 e-mail: neilsharkey@eircom.net
Issue No. 75 Nov 2011

This is a local forum newsletter
– contributions and comments
are most welcome.
Distributed by e mail only

THE 75TH SPECIAL EDITION

In deciding to do something special for this landmark edition my objective was to produce something that would firstly offer a reflection of Galway birdwatching down the years and secondly include articles that showed the state of present day birdwatching here. Finally, as we keep stressing of late, the continuity of the branch really depends on fresh input from new and younger people and the hope is that this special publication will help to bring this about.

Thanks to an amazing response from so many contributors I feel that the first two objectives have been largely achieved. The third is in the hands of the future! So, my thanks to all who responded and a particular thanks to Marianne for her unfailing help in putting it all together. **NS**

CONTENTS

The 75 th Special Edition	Neil Sharkey
Branch Newsletter Matters	Marianne ten Cate
From Lawrencetown in the 'Far East'	Stephen Heery
The Newsletter – how it happened	Neil Sharkey
A Galway period	Dave Nutall
Birding co-incidences – 1 st Irish Records in County Galway	Joe Hobbs
Recollections	Pádraic Reaney
Tony Whilde – a day of tribute	Gerry Donnelly
A birdwatcher's progression	Gerry O Keffe
My patch	Brendan Dunne
Tribute	Peadar O Dowd
Raptors.... Raptors – five years with the hen harrier	Aonghus O Dónaill
Down in the dumps	Marianne ten Cate
Down Memory Lane	Martin Byrnes
I-WeBS Galway	Helen Boland
An English birder abroad	Pete Capsey
Ringling nestlings in County Galway	Chris Benson
Yellow Takkies	John Carey
Congrats from BirdWatch HQ	Niall Hatch
Birds in poetry	Marianne ten Cate
The Bird Atlas 2007-11	Brian Caffrey
Birds of the Connemara hills	Padraig Kearns
The Barn Owl Research Project	John Lusby
My Galway connections	Dermot Breen
Down the memory lane of birdwatching in Galway - a chat with May Cashman, Tuam	Willi Kiefel
The Magpie's tale	Martin Ryan
Changes as the years go by	Chris Peppiatt
Birds I can identify myself - confessions of a birdwatcher's son	Eoin Sharkey
Forthcoming programme	Marianne ten Cate
Galway Bird Report, Quarter 2 2011	Chris Peppiatt

BRANCH NEWSLETTER MATTERS

The 75th issue of the Galway Newsletter does not only invite us to look forward to the next 75 issues, but also invites us to look back over the earlier issues – with some trepidation as one never knows what lurks in the chronicles of our branch - our ups and downs, our arrivals and departures, our people, places and programmes, and what, over time, has been important to us, the community of bird watchers in County Galway.

Let's start at the start and reveal a little secret: this is actually the 80th Galway Newsletter. The present run of newsletters, edited by Neil Sharkey, started with Issue No.1 in Spring 1993 but there were 5 earlier newsletters, Issues No. 1 to No. 5, dated January 1986 to November 1987, and guess who was one of the editors, with Dave Nuttall: none other than Neil Sharkey! And no prizes for guessing who was branch secretary in 1986....

That first 1986 Newsletter contains a sketch of the beginnings of the branch, starting with the inaugural meeting in the Odeon Café on Eyre Square on the 3rd of May 1969, arranged by Fr Brendan Dillon OP, who later became our Life President and remained deeply interested in the branch, even when he had moved to Rome and later Tralee, till he died there in the Autumn of 2005. The first formal committee was elected in 1971 and included Martin Byrnes, who is still an active member!

Our Galway membership has steadily grown from no more than 30 members in 1971 to over 150 in 1986 and well over 300 at present.

In 1996 the Irish Wildbird Conservancy (IWC) was renamed BirdWatch Ireland. With this name change the Galway branch adopted the shorthand 'BirdWatch Galway', but we were asked to call ourselves the Galway Branch of BirdWatch Ireland to be clearly identified as a branch of the national organisation.

Initially, our 'years' ran from October to October but, after a gradual slide till later in the year, from 2001 our annual report covers a calendar year and Annual General Meetings take place in early January.

Changes also took place in the venues for our meetings, which, since 1984, are all in the Anno Santo Hotel on Threadneedle Road and kindly welcomed by the Vaughan family.

Committee meetings used to take place on every first Wednesday of the month, usually in the bar; from the mid-1980s they became more formal and were held on the second or third Wednesday of the month, and later they were opened up for all members to attend until they were abandoned earlier this year.

In relation to the Newsletter itself, a major change was the out-sourcing of the distribution of Wings. From 2003 we had to either post or e-mail the Newsletter to our members as it could no longer be inserted in Wings. Now, it is all done by e-mail.

My own involvement with the branch started when I joined a very active educational sub-committee. During the Christmas school-holidays of the years 1978-1980 the branch offered day-long courses for young people, which were attended by about 100 youngsters each! Responding to the interest among so many young people, the branch set up a very successful Young Ornithologists' Club, which hosted monthly talks and outings for its 79 members on Saturday mornings during the winter months from 1981 till 1989. Later, educational projects were run by Gordon D'Arcy and me in the Gort and Oughterard areas in 1991, and in 1992 we received further our

funding to continue schoolwork well into 1993. Over the years schools could request occasional visits by one of our members free of charge. Now, we rarely get asked to give talks in schools as most NPWS Rangers visit schools, the County Council has funded a number of school projects and there is funding from the Department of Education to facilitate accredited heritage courses in schools. Environmental education has been put on a more professional footing at last!

As you can see, the Newsletter has chronicled many changes and makes for interesting reading, providing jolting flashbacks, throwing up reminders not only of people, places and regular activities, but also of columns that flourished and faded, were tried but didn't take, or lasted from 1986 till this very issue.

The earlier issues are now of an age that you may consider getting one of a significant year framed to remind a young bird watching recruit of what went before!

Marianne ten Cate



Birdwatchers at the outing at Nimmo's Pier during Heritage Week 2011 with Galway Bird Guide and heritage teacher Tom Cuffe. (Photograph Tom Cuffe)

FROM LAWRENCETOWN IN THE 'FAR EAST'

A very short ramble through thirty-one years in the far east of County Galway leads me to the following.

In the early eighties, during the three-year national census, the sound and sight of geese along the linear landscape of the River Suck remain in my mind. A local newspaper misquoted me, saying that Lough Lurgeen bog was a habitat for the green and white fronted grouse. Greenland White-fronted Geese *Anser albifrons flavirostris* still use this raised bog near Glenamaddy. One May, we traipsed through floodwater on Tower callow, in Galway across from Banagher, checking out a Woodlark report, to be confronted with a singing Skylark with no tail. The most convenient bird watching spectacle is to view the Cormorant colony at close range west of Rinmaher Point in Portumna Forest Park. Tony Whilde gave me my first chance to walk and watch birds on, and write about, the Shannon Callows for his and Marianne's comprehensive 1982 *Irish Wetlands Survey*, for which I have always been very grateful. It sometimes seems that the Shannon Callows belong to no county at all. However Galway can claim Inishee Island, on which 18 pairs of Redshank successfully bred in 2010 (not too much down on the 25 pairs, productivity unknown, in 1987 and a far greater percentage of the national population today). A Curlew pair was successful there in 2011. Someone saw a Rose-coloured Starling at very close quarters from his car at Clonmoylan, 890 Whooper Swans inhabited the working, but flooded, Bord na Móna bog near Clonfert in February 2010, Buzzards have arrived in Lawrencetown. The most constant and arresting sound from my house has been the croak of Ravens.

Stephen Heery



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THE NEWSLETTER – HOW IT HAPPENED

The life of the Galway BirdWatch *Newsletter* mirrors the development of personal computers and other such innovations.

As Marianne has referred to elsewhere, it began with a short-lived effort of five issues in the mid-1980s. Dave Nuttall and I used Dave's BBC or Commodore computer. It printed out in small - A5 size - continuous stationery, which we cut into sections and pasted onto sheets of A4 paper for copying. Cutting meant with scissors and pasting was with real glue. This effort lapsed when Dave and his family went back to England.

By the early 1990s I acquired a Wang computer - bought through the ESB bill, costing £1,200 (not euros!) and taking forever to pay off! This enabled the start of the *Newsletter* proper using an early Works menu driven word processing program. Distribution was easy - we just sent a master copy to BWI HQ and the volunteer packers there put a copy in with each of the Galway members' *Wings* magazine.

At some stage I got some kind of a 'publisher' program on a floppy disk and this produced a more presentable copy but could only be printed on a single specialised printer in my place of work - so for a period my employers made an unofficial contribution to ornithology and conservation!

By the early 2000s I had progressed to a Dell desktop and Windows Office, and articles could be sent to me by e-mail, a huge benefit. However, a new situation arose when HQ handed over *Wings* distribution to a professional firm; no more convenient *Newsletter* inclusion! Initially, they made a contribution to postage to enable local send-out. So, after monthly meetings we stayed on and had a 'meitheal' of the committee to do our own addressing for Co. Galway members while for the city I cycled delivery from Renmore to Knocknacarra and all points in between. However, as the new millennium progressed we gradually shifted to e-mail and stopped other delivery means. The list of mail recipients has grown and grown - to now over 350.

Despite the arrival of ultra user-friendly publishing and production means, such as enhanced Office, Publisher, brilliant photography options etc, the format of the *Newsletter* has remained deliberately plain. I have always held the view that good narrative content by local contributors is the key to success. Therefore, I am enormously grateful to all those who have supported the *Newsletter* year in year out over the past 75 issues, and particularly to those who have risen to the occasion for this special edition.

Neil Sharkey

A GALWAY PERIOD

I am Dave Nuttall and together with my wife Chris we blew-in to Galway as newly weds just after Christmas of 1979. As a hopeless and naïve romantic I had arranged our honeymoon to be in a holiday cottage at Errislannin just outside Clifden. That winter temperatures fell to minus 12°C. To my good fortune we are still married 33 years later.

During our first Galway winter we met Tony Whilde at Mweeloon whilst looking for Brent Geese; he was showing a group around the bay. I soon found myself filling the vacant post of treasurer of the branch. Over the next ten years I was active in one role or another in the branch. I look back on these

years as a halcyon period of my life. From those days I hold a number of people in the highest regard, the foremost being Neil Sharkey. This quiet, determined man has been a catalyst and an innovator of all that is good in the IWC, both in Galway and nationally.

We left Galway in 1988 under a cloud of family difficulties and to this day I value the kind and supportive words Neil spoke to me as we watched Whimbrel at Menlough in the spring of 1988. From the bottom of my heart I say thank you Neil.

David Nuttall

BIRDING CO-INCIDENCES
1st Irish records in County Galway

From a particular point of view, bird watching consists of a series of co-incidences. I mean, the happenstance of birder and bird being in the same place at the same time and the birder observing the 'birdee'. Within the geographical boundaries of County Galway we should expect the majority of these co-incidences to involve expected and familiar species. However, every now and again the co-incidence of bird and person occurs for the first time, not just in Galway, but for all of Ireland, and so a species gets added to the national list.

Historically, most additions to the national list are found in the south and southwest of the country, although County Galway has added its fair share over the years. And, perhaps not surprisingly, most of these 'first birds' have come from the New World. That said, the earliest addition to the Irish list found in Galway came from the south rather than the west as a Great Spotted Cuckoo *Clamator glandarius* occurred on Omev Island in March 1842. While pursued by hawks the bird was observed to fly to a crevice in a stone wall where it was captured alive. It survived in captivity for four days, during which time it lived on potatoes and water. This handsome bird has occurred on a further four occasions in Ireland, mostly in spring when overshooting its southern European breeding grounds.

Two further firsts were recorded before the end of the 19th century and both were waders. The first of these was an Upland Sandpiper *Bartramia longicauda*, which was shot on the River Suck near Ballinasloe in the autumn of 1885. Back then Upland Sandpiper was known as Bartram's Sandpiper, after the American naturalist and author William Bartram. As for appearance, think small Curlew without the long bill. Unusually for a wading bird, it is not fond of estuaries or shorelines, instead choosing to breed on the prairie grasslands of Canada and the USA while spending the winter months on the pampas of South America. It is rare on this side of the Atlantic and the intervening years have produced only ten further Irish records. This could have something to do with its preferred migration route through the Great Plains, Mexico and Central America, a journey that manages to avoid the open sea and deep, fast moving Atlantic depressions.

The next first was a Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*, a species that has now become an annual visitor to Ireland. In October 1888 Edward Williams discovered and procured a male Pectoral Sandpiper in a Dublin market. It had arrived with a consignment of Snipe from Portumna where it had been shot. It has the distinction of occurring in both the old and new worlds with breeding populations on

marshy areas in Siberia and North America, migrating south to Australasia and South America.

In June 1919 Alcock and Brown made the first non-stop transatlantic flight. It ended when they crash-landed their Vickers Vimy in a field near Clifden. Less than a year later a Sora *Porzana carolina* made a similar voyage that ended when it crash-landed against the lantern at Slyne Head lighthouse on 11th April 1920. Present to record another Irish first and collect the specimen for the National Museum was Professor C.J. Patten. The arrival date is unusual but not unique as there are other spring records of this rail in Europe. It breeds locally throughout much of North America in a wide range of marshy habitat and migrates south to Central and north South America using a variety of routes over land and sea. To date, there has been one further Irish record from Wexford in 1998.

It would be almost fifty years before Galway would produce another national first and, unlike all previous firsts, it would survive the experience. On the first day of July 1969, on the beach at Ballyconneely Bay, a Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*. About the size of a Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis* but more robust and with a thick black gull-like bill. These terns have a rather fragmented distribution in the old and new worlds, wintering in the tropics. A further fourteen birds have reached our shores since 1969.

A report of a Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus* in Claregalway had enticed Aidan G. Kelly, Tom Shevlin and Victor Caschera west on the 18th November 1995. They were rewarded with excellent views of the bird on the ground and in the air. Next, they decided to head for Nimmo's Pier in the hope of some interesting gulls. On arrival, Tom and Victor remained in the car for a brew while Aidan headed off along the pier. On raising his binoculars a Cormorant with an orange lower mandible and gape immediately caught his attention and, as soon as he was able to view the bird through a telescope, he knew it was a Double-crested Cormorant *Phalacrocorax auritus*, a species he had previously seen in the USA. He ran back to alert Tom and Victor and together they managed to see the bird again before it flew out of the harbour and out of view. As others arrived there was an anxious three-hour wait until it reappeared where Aidan had first noticed it. Although it remained in the area until early the following year, it was often very elusive, and erratic in its presence. To date, no further Irish records have occurred.

On the 2nd November 2007 Anthony McGeehan found a Mourning Dove *Zenaidura macroura* on Inishbofin, a first for Ireland and the 6th record for the Western Palearctic. It is tempting to speculate on the subsequent fate of vagrant birds. Do they realise they are lost and do they, upon making the necessary course adjustments, resume their journey? For this individual that does not seem to be the case, at least not in the short term, as photographs of a Mourning Dove in north-eastern Germany and Skagen, Denmark the following May 2008 strongly suggest they involve the Inishbofin bird. Mourning Dove is a common and widespread bird in North and Central America where its sorrowful call provides its name.

On the 24th September 2008 a Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* at Barnaderg Bay near Letterfrack was brought to the attention of Aonghus O'Donnail and Dermot Breen. Subsequently, they were able to observe the bird on the shore opposite the Avoca gift shop. They considered but discounted the possibility



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that it might be a Snowy Egret *Egretta thula*; however, they left unable to completely resolve some of the bird's features with Little Egret. By the 4th October Dermot was on Inishmore browsing Sibley's *North American Bird Guide* and there, on page 63 of the guide, was the Barnaderg bird of two weeks previous; not a Little Egret, not a Snowy Egret but a lovely juvenile Little Blue Heron *Egretta caerulea*! A rather frantic text message was sent to Aonghus that ensured he was back in Barnaderg Bay at first light the following morning and he was able to confirm that the bird was still present as well as its identification as a Little Blue Heron. A first record for Galway, Ireland, Europe and just the 4th for the Western Palearctic. It remained until the 22nd October, attracting a steady stream of birders from Ireland and Britain. Little Blue Heron breeds colonially in sub-tropical swamps from the US Gulf south through Central America as far as Peru and Uruguay. It is largely sedentary in its habits, although birds in the northern part of its range do migrate south. Young Little Blue Herons, like the Barnaderg individual, are white, only acquiring their distinctive blue plumage as they age.

That should be it then, but not quite as there are some Galway records which are potential first Irish records, but are pending and yet to be published by the Irish Rare Bird Committee. In recent years, Anthony McGeehan has ensured that Inishbofin has featured prominently in the consciousness of birders as he has found so many great birds there. Already mentioned is the Mourning Dove he found in 2007. Almost two years later he would do it again by finding a Cedar Waxwing *Bombycilla cedrorum* there. This North American congener of the Old World Bohemian Waxwing *Bombycilla garrulus* is superficially similar, but is smaller, has a pale yellow belly and lacks the white under-tail coverts, white wing-bar and white and yellow tips to the primary feathers of the Bohemian Waxwing. Finally, a Pacific Diver *Gavia pacifica*, which was treated as a race of Black-throated Diver *Gavia arctica* until recent years and is very similar in appearance, was found and photographed by Michael Davis off Rinville Point, Oranmore on the 30th January 2010. The soon to be published 2009 and 2010 Irish Rare Bird Reports will, no doubt, include details of these two great records.



Pacific Diver *Gavia pacifica* 30.01.2010
(photograph Michael Davis)

The appearance of any bird, especially a first for Ireland, is never a scheduled event; indeed it often seems to happen when least expected. If I had to guess about those people who have found first Irish birds I would say that few, if any of them, considered the prospect when heading out on the day in question and, in my opinion, that is the great joy of birding.

A PDF copy of the Irish List is available online at the IRBC web-site
<http://www.irbc.ie/topbar/categories.php>.

Joe Hobbs

RECOLLECTIONS

The very first meeting that I attended of the Galway branch of Birdwatch Ireland - or the IWC as it was called then - was in a city centre hotel. I was with my good friend Benny Murray. He was the one who got me interested in bird watching and wildlife in general. Benny was very interested in fishing and shooting as well as falconry, all of which he passed on to me. At the meeting that night was Neil Sharkey. Neil is still with us, doing a great deal of work for the branch, and a lot of credit goes to Neil for keeping the branch going over the years. It is very hard to say 'no' to Neil when he wants something done. He and Tony Whilde both became good friends to me later on in my life.

Benny was very familiar with the bogs and lakes in the Connemara. He and I took part in many bird counts in the area, some of them for other members of the IWC. One of those who were always in contact was Major Rutledge. Most of the information he looked for would have to do with White-fronted Geese and swans.

When I was about fourteen, Benny introduced me to falconry. The love for birds of prey never left me and led me later to setting up a raptor rescue facility.

Benny and I, at one stage, decided to clear some willows and weed off an island on the big lake in Carraroe. I heard from my grandmother that people used to collect eggs from the island every summer when she was a child. I told Benny about this and he had heard about it too. With that, we decided to clear off the over-growth during that winter and see what would happen. We reckoned, at the time, that the birds in question would have been terns and we thought they might not return, but they did! They were Common Terns and we had six nests that summer and about ten the next. We only went onto the island once during the second summer as the island is small and we were afraid of stepping on eggs. The birds came back for a few years after that. But I moved into Galway and Benny didn't have the time nor any help to go back in the winter to keep the willow and weeds down. The willow took over the island again and, of course, the terns never returned. David Scott was also a great help. I remember, with the tern project. He took a real interest in what we were doing and kept in touch with us to see how it worked out.

Benny and I went to as many meetings of the Galway branch of the IWC as we could. It was through these meetings that I got to know Tony and, if Benny taught me the beauties of nature and bird watching, Tony taught me the importance of doing counts and keeping records. We counted sea bird nests on Inishmore for many years, in all weathers. That was something else that Tony taught me - no matter what, the count had to be done. His knowledge of all things to do with nature was so vast that it was always a great pleasure to be in his company.

Things have moved on a good bit since I first started. Over the years the Galway branch of BirdWatch Ireland is much bigger, with a lot of very keen young bird watchers who are eager to share any sightings of interest. Not so long ago, I was going down O'Connell Street in Dublin when I got a call on my mobile phone to let me know that a Stone Curlew was seen on the coast in Indreabhán. I like that.

Pádraic Reaney

TONY WHILDE – A DAY OF TRIBUTE

Saturday morning 3rd October 1998 was overcast, windy and cool as I left Rosslare Harbour at an early hour for Galway. When I arrived at Nimmo's Pier the climate conditions on the Atlantic seaboard were a few notches up on those in the South East as expected. I had come to Nimmo's Pier to join in the unveiling of the Padraic Reaney designed plaque and the telescope stands that had been arranged by the Galway Branch of the Irish Wildbird Conservancy to commemorate Tony Whilde. The warmth and good feeling generated by those present certainly overcame the chilly weather conditions.

Tony Whilde was the most competent ecologist and conservationist I ever met. I doubt if there was anyone who had the depth of knowledge of so many aspects of nature as Tony had. He was learned in every sphere, from invertebrates (his PhD was on oyster cultivation in Galway Bay) to vertebrates (as exhibited in his *Irish Red Data Book 2: Vertebrates*), with an emphasis on ornithology, and many other subjects in between as best demonstrated in his magnificent book *The Natural History of Connemara*.

Tony had the innate ability to inspire and enthuse all he came into contact with and never, ever talked down to anyone or tried to impress with his unique knowledge of ecology. He was in fact one of nature's gentlemen.

Driving home to Cork that afternoon, I pondered on the occasion. It was simple but dignified, heart-warming and genuine. It was a fitting tribute to a man who loved Connemara, his profession and his family.

Gerry Donnelly

Editor's note for newer readers: Dr Tony Whilde (1947 – 1995) came to live in the Galway area in the late 1960s. He was the inspirer of the Galway Branch of BirdWatch as it is today and worked tirelessly to further it. Among many other landmark achievements he started the Galway Bay and Corrib counts and edited *Birds of Galway and Mayo* and *Birds of Galway* for the Irish Wildbird Conservancy, now BirdWatch Ireland.

NS

A BIRDWATCHER'S PROGRESSION

I blame Tony Whilde. I was minding my own business as a bad amateur bird and nature watcher when I signed up for a course on birds in UCG. Tony turned me on - to the birds, that is, feathered. I joined the Galway branch and was a regular during the nineties. The tri-annual counts of the birds of Galway Bay were an excellent grounding in bird identification, without the time for twitching, and also in estimating (an underrated skill). We do counts here in Inishowen and, without blowing my own trumpet, the Galway experience has stood to me.

I lived in Kilcainin, a perfect place for watching waders. In June 1998, I looked out of the window, saw a plastic bag on the bay, then shock, excitement: it was a Little Egret! After informing everyone and calming down, I bought a scope. Now, I understand Egrets are passé. A couple of years ago in Donegal, they appeared for the first time - causing the same excitement again. We now have a resident pair in Malin town but no sign of hanky-panky just yet.

After Tony's early death, Tim Griffin was the 'Supreme Authority'. He used to cause me envy about all the stuff I was missing in Kilcainin. I lost



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most of my hair trying to identify the Spotted Redshanks. I eventually had some success. Once, I got the better of Tim. As we entered McDonagh's after a count, I announced a Pink Footed Goose in Oranmore Bay. The multitude scoffed, my counting companion couldn't be sure, I stuck to my ground. In fading light, we repaired to the coast road and there it was, under Tim's and all our noses.

The oddest thing I saw in Galway was the behaviour of a flock of Snipe in Kilcaimin. Every other year or so, a flock would act like regular waders on the mud for a day or two. At high tide they would all roost on a wall. My high count for wall roosting Snipe was 66. I have checked the literature and found no reference to this behaviour by Snipe.

Nowadays in Inishowen, it is all Buzzards and Golden Eagles, but I don't like to brag. And, I have a Grasshopper Warbler in the back garden for the last two years. Did I mention the Common Lizard at Malin Head?

Gerry O Keeffe

MY PATCH

For years I visited Nimmo's Pier very regularly. However, in recent years as (legal) parking became extremely difficult, I more often than not drove off – very frustrating! It was time to look elsewhere.

Being a regular Prom walker, I checked out that area and was very pleasantly surprised at what I was seeing. After a few visits with binoculars, I settled on the stretch from 'The Second Rock' west to the golf driving range. (For non-swimmers, 'The Second Rock' is, believe-it-or-not, the second rock east of the diving tower at Blackrock, where the yellow-painted shelter just off the Prom is found.) This stretch has a range of habitats from shingle to mudflat, reef and rock, with Galway Bay behind all that. West of the diving tower and to the north there is Galway Golf Club, which has a few fresh water ponds with plenty of reeds and a good area of scrub.

Since adopting 'My Patch,' I've visited it a lot, all year round. As some of you are aware, I avidly record species seen. My earliest records from 'My Patch' are for 24 November, 2007 - 28 species in one hour, two hours after low tide.

To date, 21 October 2011, I have visited My Patch 416 times, sometimes with telescope and binoculars and sometimes with binoculars only. I have recorded over 100 species, including a Red-necked Grebe, a Grey Phalarope, Sanderling, a Little Stint and a White-tailed Eagle.

Brendan Dunne

TRIBUTE

May I, from my Heritage Column in the *Connacht Sentinel*, wish you and all at the Galway Branch of BirdWatch Ireland the very best for the 75th quarterly edition of your *Newsletter*. Birds are an important part of Galway's natural heritage and I commend your efforts in promoting their welfare in the environs of this old City of the Tribes, and commend you on providing this important publication on a regular basis.

Peadar O'Dowd

The Galway Branch of BirdWatch Ireland would like to thank Peadar and The Galway Sentinel for their unfailing support over the years.

NS

RAPTORS.... RAPTORS
five years with the Hen Harrier

"The last one I saw was on the Curraghline a few years ago", was the response to the question I asked. Two days later on the 27th October 2000, I cycled seven miles to a spot on the Curraghline and saw my first Hen Harrier. Since 2006 I have been monitoring Hen Harriers at a winter roost on the Curraghline. I had regularly been watching Hen Harriers since 2000 but the National Hen Harrier Winter Roost Survey starting that year afforded an opportunity to undertake a more systematic and structured approach to time spent watching this most maligned and misunderstood bird of prey.

Hen Harriers, like many birds, roost communally in winter and this allows for an excellent opportunity to study not only their roosting behaviour but also their lifestyle and ecology away from their breeding grounds. As the majority of Hen Harriers go to roost around dusk, roost watches begin a minimum of one hour before sunset and continue until the onset of complete darkness. Since November 2006 I have carried out a total of 68 watches, 60 of these on my own and the remaining eight with another observer or observers. A total of 11,550 minutes has been spent watching for Hen Harriers at this site. Arrival times of the birds at the roost are recorded as are the times all birds go to roost. Other data recorded include weather conditions, time of sunset, time of birds going to roost in relation to sunset time, direction from which birds arrived at the roost, activity of Hen Harriers around the roost, other birds of prey at the roost and their interaction, if any, with the Hen Harriers and disturbance around the roost. The numbers of all birds of prey recorded at the roost are as follows:-

Hen Harrier – recorded on 67 out of 68 watches. A total of 260 sightings recorded of which 231 were ringtails (adult females or juveniles), 19 were adult males and 10 were second-winter males. The maximum number of Hen Harriers recorded on any given watch was eight, a total recorded on three separate occasions.

Kestrel – recorded on 37 watches. A total of 63 sightings recorded with a maximum of three birds recorded on four occasions.

Martin – recorded on 22 watches. A total of 30 sightings recorded with a maximum count of 4 birds recorded on one occasion.

Sparrowhawk – recorded on 18 watches. A total of 36 sightings recorded with a maximum of 6 birds recorded on one occasion and four birds recorded on a further two occasions.

Marsh Harrier – recorded on 13 watches. A total of 16 sightings recorded with a maximum of two birds recorded on two occasions.

Peregrine – recorded on 12 watches. A total of 13 sightings recorded with a maximum of two birds recorded on one occasion.

Buzzard – single birds were recorded on two occasions.

Short-eared Owl – single birds recorded on five occasions.

Other notable non-raptor species recorded on roost watches have been Greenland White-fronted Goose, Pink-footed Goose, Little Egret, Great Egret, Bittern, Kittiwake, Woodcock and Kingfisher. Highlights have included the sight of three Hen Harriers, two Marsh Harriers and a Short-eared Owl in the air together at the same time, six Hen harriers

in the air together flying over a roost site, a Bittern flying by at dusk and the aerial acrobatics of 50,000 Starlings preparing to go to roost.

The time put in at the roost site has shown the roost to be one of the largest and most consistently used Hen Harrier roosts in Ireland. In recognition of this fact the roost has been included in the Lough Corrib SPA (Special Protection Area). SPAs are designated under the EU Wild Birds Directive for species which are rare and vulnerable and it obliges member states to designate areas for their protection. Too often data collected gathers dust on a shelf and is never put to any practical use. It is comforting to know that the many hours spent with the Hen Harrier on the Curraghline, often in torrential rain, in temperatures as low as -14 degrees and near gale force winds, have not been in vain. To be able to watch and study these magnificent birds is not only a great pleasure but a privilege. As each winter progresses I come to recognise individual birds by their plumage and behavioural characteristics and find myself becoming anxious and worried about individuals that do not turn up at the roost. Never once did I reluctantly carry out a watch, in any type of weather. Never once did I not enjoy a watch.

Aonghus O Dónaill

DOWN IN THE DUMPS

From 1995 till 2001 Tim Griffin wrote a column called *Galway Birding Sites* for the *Newsletter*, introducing readers to the most interesting sites for birdwatching in and around Galway. We all know Tim from his first-Saturday-of-the-month outings at Nimmo's Pier so it is not surprising that one of his articles covered that area. But there was much more, from various sites along the shores of Galway Bay to inland sites such as Rahasane Turlough, Muckrush on lower Lough Corrib to Cloosh Wood off the Oughterard to Rossaveel road. It may be surprising that one article covered the Galway municipal dump. Here is some of what Tim wrote about it:-

Situated approximately 3 miles from the city on the Headford Road the dump is a mecca, especially for those keen on gulls. Although access is more restricted now than heretofore good birds can still be seen in the flooded fields on either side of the road. The dump has hosted many varieties in recent years such as Mediterranean, Ring-billed, Glaucous and Iceland Gulls in numbers varying from year to year. Individual adult male and female Gulls (Iceland Gulls and subspecies of the Iceland Gull) have occurred almost annually.

Perhaps the most exciting visitor to the dump was Europe's first (probable) Thayer's Gull which drew hordes of dedicated birdwatchers from both sides of the Irish Sea. The fields along the road opposite the dump are grazed by parties of Whooper Swan and White-fronted Geese. Ravens, Hen Harriers and several other raptors can be seen in the general area.

After sixteen articles Tim had covered most of the county and his insights formed the basis of the guide to *Bird Watching in County Galway* that Deirdre Comerford and I compiled for Galway County Council in 2005. In that same booklet we also drew heavily on the guide to Galway habitats by Ian Brophy who was a regular contributor to the *Newsletter* in the 1990s as well. Thank you Tim for all the articles and Ian for the habitat guide.

Marianne ten Cate



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SPECIAL 75TH EDITION

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Issue No. 75 Nov 2011

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DOWN MEMORY LANE

When Neil asked me to write an article for the 75th issue of our *Newsletter* I decided to start at the beginning – that is the beginning of the Galway Branch of the Irish Wildbird Conservancy, as it was then called – and share a couple of memories from the early days of the Branch.

First of all a personal memory. I was one of the first members of the Galway Branch and we held our meetings in the home of the late Eily O'Connor in St. Francis Street, beside the Abbey Church. This building doubled as Eily's office, she being the owner and managing director of H.G.L. O'Connor Architects.

Regular attendees of these meetings were founder members Fr Brendan (Gene) Dillon, OP, in the Chair; Eily O'Connor, Secretary; Mrs Coll; Dr Harry McMahon – all sadly now deceased – along with, I think, Deirdre Comerford, and myself. We were later joined by the late Tony White and Barbara. One night another newcomer joined us, brought along and introduced to us by Mrs Coll. Her name was Elizabeth Crowley.

After the meetings, Harry McMahon and I used to resort to the Ely Bar in Woodquay, and this night Mrs Coll suggested I might bring Elizabeth with me. I did and the following day I asked her to come to Lough Key Forest Park on an outing and the rest, as they say, is history!! Love blossomed, and we eventually married. Neither Eily nor Fr Dillon (both of whom were at our wedding) knew, until that day, that our romance started in Eily's house that night; they were so happy they had, unwittingly, played a part in it.

One of the earliest outings I remember was a trip to High Island off Cleggan. We got a Hickeys motor launch from Cleggan to the island. There we had to transfer to a curragh as there was a heavy swell, making landing on the island rather tricky. On the trip were Fr Brendan, Eily, Harry McMahon, Col Peter Wilson, Ronan O'Driscoll, Ronan O'Malley, Mrs Coll, her son John Coll (now a well known sculptor) and I.

We were particularly interested in the nesting Peregrine falcons on the island, as Peregrines were in decline at the time, and I have a memory of Ronan O'Driscoll managing to take a photo of a Peregrine nest with eggs using a camera and a telescope – the fore-runner of modern digi-scoping!!

There were Basking Sharks below the cliffs and a large variety of birdlife, all of which made it one of the memorable days we had in the early years of BirdWatch Galway.

I must stop here as space is limited. Wishing BirdWatch congratulations on the 75th issue.

Martin Byrnes



From left: Ronan O'Driscoll, Dr. Harry McMahon, Dr. Ronan O'Malley, Martin Byrnes and Fr Brendan Dillon on Cleggan Pier.

I-WeBS GALWAY

The 75th edition of the *BirdWatch Galway Newsletter* means there have been 75 'quarters', which is almost 19 years of publication (if my maths are any good). The Galway Branch has been doing something else for a long time, too, and that is the monitoring of waterbirds. Waterbird counts in Galway have, incredibly, been carried out since the 1960s. And that is quite something. In fact, it is amazing. The first count of Inner Galway Bay for the Irish Wetland Bird Survey – the name of the current monitoring scheme – was carried out by BirdWatch Galway in November 1994, 18 years ago this month.

Inner Galway Bay is one of the most important sites in the country for wintering waterbirds, supporting internationally significant numbers of some species. Regular monitoring of a Special Protection Area like Inner Galway Bay is mandatory, and allows us to do our best to protect its integrity.

There are so many people throughout the county who have contributed to waterbird counting over the years, and many who continue to brave cold winter days to count birds for I-WeBS, but I do not have space here to list everyone individually. In short, I would like to offer a sincere and heartfelt 'thank-you' to BirdWatch Galway for their marvellous dedication to I-WeBS in Galway. Do not underestimate the importance of your contribution to wintering waterbird monitoring.

Helen Boland

I-WeBS National Organiser

AN ENGLISH BIRDER ABROAD

When I moved to Ireland from England 13 years ago, I knew there were some significant differences between the indigenous avifauna of each country. Having been brought up birding in various woodlands around Bristol, the biggest difference for me was going to be the lack of woodland birds. No Woodpeckers! No Nuthatch! Two species of tit missing! No Redstart, Wood Warbler... the list seemed endless. What was I going to do?

Well, one of the first things I did when I arrived was join BirdWatch Ireland. I then attended a committee meeting (the only one I've attended in 13 years...), and was "volunteered" to take over the role as I-WeBS counter for Rahasane Turlough, on the pretext that I was living nearby. I didn't even know what a turlough was, and the committee members had no idea about whether I was an experience birder or a total beginner. A gamble all round then.

Over the years I have become very attached to Rahasane – I'm not going to bore you again with the details – and, despite watching it for 13 years, it still has the capacity to surprise and delight me. I'm still adding new species to my list for the site, the latest being Green Sandpiper in October of this year. Needless to say, one of my most enjoyable ticks there was a Treecreeper – back to those woodland birds again.

One thing that never ceases to amaze me is how rarely I meet a fellow birder at Rahasane. If the site were anywhere in Britain, it would be protected by one of the main conservation bodies, it would have hides and marked footpaths and it would be crawling with coach parties from birding clubs up and down the country. There'd be a car park, a shop and

chocolate wrappers dancing on the wind with the Golden Plover. What a horrendous thought!

This does highlight the biggest difference between birding here and in Britain, apart from the birds themselves. I would often visit decent birding sites around Bristol and be greeted with the sight of coaches disgorging parties of birders from all over the country. Birding has become big business over there, and with that comes a sense that everyone is trying to outdo everyone else. I experienced this first hand at Rahasane, of all places. I'd had a reasonable morning – over 30 Little Egrets and my first Iceland Gull there being the highlights – when I met up with a group of English birders on a long weekend in Co. Galway. One of their number came over to speak to me and I gave him a brief summary of what was about. When I mentioned the Iceland Gull, I was put firmly in my place with the comment "Oh, we had 4 of those at Nimmo's yesterday". That told me.

The other thing that struck me after this meeting was that, at no point did the birder ask me what I was doing there. I asked if he had been to Rahasane before, and was assured he had, but it didn't appear to cross his mind to ask me the same thing. Obviously my English accent is fading...

So what have I made of my 13 years here? Well, I've had some memorable days out with good friends – one that sticks in the memory is the "five raptor day in the Slieve Aughty Mountains" – as well as falling in love with Rahasane, despite (or maybe because of) the challenge of counting the birds there. I've seen a number of life ticks here, and have been fortunate enough to have had Wheatear, Meadow Pipit and Brambling in my garden (not all at the same time!).

Overall though, I think I've learnt to appreciate the birds themselves more, because it does take more effort here to see a variety of species. In Britain, for example, you can sit in centrally-heated hides watching Hen Harriers quartering reed beds in front of the picture windows (believe me, I've done it...). The Hen Harriers that I've been fortunate to see in Co. Galway have been accompanied by a sense of occasion and privilege, and of the birds going about their business in their natural habitat. Because of this increased appreciation I like to think that I've become a better birder because I'm spending more time watching the birds, as opposed to just ticking them off and rushing off elsewhere to add a few more species to the day list.

I still miss my Woodpeckers though.

Pete Capsey

RINGING NESTLINGS IN COUNTY GALWAY

Most birders, if asked, "How are birds caught for ringing?", would probably reply "With mist nets". While that would be true for the majority of birds that we catch, one of the most useful, if under-used, methods employed is to ring them when they are just starting out in life – as chicks in the nest. I have had a lifelong passion about finding nests ever since I was a youngster (many years ago now....) and employed the skills I learnt from those early days when I took up bird ringing years later. So, come every spring, I usually concentrate all of my ringing time between April, May and June into searching for the various species which nest around my home up here near Milltown in north county Galway. I focus mainly on warblers – Willow, Grasshopper, Sedge and



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Whitethroat, as well as species like Meadow Pipit, Linnet, Lesser Redpoll and Reed Bunting.

This year, 2011, I have had a reasonably good year, despite the weather, with 38 Willow Warbler, 2 Grasshopper Warbler, 9 Sedge Warbler and 6 Whitethroat nests found and comprehensive details recorded for each one going into the BTO's long-running Nest Record Scheme database. To put some numbers to these species shows that 190 Willow, 9 Grasshopper and 31 Sedge Warblers as well as 14 Whitethroat pulli (chicks) were ringed this year from those nests.

Many of the young that I have ringed in previous years have been re-caught in following seasons, coming back to breed in the same locality that they started life in. A good few of the adults also return, in some cases to the exact same bush under which they nested previously, a fact proven by the consistent year to year ringing programme I carry out.

Many other interesting facts and figures come from long term, amateur studies such as this one and many scientifically useful data can be gleaned from the results. For instance, in the last 15 years alone of my study, I have found that Willow Warblers are now laying eggs, and therefore producing young, some 10-12 days earlier in the season in Galway than 15 years ago. That is an incredible average of nearly one day earlier per year, the reasons for which are probably a bit more complex than the simple, oft quoted "it's all because of global warming" mantra. Although the males are coming back in spring at roughly the same time - usually the first few days of April - the females seem to be coming back a bit sooner, the springs are starting earlier and therefore insect activity (= food for chicks) is commencing as soon as the birds can get their eggs hatched.

Of course, finding a nest is one thing, but it takes a lot of luck for it to survive and be successful, fledging young that might one day breed themselves. I have observed a few nests actually in the process of being predated - foxes, magpies, stoats etc being amongst the culprits but there was one particular Willow Warbler nest that I remember well. This nest was next to the Western rail line that runs by my house, and I was just on my way to check the progress of the chicks I had ringed a few days before. Willow Warblers nest on the ground and cover the nest cup with a dome made of various bits of vegetation. Just before I reached it, a Kestrel rose from the ground carrying something in its talons - one of the chicks! Though there were still several of the brood left, they didn't survive, all falling prey to this particular predator. I watched from a distance as it returned several times to finish off the job, each time going off to distance tall trees where, no doubt, its hungry offspring were waiting to be fed. There was nothing I could do to prevent this as the Kestrel knew where the food was and even covering it with a bit of vegetation didn't stop it as it simply landed and walked to the nest for its next take-away.

Since the inception of this *Newsletter* there have been some species that once bred in Galway but have probably gone forever or are very close to extinction. The Corn Bunting will never deliver its unique 'jangling keys' song again, the once very common Yellowhammer - my favourite bird from childhood - has not bred around me for over 20 years and the rasping Corncrake no longer keeps me awake on mid-summer nights.

Thankfully, it's not all gloom though. On the other side of the coin of course, we welcome new breeding

birds in Galway that we could only have dreamt of in past years. Perhaps the most obvious of the newcomers is the Little Egret, breeding now at established colonies near Oranmore and at least two sites in Connemara. How long will it be before the Great Spotted Woodpecker moves west from its fledgling breeding population in the east of Ireland? Will the Hobby become our next breeding raptor? Will Cetti's Warbler beat the Reed Warbler to become the next new wetland breeding passerine? Who knows, but one thing is for sure: I'll be out looking for them again come next spring!

Chris Benson

YELLOW TAKKIES

In 2006 I left the Gordon Gecko infested Dublin City for the Waterberg area of South Africa. Training as a field guide I was ushered into a world of wildlife via the capable hands of experienced guides as well as a plethora of books I accumulated along the way. The anecdotes would fill Neil's *Newsletter* obligations for eons to come. One thing I do recall is the stories the various local tribes had concerning every single thing in the Bushveld from beetle to tree and rock to bird. Our Bantu speaking counterparts in the reserve had a wealth of such stories and were always willing to share. Another observation they always informed us 'mulungus' about was the incredible abundance of plants which were a cure for VD. In hindsight, almost every plant was a cure for VD, thus suggesting that VD itself was very abundant. When stories of the great Creator and his workings were in short supply, the rangers would fabricate them. I invented one such story about the Little Egret.

In South Africa, like anywhere, colloquialisms prevail. One such term is takkies. A word used to describe casual shoes or trainers. The long story short tells how the Little Egret's Mum could not afford to buy him black trainers and instead bought him his crazy yellow takkies. A few of us even began referring to the Little Egret as the Yellow Takkies Egret. A colleague of mine then observed that if the Little Egret was the "Yellow Takkies Egret" then surely the Yellow-Billed Egret *Egretta intermedia* should be referred to as the Hooker Boots Egret. The story behind that one eludes me.

Why this odd reference you may ask? In April 2007 I moved back to Ireland and migrated to the favoured wintering grounds of the vagrant-Galway. Soon enough I realised that I knew little to nothing of the wildlife I grew up around. After a few excursions to Treanleir near Oranmore I saw an incredible sight among the Curlews (or were they Whimbrels?)...a Yellow Takkies Egret. It sort of blew me away. Having struggled with all the brown wader things on the Irish shoreline, this familiar beast brought me some hope. A renewed ideal that yes, I can figure these creatures out and know them as well as the African ones I left behind. An e-mail to the local branch of BirdWatch Ireland was followed by attending a few meetings. Then a few outings. Then I was hooked. A Stork may deliver babies, but it was *Egretta garzetta*, sub species *yellowtakkious* that delivered me. Since then my involvement has been as intense as it has been ephemeral, but thankfully the stalwarts of our branch keep the likes of me in the mix and keep the whole thing ticking over... hopefully for another few seasons.

John Carey

CONGRATS FROM BIRDWATCH HQ

Congratulations to the Galway Branch from all of us in BirdWatch Ireland head office in Wicklow on reaching the remarkable milestone of your 75th *Newsletter*. One of the best parts of my job is receiving newsletters and communications about branch activities across the country, and I can quite honestly say that the Galway Branch *Newsletter* has always been my absolute favourite. The mix of news items, outing reports and bird news is perfect, and I'm particularly fond of the poetry. I wish more branches would follow your lead and include such welcome cultural content.

I have also had the very good fortune to visit the Galway Branch and to participate in many of your events over the years, and I've always thoroughly enjoyed myself. Nimmo's Pier holds particularly happy memories for me: it is without doubt one of Europe's finest birdwatching locations and has provided me with many a tick, not least of which was a gorgeous white-phase Gyrfalcon that unexpectedly rocketed past our bus there during a joint trip with the South Dublin Branch a couple of years ago. I can't think of any branch that can top that!

Here's looking forward to the next 75 issues,

Niall Hatch

Development Officer, BirdWatch Ireland

BIRDS IN POETRY

In 1996, in the 12th issue of the *Newsletter*, our Editor introduced a new column, Birds in Poetry. The first poem featured was *Postscript* by Seamus Heaney. As this received a warm welcome from the readers it was decided to make poetry a regular feature. For the following issues Neil chose poems by distinguished poets such as John Clare, Richard Murphy, Patrick Kavanagh and 'our own' Moya Cannon to grace the *Newsletter*.

By 1998, issue 20, branch member Pat Finnegan started to contribute his choices of poems and short introductions to them. Pat had, in February 1990, regaled the branch with a talk on birds in poetry entitled *Love the wild swan* (after the famous poem by the American poet Robinson Jeffers) and with his vast knowledge of poetry he was well placed to look after our poetry column. With very few exceptions, he continued to do so till issue 69 in 2010, having shared with us over 40 poems by a great number of poets.

Unfortunately, copy right issues have surfaced now that the *Newsletter* is posted on the internet, and it has become harder to secure permission to include poems from publishers and authors. Therefore, the column was discontinued and Pat bowed out. This is to thank him for 'his' poems and the accompanying comments.

Marianne ten Cate

THE BIRD ATLAS 2007-11

As the newly appointed Irish Atlas Coordinator, I arrived at the Anno Santo Hotel on the 19th September 2007 with a *small* challenge for the Galway branch. Four years, 1,200 Timed Tetrad Visits, 76 ten-km squares, hundreds of hours collecting Roving Records.....the Atlas Challenge.

From Ballinasloe to Ballyconneely and Inis Meain to Inishee, the call for volunteers across the county



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was out and the Galway Branch certainly didn't disappoint. Branch Atlas days were soon organised to help increase survey coverage and the Bird Atlas was underway. John Carey recalls his first event:

The idea of the blitz in Galway was to gather species lists from 10km squares that have not been officially recorded since the last Atlas, all those years ago. Our results would give the Galway Atlas a much needed boost (and probably save Brian Caffrey from going grey).

I was excited at the whole idea of the thing - roving around the county to wild places I have never been before (Clonberne), and rubber-stamping every avid I could find. I was not alone. We had divided into teams, each designated with 1-2 squares.

Heading north away from civilisation (Galway City), I felt like Dr. Livingstone, armed with the good book (Collins), my trusted steed (Brian Caffrey's Corsa) and ample provisions (Ham Sandwiches). We approached each square with a plan to maximise habitat coverage and minimise time spent travelling. Wooded areas, bog land, rivers, towns and parks were interrogated to reveal the usual suspects and fill the list. It was a lot like a bird race but you started again every time you entered a new square. Of course breeding evidence was essential, whether it was a simple H for habitat or an FL for a fledged bird we recorded it.

Outlandish things appeared: a Sand Martin colony in an old quarry east of Tuam, a Lapwing in a field full of Hares, Blackcaps having a Deliverance style banjo duel - but without the banjos. We were certainly heading into the Heart of Darkness.

The lists filled up. Little Grebes on their awesome floating nests in Lavalley Lough. NPWS nature reserves gloriously unkept and teeming with Passerines. Swifts, far from any modern dwellings but attracted like diurnal bats to an old castle. All this as wild haired turf cutters eyed us cautiously as we scanned the ravaged bog for Mippits and Larks. The joys of nature conservation.

Several times we abandoned our heavily shod Opel to jump over ditches in the hope of a Stonechat. Roads were jaywalked, riverbanks voyeured and garden feeders violated-all in the name of science. We returned to town, feeling no one could ever understand what we had been through...it was great!

Later on that week, Brian e-mailed me the results of the Galway branch effort. Incredible. We managed lists ranging from 28-49 plus, in areas that previously had nothing. Our combined efforts showed what difference a few people can make. Kudos to you all.

A sincere thank you to all the volunteers across Galway who helped make this project a success. In the coming months we will be validating the 2 million bird records received in Ireland and starting to write the Atlas Book, which will be in the bookshops in mid-2013. In the meantime we will keep you posted with progress and possibly even provide a sneak preview of a few species maps. Don't forget, it's not too late to send in your records. Please enter them to www.birdatlas.net or mail them to bcaffrey@birdwatchireland.ie.

Brian Caffrey
Irish Atlas Coordinator

BIRDS OF THE CONNEMARA HILLS

The most noticeable thing about birds in the Connemara hills are just how few and far between they are. However, many of the usual suspects eventually show up – Meadow Pipits, Skylarks and the occasional flushed Snipe. Some of the more sheltered lower valleys, that contain some cover, have small populations of Robins, Wrens, thrushes and the regular garden birds. The loudest and most vocal bird, and definitely king of the mountains, is without doubt the Raven. Its wonderful throaty call invariably accompanies the mountain walker on his way and at times their antics while playing on the up-draughts at cliff edges are a pleasure to watch. An ample supply of dead sheep supports a healthy population of these wonderful birds.

The return of our summer migrants every spring is always welcome. The Wheatear comes back every March/April and its harsh rattle and white rump patch are to be found on all south facing scree slopes that they favour for breeding. Occasionally, one can be very lucky and see its nemesis, the flash of the Merlin flying at speed low to the ground just above the heather. A few black and white feathers are all that mark a plucking site. Winter sees the odd party of Snow Bunting – I once saw a flock of 500 in the Blue Stack Mountains in Donegal. All I can conclude is that they were just getting ready for their return north.

Perhaps the most interesting breeding birds of the western uplands, albeit in small numbers, are the Golden Plover. They live and breed in the most exposed and barren places on the tops of the Sheeffry Hills and on the Maumtrasna plateau that are the most favoured areas. There is a kind of stony terrain that I always associate with these hardy wonderfully coloured individuals. Every winter finds them up there and why they should choose to stay here I simply don't know. Our visits to these areas are fleeting and we are always happy to return to the lower ground.

The other character that the hills have in small numbers is the Dipper. It is one of our sub-species in that it is sufficiently different from its English and European counterparts to be considered uniquely Irish. The bobbing action and constant dipping into the freezing water, in search of invertebrates, is much to be admired. In summer, if you see one feeding, it is worthwhile to look for the nest. It is usually under a rock or overhang and looks like a large Wren's nest with only a small opening.

Unlike most Irish habitats the uplands have improved significantly in the last twenty years. Up until then the affect of overgrazing by sheep had just to be seen to be believed. Large areas were reduced to bare turf. A reduction in sheep numbers has meant that the vegetation has returned to many areas and with it some of the wildlife.

During the 19th century the area around Kilmore claimed to have the best grouse shooting in the world. Oscar Wilde records shooting bags of them during his youth. Unfortunately, one hundred years later the heather is long gone and with it the grouse. However, in recent time there are signs of the heather returning. Recently, I have seen grouse there for the first time in thirty years of hill walking in Connemara. There is a breeding population in the National Park in Letterfrack – possibly the nucleus for their recovery. It is good to end on a positive note.

Padraig Kearns

THE BARN OWL RESEARCH PROJECT

The BirdWatch Ireland Barn Owl Research Project was initiated in 2007. The project is focused on monitoring the population to effectively assess trends, as well as addressing relevant aspects of Barn Owl ecology, in order to increase our understanding of the issues which impact the species and the conservation efforts required. A nest box scheme has also been established and boxes have been installed at numerous sites throughout County Galway over the past three years.

Although the south-west of Ireland is the main stronghold for the population, County Galway still holds a reasonable number of breeding pairs compared to other parts of the country, where more dramatic declines have occurred. However, numerous traditional sites have been abandoned in the county in recent years, which highlights the need for continued monitoring and conservation action.

In 2011, the project registered eleven active sites in the county; but from sightings received it is obvious there are many more sites which remain to be discovered.

For further information on the project, or to greatly assist this work through reporting any sightings, or Barn Owl carcasses found, please contact John Lusby, Raptor Conservation Officer for BirdWatch Ireland, jlusby@birdwatchireland.ie.

John Lusby

MY GALWAY CONNECTIONS

My very first trip to Galway was on an Irish Wildbird Conservancy Athlone branch (since defunct) outing in March 1999. We were met by Neil Sharkey and Marianne ten Cate at Traught where I managed to tick Little Egret, Long-tailed Duck and Black Guillemot. We finished up at Nimmo's Pier where I saw my first ever Ring-billed Gull. A nice day's outing, coming from land-locked Co. Offaly.

I started third level education at the Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology in the autumn of the same year. Ballyloughaun, Nimmo's Pier and Grattan Road Strand would prove to be my local patch over the next few years. My first winter at Nimmo's Pier made a great impression on me with the appearance of an exquisite first-winter Ross's Gull (one of the best birds I've ever seen), an adult Kumlien's Gull and numerous Glaucous, Iceland and Little Gulls. One notable event during the same winter were the big numbers of Ring-billed Gulls. I remember seeing at least nine Ring-billed Gulls in one place. I feel drawn to assume this was the norm but I've never seen anything like it since. In the preceding years Nimmo's gained an ever increasing reputation for gulls with many Irish, British and continental birders making winter pilgrimages to one of Ireland's premier gull spots. Recent winters have been a little disappointing with a collapse in wintering white-winged gulls. But, there is always the long staying American Herring Gull and Forster's Tern to keep interest going.

I returned to Galway again in August 2008 after a three year sabbatical spent in Glenveagh National Park. I was extremely lucky to be offered a Conservation Ranger's position with National Parks and Wildlife Service in North-West Connemara. I had only been out this far west on two occasions before. Once on a college field trip to the Connemara National Park (my future workplace) and on a successful twitch for the Inishbofin Mourning Dove.



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SPECIAL 75TH EDITION

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Issue No. 75 Nov 2011

This is a local forum newsletter
– contributions and comments
are most welcome.
Distributed by e mail only

Before starting in Connemara I had heard virtually nothing about anyone birdwatching in the area – was there a reason for this? Thankfully, my first Autumn didn't disappoint with the likes of Little Blue Heron and Western Sandpiper turning up.

Another relatively new destination for myself and a few select others has been Inishmore for on and off twelve years. The island was only first checked in October 1998 by John Murphy and Tony Mee. A collection of Icterine, Garden and Wood Warbler were virtually unheard of in Galway before this and hinted of its potential. Over the years it has had a varied list of good birds such as a flock of 15 Ring-necked Duck, American Wigeon, Blue-winged Teal, 2 Green-winged Teal, Bittern, 2 Hobby, 2 Semipalmated, a White-rumped, a Baird's and a Buff-breasted Sandpipers, Long-billed Dowitcher, Wood Warbler, at least two dozen Yellow-browed Warblers, 3 Barred Warblers, 3 Red-breasted Flycatchers, Rose-coloured Starling, 2 Red-eyed Vireos, and Blackpoll and Yellow-rumped Warblers. Who knows what the next twelve years will produce?

Dermot Breen

**DOWN THE MEMORY LANE OF BIRDWATCHING
IN GALWAY – A chat with May Cashman, Tuam**

May Cashman has an almost lifelong interest in birds, starting with growing up in the country, in Macroom, Co. Cork. But her "birdwatching" really only started after the retirement of her husband Michael in 1989.

Michael had very good eye sight while May had a good ear and could pick up bird songs easily. In fact, she would often tell Michael: "I hear an unusual bird coming from that direction" and he would then spot the bird.

Sometime around 1990 they came across one of Tony Whilde's talks on birds in Galway and that was the beginning of their connection with the Galway BirdWatch group. May remembers that on one of her early outings to Inishbofin she was recording birds when a sudden shower washed away her notes she had taken with a Biro. Tony Whilde simply said: "Well May, that teaches you to use a pencil in future, when recoding bird counts". He also advised to record a Goldcrest on the strength of her identification through hearing although she couldn't see the Goldcrest. Another outing she remembers well was the one to Belfast. She was with a group of fellow birdwatchers in the magnificent bird-hide looking out at the harbour when someone pointed out a Blue-winged Teal – but since the bird was in the water she couldn't see any blue wings, only to be told later that the most distinctive feature was the white stripe on the blue-grey head. May says she loved the birdwatching outings – every one of them.

May has also been involved, for a good number of years now, with the Irish Wetland Bird Survey (I-WeBS) around Tuam, monitoring places with names like Kilglassan, Croghan's, Rathbaun Turlough, Blindwell, Gardenfield, Belclare Turlough, Levally Lough, Summerville Lough, Mullaghmore and Horseleap. On the last such count on 26/10/11 for Belclare Turlough we counted 100+ Lapwing, 40 Mallard, 400+ Golden Plover, 100+ Wigeon, 20 Tufted Duck, 6 Pochard, 30 Curlew and 6 Black-headed Gulls.

May also has a suggestion or question: would it be possible to have an outing to a warm and sunny country?

Willi Kiefel

THE MAGPIE'S TALE

Back in the mid -1990s, at a traditional singing session in the Goin Singers Club in Dublin, I first heard a great song which fitted a lot of British and Irish folklore about magpies to a wonderful, chant-like air.

THE MAGPIE

The magpie brings us tidings of the air both fair and foul

He's more cunning than the raven, more wise than any owl.

For he brings us news of the harvest, of the barley, wheat and corn.

He knows when we'll go to our grave and he knows how we are born.

CHORUS

One's for sorrow, two's for joy, three's for a girl and four's for a boy.

Five for silver, six for gold and seven for a secret never told.

Devil, devil, we defy thee.

Devil, devil, we defy thee.

Devil, devil, we defy thee.

He brings good news when from the East, bad news when from the West.

Of all the news that's in the air, we know to trust him best.

For he sees us at our labour and he mocks us at our work.

He'll steal the egg from out of the nest and even mob the hawk.

CHORUS

The priest says we are wicked for to worship the devil's bird,

But we respect the old ways and we disregard his word.

For we know they sleep uneasy as they slumber through the night;

And we always leave out a little bit of meat for the bird that's black and white.

CHORUS

As I learned the song, I found that I – like all traditional singers – changed the words a bit and even dropped one section of the chorus completely (the "Devil, devil, we defy thee" bit). Along with a handful of other songs, I posted my set of *The Magpie* in an early attempt at an online database of traditional songs called *The Digital Tradition*.

About three years later, having moved to Galway, I was attending yet another singing session in the Crane Bar. Among the participants was a pair of elderly American tourists on their first visit to Ireland. Being themselves "old folkies" from a long time back, they happily sang a song each and then, as their *piece de resistance*, sang a duet... It was, of course, *The Magpie* – in my version, word for word! The song which I had sent out on the new-fangled Internet three years previously, had crossed the Atlantic and flown straight back to land at my feet. Got to be a record for migrating magpies...

Martin Ryan

P.S. If you would like the air, drop me an e-mail at martinpatrickryan@gmail.com

CHANGES AS THE YEARS GO BY

The 75th edition of the Galway Branch *Newsletter* marks almost nineteen years of sustained effort in editing and getting it out there (well done, Neil). I myself have only been living in Galway for the last eleven years, but even during that time there have been a number of changes in the local bird scene. These changes have included those to the people who are involved in birds in the county, with additions over the years and others that are now absent, both those who have moved on to pastures new and those who sadly have passed away.

However, it is not only the birding personnel that has changed over the years, but the birds themselves, too. On the debit side, only one Bewick's Swan has been recorded in the county in the last eleven years (in 2005) and Comcrakes are now virtually absent from their old stronghold in the Shannon callows following summer flooding in 2002 and 2006 (although this has been compensated for in part by increases in the numbers on the western islands like Inishbofin, Inishturbot and Omev). Numbers of breeding terns, Black-headed, Common, Lesser Black-backed and Herring gulls are generally down too (markedly in the case of the last two species, although a rooftop breeding colony of Herring and a pair or two of Lesser Black-backed has become established in the city). Other species that have declined in recent years in Galway include Yellowhammer, House Sparrow, Swift and Greenland White-fronted Goose.

On the positive side, there have been some successful colonists. Little Egret, once a notable bird, has become on common sight, with groups of over fifty having been recorded. Breeding has occurred in the last few years and three colonies are known. Mediterranean Gull has also been proved to breed in the county in the last few years. There have been a few records of Great-spotted Woodpecker in recent years and, with breeding now occurring in Wicklow and the north, we can only hope that they will recolonise here. Reintroduction programmes also provide hope that former members of the Irish avifauna will again become established in the county. There have been numerous sightings of both Golden and White-tailed Eagles in the county and with luck both may permanently grace our mountains and islands. There has been little sign so far of Red Kite from the reintroduction sites in Wicklow and Northern Ireland, but (if they are as successful as they have been in Britain) hopefully they will soon be found all over Ireland. Among the smaller birds, it appears that Garden Warbler (known from the Shannon valley and more specifically from the Portumna area in Galway) have bred near Moycullen for the last two years. Who knows what the next nineteen years will bring?

Chris Peppiatt

BIRDS I CAN IDENTIFY MYSELF
confessions of a birdwatcher's son

My fledgling days, Nimmos Pier after Sunday mass, at least we young 'uns could stay, squawking in the car. The water scanned for gulls and waders against a backdrop of (so it always seemed to be) grey skies and grey houses. Occasionally, something unusual (I



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seem to recall a thing called a Glaucous Gull, I often though it had poor eye-sight and a loud call). Usually, the same old things, 15 varieties of common or garden gull, and the odd thing that wasn't a gull but not worth getting excited about according to 'himself'.

Ah but... the terns with their spectacular dives, always conflated in my mind with the Stukas from the World War II comics I was reading constantly.

Later years, established in a nest of my own. Dad is visiting. Very early one morning, just before dawn, I am up creeping about, leaving to play golf on my own, just for practice (then as now I was a beginner at the pastime). Dad creeps out too - wants to join me for a bit of company. The first few holes, my success rate is very mixed to say the least. Come to the long par 5 up the hill, dogleg left. I get in some kind of position with the first 2 blows, then nail a sublime 7-iron right into the green, bouncing and biting and ending near the flag. I walk down, exhilarated, in my burgeoning golf career this is as good as it gets. I make the 2 putts and walk off with a par, a rare and precious event in my eyes (and indeed, still is). Look around for my father, surely he will want to congratulate me on my prowess? Soon enough, he walks into sight, all smiles, looks excited. "Just seen a Ring-necked Parakeet – lifetime first!" "What about my heaven-sent seven-iron into the heart of the green?" "No, sorry, missed that, is that good?"

Some moons later, a sultry summer day. Dad over on one of his seasonal migratory visits. Today has been a red letter birdwatching day - a Red Kite (then just re-introduced to the Chilterns area), a tree creeping Nuthatch and then, as we meandered down by a backwater of the Thames, a flash of azure and russet - the elusive Kingfisher. Towards evening, all are resting in the shade in the back garden, including my wife, about to provide our nest with a first chick, and her friend Tereza, a transient visitor from far-flung Catalonia. Of a sudden Tereza spots something - doubtless a rare exotic, at least in her eyes. She turns to the expert and asks in her perfect, if accented English "Whats *that* biird, meester Sharkey". Laconically the expert, scarcely glancing up from his paper, replied in words that echo down the years (at least in our house) : "It's a pigeon".

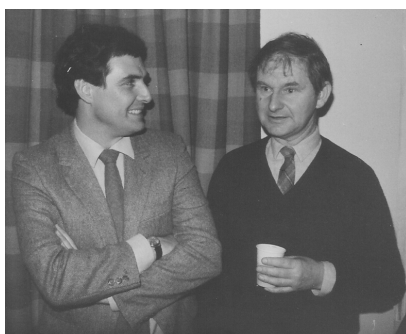
So, forty-something years a birdwatcher's son and Birds I Can Identify Myself without "himself" to guide me include as well as those mentioned the Starling, the Blackbird and the Robin, just to be clear on my level of ornithological ability. It sure ain't genetic; my own chicks are at mine rather than their grandparental level of ability.

What I have gained down all these days is a baffled love for all those graceful, winged creatures and a growing admiration for the flocks of ornithologists like my Dad who can so freely put names on them.

Congratulations on your 75th edition Dad.

Eoin Sharkey

Dave Nuttall and Neil Sharkey
Editors of the first Galway Newsletter – 1986



FORTHCOMING PROGRAMME

Saturday 26 November: I-WeBS workshop with Helen Boland, the national organiser of the Irish Wetland Bird Survey, BirdWatch Ireland. Maldron Hotel, Oranmore. boland@birdwatchireland.ie or phone 01-2812410.

Saturday 3 December: Short outing at Nimmo's Pier; also suitable for beginners. Meet **10.30am** at the slipway. The outing will take about an hour and a half. Children are welcome if they are accompanied by an adult.

Friday 9 December: Pre-Christmas branch gathering and the celebration of this special **75th** issue of the *Galway Newsletter*, edited by Neil Sharkey. All members are welcome to attend. Anno Santo Hotel, Threadneedle Road, Salthill, **8pm**.

Saturday 7 January: Short outing at Nimmo's Pier; as above. Gather at the slip way at **10.30am**.

Saturday 14 January: Galway Bay count – join a team for a full day from **9am** to count the birds on Galway Bay for I-WeBS. Contact Chris Peppiatt if you can help: 091-862566 / 086-3125356 or email chris.peppiatt@iol.ie.

Wednesday 18 January: Annual General Meeting of the Galway branch of BirdWatch Ireland; please come along and have your say! Anno Santo, **8pm**.

Saturday 21 January: Corrib count – join a team for a few hours from **9.30am** to count the birds on Lower Lough Corrib for I-WeBS. Contact Marianne 091-552519 / 087-2378051 or email mariannetencate@gmail.com.

Friday 27 January: *Garden Birds* – an illustrated talk by Jamie Durrant, Membership Development Officer with BirdWatch Ireland. This talk will be of particular interest to beginners and those who would like to attract more birds to their gardens. Anno Santo, **8pm**.

Saturday 4 February: Short outing at Nimmo's Pier, as above. Gather at the slip way at **10.30am**.

MtC

BirdWatch Galway (Branch of BirdWatch Ireland) 3rd Quarter 2011

QUARTERLY BIRD REPORT COMPILED BY CHRIS PEPIATT

DATE OF ISSUE: 4th February 2012

1st July: 1st Sum. Ring-billed Gull, Nimmo's Pier, Galway City (Michael Davis).

3rd July: Spotted Flycatcher, Ballinahinch Castle (Miryam & Michael Harris).

5th July: Tree Sparrow, Inishbofin (Gordon D'Arcy).

5th July: 2nd Sum. Glaucous Gull, again present, Nimmo's Pier, Galway City. (1)

5th July: Ad. Ring-billed Gull, Nimmo's Pier, Galway City (Michael Davis).

15th July: Glaucous Gull, Nimmo's Pier, Galway City (Ken McNiffe).

17th July: Wilson's Petrel, off Inishbofin (Anthony McGeehan).

18th July: Leach's Petrel, off Inishbofin (Anthony McGeehan).

19th July: Calling Corncrake, again present, Coarsefield, Nr. Lough Corrib. (2)

19th July: Barn Owl, Clifden (Dermot Breen).

21st July: Sooty Shearwater, Arctic Skua & 2 (Fem. & duckling) Eider, Slyne Head (Dermot Breen).

21st July: 1st Sum. Rose-coloured Starling, Inishbofin (Anthony McGeehan). (3)

22nd July: 1st Sum./Fem. Red-footed Falcon, Kilonan, Inishmore (Aonghus O'Donail).

22nd July: Leucistic Black-headed Gull, Ballyloughaun, Galway City (Martin O'Malley).

23rd July: Peregrine Falcon, Headford Road, Galway City (Chris Peppiatt).

23rd July: Juv. Mediterranean Gull & 2nd yr. Ring-billed Gull, Long Walk, Galway City (Tom Cuffe).

24th July: Ad. Ring-billed Gull, Long Walk, Galway City (Tom Cuffe).

24th July: Juv. Mediterranean Gull & Whooper Swan, Kiltullagh Lough (Dermot Breen).

24th July: Juv. Greenshank, Glenamaddy Lough (Dermot Breen).

28th July: Juv. Sparrowhawk, Crestwood, Nr. Menlo (Dympna Brennan).

29th July: 10 (2 Fem. & 8 chicks) Red-breasted Merganser, Mannin Bay, Nr. Ballyconneely (Miryam & Michael Harris).

31st July: Merlin, Ballinakill Lough, Nr. Cleggan (Miryam & Michael Harris).

1st August: Merlin, chasing Sand Martins, Murvey, Roundstone (Miryam & Michael Harris).

3rd August: Fem. Tufted Duck, Nimmo's Pier, Galway City (Colin McCay).

4th August: Arctic Skua, Nimmo's Pier, Galway City (Michael Davis).

6th August: Spotted Redshank, Kilcaimin (Tom Cuffe).

8th August: Bean Goose (*rossicus*, Tundra race), Lough Rea. (4)

11th August: 2 Ad. Whooper Swan, Rahasane turlough (Michael Davis).

12th August: Fem. Sparrowhawk, Ardnasillagh, Oughterard (Marianne ten Cate).

13th August: 8 Ruff & 7 Gadwall, Rahasane turlough (Michael Davis).

13th August: 6 Juv. Red-breasted Merganser & 2 Greenshank, Mannin Bay (Miryam & Michael Harris).

14th August: Juv. Ruff, 170 Lapwing, 55 Curlew & Peregrine, Glenamaddy Lough (Dermot Breen).

15th August: 1st Sum. American Golden Plover, Loughaunbeg, Inveran (Aonghus O'Donail). (5)

16th August: Fem. Sparrowhawk, Crestwood, Menlo (Dympna Brennan).

18th August: Stone Curlew, Inveran (Aonghus O'Donail).

19th August: 5 Juv. Black Tern & Juv. Mediterranean Gull, Mannin Bay, Ballyconneely (Dermot Breen).

19th August: 2 Sooty Shearwater & 1,000 Manx Shearwater, off Inishbofin (Gavin Ó Sé).

20th August: 5 Sanderling & 5 Chough, Inishbofin (Gavin Ó Sé).

21st August: 2 Whooper Swan, 350 Mallard, 4 Wigeon, 23 Shoveler, 6 Tufted Duck, 15 Little Egret, 130 lapwing, 85 Curlew, 2 Ruff & 7 Black-tailed Godwit, Rahasane turlough (Pete Capsey).

23rd August: 4 Great Shearwater, 100 Sooty Shearwater, 20 Storm Petrel, Arctic Skua & 5 Great Skua, 13 km WSW of Aughrus Point (Dermot Breen & Aonghus O'Donail).

23rd August: 3,000 Manx Shearwater, 300 Sooty Shearwater, 5 Great Shearwater, 100 Storm Petrel & Ad. Sabine's Gull, from small liner off Slyne Head (Jim Wilson).

23rd August: Blue Phase Fulmar, from small liner 2 km South of Inishmore (Jim Wilson).

24th August: 5 Sooty Shearwater, 100 Manx Shearwater & 2 Great Skua, Inishbofin (Tom Cuffe).

26th August: 435 Sooty Shearwater, 7 Storm Petrel, Sub-Ad. Long-tailed Skua, 2 Arctic Skua & 3 Great Skua, Slyne Head seawatch, 15:45 - 21:00 (Dermot Breen & Aonghus O'Donaill).
27th August: Great Shearwater, 8,000 Sooty Shearwater, 2 Storm Petrel, Common Scoter, Long-tailed Skua, Pomarine Skua, 7 Arctic Skua, 5 Great Skua & 2 Puffin, Slyne Head seawatch, 07:00 - 20:00 (Dermot Breen).
27th August: Lesser Whitethroat & 15 Wheatear, Slyne Head island (Dermot Breen).
28th August: 2 Whooper Swan, 300 Mallard, 100 Teal, 10 Shoveler, 27 Little Egret, 105 Lapwing, 69 Curlew & 9 Black-tailed Godwit, Rahasane turlough (Pete Capsey).
30th August: Pectoral Sandpiper, Truska, Ballyconneely (Dermot Breen). (6)
30th August: hepatic form Fem. Cuckoo, Golf Course, Ballyconneely (John Davis). (7)
31st August: Sabine's Gull, off Inishark (John Brittain).
1st September: Blue phase Fulmar, off Inishark (John Brittain).
2nd September: Juv. Curlew Sandpiper, Crompaun Bay, Ballyconneely (Dermot Breen).
3rd September: Juv. Spotted Redshank, Greenshank, 2 Whooper Swan, 17 Little Egret & Wheatear, Rahasane turlough (Paul Troake).
6th September: 315 Sooty Shearwater, 9 Arctic Skua & 5 Storm Petrel, 15:00 - 17:00, Baile na hAbhainn (Aonghus O'Donaill).
6th September: 30 Sooty Shearwater & 5 Arctic Skua, passing West, Loughaunbeg, Inveran (Aonghus O'Donaill).
6th September: Ad. Sabine's Gull, Black Tern & 16 Sooty Shearwater, Slyne Head (Aonghus O'Donaill).
7th September: albino Swallow, Rinvile, Oranmore (Jennifer Doyle).
7th September: 200 Sooty Shearwater, 25 Common Scoter, 13 Arctic Skua, 8 Storm Petrel, 2 Great Skua, 2 Juv. Little Gull, 2 Black Tern, 08:30 - 10:00, Spiddal (Aonghus O'Donaill).
7th September: 8 Sooty Shearwater, 4 Arctic Skua & Black Tern, Baile na hAbhainn (Aonghus O'Donaill).
7th September: 4 Juv. Sabine's Gull, 2 Sooty Shearwater, 3 Storm Petrel, 2 Great Skua & Arctic Skua, Silver Strand, Galway City (Tom Cuffe).
8th September: 3 Sooty Shearwater, 5 Arctic Skua, Great Skua & Pomarine Skua, Baile na hAbhainn (Aonghus O'Donaill).
8th September: 25 Light-bellied Brent Goose, flying West, Blackrock, Salthill, Galway City (Brendan Dunne).
8th September: 42 Light-bellied Brent Goose, Mweenish, Ballinacourty (Joe Smith).
9th September: 7 Light-bellied Brent Goose, Arctic Skua & Lapland Bunting, Mannin Bay, Ballyconneely (Dermot Breen).
9th September: Whinchat & 20 Chough, Truska, Ballyconneely (Dermot Breen).
10th September: Juv. Sabine's Gull, Spiddal (Ann Fleming).
11th September: Juv. Curlew Sandpiper, Omey Strand (Dermot Breen).
11th September: Black Tern & Juv. Sabine's Gull, Rahasane turlough (Paul Troake).
12th September: Juv. Sabine's Gull, picked up injured and later died, Mannin Beg, Ballyconneely (Martin O'Malley).
12th September: 12 Great Skua, 6 Arctic Skua, Juv. Sabine's Gull & Manx Shearwater, two hour seawatch, Rinvyle Point (Dermot Breen).
12th September: Juv. Sabine's Gull, Renville, Oranmore, Galway City (Frank Flanagan).
12th September: Juv. Semipalmated Sandpiper, Inishbofin (Anthony McGeehan). (8)
13th September: 2 Ad. Sabine's Gull & 11 Storm Petrel, off Mutton Island, Galway City (Michael Davis).
13th September: Ad. Sabine's Gull & 4 Storm Petrel, Gratton beach, Salthill, Galway City (Tom Cuffe).
13th September: Ad. Ring-billed Gull, Nimmo's Pier, Galway City (Tom Cuffe).
14th September: Juv. Pectoral Sandpiper, Gorteen, Nr. Roundstone (Dermot Breen).
15th September: Buff-breasted Sandpiper & White-rumped Sandpiper, Mweenish, Ballinacourty (Paul Troake). (9)
16th September: Juv. Baird's Sandpiper & Juv. Curlew Sandpiper, Mweenish, Ballinacourty (Dermot Breen).
16th September: Black Swan, Rahasane turlough (David Laine).

16th September: 3 Little Egret, Tubber-Gort Road (Nick Parry).
16th September: Wood Sandpiper & 2 Curlew Sandpiper, Rahasane turlough (Aonghus O'Donaill).
17th September: 5 Pectoral Sandpiper, Truska, Ballyconneely (Dermot Breen). (10)
17th September: Ruff & Lapland Bunting, Aillebrack, Slyne Head (Dermot Breen).
18th September: Ad. White-rumped Sandpiper & Juv. Curlew Sandpiper, Inishmore (Dermot Breen).
18th September: Great Shearwater, Great Skua, 50 Arctic Tern & 20 Kittiwake, Inishmore-Rossaveal ferry (Dermot Breen).
18th September: 4 (3 Juv. & Ad.) Sabine's Gull, Silver Strand, Galway City (Tom Cuffe).
20th September: Iceland Gull, Lough Atalia, Galway City (Miryam & Michael Harris).
21st September: 2 Grey Phalarope, 14 Arctic Skua & 9 Sooty Shearwater, Inveran (Aonghus O'Donaill).
22nd September: Juv. Dotterel, Truska, Ballyconneely (Dermot Breen). (11)
22nd September: Leach's Petrel, off Mutton Island, Galway City (Chris Peppiatt).
22nd September: 3 Juv. Curlew Sandpiper, Mweenish, Carna (Dermot Breen).
22nd September: 1st Win. Mediterranean Gull, Kilkieran Harbour (Dermot Breen).
22nd September: 2 Grey Phalarope & 7 Arctic Skua, Baile na hAbhainn (Aonghus O'Donaill).
23rd September: Juv. American Golden Plover, Truska, Ballyconneely (Dermot Breen). (12)
24th September: 2 Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Truska, Ballyconneely (Miryam Harris, Michael Harris & Chris Peppiatt). (13)
24th September: 8 Common Rosefinch, Inishbofin (Anthony McGeehan).
25th September: Ad. Iceland Gull, Nimmo's Pier, Galway City (Neil Ellis).
25th September: 4 Ruff, 200 Black-tailed Godwit, Pintail & 3 Little Egret, Rahasane turlough (Chris Cook).
25th September: 5 Curlew Sandpiper, Rahasane turlough (Aonghus O'Donaill).
26th September: Lapland Bunting, Truska, Ballyconneely (Dermot Breen). (14)
26th September: Ad. Glaucous Gull, Nimmo's Pier, Galway City (Tom Cuffe).
26th September: Male Sparrowhawk, Ballyshrule, Nr. Portumna (Valerie Maxwell).
27th September: Barred Warbler, Slyne Head (Dermot Breen). (15)
27th September: 3 Ruff, Doolough/Turloughcor, Nr. Headford (Neil Sharkey & Deirdre Comerford).
28th September: Juv. White-rumped Sandpiper, 2 Juv. Curlew Sandpiper & 9 Arctic Skua, Barna Pier (Tim Griffin). (16)
28th September: Lesser Whitethroat, Inishbofin (Anthony McGeehan). (17)
29th September: Male Redstart, Slyne Head (Dermot Breen).
29th September: Juv. Curlew Sandpiper, again present, Barna Pier.
29th September: Green Sandpiper, Ruff, male Marsh Harrier & 2 ringtail Hen Harrier, Angliham, Lough Corrib (Tim Griffin).
29th September: Ad. White-rumped Sandpiper, Mannin Bay, Ballyconneely (Dermot Breen).
29th September: 21 Arctic Skua, 3 Pomarine & 4 Great Skua, Baile na hAbhainn (Aonghus O'Donaill).
30th September: Yellow Wagtail (unknown subspecies), Ardmore, Nr. Kilkieran (Dermot Breen).
30th September: Blue-headed Wagtail, Barna Pier (Aonghus O'Donaill). (18)
30th September: Tree Sparrow, Inishbofin (Anthony McGeehan).

NOTES:

- (1) This Glaucous Gull was originally seen on several occasions during May and June in the second quarter of 2011.
- (2) This Corncrake was first seen on the 19th of June during the second quarter of 2011.
- (3) The Rose-coloured Starling was seen again on the 24th of July.
- (4) This unseasonal and relatively tame bird is considered to have been an escapee from captivity.
- (5) This bird was also present on the 18th of August.
- (6) This Pectoral Sandpiper was also seen on the 1st of September.
- (7) The hepatic Cuckoo was also seen on the 1st of September.
- (8) The Juvenile Semipalmated Sandpiper was seen again on the 13th and 14th of September.
- (9) This White-rumped Sandpiper was seen again on the 16th of September.
- (10) Three Pectoral Sandpipers were seen at Truska on the 22nd of September and remained until the 29th at least.

- (11) The Juvenile Dotterel remained here until the 29th of September at least.
- (12) The Juvenile American Golden Plover remained into October.
- (13) The Buff-breasted Sandpipers were present at Truska until the 1st of October at least.
- (14) The Truska Lapland Bunting was seen again on the 29th of September.
- (15) The Barred Warbler remained into October.
- (16) The Barna Juvenile White-rumped Sandpiper was also seen on the 29th of September.
- (17) The Inishbofin Lesser Whitethroat was present until the 30th of September at least.
- (18) Blue-headed Wagtails were present at Barna into October.

OTHER BEASTIES:

23rd August: 2 Common Dolphin & 6 tagged/released Blue Shark, 13 km WSW of Aughrus Point (Dermot Breen & Aonghus O'Donail).

23rd August: 500 Common Dolphin & 2 Humpback Whale (lunge feeding), from small liner off Slyne Head (Jim Wilson).

HIGHLIGHTS:

Wilson's Petrel, 11 Great Shearwater, Red-footed Falcon, Semi-palmated Sandpiper, Baird's Sandpiper, 3 White-rumped Sandpiper, 3 Buff-breasted Sandpiper, 7 Pectoral Sandpiper, 2 American Golden Plover, Dotterel, Stone Curlew, 4 Grey Phalarope, Green Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper, 19 Sabine's Gull, Rose-coloured Starling, 8 Common Rosefinch, Redstart, 2 '*flava*' Wagtail, Barred Warbler, 2 Lesser Whitethroat & 2 Lapland Bunting.

First Winter migrants: Light-bellied Brent Goose (8th September); 2-3 Whooper Swan apparently summered.

Escapes: Black Swan and Bean Goose.