

## Welcome from the Chair

At BirdWatch Ireland, 2008 has been another exciting year in our ongoing efforts to conserve Ireland's birds and the habitats in which they live. Our Annual Report reflects the incredible variety of activities in which BirdWatch Ireland is involved: from ground-breaking scientific research to practical hands-on habitat restoration and management, garden bird surveys to the international atlas project, rulings of the European Court of Justice to local planning appeals and our presence at public events from the Irish Ornithological Research Conference at University College Cork to Bloom in the Park. This represents an impressive team effort involving individual volunteer members, BirdWatch Ireland branches across the country, our dedicated professional staff and the Board. And, of course, much of this would not have been possible without the generous financial support from our members and funding partners.

Nevertheless, serious challenges face us as we grapple with ongoing species declines and habitat degradation, not to mention the implications of climate change. Our aim is to strengthen and empower the BirdWatch Ireland team on all fronts—staff, branches, Board and volunteers—so that we are in the best possible position to meet these challenges. A healthy, growing and active membership is critical to this and will be one of our priorities in the coming year.

**John Cromie, Chairman**



*Alex Copland: Barn Owl Project Research Officer John Lusby with farmer's children and barn owl chick*

## Irish Barn Owl Conservation Project

The biggest story of the 2008 Barn Owl Project was the discovery in March of the remains of Greater White-toothed Shrew in Barn Owl pellets in Co. Tipperary. This is the first record of the species in Ireland, and an initial search of potential nest sites for Barn Owls and Kestrels

in the vicinity of the known site provided a picture of the extent of this new species' distribution in Ireland. A paper documenting this work has been published in the journal *Mammal Review*. Detailed follow-up work included pellet analysis from sites within the known range of the shrew which showed that the Greater White-

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toothed Shrew is the dominant prey item for Barn Owls where it occurs, accounting for up to 68.5 % of the diet. Data collected from within the shrew range also showed differences in the breeding ecology of Barn Owls, with birds inside the range nesting earlier than sites elsewhere.

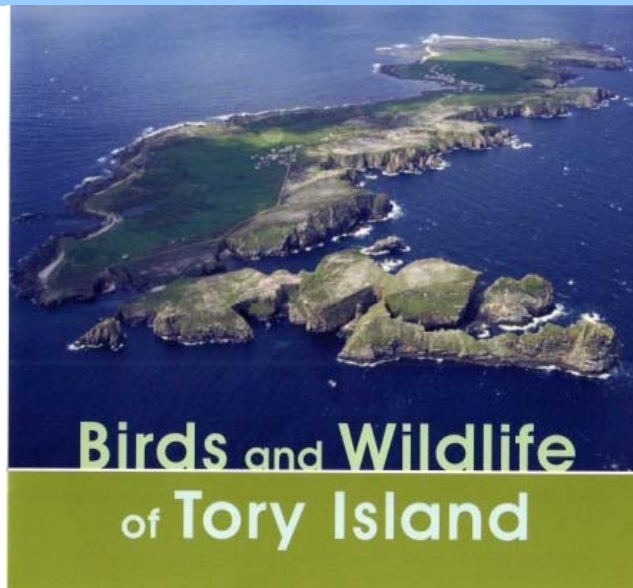
The National Barn Owl Survey was completed in 2008, with a total of 72, 10km squares surveyed nationally. Population estimates derived from this work suggest an Irish total of around 300 breeding pairs. As well as turning up the Greater White-toothed Shrew remains, the Barn Owl Research Project continued apace, with a further six males radio-tagged during the year. In addition, breeding was assessed at 55 sites (out of a total of 105 active sites confirmed during the year – up from 81 sites in 2007) with chicks ringed at 23 sites. The number of Barn Owl boxes in the country continues to rise, with a minimum of 118 boxes currently in place. In conjunction with Teagasc, a leaflet entitled *Bird Nest Boxes*, aimed at farmers participating in Option 8B of REPS4, was launched.

## Birds on Cutaway Peatlands

This new project started in 2008, undertaken in association with Bord na Mona, aims to identify key bird species and habitats using peatland sites after commercial peat extraction has been completed. Already recognised for their importance for breeding waders, such as Lapwing and Redshank, breeding Black-headed Gull and, in winter, for wildfowl, such as Whooper Swans, these “cutaway” peatlands provide an excellent opportunity to undertake habitat management for many Red- or Amber-listed species. Work will continue in future years.



Anita Donaghy: Tim Gordon, Corncrake Fieldworker & Farmer



Alyn Walsh: Leaflet produced by Anita Donaghy, Corncrake Project Officer on Birds & Wildlife of Tory Island

## Corncrakes 2008

2008 was another year of mixed fortunes for Corncrakes. Overall in the country, a total of 146 calling males was recorded in the three core areas of Donegal, West Connaught and the Shannon Callows, a slight drop from the total of 150 recorded in 2007. On the Shannon Callows, unprecedented instances of summer flooding since 2002 have decimated the population here, with just four calling males recorded. An emergency measure was implemented and hay crops were left until very late in an attempt to maximise breeding success and prevent extinction. Early results in 2009 indicate that possibly three birds have returned. Once again, the population in the West increased, to 44 calling males, almost half of which were in Erris area, including two in or near the BirdWatch Ireland reserve. Donegal showed a slight decline from 104 to 93, much of which occurred on Tory and Inishmeane. BirdWatch Ireland was also successful in securing Heritage Council funding to carry out habitat management on key islands, including meadow restoration and early cover creation. The designation of new SPAs is progressing and we are working closely with National Parks and Wildlife Service on all aspects of this process.

## Phoenix Park

A bird survey of the Phoenix Park carried during the summer of 2007 and winter of 2007/08 aimed to quantify the abundance and distribution of birds occurring throughout the park, and was carried out as part of the Office of Public Works Management Plan. A total of 72 species was recorded, of which 35 species were



considered to be definitely breeding, while a further 10 were probably breeding, and two were possibly breeding. Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus*, Great Tit *P. major* and Magpie *Pica pica* were among the most widely distributed. Jackdaw *Corvus monedula* and Blue Tit were among the most numerous species recorded. Greatest diversity was recorded in both summer and winter in the Zoo sections. Bird densities ranged between 1.1 (in the *Fifteen Acres*) and 28.1 (Zoo) in summer and between 1.6 (a section predominated by playing pitches) and 45.0 (Zoo) in winter. Some four species which were recorded are Red-listed in the Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland, and include Shoveler *Anas clypeata*, Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*, Black-headed Gull and Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*, while a further 24 are Amber-listed. It is hoped that the results will form a baseline from which we can measure how birds are faring in the park over time.

## Waterways Birds

A full census was carried out on the Boyne catchment and the Munster Blackwater as part of a joint BirdWatch Ireland, National Parks and Wildlife Service and Office of Public Works project aimed at examining the variation throughout these river systems in the densities of Kingfisher and other waterways birds. This work also incorporated boat-based survey work aimed at exploring a possibly more efficient means for surveying Kingfisher in the future. Overall, 28 waterways bird species were recorded, with Sand Martin *Riparia riparia* and Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* the most abundant species and/ or widespread species. A maximum of 22 Kingfisher territories was estimated on the Boyne (which equates with a density 1 territory per 10 kilometres) and 20 on the Munster Blackwater (0.7 territories/10 kilometres). The results from ground-based and boat-based surveys were highly comparable.

## An assessment of the distribution range of Greylag Geese (Icelandic-breeding & feral populations) in Ireland

Each winter, Ireland supports over 5,000 Greylag Geese *Anser anser*, most of which migrate from breeding areas in Iceland, the remainder of which are resident feral birds descended from birds released during the 20th century. This assessment was carried out with the intention of confirming the current number and distribution range of Icelandic and feral birds in Ireland, and identifying movements of Icelandic birds between roosts and feeding areas. All sites known to be used by Greylag Geese were surveyed at least twice during the winter of 2007/08. Sites known to be used by migratory

(Icelandic-breeding) geese were surveyed in greater detail in December in an attempt at identifying regularly used feeding and roosting areas, and at defining goose movements. Overall, 405 visits were made by over 50 observers to 86 sites, comprising 187 subsites. The total number of Greylag Geese of Icelandic origin was estimated at 4,761, and occurred in nine main flocks. This represents a decline in numbers compared with more recently published estimate of 5,030 (based on the 1999/2000 – 2003/04 period). Some 1,555 feral birds were estimated the following autumn (2008), representing an increase in that population.

## Reserves Update

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



David Suddaby: Rogerstown Salt Marsh

During 2008 the main areas of work on our reserves to benefit birds and the habitats included the continuation of the habitat management work, following the completion of the successful LIFE-Nature funded project, at our East Coast Nature Reserve. This provided our first confirmed breeding pair of Reed Warblers *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* along with a pair of summering Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* (the first for many years); in addition the watercourses provided an excellent habitat for a wide variety of dragonflies, including the scarce Emperor Dragonfly and Migrant Hawkers. The reversion of reclaimed grasslands back to saltmarsh at our Rogerstown Estuary reserve also proved attractive to a pair of Lapwings with breeding confirmed, again the first for many years.

Other active management work continued at our reserves on the Mullet Peninsula; at our Termoncarragh Meadows reserve enhancement of cover areas and late mown grasslands proved attractive to singing Corncrakes *Crex crex* with two males holding territories throughout the summer and breeding successfully with chicks being seen during late July and early August. At our Annagh Marsh reserve, management proved attractive for breeding waders with at least 12 pairs of Lapwings *Vanellus vanellus*, 2 pairs of Redshank *Tringa totanus*, several drumming Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* and a pair of Dunlin *Calidris alpina*. These areas on the Mullet continue to produce a wide diversity of insects, including the rare Great Yellow Bumblebee.

The Shenick Island Nature Reserve Management Agreement was reviewed and renewed during the year.

and 18 March 2008 surveying a total of 328 islands and mainland sites along the west and north coasts of Scotland and Ireland. Most sites were surveyed from the air, while several ground-based counts were carried out also. In Ireland, approximately 11 hours flying was undertaken, surveying sites in a south to north direction along the west coast of Ireland from the Blasket Islands, Co. Kerry to Inishtrahull, Co. Donegal. Weather conditions were good, with good light and visibility and generally light winds throughout. Some 33 sites were found to hold 12,232, which represents 17% of the population, and is an increase of 35% when compared with the last census in 2003. The majority (53%) of the geese present in Ireland were found at two key sites, namely Ballintemple/Lissadell in Sligo and the Inishkea Islands in Mayo.



Katie Jennings: Discovery Day on the East Coast Nature Reserve, August 2008

## The Winter Garden Bird Survey

BirdWatch Ireland's Garden Bird Survey (GBS) has been running since the winter of 1994/95. Participants provide the peak count of each species seen in their gardens over a 13-week period, beginning in the first week of December. Some 630 participants took part in 2007/08. Overall, 81 species was recorded, and highest diversity was recorded in large and rural gardens. Two gardens, in Counties Mayo and Wexford, supported 31 species, while most gardens supported between 16 and 25 species. Robin, Blackbird and Blue Tit were the most widespread species recorded. Most garden bird species have continued to fare relatively well since monitoring began in winter 1994/95, especially Goldfinch, Bullfinch and Goldcrest.

## Barnacle Goose Census

BirdWatch Ireland staff assisted NPWS with a full census of Greenland Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis* between 16

## Monitoring and measuring breeding parameters of Lapwing and other waders at selected NATURA 2000 sites in N.W. Mayo

A total of 274 Apparently Occupied Territories (AOTs) were recorded for Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, Dunlin *Calidris alpina*, Redshank *Tringa totanus* and Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* combined from ten monitored sites. Lapwing was the most numerous species, accounting for 50% of the total. The overall number of wader AOTs has increased by 60% since 1985 with the offshore islands, particularly Inishkea North, supporting the highest proportion (72%) of all wader territories today. The populations associated with the mainland sites have declined since 1985. Detailed monitoring of Lapwing showed two distinct laying periods with first clutches being laid around 8<sup>th</sup> April and second clutches around 6<sup>th</sup> May. The percentage of clutches estimated to survive until hatching was 26% (13% in 2007). Failure rates varied considerably between sites; at the mainland sites, nearly half of failures were attributable to predation. Overall minimum productivity was estimated at 0.16 fledged young per AOT; Inishkea North's chicks suffered heavy losses as a result of predation from several gull species.

## 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.



*Anthony McGeehan: Lapwing*

By August 2008 the first breeding and winter season of fieldwork was successfully completed. By the end of October 2008 1,275 volunteers had registered to take part in the survey with 259 volunteers undertaking Timed Tetrad Visit survey work. Following the first winter of survey work the TTV coverage stood at 15.20%, while the first breeding season coverage stood at 16.53%.

The professional field staff completed a pair of timed visits to 346 tetrads in the winter in the North West followed by a pair of breeding season visit to 369 tetrads. During 2008 the EPA was brought on board as a funding partner to the project with a welcome €95,000 commitment.

### **Red Grouse National Survey 2006-08**

The national Red Grouse Survey 2006-08 was near completion in 2008 (completed early 2009) and a report was prepared for the National Parks & Wildlife Service. The report detailed the findings of the two-year survey and included an analysis of the survey's results together with data collected by the accompanying 'Survey of Red Grouse (*Lagopus lagopus*) Habitat in Ireland 2007 – 2008: an assessment of habitat condition and land-use impacts' carried out by botanist Dr. Patrick Crushell.

Findings were presented at the 'Fifth Irish Ornithological Research Conference' at University College Cork in November 2008.

Of the total of 491 1km squares which were surveyed using tape playback and by detecting droppings, 231 were occupied by Red Grouse. The main results indicate that no further declines in Red Grouse have occurred since the 1988-91 atlas period but further analyses will continue in 2009.

### **Research of breeding Dunlin ecology associated with machair and upland NATURA 2000 sites in N.W. Mayo**

Dunlin *Calidris alpina* breeding populations on Inishkea North have significantly increased since 1995, although overall breeding performance has been low in recent years. This is in contrast to the mainland machair sites which have decreased. Our results predict an extinction of the mainland machair population in the next few years. The overall population was estimated at 66 breeding pairs from the monitored sites; key sites being Inishkea North (39 pairs) and Slieve Fyagh (15 pairs). Egg laying dates were found to be 20 days later than those calculated within Scandinavian populations. On Inishkea North observed hatching success (36%) was much lower during 2008, due mainly to clutch desertion or depredation. In contrast, hatching success was higher on Slieve Fyagh (86%), although depredation of broods occurred as a presumed consequence of Red Fox activity. On Inishkea North, clutch desertion occurred mainly during the egg laying period or within the first days of the incubation period and clutch depredation was observed by Common Gulls *Larus canus*, mainly during June. Following hatching, chick survival declined rapidly and no chicks were known to have fledged from either Inishkea North or Slieve Fyagh; the worst year recorded since 2006. Adult return rates to Inishkea North were estimated at 52%, whilst the return rate of males was found to be higher (73%) than females (33%). Further comparisons between Inishkea North and Slieve Fyagh found that nest site components were different, that egg size and hatchling weights were larger and that egg colour was darker on Slieve Fyagh. These were probably a result of adaptation to their different breeding habitats. All these factors combined make these Dunlin populations very vulnerable.



*Paul Troake: Dunlin*



## Shannon Callows Breeding Wader Project

When in 1987, the Shannon Callows were first designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA), they held one of the largest populations of breeding waders on lowland wet grassland in Ireland and the UK. In addition they held 10% of Ireland breeding population of Redshank. However, between 1987 and 2002 numbers fell drastically, Lapwing by 82%, Redshank by 71%, and Snipe and Curlew by 68 and 83% respectively. In response the Breeding Wader Grant Scheme, funded by National Parks and Wildlife Service was introduced in 2005. The scheme protects nests and chicks from agricultural damage and actively manages habitat on the sites. Approximately 255 hectares were under agreement up to 2008.



Brian Caffrey: Redshank

During 2007 a number of sites for habitat restoration work were identified. Tree removal was carried out on one site in late-2007/early-2008 and Lapwing were

confirmed breeding on it for the first time in 2008. Unsustainably high levels of depredation were recorded on research sites in 2008 and in response a targeted predator control strategy was introduced in 2008 which aimed to improve breeding performance though with limited success. Future work will focus on further habitat works and novel approaches to reducing predator impacts.

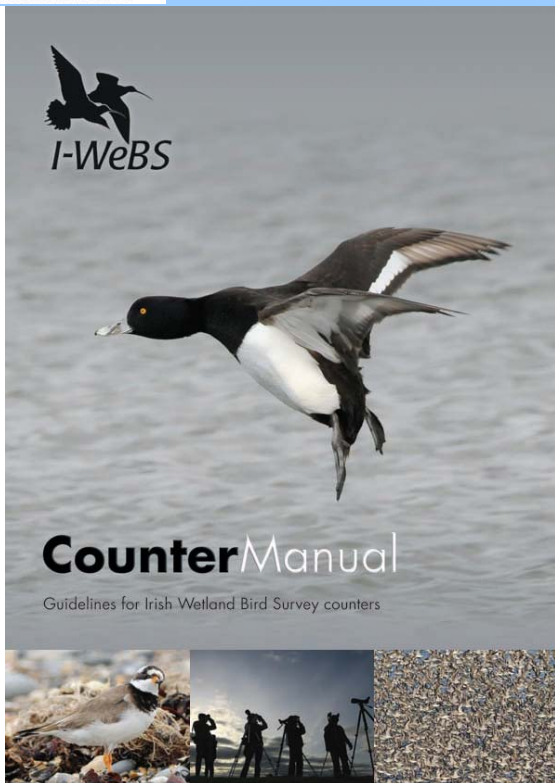
## The Countryside Bird Survey (CBS)

CBS has been running each spring since its launch in 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.

A small number of training sessions were conducted at the beginning of the 2008 season to train new recruits and to encourage them on board. Almost 200 observers took part in the survey in 2008 and, to date, data has been received for just under 300 squares. Overall, 120 species were recorded, and as always, there was massive variability in species diversity between squares ranging between as few as two species in one upland square in County Wicklow to 60 species in one coastal square also in County Wicklow. However, the large majority of squares supported between 20 and 40 species. Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*, Robin *Erithacus rubecula*, Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*, Blackbird *Turdus merula*, Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus* and Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos* were the most widespread species, and all were recorded in at least 90% of squares. Some scarce species reported included Twite *Carduelis flavirostris* and Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*.

Analysis of data for the milestone ten year report on CBS commenced, and some of the trends which have been in evidence were shown to continue. These included declines in Skylark *Alauda arvensis* and Robin and increases in Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* and Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*.

CBS Online, a facility for the submission of CBS data, was developed and trialled in 2008. It is now in operation during the 2009 season.



*I-WeBS Counter Manual*

## The Irish Wetland Bird Survey (I-WeBS)

I-WeBS has been monitoring wintering waterbird populations in the Republic of Ireland in all winter seasons since 1994/95. During this time, 144 species have been recorded, and 717 sites comprising 2035 subsites have been covered overall. The greatest declines have been reported for Common Pochard *Aythya farina*, Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*, Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*, Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, Knot *Calidris canutus* and Dunlin *Calidris alpina*. In contrast, there were considerable increases in Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis*, Light-bellied Brent Goose *Branta bernicla hrota*, Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*, Sanderling *Calidris alba* and Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa islandica*. In 2008, a significant development within I-WeBS was the launch of the I-WeBS Online data submission system. Participants in the survey can now choose to enter their data online through the Online Surveys section on the BirdWatch Ireland website. This will hopefully improve the efficiency of submitting records.

Aside from the regular monthly Core Counts conducted at wetland sites across the country, other I-WeBS achievements during 2008 include the completion of a survey of Greylag Geese, (see summary paragraph titled 'An assessment of the distribution range of Greylag Geese (Icelandic-breeding & feral populations) in Ireland'), participation in an international survey of Golden Plover in October 2008, and a Barnacle Goose

survey which was conducted by both aerial and ground census.

I-WeBS publications in 2008 include the annual edition of I-WeBS News, a summary paper reporting on the 2006/07 season, and the I-WeBS Counter Manual.

## Kilcoole Little Tern Project 2008

Wardening of the Little Tern colony at Kilcoole began on the 15<sup>th</sup> May and continued until the 11<sup>th</sup> August 2008. The highest recorded maximum count of adult terns was 160 on the 7<sup>th</sup> July.

This year a total of 134 nesting attempts were made by 74 breeding pairs. The first nest was found on the 21<sup>st</sup> May, a few days later than expected. The vast majority of nests were located at the traditional breeding site north of the Breaches channel. Overall 309 eggs were laid and the mean clutch size calculated was 2.3 eggs per nest.

Despite high losses from predation and bad weather, productivity was high, at 1.76 fledglings per nesting pair. A total of 146 chicks hatched (48% of all eggs). Predation accounted for the loss of 111 eggs (36%). 5 eggs (1.6%) were abandoned, 12 were infertile (4%) and 33 were lost to flooding by high tides (10%). 130 chicks were presumed to have fledged, with a maximum fledgling count of 60. No chicks were predated, but 14 died in storms, where high tides coincided with strong onshore winds and heavy rain, and 2 died during or soon after hatching. A total of 135 chicks were ringed, 85 of which were retrapped at least once.

Losses were extremely high, mainly due to a fox or foxes entering the colony on one night and taking 49 eggs, and 62 eggs being lost over a period of 2 weeks to corvids, mainly Rooks. 33 eggs were lost to flooding, when high tides were exaggerated by strong onshore winds. Luckily, all the major incidents were early enough in the season that the pairs affected laid another clutch, many of which went on to successfully fledge young.



*Joe Cockram: Little Tern chick*



## Rockabill Roseate Tern Project 2008

There was continuous wardening on Rockabill Island between 12 May & 8 August 2008.

The first Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii* eggs were seen on 23 May. The first Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* eggs were seen on 20 May. In total, 928 Roseate, 1,347 Common and 281 Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea* nests were found up to and including the cut off date (34 days after first eggs were seen). Mean clutch sizes for the three species were 1.36, 1.89, and 1.62 respectively.

The productivity of Roseate Terns was 0.73 fledged chicks per nest, which is the lowest ever recorded on Rockabill. Productivity of Common Terns was estimated to be 0.55 fledged chicks per nest, again the lowest ever recorded on Rockabill. Arctic Tern productivity was very poor, with only 13-15 young definitely fledged.

A total of 70 Black Guillemot *Cephus grylle* nests were recorded with a mean clutch of 1.77. Productivity of Black Guillemots was estimated to be 0.83 fledged chicks per nest with eggs, and 57 chicks were ringed in total.

A total of 121 Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* apparently occupied nests (AONs) were recorded with a mean clutch of 1.71. The productivity of Kittiwakes was estimated to be 0.46 fledged chicks per egg laying pair.

One Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis* pair successfully fledged a single chick.

Totals of 852 Roseate, 1,198 Common and five Arctic Tern chicks were ringed. The ringing total for Roseate and Common Terns was higher than previous years, but for Arctic Terns it was significantly lower. Two adult Roseate Terns and 17 Common Terns were also ringed.

Disturbances were logged and totalled 12 hours 40 minutes over the three month season, very similar to 2007. Much of this was relatively benign and principally caused adult terns to dread. A Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* was observed on two occasions in 2008 during the wardening period. Observations and evidence of depredation were recorded, mainly by Great Black-backed Gulls *Larus Marinus*. Botulism was recorded in one Common Tern.

An estimated 80% of adult Roseate Terns were ringed and thus potentially identifiable.

The rings of 723 individual Roseate Terns were read, with three year old birds comprising the largest cohort (14.8%). All Roseate Terns, whose rings have been traced, originated from two colonies in Ireland; Rockabill (98.4%) and Lady's Island Lake (1.6%). The oldest bird was twenty-one years old and was ringed on Rockabill in 1987.

Clupeids were the most common prey item (96.2%) presented to chicks by Roseate Terns. Sandeels and

gadoids were a minor component of diet. Common Tern provisioning consisted of 100% clupeids.

The chick-feeding rate of Roseate Terns peaked in the afternoon/evening (14:00-20:00).

Tern foraging activity occurred in all directional sectors around Rockabill. The highest percentage of tern foraging events was recorded to the north of Rockabill (16%). When seen foraging in association with other seabird species (62.9% of all observations), auks were the most frequently present group (40%) followed by Manx Shearwaters *Puffinus puffinus* (25.9%) then Gannets *Morus bassanus* (13.2%).



Laura Glenister: Roseate Tern and nest-boxes

## NPWS Chough Research Project

'Phase 2' of baseline studies of Chough ecology in newly created Special Protection Areas were initiated following award of the NPWS tender to BirdWatch Ireland in January 2008. Seven sites are to be covered over a two-year period, with work started at four of these in February 2008 and one in September 2008 (see Table below).

Site Name & County	Site Code	Area & Length	Max. # of Pairs 2002/03	Field Timetable
<i>Co. Waterford</i>				
1. Mid-Waterford coast	004193	945 ha 24 km	21 pairs	Feb.-Dec. 2008
2. Helvick Head to Ballyquin	004192	632 ha 15 km	11 pairs	Feb.-Dec. 2008
<i>Co. Cork</i>				
3. Seven Heads	004191	451 ha 12km	15 pairs	Feb.-Dec. 2008
4. Galley Head to Duneen Point	004190	421 ha 11km	11 pairs	Feb.-Dec. 2008
<i>Co. Kerry</i>				
5. Kerry Head	004189	968 ha 24km	30 pairs	Sep.-Dec.2008



Monthly long-transects were conducted in extended areas that were centred on the SPAs. During these, the location, numbers, behaviour and habitat use of all Choughs seen were recorded. Also, during the 2008 breeding season seven pairs were selected for focal watches in which the foraging locations of a breeding pair are followed continuously while they are feeding young in the nest. Areas within the SPAs were re-surveyed to estimate the number of breeding pairs and non-breeding birds. Fledging success was determined for sample areas with the SPAs. Communal roosts were located and the movements of birds in the Co. Waterford and Co. Cork study areas were followed. A NPWS/BWI field visit to Chough SPAs in Co. Waterford was organised (8<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup> October) with the theme - *Chough foraging ecology & conservation in the most intensively farmed landscape within the species' range in Ireland.*



Peter Loughlin: Kieran Grace (BirdWatch Ireland Chair), Siobhán Egan (Policy Officer), John Gormley, Minister for the Environment & Local Government, Oran O'Sullivan (CEO), & Niall Hatch (Development Officer) at the 41<sup>st</sup> All Ireland Bird Conservation Conference.

## Policy & Advocacy

### Policy Priorities

A number of key policy priorities that have been pursued include:

- consultation on SPA boundary review being carried out by NPWS.
- the appropriate use and structure of the Designated Sites Appeals Boards in the determination of designated site boundaries.
- delivering the outcomes of the December 2007 European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruling and engaging with NPWS to tackle the issues raised.
- formalising the internal processes for the development of Policy papers. Papers brought to the Board in 2008 were Update on ECJ ruling, Policy Development Paper and the Casework Report June – December 2008.

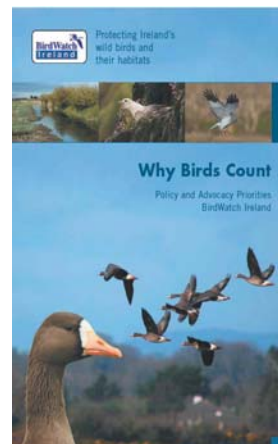
- funding was obtained for a Species Policy Officer (Peadar O Connell) who is progressing a strategy for the protection of species in the wider countryside through the development of Species Action Planning and Groups Species Action Planning.

### Casework

The volume of casework as a result of potentially damaging proposals on Special Protection Areas (SPAs) has increased significantly and continues to be of significant concern. This is being addressed through both policy development as well as engagement with individual cases. Significant cases in 2008 included An Blascaoid Mór centre/café proposal, Sligo airport runway and the golf course development on the Mid-Waterford Coast SPA. Conservation staff were involved in directly responding to cases and liaising with branches regarding their responses where appropriate.

### Advocacy

We have been actively engaging with government departments through our work with other wildlife non governmental organisations (NGOs) (including a formal presentation to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Change and Energy Security) and through the development of the Environmental Pillar of Social Partnership. BirdWatch Ireland is one of the seven elected representatives of the 27 environmental NGOs engaging in Social Partnership. A number of advocacy initiatives led by BirdLife International have been part of our advocacy work targeting MEPs including CAP Health Check, Cormorants, and Biofuels. BirdWatch Ireland has also been re-nominated as one of three representatives of the 30 environmental NGOs of the Irish Environmental Network on the Biodiversity Forum. This year also saw the publication of our Policy Priorities document "Why Birds Count" which serves as a valuable advocacy tool.



Policy & Advocacy Document: "Why Birds Count"

## BirdWatch Ireland Branch Activities

We were delighted to note a marked increase in BirdWatch Ireland Branch events around the country during 2008. We rely heavily on our Branch network for help with our membership recruitment, survey and local conservation work, and are indebted to our Branch volunteers for all of their efforts.

Special congratulations must go to the West Kerry Branch, which won the Heritage and Environment category at the Kerry Community Awards for their work locally. Congratulations also to the Mayo Branch, which launched its excellent new website ([www.birdwatchmayo.org](http://www.birdwatchmayo.org)), supported by funding from the Heritage Council. The Galway Branch carried out superb habitat restoration work at the BirdWatch Ireland reserve at Small Wood and continued to be heavily involved in local conservation efforts.

The Fingal Branch did likewise in their region, continuing their excellent work at our Rogerstown Reserve and at their Knock Lake Hide, and providing invaluable assistance to the tern conservation project on Rockabill Island. The South Dublin Branch continued their own tern project at Maiden Rock, Dalkey, and also raised a total of €600 in donations for the East Coast Nature Reserve. Our North Louth Branch continued their excellent work, assisting with and providing some funding for the Little Tern conservation project at Baltray and securing funding for a wonderful new bird observation area and public telescope at Carlingford.

One of the biggest events in the nationwide Branch calendar is National Dawn Chorus Day, and our Branches excelled themselves once again this year, attracting a new record of over 4,000 participants across the country. Special mention must go to the Kilkenny Branch, which holds perhaps the most popular dawn chorus event of all, and to the Branches in Cavan and Monaghan for their particularly impressive efforts in their respective counties.

In September, a questionnaire was circulated to all BirdWatch Ireland Branch committees, generating a very impressive number of responses. These will form the basis for a new set of Branch Guidelines, to be published in mid 2009, which should assist greatly in the setting up and day-to-day running of Branches.

## Development Events

During 2008, we successfully organised our 3-day 41<sup>st</sup> All Ireland Bird Conservation Conference, on the theme of citizen science. It was attended by over 250 delegates. We hosted information stands at many public shows, including Bloom in the Park, Dun Laoghaire Cool Earth,

Dublin Zoo Native Species Weekend and the Tullamore Show among many others. An active presence at these shows enable us to both recruit new members and to spread our bird conservation message. Our Development Officer also gave many talks to schools and community groups such as the ICA.

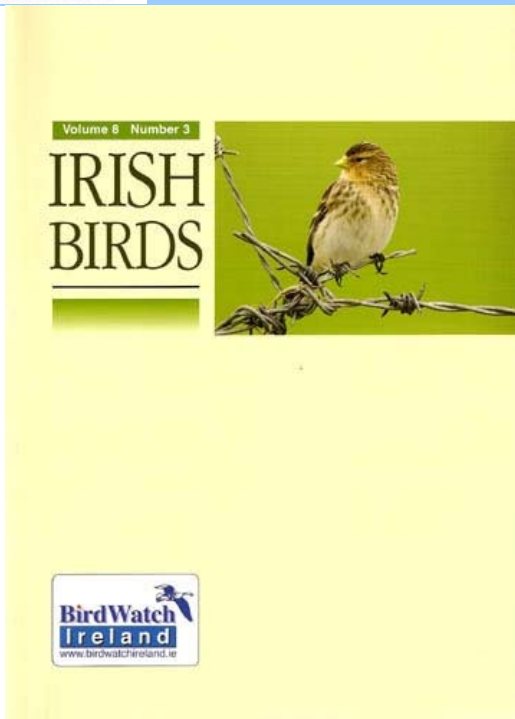


*Katie Jennings: Birds of Prey Children's interactive workshop  
Avondale, Heritage week 2008 (Harriet the Hawk is a rescued bird from  
the South East Birds of Prey Centre)*

Thanks to an extraordinarily generous anonymous donation we were able to employ an experienced Field Education Officer for our East Coast Nature Reserve. This officer helped us to organise a Children's Bird Conservation Education Marquee at Bloom in the Park for the first time, as well as a Discovery Day on our East Coast Nature Reserve, and a Birds of Prey Workshop in Avondale Wicklow, as part of Heritage Week as well as other activities. A large bank of materials and activities were developed which will be a great resource to draw upon in the future. We also ran a very successful series of educational courses based at our Bird Observatory on Cape Clear Island, Co. Cork, with over 41 participants. We held a Family Fun Day on our East Coast Nature Reserve, Wicklow as part of Biodiversity Week in addition to a number of guided walks.

We also targeted 3<sup>rd</sup> level students at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Postgraduate Ecology Forum in Trinity College Dublin, as part of our continuing focus on reaching the next generation of bird conservationists and supporters. In a similar vein, our conservation staff had a very strong presence at the 5<sup>th</sup> Irish Ornithological Research Conference at University College Cork in November.





*Irish Birds, Vol 8, No. 3*

## Publications

Aside from the newsletters and manuals published by the conservation projects, we produced 4 editions of our Magazine "Wings" in 2008 & Vol. 8 Nos. 2 & 3 of our annual scientific journal "Irish Birds". We also published a new leaflet listing the *Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland* in conjunction with RSPB Northern Ireland as well as new editions of our highly popular *Garden Birds* and *More Garden Birds*. Our new website, launched in August 2007, continued to grow throughout 2008.

## Corporate Sponsorship

We continued our Garden Biodiversity Competition with Corrin Hill Ice Cream as well as our association with Cemex Ireland.

## Media Report

### Radio interviews & newspaper articles (local and national)

January	25	May	21	September	22
February	15	June	7	October	28
March	11	July	25	November	26
April	38	August	20	December	22

### Website hits

106,258 visits from 68,566 visitors during 2008.

### Public enquiries

Several thousand during 2008 in total, mainly by phone, letter or e-mail.

## Wings Shop

Wings Giftshop continued to provide an excellent retail service to our members during 2008, with a greatly expanded range of products. This quality service provides our members with the opportunity to discuss their requirements with genuinely interested and experienced birdwatchers and to be assured of the suitability of their purchase be it a book or a pair of binoculars. The turnover during 2008 was maintained from 2007 and showed no signs of being affected by the current recession. The annual Christmas catalogue was once again a success with our members and the use of the online shop continues to grow in popularity.

## Cape Clear Bird Observatory

2008 saw the CCBO continue to grow, increasing the number of courses held, especially the Beginners Birdwatching weekends which have proved to be very popular. A new ringing site was opened up near the Post Office which will hopefully increase the number of birds ringed and therefore the possibilities of holding ringing courses in the future.

Work was carried out during the winter months on improving the website pages for the Observatory, the results of which can be seen on [www.birdwatchireland.ie/Birdwatching/CapeClearBirdObservatory/tabid/567/Default.aspx](http://www.birdwatchireland.ie/Birdwatching/CapeClearBirdObservatory/tabid/567/Default.aspx). This, hopefully, will promote the Observatory to a wider audience and keep us in line, technologically, with the other Observatories around northern Europe.

Progress on the revamped version of The Natural History of Cape Clear has been ongoing, although there is much work to be done yet!

The birds were, as usual, the stars of the year with mega rarities and common species both grabbing the headlines. An amazing fall of Coal Tits in September and October saw more birds ringed this year than in all previous years put together! Equally amazing is that virtually all of them were Irish birds and not from the continent, indicating the species had had an exceptional breeding season. The island saw three species for the first time, a Black Kite and a Great Spotted Woodpecker in the spring and a Yellow Warbler in August. The Yellow Warbler was part of an amazing story, arriving with a Northern Waterthrush and a Solitary Sandpiper. This event has been widely published in Europe's leading birding publications and resulted in huge numbers of birders visiting the island. For the second time in the Observatories recent history there were three American rarities on the island on the same day – a feat not matched anywhere else! Later in the autumn, yet another American species turned up in the form of a White-

throated Sparrow, bringing an end to an exceptional birding year.



*Tom Shevlin: Yellow Warbler*

## Volunteers

2008 saw another increase in the number of volunteers who help BirdWatch Ireland with bird surveys, events,

photographs, data input, reserve management work, shop tasks and administration. Without these dedicated who give of their time and efforts, we simply would not be able to achieve all that we do.

	No. of Volunteers	Total Hours
Surveys	2,784	33,440
Development	21	368
Administration	5	176
Shop	5	284
Reserves	6	420
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,821</b>	<b>34,688</b>

This is the equivalent of 17 full time employees per annum.

We would like to sincerely thank all of our funders, sponsors and donors, including the following:



Comhshaoil, Oidhreacht agus Rialtas Áitiúil  
Environment, Heritage and Local Government







## 2008 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 31<sup>st</sup> December 2008 is available from BirdWatch Ireland on request.

### Profit and Loss account for the year ended 31st December 2008

	2008	2007
	€	€
Turnover	2,421,886	2,201,220
Cost of sales	(55,235)	(56,400)
Conservation expenditure	<u>(1,770,768)</u>	<u>(1,646,862)</u>
Gross Profit	595,883	497,958
Administration expenses	<u>(515,644)</u>	<u>(446,322)</u>
Operating (profit/loss)	80,239	51,636
Other Operating Income		
Government Grant Amortised	<u>24,886</u>	<u>24,886</u>
Profit on ordinary activities before interest	105,125	76,522
Investment Income	17,662	24,135
Interest payable and similar charges	(4,544)	(4,508)
Decrease in value of investment	<u>(96,636)</u>	<u>(42,211)</u>
Retained profit for the year	21,607	53,938
Retained profit brought forward	<u>1,978,321</u>	<u>1,924,383</u>
Retained profit carried forward	<u><u>1,999,928</u></u>	<u><u>1,978,321</u></u>



## Balance Sheet as at 31st December 2008

	2008		2007	
	€	€	€	€
Fixed Assets				
Tangible Assets		2,414,103		2,413,257
Financial Assets		152,472		249,108
		<u>2,566,575</u>		<u>2,662,365</u>
Current Assets				
Stocks		32,500		29,211
Debtors		531,784		632,260
Cash at bank in hand		678,802		517,545
		<u>1,243,086</u>		<u>1,179,016</u>
Credit Amounts falling due within one year		<u>(229,878)</u>		<u>(282,521)</u>
Net Current Assets		<u>1,013,208</u>		<u>896,495</u>
Total Assets less Current Liabilities		3,579,783		3,558,860
Accruals & deferred Income		<u>(1,094,974)</u>		<u>(1,132,160)</u>
Net Assets		<u>2,484,809</u>		<u>2,426,700</u>
Capital Reserves				
Other reserves		484,881		448,379
Profit & Loss account		1,999,928		1,978,321
		<u>2,484,809</u>		<u>2,426,700</u>