
BirdWatch Ireland
Annual Report 2010



BirdWatchIreland



Introduction from the Chairman

2010 has been a challenging year for BirdWatch Ireland, with the economic crisis starting to bite and with state funding for conservation and related work under a significant degree of stress. I have been impressed with the dedication and commitment shown by BirdWatch Ireland staff in coping with this, ensuring that our vital work for birds and nature in this country can continue to develop. The scale and scope of what our staff and volunteers deliver is huge: reading the annual report brings a real sense of that each year. "2020 Vision", our forward strategy launched in March 2010, sets out our ambition and goals for the next ten years, and helps us to focus on priorities as we tackle the challenges ahead.

Significant new efforts began this year on increasing our membership support. Members are vital, their numbers and influence help us to influence the wider world to better protect birds and biodiversity and not least, they help to fuel the engine of BirdWatch Ireland, through their voluntary effort and their financial support. For every Euro a member contributes many more Euros are levered from other funding sources to put directly into conservation work, making the value of donations and subscriptions vital to the future of the organisation in its mission to protect Ireland's birds. So much of what we do would be impossible were it not for this generous support from our members. Thanks to all our members for their support and of course thanks to our other partners who work closely with us to help Ireland's birds.

John Cromie, Chairman

2,439	the number of volunteers registered to the Bird Atlas
138	the number of active Barn Owl nests monitored in 2010
23	the oldest Roseate Tern present on Rockabill, ringed as a chick in 1987
15,000	Whooper Swans were recorded in the all Ireland census, a 6% increase.
1,274	the number of new members who joined us in 2010
396	the number of media 'hits' for the organisation in 2010
12	the number of Little Tern chicks lost to a depredating Kestrel at Kilcoole.
42,134	volunteer hours given to BirdWatch Ireland in 2010
26	active branches of BirdWatch Ireland in 2010

People

People

Working with staff and volunteers to maximise our membership

Membership Development

In March 2010 the previously identified priority of a dedicated Membership Officer was brought to fruition with the appointment of Jamie Durrant as Membership Development Officer.

The post has led on an improved approach to and successful delivery of enhanced membership recruitment and small donor support through development and implementation of organisation-wide initiatives.

Membership targets and priorities

The target of 300 additional new members in the first 12 months of the MDO position, was surpassed in 2010 and we set a record for new memberships in a calendar year with 1,274, up from 1,124, the previous high set in 2006.

Events and 'Face to Face' programme

In conjunction with the Development Officer and staff from Administration and Conservation teams, Branches and other volunteers, an expanded events programme was carried out in 2010. Garden shows continue to generate new memberships, the regional events were all new and successful for us and BLOOM had a big increase over 2009. The Cliffs of Moher Seabird event engaged with many visitors to the site. A 'Walk in and set up' invitation from IKEA in Dublin on two dates resulted in new members joining us from a completely new audience.

Working with staff, volunteers and branches

Direct contact has been made or maintained with existing and emerging branches. In 2010 we saw the re emergence of the Cork branch, Carlow branch and the set up of a Kildare branch. Some time has been spent with branches such as Clare, Limerick and Mayo which needed increased contact, support and assistance in carrying out existing events programme. Both Donegal and Galway branches responded very well to new membership event initiatives and were instrumental in their success.

The number of active branches at the end of 2010 was 26, a tremendous and increasing resource for our membership that, literally, covers the country.



Display at Bloom in the Park.

People

Volunteers

In 2010, BirdWatch Ireland drew heavily on the time, efforts, skills, knowledge and expertise of its volunteers, from transition year through to third level students, from the Board of Directors to all the committed local branch members, from volunteers who donated half an hour to those who donated three months or more. Volunteers are closely involved with every aspect of our work. In 2010 the work of volunteers was equivalent to 20 full time staff, an increase of 5% from 2009. Volunteers enabled us to be present and active at even more public events in 2010, and helped increase our membership to record figures. They helped us produce publications, build predator proof fences, pack parcels for the shop, collect and input conservation data, improve our website, answer the telephone and much more. The goodwill and enthusiasm they bring to our conservation work is irreplaceable.

2010	No. of Volunteers	Total Hours
Surveys, Habitat Management	4,021	40,313
Development & Publications	78	1,013
Administration	8	328
Shop	2	136
Reserves	6	344
Total	4,115	42,134
Full days per annum	5267	
5 day weeks	1053	
Full time Annual staff Equivalent	20	

Cape Clear Bird Observatory

The Observatory continues to serve the needs of active bird watchers and migration fans and also students and beginners to birdwatching. The observatory is manned by a full time warden from April to November and hosts a selection of bird and natural history courses on the island. These courses run from 2 to 5 days duration and are an important stepping stone

for beginners and the more experienced who wish to learn more about bird and natural history subjects in a relaxed setting in an island setting.

Nature Reserves

We continue to maintain a network of nature reserves around the country, all located in areas of conservation importance to birds. Our land ownership and leases extends to over 475 hectares and covers a variety of habitats from rocky islands to saltmarshes and lakes through to woods and semi-improved grasslands.

During 2010 we continued the enhancement of the visitor facilities at our East Coast Nature Reserve with the completion of a raised boardwalk and a third hide allowing access to within and along the woodland edge. Since the development of the infrastructure, increasing numbers of visitors are being attracted to enjoy the diversity of wildlife on offer, whether it is the plethora of wintering waterfowl or the continuing successes of attracting breeding Lapwings or the diversity of other wildlife, such as butterflies, dragonflies or otters. Similarly, at our Rogerstown Estuary reserve the development of saltmarsh habitat is continuing to attract breeding Lapwings and a wealth of waterfowl during the winter. However despite the continuing management at our Annagh Marsh reserve the populations of breeding waders are suffering high losses of eggs and chicks to foxes. But, close by at our Termoncarragh Meadows reserve the enhancement of cover areas and late mown grasslands are continuing to attract breeding Corncrakes and offer the visitor a rare chance to see these elusive birds. These meadow grasslands are also providing an excellent foraging area for the rare Great Yellow Bumblebee, and during the winter attract Barnacle Geese and Choughs to feed.

Much of our work on the reserves is only possible through volunteer help, membership support and public funding support. In 2010 we received specific funding support from the Rural Development Programme (County Wicklow Partnership) and the Heritage Council.

Policy

Advocating messages and working in partnerships

Casework

Planning submissions and representations on the proposed port extension in Dublin Bay and Keelderry Wind development in County Galway were two of over 200 submissions made on planning related issues, policy development and national and European consultation calls. Other examples include submissions on the National Biodiversity Strategy. In particular, we were active in the area of legislation development by making submissions in the drafting of the Poisoned Baits regulation, the new Planning Act and on the transposition of the EU Habitats and Birds Directive the Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations

Wildlife crime

In previous years BirdWatch Ireland has repeatedly called for the legislation regarding the use of poisons in Ireland to be amended. In 2010 numerous high profile incidents of raptor poisonings served to further highlight the inadequacies of the existing legislation. A key focus of our policy in 2010 was to use our influence to deliver the necessary changes to the laws to afford better protection to our wildlife. In 2010, alongside the Golden Eagle Trust, we played an instrumental role in bringing about such changes to the poisoning legislation. In October 2010, the then Minister for the Environment, John Gormley announced the new regulations under the European Communities Acts which make it an offence to use poison to kill birds or animals, unless licensed to do so. BirdWatch Ireland widely welcomed these new regulations as a major step in the right direction towards a healthier countryside.

Advocacy & partnerships

BirdWatch Ireland produced a leaflet on *'Avoiding impacts on Irish Birds; Appropriate Assessment & Natura 2000'*. This is guidance for planners, engineers, consultants or anyone else interested in how to go about assessing possible impacts of proposals on designated sites.

A new publication by BirdWatch Ireland on *'Ecosystem Services; accounting for services that nature provides in local and regional policy-making'* details how to incorporate biodiversity into decision making at a local level. This will be used in our advocacy and outreach work in 2011.

BirdWatch Ireland saw the successful election of BWI staff onto the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and on the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) by the 27 NGOs that make up the membership of the Environmental Pillar of Social Partnership.

Policy

Action Planning for Irish Birds

2010 saw the publication of the Upland Birds Action Plan with stakeholder meetings held for three other plans due to be published in 2011 for Farmland Birds; Marine and Sea Cliff Birds; and Shore and Lagoon Birds. This project is partially funded by the Department of Environment Heritage and Local Government, with stakeholder meeting supported by Dublin Zoo.

The BirdLife Task Force on the Birds and Habitats Directive held their meeting in Dublin, visited key sites of interest to ongoing European Court of justice cases including Dublin Bay, and visited LIFE funded East Coast Nature Reserve.

BirdWatch Ireland joined the OCEAN 2012 coalition of NGO, Fishery interests and recreational groups. Together we have been pursuing the issue of discards and other fundamental reforms needed through the review of the Common Fisheries Policy which has included meeting with MEPs, national government and fishery interests.

Ireland's Environmental Performance

2010 marked International Year of Biodiversity and made it clear that Ireland, Europe and the international community has as yet a long way to go to protect biodiversity and enhance the range of 'ecosystem services' our natural infrastructure provides. Lobbying by BirdLife International and our advocacy at home pushed for better targets and commitment at the Conference of the Parties in Nagoya. Ireland still ranks at the bottom of league tables and barometers produced by environmental NGOs and official Commission statistics on wildlife protection in Europe. This highlights the importance of increasing political pressure and giving people and nature a voice!

As part of the Stop Climate Chaos coalition and through our new social media, we have been campaigning for coherent Climate legislation – hopefully 2011 will see the development of legislation that will deliver coherent plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from all sectors.



Lowland Farmland Birds stakeholder workshop (Siobhan Egan)

Policy

Agriculture: The burning issue

One issue that came to light early in 2010 was the cutting and burning of scrub. Having struggled through a harsh winter, many birds were faced with the destruction of nests, nesting habitats and foraging areas in April and May. The reason for the spate of scrub removal was identified as rules, operated under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), requiring farmers to remove “non-forage land” from grant application forms, losing the money they received on this area. Lobbying work is continuing at a national and European level to address this very serious issue.

Lobbying continued in 2010 on the shape of the new (CAP) after the current programming period is completed in 2012. A Mid-term evaluation of the current Rural Development Plan (the part of the CAP that funds agri-environment schemes and land management on Natura sites) took place during the year. BirdWatch Ireland made submission directly for this evaluation, and also worked with our partner organisation in the Environmental Pillar to ensure a strong and coherent message on the past performance and future needs for the CAP could be delivered for farmland birds and biodiversity in Ireland.

BirdWatch Ireland staff continue to serve as elected Director of the Irish Environmental Network (IEN) and as an IEN representative on the Biodiversity Forum. Throughout 2010 BirdWatch Ireland staff have engaged in advocacy work of the Environmental Pillar and represented the Pillar at EU and national level on the RDP Monitoring Committee, Designated Areas Appeals Board, and at stakeholder consultations such as for Harvest 2020.

Organisations we have actively worked with and got to know better in 2010 through our policy and advocacy work include National Parks and Wildlife Service, Environmental Protection Agency, the Irish Farmers Association, An Bord Pleanála, the Irish Permanent Representation in Brussels, NGOs of the Environmental Pillar, the Marine Institute, Department of Agriculture (Fisheries), Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Department of the Taoiseach, The Heritage Council, DG Environment, DG Energy, Mountaineering Ireland.



Yellowhammer (John Fox)

Media

Media

Promoting our work to the public

Media coverage of BirdWatch Ireland was up 170%, over the 2009 annual figure. This involved steady growth in established media sectors such as national newspapers but also a spectacular growth in coverage with on line media, blogs, news websites etc. We also featured in parliamentary debate in the last quarter. The media drive is lead by Niall Hatch but conservation staff took the lead on relevant issues. Coverage is often gained on 'novelty or soft stories' but harder news also featured with policy issues to the fore and sustained interest in species colonisation and garden birds.

News coverage now routinely follows the publication of our monthly e zine, which ensures a consistent spread of coverage across the year with enough variation of content to interest journalists. It is thought that the coverage in the media has been an aid in our successful year of membership development. Recognition of the organisation and its work is at a high.

Media Coverage by sector

	January to December 2009	January to December 2010
National Television	14	17
National Radio	15	25
Regional Radio	27	42
National Newspapers	45	97
Regional Newspapers	33	85
Magazines	3	5
Dail & Seanad		4
News Websites & Blogs	14	121
Total	151	396

Promoting the organisation through new media channels and audiences Following on from the success of the monthly e zine, (circulation list 11,000) a BirdWatch Ireland Facebook Page was developed and is moderated by the MDO and key staff. Regular contact through electronic means is both cost effective and important in fostering membership retention and loyalty.

There are over 2000 friends on our Facebook page. Subscribers to our Facebook page have also shown an interest in our surveys and advocacy work and the site is updated daily.

A project blog was developed for the Little Tern Project at Kilcoole and this has generated feedback with increased interest and support for the project.

Surveys

Surveys

Monitoring and tracking changes in our bird populations

Bird Atlas

The Bird Atlas 2007-2011 is a joint project to map all of Ireland and Britain's birds during both the winter and the breeding season. It is a working partnership between BirdWatch Ireland, the British Trust for Ornithology and the Scottish Ornithologists Club. It will allow us to assess changes in bird distributions since previous breeding atlases in 1968-72 and 1988-91, and since the last winter atlas of the early 1980s. By the end of 2010 over 2,439 volunteers had registered to take part in the project on the island of Ireland.

Following the successful completion of two seasons of survey work the Timed Tetrad Visit coverage figures stood at 77% for the winter and 76% for the breeding season, based on a checkerboard system. Along side the work of the volunteers a number of atlas contract staff undertook survey work in the more remote and rural parts of Ireland where coverage to date was limited

A series of Atlas events, workshops and talks were delivered during 2010 with many BirdWatch Ireland Branches holding Atlas Roving Events to help increase coverage levels on a county basis.

Countryside Bird Survey (CBS)

The CBS is carried out during the months of April, May and June every year and has been running since 1998. Its aim is to monitor population changes in breeding countryside birds in the Republic of Ireland. It is a joint project of the National Parks and Wildlife Service and BirdWatch Ireland.

Nearly 190 observers (150 volunteers, 33 NPWS rangers and 4 contract workers) participated in the survey in the 2010 season, covering 289 1km squares (a slight drop from 292 in 2009). As with other years, coverage was best in the eastern half of the county and poorest in some west and southwestern counties. One-to-one training sessions were conducted with some new participants.

The results of the first 11 years of the survey (1998 – 2008), which were published in a paper in *Bird Study*, showed that most of the 52 species being monitored are fairing well. A total of 22 species were showing an increase, 22 remained stable and eight had shown a decline. Greatest declines were noted in Kestrel, Swift, Skylark and Mistle Thrush.



Woodland Boardwalk at the East Coast Nature Reserve (O.O'Sullivan)

Surveys

Irish Wetland Bird Survey (I-WeBS)

The Irish Wetland Bird Survey entered its 17th winter season in 2010. Since the scheme began in the Republic of Ireland in 1994 regular counts of wetland sites across the country have been carried out in order to identify population sizes, determine trends, and to identify important sites for waterbirds. Over 80 wetlands in Ireland have been designated as Special Protection Areas under the EU Birds Directive based on data collated about wintering waterbirds.

There are currently over 320 people taking part in the survey, including skilled volunteer observers and staff of the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

In January 2010, in addition to the regular Core Counts, the International Migratory Swan Census of Whooper and Bewick's Swans took place in Ireland, Britain and Iceland over the weekend of 16th/17th, co-ordinated in Ireland by the I-WeBS Office. Almost 15,000 Whooper Swans were recorded in 387 flocks in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, representing a 6% increase on the previous census in 2005. Bewick's Swans continued their decline with just 80 birds recorded. An aerial census was carried out on the 22nd January which enabled coverage of several large and inaccessible sites for both the Swan Census and for the main January I-WeBS count. I-WeBS publications in 2010 include the annual edition of I-WeBS News, and a summary paper reporting on the 2008/09 season.

The Garden Bird Survey

During the 2009/10 survey, garden bird surveyors witnessed huge movements of birds during prolonged cold weather in late December and early January, the coldest for nearly 50 years. Given the direction of bird movements from the Continent, the East coast counties from Louth to Wexford showed well with 18 of the top 25 gardens recording a diversity of between 33 and 42 species.

Wrens, susceptible to cold weather and more dependent on favourable feeding conditions showed an ill effect to the prevailing weather, falling 4 positions and out of the top 10 species list. Thrushes showed increases with visits to gardens very high amongst migrating Redwing, up 15 places and Fieldfare up 16, Song and Mistle Thrushes were up 6 and 3 places respectively. Other garden birds to fare badly in the cold snap, were Long-tailed Tit and Goldcrest, two of our smallest birds. The fortunes of our Greenfinches have been reported on previously, their plight continues to alarm, down 3 places in the species listing.



Watching Little Terns at Kilcoole (Katie Jennings)

Research

Research

*Making informed decisions
based on scientific findings*

Kestrel Research

In 2010 BirdWatch Ireland were awarded funding from the Heritage Council to initiate research on aspects of Kestrel ecology. The Countryside Bird Survey and Breeding Atlas have both recently highlighted declines in the Kestrel population. This was the first research effort of its kind to focus on the species in Ireland, and will inform the direction and requirement of future research and conservation work. The project was comprised of four individual elements, which included population monitoring and survey work; assessment of nesting ecology and site selection; Kestrel diet and monitoring of breeding success.

Over 500 potential sites were surveyed to determine suitability and occupancy of the species. Survey efforts in 2010, which were greatly assisted by local branches, volunteers, National Parks and Wildlife Service staff and Irish Raptor Study Group members resulted in the confirmation of 39 nesting attempts and a further 12 occupied territories. A detailed investigation of 30 nest sites was also conducted to collate data on the nesting requirements of Kestrels. Nest site types ranged from man-made structures to natural sites including castles, ruined mansions, trees, quarries, derelict farmhouses, farm buildings, churches, cliff faces, a bridge, grain store and courtyard. It was possible to assess breeding success at 26 of these sites. The findings were positive, with only 2 sites (7.69%) failing to fledge young. The average clutch size was 4.58. The average fledging success was 3.78, with one nest site in County Kerry fledging six chicks. In total 69 chicks were fitted with BTO rings. Specialised nest cameras were installed at eight sites to monitor prey deliveries and breeding behaviour.

Over 500 pellets were collected and analysed from 30 different nest and roost sites, with particular emphasis on determining the importance of introduced small mammals (Bank Vole and Greater White-toothed Shrew) in the diet.



Kestrel (Shay Connolly)

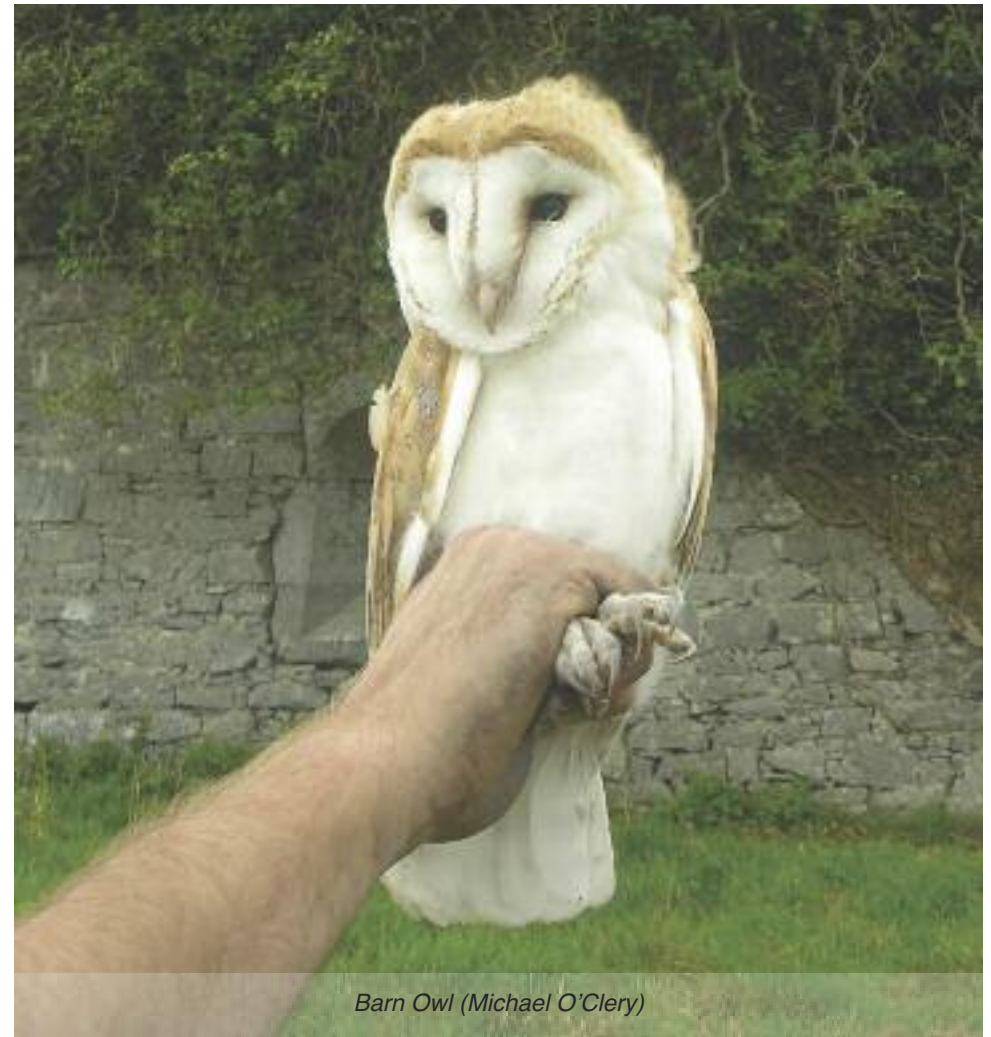
Research

Barn Owls

The Barn Owl Conservation and Research Project has been in operation since late 2005. The project is monitoring the population and aims to create a long term dataset to effectively assess trends, as well as addressing relevant aspects of Barn Owl ecology to increase our understanding of the issues which impact the species and the conservation efforts required. The project received core funding from the National Parks and Wildlife Service, and Kerry and Cork County Councils in 2010. The project benefits from an important level of volunteer input.

Intensive survey work revealed a total of 138 active nest sites, the highest annual total recorded by the project since its initiation. Of all nest and roost sites assessed the most common site type was ruined mansions (appropriate in these dark economic times!), followed by castles and ruined farmhouses. Nine nest boxes were used as breeding sites in 2010 with additional nest boxes also used for roosting. The breeding season was more productive than previous years, of 72 sites monitored, 58 successfully fledged young (19 % failed). This was an improvement from 24% of sites which failed in 2009. The productivity of all successful pairs assessed throughout the country was 2.84, an improvement on 2.41 in 2009. A total of 115 chicks from 43 nests were ringed in 2010. The average first egg date for all sites assessed was the 7th of May.

The Barn Owl Project was also contracted by Cork County Council and Limerick County Council to undertake survey work and devise appropriate mitigation for the species for the proposed M20 Cork to Limerick motorway. This scheme was innovative in the European context, and serves as a milestone for Barn Owl conservation in Ireland.



Barn Owl (Michael O'Clery)

Merlin Pilot Survey

The 2010 Merlin Pilot Survey, funded by the National Parks and Wildlife Service and BirdWatch

Ireland represents the first steps towards the development of a monitoring and conservation strategy for Merlin. The primary aim of the project was to evaluate survey techniques previously used in other countries to inform a practical and realistic approach to effectively monitoring the Irish population. Survey efforts were focused on ten selected 3 x 3 km squares in Merlin strongholds in Donegal, Galway and Wicklow in order to test survey methods. These survey squares were intensively and systematically searched for breeding Merlin throughout the summer by two teams of fieldworkers (BirdWatch Ireland and National Parks and Wildlife Service) which used different methodologies. Comparison of the findings between the two survey elements highlighted the difficulties associated with Merlin survey work in Ireland. Results were similar for six of the ten survey squares (with three squares occupied, two holding breeding attempts, and one with a successful breeding pair), with contrasting findings for the remaining four squares. As well as providing insights into aspects of Merlin ecology the findings also facilitated valuable information on the practicalities of surveying Merlin in Ireland. A separate diet study was also carried out by BirdWatch Ireland. A total of 384 prey items were collected from 264 Merlin plucking perches. Of all items analysed, 66% were birds, 33% moths and 1% dragonflies. A total of 24 bird species were recorded. The most frequent prey item was Meadow Pipit (23%).

Birds on Cutaway Peatlands

In partnership with Bord na Móna, three areas of work on the cutaway peatlands were developed. As part of a baseline ecological assessment of all Bord na Móna sites, bird surveys were undertaken on bogs at Ballycon, Lullymore, Drumman and Timahoe South. Ballycon Bog proved to be particularly valuable, with breeding confirmed for Lapwing and Ringed Plover, and suspected for Redshank. Whooper Swans use the site in winter, and even Common Crane and Marsh Harrier were recorded.

Many previous studies have demonstrated the value and importance of the breeding wader populations on the cutaways. In 2010, an assessment of the aspects of the nesting ecology of breeding waders, and particularly Lapwing, on these sites was initiated. Despite being an exceptionally late breeding season for Lapwing in 2010, several nests were located, and data loggers deployed. This work will hopefully continue for at least two more breeding seasons, to help improve our understanding of these habitats for such an important group of species.

The value of the cutaway peatlands to many species stems from the natural recolonisation of many cutaway areas, and in many cases the flooding, or raising of the water table. However, it is envisaged that a small amount of land management to these sites might substantially improve the habitat for birds. In the autumn of 2010, 20 hectares of peatlands at Drinagh were cleared of encroaching scrub and trees, the drainage ditches re-profiled and the main drains blocked. The aim of this work was to raise the water table in a sculpted environment to benefit wintering wildfowl and breeding waders. The benefits of this work were realised very quickly, with Whooper Swan, Teal, Lapwing, Curlew and Golden Plover all using the site. An evaluation of the work will continue in 2011, when it is hoped the land management can be expanded further.

Corncrakes

Corncrake populations had mixed fortunes in 2010. Overall, the national population was up slightly, with 133 calling males recorded compared with 128 the previous year. However, this masked declines in two of the core areas, with 40 in West Connaught, a decline of 16% since 2009, and sadly, just two calling males on the Shannon Callows, where the population has been decimated by a long series of disastrous summer floods. In Donegal however, there was a reported 26% increase from 67 to 91.

2010 saw the first year of direct management of the project by National Parks and Wildlife Service, with BirdWatch Ireland no longer acting as the main delivery agents. NPWS work included predator control and leasing of land on conacre.

BirdWatch Ireland continued its own programme of work at key sites through the creation of more early cover. Lack of early cover has consistently been identified as limiting the recovery of corncrake populations in the west and Donegal. Autumn 2010 saw BirdWatch Ireland staff and contractors undertake a programme of work to create early cover in the form of nettle patches on Tory Island and added to cover on our reserve at Termoncarragh near Belmullet, Co. Mayo. Our intention is to build on this vital work in coming years and particularly to see Corncrake numbers flourishing on our reserves and other key areas.

BirdWatch Ireland is very grateful to the Heritage Council for their continued funding of this work.

Breeding ecology and distribution of Curlew

Sadly, a second Irish breeding bird has been added to the global Red List along with Corncrake; our population of breeding Curlew has suffered an 80% decline in the last 25 years alone, with probably just a few hundred pairs left in the country. These catastrophic declines have mainly been due to loss and fragmentation of breeding habitats, mostly marginal upland pastures and wet grasslands. The loss of peat bogs, afforestation, more intensive management of farmland and encroachment by scrub have all contributed.

However, in a successful bid to begin to tackle these problems, in 2010, BirdWatch Ireland, in partnership with RSPB Northern Ireland and RSPB in South and West Scotland, was awarded funding for a major 3 year project to trial techniques of habitat restoration for Curlew. INTERREG IIIC is an EU-funded programme that helps Europe's regions form partnerships to work together on common projects. Called the Halting Environmental Loss Project (HELP), our project aims to tackle a range of problems affecting breeding waders in Scotland, Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland.

In addition, BirdWatch Ireland also launched a membership appeal for funds to establish new management and research work in other parts of the country, where curlew are suffering similar declines. These initiatives are just the tip of the iceberg though, and much more work remains to be done before we can save what remains of this most evocative of upland waders.

Research

Shannon Callows Breeding Wader Project

The Shannon Callows Breeding Wader Project, funded by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, began in 2005 with the aim of maintaining and restoring populations of breeding waders - Lapwing, Redshank, Curlew and Snipe - in the Shannon Callows SPA. The Callows once held one of the largest populations on lowland wet grassland in Ireland and Britain. Sadly numbers fell drastically between 1987 and 2002, Lapwing by 82%, Redshank by 71% and Snipe and Curlew by 68 and 83% respectively.

The project consists of a voluntary grant scheme for farmers and selected habitat management at key sites. The grant scheme consists of two tiers; the breeding tier protects nests and chicks from agricultural damage during the breeding season; and the late tier which actively manages sites to ensure that the habitat is suitable for breeding the following spring. Approximately 210ha of land is currently under agreement.

In 2009, a series of works were undertaken, with the aim of improving breeding success on key sites. A fence was erected to exclude mammalian predators around one of the key breeding sites – Inishee Island, Co Galway. Operational now for two years the fence has proven very successful. After almost complete breeding failure in previous years, breeding for Redshank and Lapwing has proven to be 100% successful in 2009 and 2010, with many pairs fledging three or four chicks.

Scrub encroachment on the Callows has led to a deterioration and fragmentation of wader habitat at some sites. In Autumn 2009, tree and scrub removal was carried out on Inishee Island and adjacent Esker Island, and on one other site, Devenish Island in Co Roscommon. Small numbers of Lapwing and Redshank bred on Esker Island for the first time in nearly 20 years, in 2010, and all pairs successfully fledged chicks.

Wader populations and productivity have been monitored on all management areas since 2008 and initial results show that the total population in these areas has increased year on year. With seven sites recording a population increase, two remaining stable and two continuing to decline. Both sites in decline were shown by the research project (2006 – 2008) to suffer from high levels of depredation.

The last complete breeding wader census was carried out in 1987 and various partial surveys since show that overall, the trend of decline has continued outside of management areas, with range declines of between 60 and 90% for Lapwing, curlew and snipe, though redshank have fared better at just over 20% range contraction since 1987. However, all species have suffered severe population declines since 1987, which reflects the declines being recorded in most breeding wader species across the country. Halting and reversing these declines presents one of the greatest challenges facing us over the next twenty years, which is why it is of high priority in the new BirdWatch Ireland Strategy, 2020 Vision.



Lapwing chick (Alex Copland)

Research

Wintering waterbirds within Irish coastal SPAs:

Baseline low tide survey programme

The low tide waterbird survey programme continued with a second winter of monthly surveys. This project, funded by the National Parks & Wildlife Service, is designed to gather specific information on how waterbirds use key sites across a range of tidal stages, especially at low-tide.

Teams of fieldworkers surveyed eleven sites between October 2010 to February 2011, all of which are prime sites for wintering waterbirds and are designated as Special Protection Areas (SPA) under the European Birds Directive. They include huge complexes such as the River Shannon and Fergus Estuaries and Cork Harbour, as well as a number of smaller sites such as Tramore Bay and Killala Bay.



Teal (Eric Dempsey)

Patterns of waterbird distribution, together with additional data on sediment composition and invertebrate distribution and abundance, will allow us to identify the most important areas used by waterbirds within these sites. This information, combined with existing data on waterbird population sizes and trends (from I-WeBS) is essential so that we can define conservation priorities for key wetland sites in Ireland.

Impact of Cormorant predation on selected fisheries

This study, established in 2010 through Inland Fisheries Ireland and BirdWatch Ireland, aims to provide preliminary information on the numbers, diet and distribution of Cormorants on selected fisheries, and to review potential impacts in light of known information from fisheries across Europe. To achieve this objective, systematic surveys of four selected waterway systems were conducted throughout 2010, to determine Cormorant numbers and how they fluctuated across the season in relation to fish densities. Particular emphasis was also given to identifying key feeding areas for Cormorants and the importance of certain fish species in the diet. Pellets and regurgitates were collected from nesting colonies and roost sites associated with the survey areas. An element of the project was also focused on working alongside Inland Fisheries Ireland staff to determine perceived impacts and to scope options for future mitigation.

Research

Status and distribution of wintering waterbirds in Ireland over a 40-year period

A study of how wintering waterbird trends in Ireland have changed over the past 40 years has recently been completed thanks to support for the Heritage Council Grant Scheme 2010. A major part of this work involved data validation and cross-checking of hundreds of datacards collected by many dedicated amateur and professional ornithologists since the early 1970s. This included data from the Wetlands Enquiry 1971/72-1974/74 and the Winter Wetlands Survey 1984/85-1986/97.

Most key sites in Ireland have retained their importance for waterbirds since the 1970s. Species which have fared best include several which migrate from Iceland, Greenland and high-arctic Canada such as Whooper Swan, Barnacle Goose, Light-bellied Brent Goose and Black-tailed Godwit. Species which have shown the most worrisome declines include Bewick's Swan, Wigeon, Pochard, Tufted Duck, Goldeneye, Golden Plover, Lapwing Dunlin and Curlew.

This study has provided a 'broad sweep' approach the long-term changes in populations of migratory waterbirds. One factor likely to impact on this group of birds is sea-level rise, which will reduce the availability of their feeding and roosting areas. Future coastal protection measures taking place at or near key wetland sites will need to take into account the loss of this important wetland habitat in Ireland.

Kingfisher Survey 2010

The principal objective of the waterways breeding bird survey in 2010, funded by NPWS, was to quantify the distribution and densities of Kingfisher and other waterways birds throughout six SAC river systems. These rivers were geographically spread across the country, and included the Barrow, Blackwater (Munster region), Boyne, Clare, Moy and Nore.

Almost 1,000 km of rivers was covered either on foot or by boat, and each river was visited three times to maximise the chance of detecting Kingfishers.

A total of 25 waterways bird species were recorded, with the highest total of 21 species on both the Blackwater (Munster) and Boyne systems. The River Nore and several of its tributaries supported most Kingfishers, and between 16 and 22 territories were identified. Some 15 to 19 territories were identified on the River Boyne.

The territories identified during this survey in 2010 will inform the Special Protection Area designation process, with regards to Kingfisher.



Kingfisher (John Fox)

Research

Kilcoole Little Tern Project

A total of 70 nesting attempts were made by 66 breeding pairs of Little Tern in 2010. The first eggs were found on 21st May, but were thought to have been laid on the 19th May. A total of 174 eggs were laid, with a mean clutch size of 2.48 eggs per nest with known clutch sizes (171 eggs from 69 nests). The largest loss of eggs related to 13 eggs/12 nests which were added (7.47%). Other losses included 8 eggs/5 nests flooded by high tides & storms, 5 eggs/3 nests which were deserted, 4 eggs/3 nests which were presumably depredated by corvids & 2 eggs/1 nest which were thought to be depredated by a Hedgehog. A further 2 single eggs were laid randomly ('dumped') and were not part of an active nest or being incubated. The fate of 1 other egg was unknown. Four known relays were recorded. A total of 139 chicks were known to have hatched out of 60 nests from the 11th June. The modal incubation period was 19.83 days.

A pair of Kestrels took 12 Little Tern chicks (8.63%) between 29th June & 10th July. In addition, 6 small chicks were trampled by humans along the foreshore, 2 small chicks were lost to a high tide & storm, 1 near-fledgling was taken by a Fox & 1 fledgling was taken by a Peregrine. A further 2 chicks were lost to an unknown cause, but are thought to have been taken by the Kestrels. Thus, 115 chicks were presumed to have fledged, which equates to productivity this year of 1.74 fledglings per breeding pair. This is likely to be a slight overestimate, and productivity based on chick re-trap data is much lower at 1.1 fledglings per breeding pair.

The Little Tern protection project is funded and jointly run by NPWS regional office and staff.

Rockabill Tern Project

In total, 1093 Roseate, 1940 Common and 234 Arctic Tern nests were found up to and including the cut off census date (34 days after first eggs were seen). Mean clutch sizes for Roseate, Common and Arctic Terns were 1.34, 1.91, and 1.82 respectively. The productivity of Roseate and Common

Terns was 1.03 and 0.72 respectively. As in 2009, no estimate could be made for Arctic Tern productivity but it is likely to have been very poor.

Totals of 1291 Roseate, 1308 Common and 74 Arctic Tern chicks were ringed. Two adult Roseate Terns and five Common Terns were also ringed. An estimated 73% of adult Roseate Terns had both BTO and Roseate special rings, 4% had special rings only, 3% bore BTO rings only and 20% were unringed. The percentage of Roseate Terns bearing both rings was higher than in 2009 (72%).

The rings of 800 individual Roseate Terns were read. 96.6% of these birds were ringed on Rockabill. Five year old birds comprised the largest cohort. The oldest bird was twenty-three years old and was ringed as a chick on Rockabill in 1987.

Clupeids (sprats) were the most common prey item (83.75%) presented to chicks by Roseate Terns, followed by sandeels (15.25%) and gadoids (1.00%). The Rockabill Tern Project is funded by NPWS.



Roseate Terns (Laura Glenister)

Accounts

2010 Annual Accounts

BirdWatch Ireland

(A company limited by guarantee and not having a share capital)

Financial Statements

The details that follow are a summary of accounts for BirdWatch Ireland.

A full set of accounts for the year ended 31st December 2010 is available from BirdWatch Ireland on request. The financial statements were approved by the Board and signed on its behalf by John Cromie and Kieran Grace, Directors.



Delegate workshop at the All Ireland Conference, March 2010

Income and expenditure account for the year ended 31st December 2010

	2010	2009
	€	€
Turnover	1,985,866	2,342,508
Cost of sales	(63,439)	(52,729)
Conservation expenditure	<u>(1,482,818)</u>	<u>(1,822,038)</u>
Gross Profit	439,609	467,741
Administration expenses	<u>(472,952)</u>	<u>(472,414)</u>
Operating (Deficit)/Surplus	(33,343)	(4,673)
Other Operating Income		
Government Grant Amortised	<u>24,886</u>	<u>24,886</u>
(Deficit)/Surplus on ordinary activities before interest	(8,457)	20,213
Investment Income	362	3,143
Interest payable and similar charges	(13,472)	(11,751)
Increase in value of investment	<u>18,026</u>	<u>26,768</u>
Retained (deficit) surplus for the year	(3,541)	38,373
Retained surplus brought forward	<u>2,038,301</u>	<u>1,999,928</u>
Retained surplus carried forward	<u>2,034,760</u>	<u>2,038,301</u>

Accounts

Balance Sheet as at 31st December 2010

	2010		2009	
	€	€	€	€
Fixed Assets				
Tangible assets		3,006,084		3,031,388
Financial Assets		<u>197,266</u>		<u>179,240</u>
		3,203,350		3,210,628
Current Assets				
Stocks	29,130		25,104	
Debtors	148,966		555,606	
Cash at bank & in hand	<u>503,438</u>		<u>70,402</u>	
	681,534		651,112	
Creditors Amounts falling due within one year	<u>(179,488)</u>		<u>(139,721)</u>	
Net Current Assets		<u>502,046</u>		<u>511,391</u>
Total Assets less Current Liabilities		3,705,396		3,722,019
Creditors Amounts falling due greater than one year		(249,261)		(266,681)
Accruals & deferred Income		<u>(1,045,203)</u>		<u>(1,070,088)</u>
Net Assets		<u>2,410,932</u>		<u>2,385,250</u>
Capital reserves				
Other reserves		376,172		346,949
Income & expenditure account		<u>2,034,760</u>		<u>2,038,301</u>
		<u>2,410,932</u>		<u>2,385,250</u>