



BirdWatchIreland
birdwatchireland.ie
protecting birds and biodiversity

Annual Report 2009



Introduction from the Chairman

2009 has been an exciting year at BirdWatch Ireland: the highlight undoubtedly being the visit of our Patron and President of Ireland, Mary McAleese, in June to open our East Coast Nature Reserve. Seeing this neglected coastal habitat transformed through the hard work of our staff and volunteers into a first class nature reserve has been a hugely rewarding experience. It is appropriate too that such a landmark event should take place in our 40th anniversary year - an occasion that has evoked inevitable reminiscences of the early years of the Irish Wildbird Conservancy. But we've chosen to celebrate our anniversary by looking to the future, setting out to develop an ambitious and far-sighted forward strategy for BirdWatch Ireland.

Ruttledge House in Monstown was at the heart of BirdWatch Ireland's activities for many years and selling this heritage building was not an easy decision in 2004. But as the organisation expanded it was clear that our staff and operations required a larger, more suitable and better located premises. We are pleased that in 2009, coincident with the cooling of the property market, we have been able to acquire and relocate to an excellent office and retail premises in Bullford, Kilcoole, Co. Wicklow.

Each year when I read our Annual Report, I'm impressed yet again with the scale and scope of what BirdWatch Ireland achieves across a huge variety of conservation and development projects. This is very much down to the dedication and resourcefulness of our professional staff, our branches and our volunteers. And, of course, much of what we do would not be possible without the generous support from our members and funding partners.

John Cromie, Chairman

Barn Owl Conservation Project

The Barn Owl Project continued to progress well in 2009 with the total number of registered breeding sites at 123. The survey confirmed the south-west to be the remaining stronghold of the population (with Cork and Kerry holding over 50% of all known sites). Ruined mansions are the most popular choice of roost and nest site, followed by castles and ruined farm houses. Over 90 nest boxes were monitored by the project in 2009, of which four were used for nesting.

Barn Owl diet was assessed at 17 sites across the country with over 900 pellets analysed confirming the importance of two species of introduced small mammal

for Barn Owls in certain areas of the country. The Bank Vole was the dominant prey item in the south-west, while the Greater White-toothed Shrew was the most abundant species in the diet in south and mid-Tipperary and east Limerick. Breeding was monitored at a total of 71 active sites. At five of these sites there were only single birds present. Of the remaining sites, 50 successfully fledged young, and 16 sites (25%) failed. The productivity of all successful pairs assessed in the study area was 2.



(John Lusby, Barn Owl Research Officer at the BT Young Scientist Exhibition)

Publicity and collaboration with local BirdWatch Ireland branches and other organisations continues to be an important aspect of the work, generating reports of Barn Owls and facilitating other elements of project. The project findings were presented to numerous national and international conferences in 2009, including the IRSG conference, the Barn Owl Conservation Network Symposium in the UK and the international Raptor Research Foundation Conference in Scotland (for which the research was awarded a high recommendation).

Birds on Cutaway Peatlands

Two main elements of this work, carried out with support from Bórd na Mona, were undertaken in 2009: a baseline survey of cutaway blanket bog sites in Co. Mayo, and an assessment of the use of cutaway peatland habitats by birds at sites in the Lough Boora Parklands, Co. Offaly.



(Lapwing Chicks: Paul Troake)

The blanket bog restoration work in Co. Mayo showed much potential, with many species characteristic of this habitat being recorded. Of particular interest, Ringed Plover were confirmed breeding on both survey sites. In Co. Offaly, the open cutaway landscapes continues to provide important breeding habitats for, in particular, breeding waders, with Lapwing, Redshank, Snipe, Ringed Plover and Common Sandpiper all recorded. Future management of these peatland areas needs to balance naturally regenerating habitats with the value of maintaining an open landscape. This challenge of delivering important and valuable habitats for wildlife at the large scale offered by the cutaway peatlands presents an exciting challenge for the future.

Corncrakes

In 2009, there was a welcome increase in corncrake populations in two of the core areas, West Connaught and the Shannon Callows, but a disappointing decline in Donegal, which led to an overall decrease in numbers from 146 in 2008 to 128 in 2009. In the West, the population increased to 48 calling males, including a record six at the BirdWatch Ireland reserve at Termoncarragh. This is a great achievement overall, given that when the project began in 1994, just 14 calling males were present in West Connaught. On the Shannon Callows, once the largest of the three core area populations, six birds were recorded, compared to four in 2008. The steep decline here in the last eight years has been due to unprecedented occurrences of summer flooding and clearly, the population continues to be very vulnerable. Donegal showed a very disappointing decline from 93 in 2008 to 67 in 2009. Reasons for this are not clear, as it happened on both mainland and island sites across the county.

2009 was a National Census year, and particular effort was made to locate calling males outside the three core areas. A total of seven birds were recorded, with Kerry again proving to be the most reliable area, with three calling males on Valentia Island. There was also one record in each of counties Cork, Dublin, Waterford and Louth.

With funding from the Heritage Council, the programme of habitat management which has been in place for the last four years, continued in Donegal and the West. Work included extending and enhancing early cover patches and restoring rank meadows to more favourable condition in the west, whilst in Donegal, the focus was on the creation of a grazing enclosure on Tory Island. This was to prevent grazing animals straying from the commonage onto meadows. It is intended to further enhance this area in 2010 by creating more patches of early cover within the fenced area, again with funding from the Heritage Council, which we gratefully acknowledge.

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 October 2009 over 1,900 volunteers had registered to take part in the survey with 370 volunteers undertaking Timed Tetrad Visit (TTV) survey work. Following the successful completion of two seasons of survey work the TTV coverage figures stood at 48% for the winter and 53% for the breeding season, based on a checkerboard system. The professional field staff completed survey work during the year in Counties Tipperary, Laois, Kilkenny, Westmeath, Offaly, Clare and Longford.

A series of Atlas events and talks were delivered during 2009 with many BirdWatch Ireland Branches holding Atlas Roving Events to help increase coverage levels on a county basis.

Breeding Wader Populations of Machair and Wet Grasslands in Mayo

During 2009, with support funding from NPWS, we resurveyed the breeding wader populations associated with the rare machair (sandy grasslands) habitat and adjoining wet grasslands found along the western seaboard from Donegal to Galway. A total of 714 breeding wader territories of seven species were recorded. Significantly, 65% of all breeding waders (464 pairs) were recorded from four sites: Inishkea North, Inishkea South, Roonagh Lough and Trawmore. County Mayo held the majority, with 515 pairs (212 pairs on machair). Overall, Lapwing was the most numerous species recorded, with 230 pairs from 23 sites. Breeding Dunlin were only recorded from seven sites, all of which were in Mayo.

Overall breeding densities in 2009 were compared with figures from 1996. These indicate declines of the order of 30% since 1996. At mainland sites declines of 63% were recorded. In contrast, on islands the populations had increased by 66%. The largest increases were recorded on Inishkea North, up by 344% since 1996 (709% since 1985).

It is estimated that, if declines continue at the observed rates, breeding waders on the machair and associated wet grasslands will soon be at unsustainably low levels. For Lapwings these low levels may be reached by 2015 and Dunlin may become extinct as a breeding species by then at the mainland sites, with the island sites following soon after. Urgent intervention is required to protect these remaining populations and bring about their recovery.

Reserves

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.



(Official opening of the ECNR by President Mary McAleese, June 2009: Michael Kelly)

Our main focus of reserve work during 2009 was at our East Coast Nature Reserve and the upgrading of the infrastructure to formally open the reserve to visitors. This was completed and the reserve was officially opened by our Patron, President McAleese on 11 June. In addition to this further habitat work was completed to enhance the visitor experience and included the creation of shallow scrape pools viewable from the existing hide and the creation of access rides and clearings through the woodland. The construction of a second hide was commenced in late autumn which when complete will offer views of both the scrapes and grasslands. Continuing on from the successes of the 2008 breeding season, Lapwings were confirmed breeding at ECNR and at our Rogerstown Estuary reserve in 2009. Overwintering numbers of geese, duck and waders on the ECNR showed a marked increase on previous years with up to 1000 waterbirds present on a regular basis throughout the winter months.

Other active management work proving fruitful was at our Termoncarragh Meadows reserve where enhancement of cover areas and late mown grasslands attracted up to six singing male Corncrakes which bred successfully. These enhanced semi-improved meadow grasslands also provide an excellent foraging area for the rare Great Yellow Bumblebee.

The Irish Wetland Bird Survey (I-WeBS)



(Purple Sandpiper: Jerry Cassidy)

The Irish Wetland Bird Survey has been monitoring wintering waterbird populations since 1994/95. The scheme has been designed to identify population sizes, determine trends, and to identify important sites for waterbirds. through regular counts of the main wetland sites between September and March each winter. There are currently over 300 surveyors including skilled volunteer observers and staff of the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Since the launch of the I-WeBS Online data submission system in 2008, there are now 72 registered users. I-WeBS publications in 2009 include the annual edition of I-WeBS News, and a summary paper reporting on the 2007/08 season.

Additional work undertaken in 2009 through the I-WeBS scheme were the annual survey of the Icelandic-breeding Greylag Goose, and the annual census of the Light-bellied Brent Goose. An aerial survey count of the Shannon & Fergus estuaries and Rivers Shannon and Suck was conducted in December.

Shannon Callows Breeding Wader Project

The Shannon Callows Breeding Wader Project, funded by NPWS, began in 2005 with the aim of maintaining and restoring populations of Lapwing, Redshank, Curlew and Snipe in the Shannon Callows SPA. These birds are an integral part of the wildlife of the area - the Callows once held one of the largest populations on lowland wet grassland in Ireland and the UK. 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 250ha of land is currently managed 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 our key breeding sites – Inishee Island, Co Galway. The design ensured the exclusion of mink as well as foxes. Monitoring of breeding success showed that after almost complete breeding failure in 2007 and 2008, all 12 Redshank pairs and numerous Snipe successfully fledged chicks in 2009; three pairs of Curlew also attempted to nest on the island. Chick rearing habitat was also enhanced within the fenced area, with ditches being reprofiled, a new scrape created and a sluice installed to allow some control of water levels.

Scrub encroachment on the Callows has led to a deterioration and fragmentation of wader habitat at some sites. Esker Island, adjacent to Inishee, once held breeding waders, however scrub invasion and an increase in the number of mature trees resulted in it becoming unsuitable; Tree and scrub

removal was carried out on Esker and Inishee Islands, and Devenish Island, in autumn of 2009. It is anticipated that these works, which were carried out under the NPWS Farm Plan Scheme, will show significant benefits for breeding waders in 2010.



(Esker Island before scrub clearance to restore breeding wader habitat)



(Esker Island after scrub clearance to restore breeding wader habitat)

The Countryside Bird Survey (CBS)

The CBS has monitored population changes in breeding countryside birds since 1998. It is a joint project of NPWS and BirdWatch Ireland. Some 190 observers took part in the survey in 2009 and data has been received for over 280 squares.

The results show stable or increasing trends shown for 44 species overall. In particular Stonechat, Blackcap and Goldfinch continue to show dramatic increases. In contrast, some of the declines reported on since monitoring began also persist. Some eight species were shown to decline, most notably Kestrel, Swift, Skylark and Mistle Thrush. CBS Online, a facility where survey participants can submit their CBS data directly online, was introduced in 2009 for the first time. The uptake on this system by participants was very encouraging, with almost 40% of 2009 data being inputted in this way. This system reduces the chance of errors and speeds up inputting.



(Mistle Thrush Peter Walsh – CBS recorded a decline in this species in 2009)

Arterial Drainage Maintenance and Riparian Birds

This joint project of the Office of Public Works and BirdWatch Ireland was designed to assess the potential impacts of arterial drainage maintenance works by OPW on riparian birds, especially Kingfisher. One of the key objectives of the Arterial Drainage Works programme is to alleviate flooding

from agricultural lands, urban areas, bogs and new plantation forestry. A total of 67 bird species was recorded during survey work carried out during the 2009 breeding season, including 18 waterways species. Among these, Sedge Warbler, Mallard and Sand Martin, Snipe and Grey Heron were the most widespread. Kingfishers were relatively scarce, with small numbers recorded during the early survey visit only. Our results showed that the impact of drainage maintenance work on birds is low. Most disturbances caused by works appear to be short lived, and the impacts are localised given that the machines work through channels at a slow rate. A series of recommendations was made for OPW to consider which would help to further minimise any impacts, and which may further enhance riparian habitats for birds.

Wintering waterbirds within Irish coastal SPAs: Baseline low tide survey programme

The low-tide survey programme is designed to address the need to understand how waterbirds utilise coastal wetland sites, and primarily mudflat and sandflat habitats, during the low-tide period. Five teams of counters surveyed 12 sites during the winter of 2009/10 including some of Ireland's most important wintering sites for waterbirds such as Dundalk Bay, Wexford Harbour, Lough Swilly and Inner Galway Bay.

Patterns of waterbird distribution at low-tide that emerge from the resultant dataset, together with site-specific data on sediment composition and invertebrate distribution and abundance, will allow the identification, and aid the ecological understanding of areas that support critical waterbird functions (i.e. foraging & low-tide roosting) on a species by species basis.

The information collected, together with existing data on population size and national estimates and trends for waterbird populations wintering in Ireland (from the I-WeBS programme) will be used to inform a complimentary project that is assessing the conservation status of coastal wetland SPA sites and their wintering waterbird populations, and seeking to determine conservation objectives for these sites.

Distribution, Extent and Status of Ireland's Important Bird Areas

The Important Bird Area (IBA) programme aims to identify and protect a network of sites critical for the long-term viability of wild bird populations. A significant volume of bird data has been collated as part of various surveys carried out in Ireland since the last inventory in 2000. The project aim in 2009 was to update the IBA inventory for Ireland, provide mapped boundaries for all IBAs, and to apply the IBA monitoring framework to a selection of sites. It was supported by the Heritage Council.

In total, 154 IBAs were identified, covering 705,040 hectares. This includes 14 newly identified IBAs. Most IBAs identified qualify for wintering waterbirds (30%) or breeding seabirds (19%), with smaller numbers for Chough, Corncrake, Hen Harrier and breeding Golden Plover.

IBAs were identified for 45 species overall under one or more of 13 criteria. Four sites support globally significant numbers. These include Lough Swilly including Blanket Nook and Inch Lake for Whooper Swans, the Blasket Islands and Puffin Island for Manx Shearwater and European Storm-petrel, and the Skelligs for Northern Gannet. Two sites in County Donegal are of global significance for Corncrake, Ireland's only globally threatened species.

The IBA monitoring exercise showed that all 11 sites which were assessed are in unfavourable condition due to little conservation or management action in place at these sites.

The IBA programme is focussed on species for which site-based conservation is appropriate. Further developments to the IBA programme in Ireland might include the integration of offshore areas of importance to breeding seabirds (marine IBAs), and perhaps sites for other more widespread Annex I species such as Kingfisher.

The Garden Bird Survey

The Garden Bird Survey (GBS) has been running in its current format 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. Almost 700 participated in the survey in 2008/09, and represented the highest

participation since this survey began. Almost 20% of participants submitted their data online.

The 2008/09 winter was among the coldest in almost 20 years. Some 90 species were recorded overall, with the top 20 most widespread species remaining reasonably consistent, and headed by Robin, Blackbird, Blue Tit, Great Tit and Chaffinch. Greenfinch seems to be falling further down the list each winter in recent times, probably because of the effects of the *trichomoniasis* disease. Several reports prompted an analysis which showed that their numbers and distribution range have declined quite dramatically since the winter of 2005/06. Most other garden birds seem to be faring quite well, especially Long-tailed Tit which has been showing an increase in Irish gardens since the survey began.

Kilcoole Little Tern Project



(Little Tern: John Fox)

Wardening of the Little Tern colony at Kilcoole continued in summer 2009, supported by NPWS.

A total of 91 nesting attempts were made by 50 breeding pairs of Little Tern. The first Little Tern egg was found on 19th May, and the first chick hatched on 17th June. A total of 203 eggs were laid, with a mean clutch size of 2.2 eggs per nest. Unfortunately, 108 of the eggs failed to hatch, mainly as a consequence

of flooding (30% of eggs laid), due to strong onshore winds which coincided with high tides in early June. Only 7 of the nests which were active prior to this storm went on to produce chicks. In addition to flooding, eggs were lost to predation (21% of eggs laid), most attributed to two Hedgehogs. Despite these setbacks, and presumably because they occurred early enough in the breeding season that most pairs were able to re-lay, 95 chicks hatched (in 41 nests). A Kestrel was responsible for the loss of 14 Little Tern chicks during July. In addition, one chick was found dead, apparently having been killed by a dog. Thus, 80 chicks were presumed to have fledged, which equates to productivity this year of 1.6 fledglings per breeding pair. This is likely to be an overestimate, and productivity based on chick re-trap data is slightly lower at 1.44 fledglings per breeding pair.

Rockabill Roseate Tern & Seabird Project

In total, 1052 Roseate, 1791 Common and 359 Arctic Tern nests were recorded. Mean clutch sizes for the three species were 1.80, 2.55, and 1.92 respectively. The productivity of Roseate Terns was 1.62 chicks fledged per nest and was amongst the highest ever recorded on Rockabill. The productivity of Common Terns was 1.68 chicks fledged per nest. As in 2008, no reasonable estimate could be made for Arctic Tern productivity but it is likely to have been very poor. A minimum of 71 Black Guillemot nests were laid with a mean clutch of 1.75. Productivity of Black Guillemots was estimated to be 1.13 fledged chicks per nest with eggs. A total of 171 Kittiwake active nests were recorded with a mean clutch of 1.86. The productivity of Kittiwakes was estimated to be 0.96 fledged chicks per egg laying pair (0.46 in 2008). Totals of 1541 Roseate, 1248 Common and 59 Arctic Tern chicks were ringed. Disturbances were logged and totalled 13 hours 22 minutes over the three month season, very similar to 2008. Much of this was relatively benign and principally caused adult terns to dread. An adult and juvenile Peregrine Falcon were observed on two separate occasions in 2009 during the wardening period. Observations and evidence of depredation were recorded, mainly by Great Black-backed Gulls.

The rings of 810 individual Roseate Terns were read. 97.16% of birds ringed as chicks were ringed on Rockabill. Four year old birds comprised the largest cohort. The oldest bird was twenty-one years old and was ringed on Rockabill in 1988. Clupeids were the most common prey item (nearly 87%) presented to chicks by Roseate Terns. Gadoids were the most common prey item (52%) presented to chicks by Common Terns. The chick-feeding rate of Roseate Terns peaked in the afternoon/evening (1700-2000). Terns foraged in all directional sectors around Rockabill and effort was concentrated in those

sectors to the north and east of the island at distances exceeding 2 km. The Rockabill Roseate Tern project is funded by NPWS.

Chough SPA Research Project

Co. Waterford, Co. Cork, North Kerry

Fieldwork for the SPA study sites was completed in 2009. Full data analysis and site specific reports for the study sites is ongoing and the final report will be delivered in the first half of 2010.

Co. Clare, Co. Sligo and Co. Leitrim

Systematic survey work is scheduled to end in January 2010.

Irish Seabird Monitoring Project

In the absence of funding, an interim, largely voluntary series of colony counts was undertaken. Seabird colonies in Counties Dublin and Wicklow were covered, including the Skerries Islands, Lambay, Ireland's Eye, Bray Head and Wicklow Head. Most species are stable or increasing but the large colonies of Fulmar and Shag on Lambay had declined significantly since the last counts in 2007. We intend monitoring these closely in 2010.

Policy & Advocacy

Action Planning for Irelands' Birds

This three year project is supported by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and was initiated to deal with some of the main issues highlighted in the European Court of Justice ruling versus Ireland in December 2007, with a particular emphasis on the protection of Ireland's priority, migratory and dispersed species in the wider countryside. Stakeholder involvement has been a pivotal part of the planning process from the beginning.

The first stakeholder's workshop, which included state departments, agencies and relevant private sectors, took place on the 11th of December and dealt with Upland Birds. This is the first step in a process that will result in a list of actions for Upland Birds. Funding for this project has been secured for a second year and our next group Action Plan will be on Marine and Sea Cliff Birds.



(Upland Birds Stakeholder Workshop)

Casework & Policy Submissions

We actively engaged in planning related cases throughout 2009; responding to or seeking input to on average 15 out of 30 incoming proposals or consultation calls per month. All of these may have had some impact on either SPAs or IBAs.

The year saw a significant decision by An Bord Pleanála to refuse permission of a golf course and associated developments on a Chough SPA in Waterford. Additionally, we made presentations to An Bord Pleanála as part of the oral hearing on Dublin Port proposed extension into Dublin Bay. The lack of full consideration of wind energy developments on sites that are important for Hen Harrier, including SPAs, is an increasing concern which we are pursuing through our advocacy activities. The RSPB invited BirdWatch Ireland to take part in their Planning Team meeting in 2009 which took place in Northern Ireland and focussed on sharing expertise and experience from Scotland, England Wales and Northern Ireland.

We made policy submissions on the McCarthy Report, a new Common Fisheries Policy, the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, and the loss of Rural Environmental Protection Scheme (REPS) and what should take its place. Submissions were also made through partnerships with BirdLife International (at a European level) and with other environmental NGOs through the Environmental Pillar of Social Partnership.

Advocating our Messages

We take an active role in the Environmental Pillar of Social Partnership as one of the elected representatives of the Pillar which includes 28 environmental NGOs. In the last year this has gained us access to some government departments and increased environmental representation at a national level on NESC and on the RDP Monitoring Committee. At a local level we have gained environmental representation on Strategic Policy Committees, Community Development Boards and LEADER Companies. Many BirdWatch Ireland members have taken up these roles as environmental representatives on local groups.

With the support of the RSPB and BirdLife International we ran an event on *Delivering Appropriate Assessment in Ireland* – the formal assessment process required for the wildlife interests of designated sites (SPAs and SACs). This popular event was held jointly with the EPA, NPWS, IEEM and IEMA and targeted Competent Authorities and environmental consultants.

Save Our Seabirds

The campaign was launched at the Electric Picnic festival. The petition with over 2500 signatures will fuel advocacy work into 2010 as we are looking for a more coordinated approach to managing our marine environment including Marine Protected Areas, better legislation, and better coastal zone management. A successful appeal for funding for our seabird campaign was launched in October and will result in an expanded research and monitoring of our seabird populations in 2010 and beyond.

Policy Development

Sarah Anthony joined the team for 12 weeks on secondment from Natural England and developed our approach to buffering coastal estuaries for longer term protection, providing compensation for destroyed areas of estuaries, as well as on the potential future role of exploited peatlands in Ireland. Her work will inform our policy development in 2010 on Climate Change adaptation and Ecosystem Services.

Working in Partnerships

We play an active role in the Irish Environmental Network of NGOs. In 2009 we were elected as a Director of IEN and engaged actively in developing a Strategic Framework and seeking to ensure multi-annual funding support for NGOs in Ireland.

Our work as the Irish partner in BirdLife International has been an important part of our work including Task Force meetings on the EU Birds Directive and EU Habitats Directive and on Agriculture. Task Force meetings focussed on addressing wind energy pressure on wild birds and the habitat requirements.



(Getting our Save our Seabirds Message across at Electric Picnic, 2009)

BirdWatch Ireland Branch Activities

2009 was another very busy year for BirdWatch Ireland Branches around the country and saw the launch of a revised and updated set of Branch Guidelines. This update was long overdue, given the 14 year gap since the previous set of guidelines had been issued, the aim being to help our volunteer committee members to organise events, take care of Branch finances and deal with liability issues. There is now an increased focus on data protection, online communications and child welfare issues, as well as a special section dealing with Branch insurance matters.

We are delighted to note that 2009 saw the establishment of three new BirdWatch Ireland Branches, in Counties Leitrim, Roscommon and Westmeath. These fledgling Branches have gone from strength to strength, holding a large number of events for BirdWatch Ireland members in their respective areas and contributing greatly to local conservation efforts, and their committees are to be warmly congratulated on all their hard work. We also very much welcome the increased opportunity to engage with our members in midland areas in particular, and we look forward to the planned establishment of even more Branches in other regions during 2010.

Special praise is due to our West Kerry Branch, which once again scooped the Heritage and Environment category at the Kerry Community Awards for its work locally. The Fingal Branch continued its excellent stewardship of our Rogerstown reserve and provided invaluable assistance to our Roseate Tern wardens on Rockabill Island, and the North Louth and South Dublin Branches continued their tireless tern conservation efforts at Baltray and Dalkey respectively. 2009 also saw the launch of several new Branch websites which are well worth a visit: see our own website, www.birdwatchireland.ie, or *Wings* magazine for full details.

It has long been felt that our Branch network is an under-utilised tool for membership recruitment, and 2009 saw a major effort to work with some key Branches to enable them to encourage more members of the public to join BirdWatch Ireland and to contribute to our conservation work. Special mention must go to the Tipperary, Galway and Mayo Branches in this regard, and the new Westmeath Branch has also proven itself more than capable in this area. Thanks must also go to in particular to the South Dublin Branch, the Tolka Branch and the North Louth Branch for all of their recruitment efforts during the year.

Development

Events

We continued our public outreach work at several major public events throughout 2009, of which the most significant again this year was our work at the *Bloom* garden and horticultural show in the Phoenix Park in Dublin over the June Bank Holiday weekend. In addition to the more than 100 new members who signed up at the show, we spoke to over 5,000 people about our conservation work and provided them with details of steps they could take to

encourage biodiversity around their own homes. We also once again ran our education marquee at the *Bloom* show and taught hundreds of children and their families about the wonders of bird migration.

Migration was also the theme of our stand at April's *Native Species Weekend* at Dublin Zoo, an annual event where environmental NGOs are invited to showcase Ireland's native wildlife to the thousands of zoo visitors who come to see the captive animals. The BirdLife International *Spring Alive* project provided the main platform for our activities, and children and their parents were encouraged to look out for Swifts, Swallows and Cuckoos and to report them to the project website, www.springalive.net. The results speak for themselves: almost 10,000 records were submitted to Spring Alive from around the Republic of Ireland, the highest *per capita* total of any of the 40 BirdLife International partner organisations taking part across Europe.

The most eagerly anticipated date in the BirdWatch Ireland calendar is probably our *National Dawn Chorus Day*, and over 30 events in celebration of birdsong were held by our Branches, staff and volunteers around the country on Sunday 17th May. It was unfortunate that, due to budget cutbacks, it was not possible for RTÉ to broadcast live radio feeds of our various events this year, but the birdsong walks were heavily publicised on the *Mooney* show, the RTÉ website and the *Six:One News*, and this helped ensure a massive turnout on the day. Many thanks to Derek Mooney and Philip Bromwell of RTÉ for their assistance.

Publications

Another new venture during 2009 was the launch of *eWings*, our new monthly electronic newsletter delivered automatically to subscribers' email inboxes. Some BirdWatch Ireland members initially expressed concern that this newsletter would replace *Wings*, our quarterly print magazine, but this is definitely not the case: *eWings* is intended as a supplement to the magazine which allows us to keep our supporters informed of topical issues and new developments as they happen. The electronic medium has allowed us to communicate our messages in a very immediate and cost-effective way, and within three months of its launch *eWings* had already attracted more than 9,000 subscribers. It is not necessary to be a member of BirdWatch Ireland to subscribe to *eWings*, and anyone can sign up via our website, www.birdwatchireland.ie, to receive it free of charge. *Wings* magazine itself remains exclusively for paid-up BirdWatch Ireland members.

Corporate Sponsorship



(Dereck McCleane, President of the Zoological Society of Ireland, presents a donation towards conservation work at the East Coast Nature Reserve as part of Dublin Zoo's Native Species Conservation Programme)

Media

One of our highest profile projects of the year was our collaboration with Áras an Uachtaraín and RTÉ Radio One's *Mooney* show on *Nestwatch 2009*. Using live webcam feeds and a very sophisticated video streaming service we were able to follow the fortunes of a family of Blue Tits in the gardens of the Áras itself, and people logged on in their thousands to follow their progress. Sadly the chicks perished due to a spell of cold weather, but their struggle for survival really touched a chord with viewers all around the world and highlighted the severe pressures that even our most common and familiar birds face. We would like to thank Derek Mooney and his team for all of their hard work, and we are extremely grateful to our patron, President of Ireland Mary McAleese, for her great contribution to the project and for her support of BirdWatch Ireland through the year.

BirdWatch Ireland Media Coverage (number of featured items) in 2009

National Television	14
National Radio	15
Regional Radio	27
National Newspapers	45
Regional Newspapers	33
Magazines	3
Websites & Blogs	12
A.P. Wire Service	2

Website Hits

In 2009, we had 126,104 visits from 83,520 visitors to our website.

Wings Shop

Wings Giftshop continues to provide our members with an excellent and quality service where they can avail of the opportunity to discuss their requirements with interested and experienced birdwatchers and to be assured of the suitability of their purchase. The location of our new premises in Kilcoole with walk in shop has enabled us to bring our services to a wider customer base that is easily accessible by public transport. For remote shoppers we launch a newly designed mail order sales catalogue inserted with *Wings*. The success of our online shop also continues to grow. We are dedicated to developing the range of goods supplied through the shop to cater for all levels of interest and expertise in bird watching and nature.

Cape Clear Bird Observatory

The Observatory celebrated its 50th year in 2009 and numerous events were organised to mark the occasion. A festival fortnight, held in August, marked the actual birthday with a party held in the Observatory building and a series of talks and walks on the island. We contacted as many ex-wardens as possible to attend and resulted in some people revisiting Cape for the first time since the 1960's, giving a unique opportunity to share old stories and memories. We are indebted to the islanders of Cape Clear who gave freely of their time to ensure the anniversary year was a great success.

The species list continues to grow, with another three added during the year. including an Arctic Warbler in October, which proved to be an excellent birthday present for the many birders present.



(Arctic Warbler, Cape Clear; Dick Coombes)

Volunteers

Once again, in 2009, 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 through all the committed local branch members, from volunteers who donated half an hour to those who donated three months or more. Volunteers enabled us to be present and active at more public events for the first time, such as Electric Picnic. They helped us build predator proof fences, pack parcels for the shop, collect and input conservation data, improve our website, answer the telephone and much more. The fact that the activities of our volunteers in 2009 amounted to the work of 19 full time staff in itself demonstrates how central they are to our conservation work.

	No. of Volunteers	Total Hours
Surveys/Conservation	3,294	36,712
Development	27	1,104
Administration	8	328
Shop	1	180
Reserves	15	144
Total	3,345	38,468



(BirdWatch Ireland volunteers working on a predator proof fence in the midlands)

Premises

In August 2009, Birdwatch Ireland moved its headquarters from temporary offices at Newtownmountkennedy to new premises at Bullford Business Campus, Kilcoole Co. Wicklow. The new premises is easily accessible by public transport and by car from the N11. It provides good office accommodation over two floors as well as an improved walk-in shop.

Partners

We would like to sincerely thank all of our, partners, sponsors and donors, including:

Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Department of Foreign Affairs, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Office of Public Works, Bord na Mona, The Heritage Council, Environmental Protection Agency, Environment & Heritage Service of Northern Ireland, Dublin Zoo, Corrin Hill & Silver Pail Dairies.



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



BORD NA MÓNA 



Department of
Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
An Roinn
Talmhaíochta, Iascaigh agus Bia



OPW
The Office of Public Works
Oifig na nOibreacha Poiblí



2009 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 2009 is available from BirdWatch Ireland on request.

Income and Expenditure Account for the year ended 31st December 2009

	2009 €	2008 €
Turnover	2,342,508	2,421,886
Cost of sales	(52,729)	(55,235)
Conservation expenditure	<u>(1,822,038)</u>	<u>(1,770,768)</u>
Gross Profit	467,741	595,883
Administration expenses	<u>(472,414)</u>	<u>(515,644)</u>
Operating (Deficit)/Surplus	(4,673)	80,239
Other Operating Income Government Grant Amortised	<u>24,886</u>	<u>24,886</u>
Profit on ordinary activities before interest	20,213	105,125
Investment Income	3,143	17,662
Interest payable and similar charges	(11,751)	(4,544)
Increase/Decrease in value of investment	<u>26,768</u>	<u>(96,636)</u>
Retained surplus for the year	38,373	21,607
Retained surplus brought forward	<u>1,999,928</u>	<u>1,978,321</u>
Retained surplus carried forward	<u>2,038,301</u>	<u>1,999,928</u>

Balance Sheet as at 31st December 2009

	2009		2008	
	€	€	€	€
Fixed Assets				
Tangible assets		3,031,388		2,414,103
Financial Assets		<u>179,240</u>		<u>152,472</u>
		3,210,628		2,566,575
Current Assets				
Stocks	25,104		32,500	
Debtors	555,606		531,784	
Cash at bank & in hand	<u>70,402</u>		<u>678,802</u>	
		651,112		1,243,086
Creditors Amounts falling due within one year	<u>(139,721)</u>		<u>(229,878)</u>	
Net Current Assets		<u>511,391</u>		<u>1,013,208</u>
Total Asset less Current Liabilities		3,722,019		3,579,783
Accruals & deferred Income		<u>(1,336,769)</u>		<u>(1,094,974)</u>
Net Assets		<u>2,385,250</u>		<u>2,484,809</u>
Capital Reserves				
Other reserves		346,949		484,881
Profit & Loss account		2,038,301		1,999,928
		<u>2,385,250</u>		<u>2,484,809</u>

 BirdWatch Ireland, Registered Office Unit 20, Block D, Bullford Business Campus, Kilcoole, Co. Wicklow, Ireland

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BirdWatch Ireland is the trading name of the Irish Wildbird Conservancy, a company limited by guarantee. Registered Charity No. 5703.

Registered in Ireland, No. 116468.