



# Cape Clear Bird Observatory

## Annual Report 2017



Prepared by Sam Bayley & Brian Caffrey

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Address for correspondence: BirdWatch Ireland, Unit 20, Block D, Bullford Business Campus,  
Kilcoole, Co. Wicklow; [info@birdwatchireland.ie](mailto:info@birdwatchireland.ie); Phone: 353 (0)1 2819878

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## Introduction

This is the 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Report for BirdWatch Ireland's Cape Clear Bird Observatory for 2017. Founded in 1959, the Observatory is located on Cape Clear Island, situated 8 miles off the coast of West Cork.

Cape Clear is one of the best places to watch seabird migration in Europe, especially during the late summer months. Spring and autumn bring large numbers of song birds moving to and from their breeding grounds, amongst which there are usually one or two strays from North America and Siberia.

The BirdWatch Ireland Bird Observatory on Cape Clear is visited annually by dozens of visiting birdwatchers, ringers and general wildlife enthusiasts. This long tradition of bird and biodiversity recording on the island makes the Bird Observatory a beacon for environmental research, education and monitoring in Ireland.

Sam Bayley returned for a second year as Cape Clear Wildlife Officer in 2017. With the success of 2016, the post was extended a further six weeks from the start of April to mid November and as a full time seasonal position.

Over the course of this year, a number of improvements were made to the Observatory building, which was assisted with donations from the BirdWatch Ireland Wild Islands Appeal, such as:

- installation of a new boiler
- repainting of the inside and outside
- removing curtains and installing blackout blinds in the bedrooms
- replacing and enlarging the benches at the front of the building

Still to be done is the replacement of all the windows and front door and new signage for the front of the building, which we hope to undertake during the 2018 season. In addition, the appeal also paid for additional surveying equipment primarily for starting up a long term study of the breeding birds around East Bog.



*Figure 1 - Adult Water Rail ringed in East Bog (Sam Bayley)*

# Surveying and Monitoring

## Daily Log

Throughout the season the daily log was maintained each evening gathering sightings and numbers of species recorded on the island, mainly focusing on birds, mammals, reptiles, lepidoptera and dragonflies. This was undertaken mainly at the observatory, except in the autumn when it was done at Cotter's Bar to collate information from people staying at various locations. In addition, a 'day sheet' was compiled for each day to detail the highlights of each day as well as document the results of the more formal surveying as presented below.

## Seawatching

A total of 12 hours of formal seawatching was conducted during the spring, from 16<sup>th</sup> April to 15<sup>th</sup> June, and 58.5 hours during the autumn 6<sup>th</sup> July to 10<sup>th</sup> October. Watches were mainly done from Blannan, but also from Bullig, Bill of Clear and Bullaun. Many visitors assisted with these watches but special thanks to Dick Coombes, Declan Murphy, Larry Donnelly, Tony Culley and Simon Linnington, to name a few.

In addition, records of birds seen from the pelagic trips run by Shearwater Tours in Cape Clear waters were added to the log which highlighted the additional species being seen just a bit further out.

## Breeding Hirundine Assessment

During 2017 the opportunity was taken to try to estimate and locate the breeding hirundines on the island. The totals recorded were as follows:

- **Swallow** – 14 pairs
- **House Martin** – nine pairs



*Figure 2 - Map of nest sites of Swallows and House Martins in 2017*



A brief assessment of the breeding sites shows that all of the Swallow nests found were in manmade structures and only one nest per building with the exception of two pairs in a large garage at the far west end. The smallest building was a goat shed just up the High Road. The House Martins on the other hand were mainly on the cliffs with four pairs nesting on one face near the old lighthouse and a single past Lough Errul. A pair attempted nesting on the shop but this got knocked down by a storm, whilst the B&B and the new house above Cotters were used and a surprising low nest was discovered under single storey eaves on the back of the Medical Centre.

### Bird Ringing

The extensive groundwork undertaken during 2016, paved the way for 2017 season. The ringing activities were as follows:

- Cotters/Nordy Wood – Some initial work on the site established it as the main ringing site for the island, operated once or twice a week during the breeding season and almost daily during migration periods
- East Bog – This site was run primarily as part of the BTO Constant Effort Site scheme (CES) as an annual study of breeding success, productivity and adult survival and site fidelity. Apart from these visits a few extra sessions were undertaken during September. Also, the process of palletting the rides in the bog to make them more accessible was started
- Old Post Office – This site was again set up and extended so to be of suitable size. It was irregularly used during the main part of the season due to time constraints, but was an important feature of the Ringing Course in September
- Trawleagaigh Beach and Focarrig – The beach behind the Obs was set up again for Storm Petrel catching at the start of the season, which proved very useful for demonstration purposes. In August the traditional spot of Focarrig, between South Harbour and Blannan, was set up and with the addition of a loud speaker, turned out to be a far better location



*Figure 3 - Setting up the net on Trawleagaigh Beach for catching Storm Petrels (Sue Walsh)*

- Observatory Garden – a single net, 2 potter traps and a walk-in trap were used to catch birds coming to the Obs feeders
- Mary Cadogan's Garden – the whoosh net was again installed for catching mainly gulls, corvids and Rock Doves
- Michael Vincent's Garden – a couple of simple net rides were created here in September for additional autumn migrants
- Nestlings – A number of nestlings were also ringed where possible, with particular effort on Swallows
- Dazzling – A number of evenings were attempted for catching nocturnal feeding waders, but with little success

The ringing effort was greatly assisted by ringers visiting Cape Clear. This included 14 from Ireland, nine from England, one from Isle of Man, one from Wales, France, Spain and Canada. The Wildlife Officer continued training Ian McDermott and Alan McCarthy and signed up a third trainee, Paloma Kreischer, all from Cork, and assessed Alex Copland for his training endorsement. The Wildlife Officer also managed to transfer all the Observatory ringing data over to the new Demography Online (DemOn) recording system.

During the first week of September the first Cape Clear BTO ringing course took place in which eight participants attended along with five additional trainers and three helpers. Although set up mainly for Irish ringers, two of the participants came from England, as did three of the trainers. The course involved a series of both practical ringing sessions and indoor talks and discussions. Although weather made conditions difficult at times for the practical sessions, it was good to be able to assess how people worked as a team and prioritise bird welfare. The challenging weather did reduce the number of birds which were caught, but enough were captured of enough species to make the course viable. The course was a great success with very positive feedback and the hope that future ringing courses will take place here.



*Figure 4 - Ringing course trainers and participants (Ian McDermott)*



## Moth Trapping

A Robinson moth trap was used in the yard at the back of the Observatory on 30 nights from 30<sup>th</sup> May to 2<sup>nd</sup> November with numbers and species recorded. In addition, Eamonn, Gareth and Michael O'Donnell did several sessions on other parts of the island during various parts of the year.

## Habitat Management

Throughout the year, beach cleans were undertaken on Inner Beg, South Harbour and Trawleagaigh beaches on an almost fortnightly basis. On Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> October, the Wildlife Officer organised a community beach clean of the South Harbour beaches following Hurricane Ophelia and Storm Brian and 25 sacks of rubbish were collected in two hours. A total of 72 sacks of rubbish were collected over the whole year, most of which was recycled.



*Figure 5 - Some of the participants in Storm Ophelia Beach Clean Up (Karine O'Regan)*

During October, a couple of mornings were spent in the Nordy Wood laying the willows and alders between the first few nets and opening up of the stream. This work was carried out with a view of doing an annual rotation of cutting in the future to keep the vegetation lower and more suitable for birds and birders.



*Figure 6 – Nordy Wood Habitat Management – Before and After (Sam Bayley)*

## Wildlife Report 2017

The following report is a basic rundown of the events of the year. Far more work was directed towards birds than any other species group for obvious reasons, but there is still a lot more to learn about the other taxonomy of the island.

### BIRDS

In total, 164 species were recorded on Cape Clear in 2017, although coverage out of season (before 8<sup>th</sup> April and after 17<sup>th</sup> November, when the Cape Clear Wildlife Officer wasn't present) was poor and thus not completely representative.

**January** had a smattering of notable records with a **Black-headed Gull** in South Harbour 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup>, a **Buzzard** seen on 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>, a **Siberian Chiffchaff** on 22<sup>nd</sup>, an **Iceland Gull** on 27<sup>th</sup> and two **Rook** on 31<sup>st</sup>.

Gulls in South Harbour dominated the **February** records with a **Glaucous Gull** on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, and a **Common Gull** and two **Iceland Gull** on 9<sup>th</sup>. Other sightings included the only early winter record of **Shoveler** with a pair on Lough Errul on 7<sup>th</sup>, two **Rook** on 8<sup>th</sup> and another **Siberian Chiffchaff** on 22<sup>nd</sup>.

During **March**, a male **Blackcap** was seen in Mary Cadogan's garden on and off from 7<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> and could well have been a wintering bird, a **Black Redstart** was seen also in Mary Cadogan's garden on 27<sup>th</sup>, but the highlight of the month was the second Observatory record of **Cattle Egret**. Initially seen flying over The Waist on 28<sup>th</sup>, and again on 29<sup>th</sup>, then finally seen on 30<sup>th</sup> on fields just off the High Road.



*Figure 7 - Cattle Egret on High Road (Mary Cadogan)*



**April** was a very busy month with a great parade of species. Remnant winter visitors included a **Redwing** on 8<sup>th</sup>, a **Common Gull** on 12<sup>th</sup>, **Iceland Gull** on 16<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> and a **Glaucous Gull** on 27<sup>th</sup>. Whilst on the sea, the first skuas were three **Great** and three **Pomarine** on 16<sup>th</sup>, divers included a couple of **Red-throated** on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> and a peak of c50 **Great Northern** on 18<sup>th</sup> and up to ten **Sandwich Tern** were seen from the ferry from 12<sup>th</sup>. A brief passage of **Whimbrel** saw 50 on 17<sup>th</sup>, 100 on 18<sup>th</sup> and a single on 19<sup>th</sup> all heading east far out to the south of the island and three **Common Scoter** were seen on 16<sup>th</sup>. But the highlight of the sea was a female **Eider** that flew past the ferry as it passed through Gascanane Sound. This is just the sixth record for the Observatory and the first since 1991. Other non-passerine spring passage included single **Buzzard** on 9<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>, single **Sparrowhawk** on, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>, a **Kestrel** on 24<sup>th</sup> and a **Collared Dove** from 20<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup>. Then on 29<sup>th</sup>, an adult male **Montagu's Harrier** was found midday trying to hunt over the Wheatear Fields before moving to East Bog where it spent most of the rest of the afternoon. This was only the fourth Observatory record, the first since 1992 and the only one to be seen here in the spring.



*Figure 8 – Adult male Montagu's Harrier at East Bog (Mary Cadogan)*

Passerine migration sprang into action too as follows:

- **Chiffchaff** – first on 1<sup>st</sup> and peak of ten on 11<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>
- **Wheatear** – first two on 2<sup>nd</sup> with peak of 16 on 20<sup>th</sup>
- **Swallow** – first on 8<sup>th</sup> with peak of 20 on 24<sup>th</sup>
- **Blackcap** – first on 8<sup>th</sup> and peak of just seven on 19<sup>th</sup>
- **Willow Warbler** – first on 8<sup>th</sup> with peak of 20 on 19<sup>th</sup>
- **Whinchat** – four different birds (two male, two female) on separate dates of 11<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>, comprised the only records of the year
- **House Martin** – first on 17<sup>th</sup> with another two on 25<sup>th</sup>
- **Grey Wagtail** – one on 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>
- **Grasshopper Warbler** – first on 19<sup>th</sup> with further singles on 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> and two on 30<sup>th</sup>
- **Sedge Warbler** – first three on 20<sup>th</sup>, with up to 30 by 30<sup>th</sup>
- **Rook** – three on 20<sup>th</sup>
- **Wood Warbler** – a single bird present between Nordy Wood and Cotters Garden from 25<sup>th</sup> to 1<sup>st</sup> May
- Single **Pied Flycatcher** and **Spotted Flycatcher** on 28<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> respectively
- First two **Garden Warbler** and **Whitethroat** on 30<sup>th</sup>

A couple of winter birds still hanging on in early **May** in the form of an **Iceland Gull** on 1<sup>st</sup>, a **Siskin** over on 7<sup>th</sup> and a **Common Gull** on 10<sup>th</sup>, but a male **Pintail** on Lough Errul on 4<sup>th</sup> was unexpected and brief, staying just an hour, and only the seventh Observatory record. **Great** and **Pomarine Skuas** were seen throughout the month with peaks of five and seven past on 17<sup>th</sup> respectively and singles of **Arctics Skua** were logged on four dates. Auks also increased in number with **Puffin** seen for first time with 17<sup>th</sup> also producing the highest count of 52. The sea also produced the first **Sooty Shearwater** and **Storm Petrel** of the year with a single on 15<sup>th</sup>, whilst **Great Northern Diver** reduced to single figures throughout, but were joined by a **Black-throated Diver** on 10<sup>th</sup>. The first **Common Sandpiper** was seen on 5<sup>th</sup>, to be joined by three others on 6<sup>th</sup> and one other single on 19<sup>th</sup>, whilst other waders included a **Dunlin** on South Harbour beach all day on 5<sup>th</sup>, joined in the evening by three **Whimbrel** and a **Jack Snipe** at Central Bog on 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>. **Collared Dove** were also present throughout the month mainly as singles, but with a high of three on 5<sup>th</sup>. Single **Buzzard** were seen on five dates from 7<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> and a **Merlin** was seen on 5<sup>th</sup> but the highlight of raptors was a **Honey Buzzard** seen briefly from North Harbour as it dropped down towards the west end of the island on 3<sup>rd</sup>, but could not be relocated. This is only the third Observatory record and only spring account with others in 1972 and 2000. A **Cuckoo** was heard on the east of the island on 2<sup>nd</sup> and by 4<sup>th</sup> had moved to The Waist and on 6<sup>th</sup> to the Lough Errul pines, whilst the first **Swift** sightings were of two on 5<sup>th</sup>, one on 11<sup>th</sup> and six on 27<sup>th</sup>.

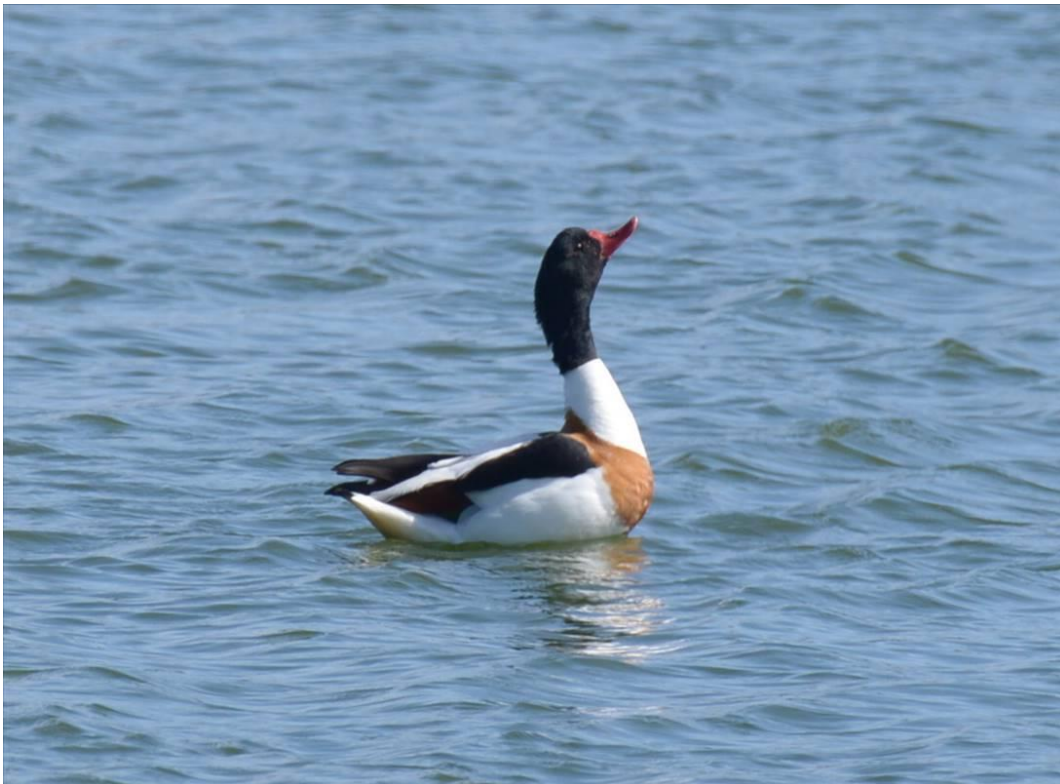


*Figure 9 - Male Pintail on Lough Errul (Sam Bayley)*

The first week of **May** produced the passerine highlights including an elusive adult male **Golden Oriole** on 2<sup>nd</sup> (first since 2008), up to four **Yellow Wagtail** in fields around Lough Errul from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup>, a **Carrion Crow** on South Harbour beach and three **Rook** on 7<sup>th</sup>. The second week saw a small fall of hirundines which included up to 35 **Swallow**, 30 **House Martin** and 20 **Sand Martin** between 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>. Sylvia warblers also peaked in these first two weeks with 11 **Whitethroat** on 1<sup>st</sup>, a single **Blackcap** up to 12<sup>th</sup> (with a single also on 31<sup>st</sup>), single **Garden Warbler** to 14<sup>th</sup> with the exception of three on 7<sup>th</sup>, although the only **Lesser Whitethroat** of the spring was in Olly Gully on 20<sup>th</sup>. Flycatchers seemed rather thin on the ground with a single **Pied Flycatcher** on 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> and up to three **Spotted Flycatcher** from 5<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> and then another single on 27<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup>. But an all too brief view of a small warbler in the Nordy Wood on 1<sup>st</sup> was almost certainly a **Ruby-crowned Kinglet**, but unfortunately couldn't be clinched and was not seen again.

Apart from the breeding birds, **June** was very quiet and featured very little in the way of migration. That said an adult **Little Gull** flew past North Harbour as the ferry was coming in on 9<sup>th</sup> and a mixed family party of 14 **Crossbill** were in the pines at the Old Post Office on 14<sup>th</sup>, being the only records of these species for the year. Other late migrants included **Great Northern Diver** on 7<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>, the latter fishing in South Harbour, a **Buzzard** on 3<sup>rd</sup>, **Arctic Tern** seen on 7<sup>th</sup> (five), 9<sup>th</sup> (one) and 27<sup>th</sup> (one), two **Collared Dove** on 28<sup>th</sup>, **Swift** on 14<sup>th</sup> (seven) and 19<sup>th</sup> (eight) and a **Sand Martin** and a **Grey Wagtail** on 18<sup>th</sup>.

Successful breeding species on the island was confirmed by the end of July. Although not thoroughly surveyed, it is thought that 52 species successfully bred with highlights being **Water Rail** in East and West Bog, a pair of **Peregrine** fledging three chicks, a pair of **Snipe** in East Bog, two pairs of **Little Grebe**, at least three pairs **Skylark**, great numbers of **Stonechat** and **Sedge Warbler**, three pairs of **Grasshopper Warbler** (two in East Bog and one on the slopes behind the graveyard), at least ten pairs of **Wheatear**, one or two pairs of **Blackcap**, a few pairs of **Whitethroat** and at least three pairs of **Chiffchaff** and two pairs of **Chaffinch** and **Redpoll**. This is the first time that **Chaffinch** have ever bred on the island and only the second time that **Redpoll** have bred. From 16<sup>th</sup> April a pair of **Shelduck** were seen on and off until 16<sup>th</sup> June, mainly near Lough Errul, giving the idea that they were attempting to nest. At one stage on this first day they even were seen prospecting some of the rabbit burrows in the sandy soil in the NW corner. A brood patch was clearly visible on the female into June, but every time they flew off north. An expedition to Middle Calf Islands solved the issue when a duckling was found on the pond there. The pair of **Shelduck** had decided to breed here and use Lough Errul as a washing and resting place. Maybe next year.



*Figure 10 - Male Shelduck on Lough Errul (Sam Bayley)*

A stunning adult **White-winged Black Tern** seen from a boat heading to the Calf Islands flew past the north side of the island at 8am on 1<sup>st</sup> **July**, representing the second record of this species for the Observatory after one on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2005. Interestingly, two others were seen on this same day in England as part of what seemed to be a minor fall in western Europe. Seabird passage was underway by mid month with **Sooty Shearwater** seen regularly from 10<sup>th</sup>, **Great Shearwater** seen from 16<sup>th</sup>



(three), single **Balearic Shearwater** seen on 20<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> and two **Cory's Shearwater** on 31<sup>st</sup>. **Great Skua** seen on four dates with two on 2<sup>nd</sup>, three on 26<sup>th</sup> and one on 27<sup>th</sup> with a **Pomarine Skua** and single **Arctic Skua** on 6<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>. **Storm Petrel** were seen in good number throughout the month with a high of 50 on 16<sup>th</sup> and a **Wilson's Storm Petrel** was seen from Blannan on 31<sup>st</sup>. Terns were also evident with three '**Commic**' on 16<sup>th</sup>, five **Arctic** on 27<sup>th</sup> and a single **Common** on 31<sup>st</sup>. A Shearwater Tours pelagic trip on 30<sup>th</sup> produced four **Cory's Shearwater**, 20+ **Great Shearwater**, six **Sooty Shearwater**, 200+ **Storm Petrel**, three **Great Skua**, one **Pomarine Skua**, a **Roseate Tern** and an amazing 40+ **Wilson's Storm Petrel**! These last two species represent just the ninth Observatory record for **Roseate Tern** with the last in 1993 and a British and Irish day record for **Wilson's Storm Petrel**, although this wasn't to last very long (see August).



*Figure 11 - Wilson's Storm Petrel (Seamus Enwright)*

July also saw the first signs of wader migration with two **Curlew** on 2<sup>nd</sup> and another on 16<sup>th</sup>, single **Common Sandpiper** from 2<sup>nd</sup> until 31<sup>st</sup> with two on 19<sup>th</sup>, a **Redshank** on 5<sup>th</sup> and a very unseasonal sighting of a **Lapwing** on Lough Errul on 24<sup>th</sup>. **Grey Wagtail** on 4<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>, **Kestrel** on 16<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> (two) and a **Sparrowhawk** on 31<sup>st</sup> were the first bit of post juvenile movement whilst a high count of 80 **Swallow** on 23<sup>rd</sup> may also have included first brood migrants. A count of 18 **Chough** together over The Waist on 20<sup>th</sup> was the highest count of the year.

**August** had a lot of focus on the sea as word came of record numbers of **Wilson's Storm Petrel** being seen offshore. Seawatching from the land this month also produced single figures of **Great Shearwater** with a peak of five on 2<sup>nd</sup>, **Cory's Shearwater** seen on just three consecutive days 22<sup>nd</sup> (one), 23<sup>rd</sup> (57 plus 20 unidentified which were probably these) and 24<sup>th</sup> (one) and **Sooty Shearwater** up to 20 on most days. **Balearic Shearwater** were seen as singles on 10<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>, two on 12<sup>th</sup> and three on 13<sup>th</sup> and single **Wilson's Storm Petrel** were seen on 6<sup>th</sup> (outside North Harbour) and 10<sup>th</sup>. **Arctic Skua** were surprisingly scarce with just three singles seen, whilst **Great Skua** were almost ever present with a peak of eight on 24<sup>th</sup>. A few Terns were seen with **Sandwich** on 2<sup>nd</sup> (three) and 4<sup>th</sup> (one), **Arctic** on 13<sup>th</sup> (three) and distant '**Commic**' on 22<sup>nd</sup> (six) and 28<sup>th</sup> (three). A group of 11 **Dunlin** past Blannan on 13<sup>th</sup> was a great record for the island as was a fly past **Turnstone** on 26<sup>th</sup> and a very early juvenile **Black-headed Gull** past North Harbour briefly on 1<sup>st</sup>. Shearwater Tours

continued doing pelagic boat trips in Cape waters with great results. The most significant record was of the massive count of 56 **Wilson's Storm Petrel** on 6<sup>th</sup>, out competing last months total of 40 to become the largest day record in Britain and Ireland. Numbers after this then quickly dropped and stayed in single figures through the rest of the month. The **Yellow-legged Gull** record is also of significance as is just the third Observatory record. A full list of highlights are below:

Species	6 <sup>th</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup>	13 <sup>th</sup>	19 <sup>th</sup>	20 <sup>th</sup>
<b>Great Shearwater</b>	5	2	1		2
<b>Sooty Shearwater</b>	6	8	6	8	15
<b>Balearic Shearwater</b>					2
<b>Great Skua</b>	3	2	2	2	5
<b>Pomarine Skua</b>		3	1	1	
<b>Arctic Skua</b>	1				
<b>Long-tailed Skua</b>	1			1	
<b>Storm Petrel</b>	300	300+	300	x	x
<b>Wilson's Storm Petrel</b>	56	16	5	5	8
<b>Yellow-legged Gull</b>			1		
<b>Sabine's Gull</b>	1				1
<b>Grey Phalarope</b>			1		
<b>Arctic Tern</b>	20	2	7		
<b>Common Tern</b>				1	

*Table 1 - Highlights from the Shearwater Tours pelagic trips during August*

On the land, as with 2016, the start of the month saw a real arrival of first year **Sparrowhawk** and **Kestrel** with peaks of four on 25<sup>th</sup> and five on 25<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> respectively. Other raptor sightings included a female **Hen Harrier** that arrived on 1<sup>st</sup> and stayed around the west end of the island until at least 10<sup>th</sup>, the first autumn **Merlin** was seen on 29<sup>th</sup> and only the 11<sup>th</sup> Observatory record of **Barn Owl**, seen roosting in a tree in The Waist on 20<sup>th</sup>.

Although a few started a bit earlier with movement peaks of a **White Wagtail** and 100 **Swallow** on 9<sup>th</sup> and two **Sand Martin** and 150 **Meadow Pipit** on 15<sup>th</sup>, all other notable passerine migration occurred in the last two weeks. **Goldcrest**, **Grey Wagtail** and **Willow Warbler** all started to increase to the month end, a **Sand Martin** on 22<sup>nd</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> and 35 **House Martin** through and a **Spotted Flycatcher** from 25<sup>th</sup>. The 26<sup>th</sup> saw a noticeable movement of wagtails with 26 **Pied** and 17 **Grey Wagtail** logged and two **White Wagtail** the following day. A peak of 85 **Swallow** was also seen on 26<sup>th</sup> as well as the first **Reed Warbler** of the year followed by two on 27<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> and five on 28<sup>th</sup>. To finish the month a **Tree Pipit** was found at the Old Post Office and a **Wryneck** on Coosadoulglas slip at the far east of the island both on 29<sup>th</sup>.

It was an unusually great month for waders with the three species seen on the sea a total of 12 species were recorded. Commoner species such as **Oystercatcher** daily, **Curlew** being seen throughout with a high of six on 7<sup>th</sup>, **Whimbrel** on four dates 7<sup>th</sup> (three), 9<sup>th</sup> (six), 19<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> (one), **Common Sandpiper** on 4<sup>th</sup> (two), 5<sup>th</sup> (two) and 27<sup>th</sup> (one) and **Snipe** just once on 1<sup>st</sup>. The last week of the month was amazing though starting with a **Greenshank** near West Bog on 25<sup>th</sup>, then 26<sup>th</sup> had a **Lesser Yellowlegs** calling over the Old Lighthouse and then seen briefly at Central Bog in the

morning, whilst looking for it a **Green Sandpiper** was flushed. Then later in the afternoon a check of the lake still looking for the **Lesser Yellowlegs** produced a **White-rumped Sandpiper**. Two American waders in just one day. The **Lesser Yellowlegs** (only second Observatory record previous in 1991) wasn't refound but the **White-rumped Sandpiper** (third Observatory record previously in 1967 and 1968) stayed until the following day.



Figure 12 – First year White-rumped Sandpiper (Simon Linington)

With north and westerly winds dominating most of the early part of **September**, migration of land birds was slow and hard work. The 1<sup>st</sup> saw a good movement of hirundines with 15 **Sand Martin** (not seen for the rest of the month), 100 **Swallow** and 60 **House Martin**, eight **White Wagtail** as well as a peak of 12 **Grey Wagtail**, also a **Common** and a **Green Sandpiper**. Whilst an unusual find on this date was a **Willow Warbler** of ssp. *acredula* caught and ringed which are usually not seen until mid to late October. With the exception of **White Wagtail** on 6<sup>th</sup> (two) and 10<sup>th</sup> (one) and a **Reed Warbler** on 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>, there was a noticeable decline in migrant passerines until 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> when 120 **Swallow** moved through each day. The 15<sup>th</sup> also saw the last record of **Whitethroat** for the year (a really early date), another **Reed Warbler** and a **Short-eared Owl** unusually in the Nordy Wood. Apart from the now pretty sedentary three **Sparrowhawk** and up to five **Kestrel**, raptors were fairly scarce with a **Buzzard** on 1<sup>st</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> and a **Merlin** seen from 4<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup>.

The second half of the month fared much better starting with an early morning movement of 33 **Raven** together over the Obs and a **Carrion Crow** by Lough Errul the following day. The 18<sup>th</sup> saw a fall of 100+ **Goldcrest** to The Waist joined by a desperately low peak of 12 **Blackcap** for the month and only seen on six other days all month, although three **Black-headed Gull**, a **Teal**, a female **Redstart** in Cotters and two **Siskin** over were the first of the autumn. The **Goldcrest** fall continued to the end of the month and were joined by four **Teal** on 19<sup>th</sup>, 40 **Pied Wagtail** and a **Spotted Flycatcher** on 20<sup>th</sup>, rising to four on 26<sup>th</sup> and five **Redpoll** on 21<sup>st</sup>. A newly fledged **Sedge Warbler** was caught in East Bog on the very late date of 21<sup>st</sup> after there had not been a sighting of this species since 31<sup>st</sup> August! On 26<sup>th</sup> the first **Yellow-browed Warbler** and a male **Ring Ouzel** were at Lough Errul pines (latter staying until 27<sup>th</sup>) followed next day by a fly over **Bar-tailed Godwit**, a pair of **Redstart**, a **Lesser Whitethroat**, two **Siskin** and peaks of ten **Willow Warbler** and 40 **Chiffchaff**.



The next two days quietened off until 30<sup>th</sup> when a **Barred Warbler** was found in The Waist with a **Lesser Whitethroat** in driving rain and 11 **Siskin** flew over.

Highlights from the sea dropped away substantially from early in the month with the only pelagic on 3<sup>rd</sup> producing six **Great Shearwater**, three **Sooty Shearwater**, one **Arctic Skua**, six **Great Skua** and a **Wilson's Storm Petrel** as highlights. Seawatching from the land produced two **Great Skua** on 5<sup>th</sup>, three on 9<sup>th</sup>, and one on 25<sup>th</sup>, four **Arctic Skua** on 10<sup>th</sup>, three on 13<sup>th</sup> and one on 20<sup>th</sup> and a **Pomarine Skua** chasing **Kittiwake** from the ferry on 9<sup>th</sup>. A very early **Red-throated Diver** was seen on 9<sup>th</sup>, seven **Arctic Tern**, on 10<sup>th</sup>, **Sooty Shearwater** peaked at 35 along with a **Sabine's Gull**, seven more **Arctic Tern**, a **Grey Phalarope** and a **Turnstone**, on 12<sup>th</sup> two **Sabine's Gull** and a **Turnstone** were seen on 14<sup>th</sup>, a **Balearic Shearwater** on 20<sup>th</sup> and three **Sandwich Tern** on 30<sup>th</sup>. As for waders, a seawatch on 5<sup>th</sup> had a flock of three **Whimbrel** with five **Bar-tailed Godwit** later followed by a single **Dunlin**.

**October** was probably better remembered for the extreme weather rather than birds this year. Hurricane Ophelia hit the island on 16<sup>th</sup> with wind speeds reaching 191 kn per hour, the highest ever recorded in Ireland. Storm Brian which hit further north just five days later both had hopes of an exotic tropical seabird to arrive or a fall of Americans, but unfortunately neither seemed to be the case. It was a very up and down month with periods of movement from 5<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> and then again from 25<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> with birds seemingly clearing out inbetween. This said there was a good mix of species from east and west, some especially notable for the island and with a few nice rarities too. For ease of viewing the major highlights are accounted individually below:

- A Yellowlegs sp. flew in from the north and over Cotters Garden at about 10am on 1<sup>st</sup> and was relocated the following day at Loch Errul as the third Observatory record of **Lesser Yellowlegs**, but was not seen after this
- A small number of **Coal Tit** moved through during the month with singles seen on 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>
- On 5<sup>th</sup> an adult **Sabine's Gull** was seen with **Kittiwake** from the ferry
- The 5<sup>th</sup> also saw the arrival of a **Spotted Sandpiper** in South Harbour. Although elusive at times it stayed for nine days staying around Inner Beag and the western rocks being twitched by a few. On 13<sup>th</sup> it decided to move to the quay on the other side of the harbour which resulted in it being taken by a **Sparrowhawk**



*Figure 13 - First year Spotted Sandpiper in South Harbour (Dick Coombes)*

- The **Barred Warbler** from 30th September was relocated in Cotters Garden also on 5<sup>th</sup>, but not seen again
- Having not been seen since the single on 26<sup>th</sup> September a small arrival of **Yellow-browed Warbler** were seen between 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> with four on 8<sup>th</sup>, then not seen again until 18<sup>th</sup> with ones or twos then on up to a peak of seven on 30<sup>th</sup>
- A small arrival of **Bullfinch** were seen with singles on 9<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> and six on 30<sup>th</sup>
- Two different **Mediterranean Gull** were seen from the ferry on 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> and a further four were seen on 28<sup>th</sup>
- After a very quiet day on 10<sup>th</sup>, a real surprise was an **Osprey** that flew into North Harbour, hovered as if hunting for a fish and then got chased off west by the local gulls. This is only the tenth record for the Observatory
- On the morning of 12<sup>th</sup>, a **Common Rosefinch** dropped from height into The Waist and then into the Nurdy Wood, found again the next day moving around with Goldfinches behind the graveyard and in front of the Observatory. It was then briefly seen again up the A1 on 15<sup>th</sup>
- A **Swainson's Thrush** was found at Michael Vincent's Garden on 14<sup>th</sup> and spent the day around there, Olly Gully and Loch Errul. This is the third Observatory record for this species with the last on 8<sup>th</sup> October 1990 and the first on the same date in 1968



*Figure 14 - Swainson's Thrush in Michael Vincent's Garden (Tom Shevlin)*

- Whilst trying to refind the **Swainson's Thrush** first thing the following day, a **Rustic Bunting** was seen briefly by Lough Errul, then again briefly on the High Road later on. Luckily, the following day it was found in the horsefield behind Michael Vincent's garden and stayed in that general area giving great views and twiched by many up until 23<sup>rd</sup>. This is the 11<sup>th</sup> Observatory record with the last in 2015 in virtually the same location



- With news of a large **Hawfinch** invasion into the Great Britain from late September it was hoped that they would make it this far and they did. The first was seen on 15<sup>th</sup> in Brid's Garden and followed by two daily until 18<sup>th</sup>, a single on 20<sup>th</sup>, then a gap until 26<sup>th</sup> when a record 12 were seen including a group of 11. Three were seen the following day and then one on 29<sup>th</sup>. A few also continued into November. This is the largest ever influx of this species seen on the island, with the last influx being October 1988
- The 17<sup>th</sup> brought the only record of **Mute Swan**, five juveniles flying along the north side of the island early afternoon and the first of an influx of **Firecrest** with peaks of five on 25<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup>
- Single **Siberian Chiffchaff** were seen on 18<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>
- On 19<sup>th</sup> two **Jackdaw** showing signs of eastern race were seen at Mara Farm and an elusive **Short-toed Lark** was found at Lough Errul but not seen again until 29<sup>th</sup> and last seen the following day



*Figure 15 - Short-toed Lark at Lough Errul (Tom Shevlin)*

- A **Richard's Pipit** was seen and heard fly over Lough Errul on 22<sup>nd</sup> and another over Lighthouse Road on 31<sup>st</sup>
- A **Little Bunting** had a one day visit to the fields behind Michael Vincent's garden on 26<sup>th</sup>
- A **Red-throated Pipit** flew over Lough Errul calling on 28<sup>th</sup>
- A **Long-tailed Skua** was seen flying between the island and the Calf Islands on 29<sup>th</sup>

Along with all these there were several notable records of scarcer species. Wildfowl was unusually absent with the exception of a few **Mallard**, whilst wader species numbered an impressive 13 (including the two above). The sea produced a single **Dunlin** on 6<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> and single **Turnstone** on 14<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>, a **Lapwing** on Lough Errul from 18<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup>, **Golden Plover** on 5<sup>th</sup> (one), 15<sup>th</sup> (four) and 29<sup>th</sup> (two), single **Whimbrel** on 17<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, **Curlew** almost throughout with peak of four on 7<sup>th</sup>, a **Redshank** on 20<sup>th</sup> and a **Common Sandpiper** on 30<sup>th</sup>. Whilst more notably a flock of **Ringed Plover** flew over Cotters in the dark on 11<sup>th</sup> thought to be about 15 individuals and really good numbers of **Snipe** with peaks of 27 on 15<sup>th</sup> and 84 on 25<sup>th</sup>. This latter tally included possibly a record group of 65 that were flushed from the lower Wheatear Fields in the morning.



Seabirds were thinning out as many depart for the winter months, **Red-throated Diver** were seen on 6<sup>th</sup> (one) and 27<sup>th</sup> (two), whilst **Great Northern Diver** were present throughout with peaks of four on 27<sup>th</sup> and eight on 30<sup>th</sup>. Large rafts of **Sooty Shearwater** were still being seen offshore with 46 on 10<sup>th</sup>, 150 on 13<sup>th</sup> and 55 on 14<sup>th</sup> whilst three large shearwaters seen on 15<sup>th</sup> couldn't be assigned to a species and the last two **Storm Petrel** were seen on 16<sup>th</sup>. **Great Skua** were seen throughout with peak of 11 on 14<sup>th</sup>, whilst **Arctic Skua** numbers were three on 8<sup>th</sup>, singles on 10<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> and two on 14<sup>th</sup> and a single **Pomarine Skua** on 15<sup>th</sup>. Other Larids were still thin on the ground although a group of up to 40 **Black-headed Gull** were seen within South Harbour, **Common Gull** were seen in single figures from 4<sup>th</sup> and a **Sandwich Tern** was seen on 1<sup>st</sup>.



*Figure 16 - Sooty Shearwater from pelagic (Dick Coombes)*

Birds of prey were also few and far between apart from **Peregrine**, **Sparrowhawk** and **Kestrel**, one or two **Merlin** all month, **Buzzard** seen on six dates involving 21 birds with peak of ten on 3<sup>rd</sup> and a ringtail **Hen Harrier** on 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup>. The only other notable non-passerine records were of a very late **Swift** seen flying around North Harbour on 17<sup>th</sup> and a **Stock Dove** flying West on 30<sup>th</sup> (only record of the year).

Possibly the worst **October** for hirundines with single **House Martin** on 8<sup>th</sup>, single **Sand Martin** on 15<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> and even **Swallow** only seen on five dates – 24 on 15<sup>th</sup>, five on 17<sup>th</sup>, two on 18<sup>th</sup> and three on 26<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>. **Skylark** migration peaked with 20 on 17<sup>th</sup>, **Meadow Pipit** peaks were 150 on 3<sup>rd</sup>, 200 on 15<sup>th</sup> and 180 on 23<sup>rd</sup> and **Rock Pipit** also had significant spikes of 42 on 22<sup>nd</sup> and 30 on 23<sup>rd</sup>. **White Wagtail** were recorded during first half of the month with two on 6<sup>th</sup> and singles up to 13<sup>th</sup> and **Grey Wagtail** peaked at 20 on 3<sup>rd</sup>. **Stonechat** numbers were high all month with peaks of 60 on 7<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> and 70 on 23<sup>rd</sup>, single **Black Redstart** were seen between 15<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> and single **Wheatear** up to 20<sup>th</sup>. Apart from a count of 50 **Blackbird** and a female **Ring Ouzel** on 9<sup>th</sup> and the first **Redwing** seen on 13<sup>th</sup>, the thrush migration was most notable in the second half of the month. Two large arrivals were noted on 27<sup>th</sup> with first eight **Fieldfare**, 60 **Song Thrush** and 400 **Redwing**, then on 30<sup>th</sup> 50 **Blackbird**, six **Fieldfare**, 100 **Song Thrush** and 300 **Redwing** were noted.

Scarce warblers were represented by up to 3 **Reed Warbler** to 29<sup>th</sup>, two **Garden Warbler** on 19<sup>th</sup> and singles on 20<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> and up to two **Lesser Whitethroat** from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup>. Commoner species month peak totals were – six **Willow Warbler** on 6<sup>th</sup> and last on 30<sup>th</sup>, 60 **Chiffchaff** on 18<sup>th</sup> and a further 40 on 30<sup>th</sup>, **Blackcap** had 25 on 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> and 30 on 18<sup>th</sup>. **Goldcrest** had a huge migration during the month with peaks of 500 on 6<sup>th</sup> and 250 on 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>, although these totals are probably rather conservative. Flycatchers were very few and far between with **Spotted Flycatcher** having four on first then intermittent singles with the last being two on 20<sup>th</sup> and **Pied Flycatcher** possibly having its worst autumn with singles seen on 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> only.

The only notable corvid numbers were a really good presence of **Rook** virtually through the month with single figures then on 30<sup>th</sup> a group of 58 flew West in small parties within 30 minutes. **Chaffinch** had a notable increase in numbers from 8<sup>th</sup> with peaks of 44 on 19<sup>th</sup> and 50 on 29<sup>th</sup>, 100 **Goldfinch** on 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>, ones and twos of **Redpoll** until 60 on 30<sup>th</sup>, a large influx of **Siskin** with peaks of 120 on 6<sup>th</sup>, 110 on 25<sup>th</sup> and 180 on 26<sup>th</sup>. **Brambling** were first seen on 26<sup>th</sup> with two birds and present until month end when 13 were seen on 31<sup>st</sup>.

**November** had much, much less coverage with proper recording only taking place on five days – 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>. The major highlight was a **Radde's Warbler** which turned up in a mist net in the Nordy Wood almost first thing on the 1<sup>st</sup> representing only the 5<sup>th</sup> record for Cape. There seemed to be a bit of an eastern fall into Cotters and The Waist on this day with four **Yellow-browed Warbler**, two **Siberian Chiffchaff**, five **Hawfinch**, ten **Brambling**, seven **Firecrest**, 15 **Chiffchaff**, two **Rook**, 25 **Chaffinch**, 50 **Siskin**, ten **Redwing**, five **Redpoll** and two **Bullfinch**. The 2<sup>nd</sup> was a lot quieter with a single **Yellow-browed Warbler**, two **Firecrest**, six **Blackcap**, three **Brambling**, two **Rook**, 30 each of **Siskin** and **Redpoll**, 15 **Redwing** and the only **Woodcock** of the year, whilst on the sea five **Great Northern Diver** and a **Black-headed Gull** were noteworthy.



*Figure 17 - Radde's Warbler caught and ringed in Nordy Wood (Sam Bayley)*

By 15<sup>th</sup>, notables included a **Siberian Chiffchaff**, three **Chiffchaff**, a **Blackcap**, three **Brambling**, a **Redpoll** and a **Hawfinch**, whilst 17<sup>th</sup> produced a **Teal** and a pair of **Shoveler** on Lough Errul, six **Redwing**, four **Chiffchaff**, a **Blackcap**, 2 **Rook**, 5 **Brambling**, a **Redpoll** and a real surprise seven **Long-tailed Tit**. The only other notable records for the month were two **Teal**, four **Shoveler** and three **Rook** on 23<sup>rd</sup>.

The only records from **December** were of an **Iceland Gull** on 8<sup>th</sup> and six **Rook** on the 9<sup>th</sup>.

## Bird Ringing

Bird ringing took place this year for a full season from 9<sup>th</sup> April to 18<sup>th</sup> November. A record of 65 species were ringed involving 3321 new birds, with the previous record being 54 in 1992 and 1997. Compared to previous years this is the second highest total behind 3499 in 1983 of which 3046 were **Storm Petrel**.

This was predominantly full grown birds, but did also include 96 nestlings of which 57 were **Lesser Black-backed Gull** from a first expedition to the Calf Islands.

The highlights for the year included three new species for the Observatory, a **Common Sandpiper**, a **Lesser Yellowlegs** and a **Radde's Warbler**. The **Lesser Yellowlegs** is only the third to be ringed in Britain and Ireland and the **Radde's Warbler** only the second to be ringed in Ireland.



*Figure 18 - First year Lesser Yellowlegs (Sam Bayley)*



Other notables included second records of **Gannet** and **Spotted Sandpiper**, the latter also only the ninth to be ringed in Britain and Ireland, third **Barred Warbler** and **Hawfinch** , third to ninth **Water Rail** and fourth **Tree Pipit**.



*Figure 19 - Adult female Hawfinch (Sam Bayley)*

Four species had not been ringed for over a decade – **Snipe** (last in 1984), **Wood Warbler** (last in 2003), **Magpie** (last in 2002) and **Common Rosefinch** (last in 2001).



*Figure 20 - Wood Warbler (Sam Bayley)*

16 species had their highest ever totals which included resident species, such as **Rock Pipit**, **Wren**, **Dunnock**, **Song Thrush**, **Blue Tit**, **Jackdaw**, **House Sparrow**, **Greenfinch** and **Goldfinch**. The **Greenfinch** total of 225 was not that far away from tripling the previous total of 84 in 2016! Summer migrant species like **House Martin**, **Grasshopper Warbler**, **Sedge Warbler** and **Reed Warbler** also had record totals, but with the exception of **Sedge Warbler** these were still low numbers. An influx in late October of **Brambling** and **Redpoll** made for good catches of these predominantly winter visitors.



The following is a list of the species ringed during 2017 along with brief notes on notable records:

Species	Full grown	Nestlings	Total	Grand Total	Comments
Fulmar	2	2	4	97	1st nestlings since 1992
Storm Petrel	680		680	13934	Highest total since 1999
Gannet	1		1	2	2nd ever (1 in 1985)
Sparrowhawk	3		3	28	Highest total since 1988
Water Rail	5	2	7	9	3rd to 9th ever (1997/2016)
Lesser Yellowlegs	1		1	1	New species for CCBO, 3rd BTO ringed
Snipe	1		1	18	1st since 1984
Common Sandpiper	1		1	1	New species for CCBO
Spotted Sandpiper	1		1	2	2nd ever (1989), 9th BTO ringed
Lesser Black-backed Gull	2	58	60	879	Highest total since 1993
Herring Gull	16		16	348	Highest total since 1993
Great Black-backed Gull	2		2	353	
Rock Dove	25		25	74	2nd highest total (2016)
Swallow	36	29	65	645	Highest total since 1992
House Martin	8		8	28	Highest ever total
Tree Pipit	1		1	4	4th ever (1961/1982/1996)
Meadow Pipit	47		47	481	Highest total since 2002
Rock Pipit	14		14	83	Highest ever total
Grey Wagtail	7		7	49	Joint highest total (2016)
Pied Wagtail	21		21	320	Highest total since 2001
Wren	133		133	1029	Highest ever total
Dunnoek	91		91	945	Highest ever total
Robin	112	1	113	1652	2nd highest total (2016)
Stonechat	41		41	317	2nd highest total (1959)
Wheatear	1		1	34	
Blackbird	77		77	942	2nd highest total (2016)
Song Thrush	59		59	497	Highest ever total
Redwing	9		9	73	3rd highest total
Grasshopper Warbler	6		6	14	Highest ever total
Sedge Warbler	159		159	460	Highest ever total
Reed Warbler	12		12	140	Highest ever total
Barred Warbler	1		1	3	3rd ever (1971/1997)
Lesser Whitethroat	2		2	21	
Whitethroat	53		53	278	Highest ever total
Garden Warbler	4		4	134	
Blackcap	132		132	731	2nd highest total (2016)
Yellow-browed Warbler	13		13	172	
Wood Warbler	1		1	20	1st since 2003
Chiffchaff	171		171	1901	2nd highest total (1986) inc 2 tristis
Willow Warbler	102		102	1491	2nd highest total (1986) inc 1 acredula
Radde's Warbler	1		1	1	New species for CCBO, 2nd Irish
Goldcrest	388		388	4321	2nd highest total (1989)
Firecrest	13		13	76	2nd highest total (1982)
Spotted Flycatcher	6		6	172	Highest total since 1999
Pied Flycatcher	2		2	217	
Long-tailed Tit	7		7	38	Only 7th year caught
Coal Tit	2		2	227	
Blue Tit	72		72	771	Highest ever total
Great Tit	36		36	394	2nd highest total (2016)
Magpie	0	2	2	29	1st since 2002
Jackdaw	3		3	7	Highest ever total
Hooded Crow	0	2	2	23	
Starling	1		1	53	
House Sparrow	93		93	748	Highest ever total
Chaffinch	29		29	257	3rd highest total
Brambling	5		5	14	Highest ever total
Greenfinch	225		225	962	Over double highest ever total
Goldfinch	122		122	241	Highest ever total
Siskin	77		77	519	3rd highest total
Linnet	16		16	208	
Redpoll	63		63	83	Highest ever total
Bullfinch	2		2	24	
Hawfinch	1		1	3	3rd ever (1988/2005)
Common Rosefinch	1		1	6	2nd year caught (5 in 2001)
Reed Bunting	7		7	58	
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>3225</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>3321</b>	<b>38130</b>	



The first year of the CES at East Bog was very successful and highlighted some of the specialist breeders within this habitat on the island. The 12 sessions from the start of May to the end of August produced a total of 292 individuals of 23 species such as **Snipe**, **Water Rail**, **Reed Bunting**, **Grasshopper Warbler**, **Stonechat**, **Redpoll** and the huge numbers of **Sedge Warbler**. Future years will be able to show how these populations are fairing and the dynamics of adult survival and productivity.

Species	2/5	19/5	28/5	7/6	16/6	28/6	5/7	17/7	1/8	7/8	15/8	26/8	Total Individuals
Water Rail						1				1			2
Snipe									1				1
Swallow			1	2	1							1	5
Meadow Pipit	1												1
Pied Wagtail								1					1
Wren	2		1	2	2	1	7	13	8	4	1	1	32
Dunnock	1	2	1	1		1	1	1			2		8
Robin	2	1			2		1	3	1		2	4	16
Stonechat						9	4	1	6		1	1	22
Blackbird	1	2	2		1	1	1	2				1	11
Song Thrush		1	2									1	3
Grasshopper Warbler					1	2	2		1	1			4
Sedge Warbler	15	13	4	17	10	23	35	30	17	4	4	3	121
Reed Warbler												1	1
Whitethroat	1				1	4	2	7					13
Blackcap								1					1
Willow Warbler	2	2	1	1	2	1	2	3	2	2	1		14
Blue Tit			2		2	3			5				12
Great Tit					4	1		1	2				5
Greenfinch											3		3
Linnet		1	2	1			1						5
Redpoll		2							2				4
Reed Bunting	4	2		1			1	2					7
Session Totals	29	26	16	25	26	47	57	66	45	12	14	12	292

Table 2 – Capture Results of East Bog CES sessions

### Recoveries

There were 14 recoveries this year, four relating to birds ringed on the island and ten having been ringed elsewhere.

**Storm Petrels** – A larger effort was made this year to catch Storm Petrels with a proper setup at the traditional Focarrig location and a few smaller sessions at Trawleagaigh beach. A total of 686 birds

were caught with 680 new (of which one was recovered), four BTO ringed, one French ringed and one Portuguese ringed. The data for the Portuguese ringed bird is still outstanding, but the others give an interesting spread of summer movements:

The oldest was a bird ringed in Wooltack Point, Pembrokeshire, Wales in 2004 and caught just over 13 years later, seems like a good age, but a long way from the longevity record of just over 37 years! Other BTO ringed birds recovered on Cape Clear were one ringed in Hot Point, Cornwall, England in 2015, and two from this year being a bird ringed in Hartland Point, Devon, England and Annagh Head, Mayo. This latter bird was also the quickest going 314km in 16 days. The only Cape Clear recovery was ringed this year on 4<sup>th</sup> July and caught on Skokholm Island, Pembrokeshire, England 34 days later. All of these recoveries were between 294km and 345km away.

The exception was the French bird (and presumably the Portuguese bird) which was ringed on 4<sup>th</sup> August 2016 in Finistere on the north west coast 524km away and caught on 4<sup>th</sup> July this year.

**Kittiwake** – The fairly fresh remains of a bird were found on Trawleagaigh beach on 18<sup>th</sup> August and was bearing a colour ring. The bird had been originally ringed as a nestling at the Trewavas Head breeding colony in Cornwall, England the previous year on 1<sup>st</sup> July. This also represented the first recovery of a bird from this project.



*Figure 21 - Kittiwake Leg Remains (Sam Bayley)*

**Sedge Warbler** – A first year bird caught on 8<sup>th</sup> August 2016 in South Milton Ley, Devon, England and caught here this year on 19<sup>th</sup> May as a breeding bird. It would be quite easy to think this was a fairly locally hatched Devon bird that was dispersing 418km further west after returning from Africa, but the next record was of a Cape Clear juvenile ringed on 21<sup>st</sup> July this year being caught 500km away not too far from the Devon bird at Squire's Down, Dorset, England just 23 days later on 13<sup>th</sup> August. So the first recovery could have been a local bird or easily have been an Irish bird that had migrated west to Devon, before continuing south.

**Willow Warbler** - The last record was a particularly good one as was the first non-BTO recovery of this species for the Obs. A first year bird caught on 30<sup>th</sup> September this year was originally ringed 28 days earlier on 2<sup>nd</sup> September in Birkeland, Rogaland on the southern tip of Norway. This is a distance of 1259km, meaning an average of about 45km a day if it was going in a straight line.

**Goldcrest** – A first year male ringed on 2<sup>nd</sup> November was found freshly dead after seemingly hitting a window at Mahon Point Shopping Centre in Cork just 18 days later on 20<sup>th</sup> November.

**Goldfinch** – A great record of juvenile ringed on Cape Clear on 16<sup>th</sup> July was caught on 30<sup>th</sup> October on Alderney Bird Observatory in the Channel Islands, assumably a display of post-juvenile dispersal or on migration to more favourable wintering grounds. Also great to have a recovery from the newest bird observatory having embarked on their first season this year.

## MAMMALS

A total of just 11 species were recorded on and from the island this year, although no targeted surveying was undertaken. With notables as such:

**Minke Whale** – infrequently seen this year with only a few sightings per month between April and October, with a peak of five on 24<sup>th</sup> July.

**Humpback Whale** – just four records all between 7<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> May and all to the south of the island. Two were seen on 7<sup>th</sup>, an incredible six were seen together off Blannan on 8<sup>th</sup>, with four the following day outside South Harbour, then a single on 12<sup>th</sup> in same area.

**Fin Whale** – a single sighting of one to the south of the island on 5<sup>th</sup> October.

**Common Dolphin** – highest spring count of an amazing sight of up to 1000 moving west on 17<sup>th</sup> April, then low double figures to mid May. June and July saw incredibly few with just two sightings in the prior and four in the latter. August and September saw numbers back to the norm with low double figures throughout and a high of 100 on 1<sup>st</sup> September. Double figures continued into October up until 12<sup>th</sup> and then virtually nothing until 100 seen on 29<sup>th</sup>.



*Figure 22 – Humpback Whale fluke flapping (Paloma Kreischer)*

**Bottle-nosed Dolphin** – just seven records as follows: 15 on 16<sup>th</sup> and four on 24<sup>th</sup> April, one on 13<sup>th</sup>, three on 22<sup>nd</sup>, one on 23<sup>rd</sup> and 40 on 25<sup>th</sup> August, eight on 20<sup>th</sup> September and 135 on 5<sup>th</sup> October.



**Harbour Porpoise** – regular in the bay throughout the year with high counts of 17 on 13<sup>th</sup> and 15 on 14<sup>th</sup> July, probably the same group.

**Grey Seal** – seen mainly in single figures throughout the year but a few high counts were noted with 26 on 25<sup>th</sup> and 25 on 30<sup>th</sup> April, 43 on 24<sup>th</sup> May, 38 on 1<sup>st</sup> July and 22 on 12<sup>th</sup> August.

**Common Seal** – a single record of one on 24<sup>th</sup> April.

Other species recorded were **Rabbit**, **Common Pipistrelle Bat**, **Brown Rat** and **Pygmy Shrew**.

## BUTTERFLIES AND MOTHS

21 species of butterfly were recorded this year. The only sightings of social note being a single **Clouded Yellow** on 30<sup>th</sup> August and single **Holly Blue** on 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> September.

Several moth trapping sessions were undertaken throughout the season but there hasn't been time to analyse the results. Although a few of the highlights are as follows:

A **Lobster Moth** was trapped on 4<sup>th</sup> July representing the first record of this relatively common mainland species for the island.

On 26<sup>th</sup> June a **Forester** was seen briefly near Fimbrega.

A splendid series of trapping at Mara Farm from 27<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> August saw a **Death's Head Hawk-moth** caught on the first night (new species for the island) and the following two night with single **Convolvulus Hawk-moth**. An additional **Convolvulus Hawk-moth** came to a head torch pre-dawn on 26<sup>th</sup> at East Bog.



Figure 23 - Death's Head Hawk-moth (Sam Bayley)

Whilst walking the Red Route up to Bullig on 29<sup>th</sup> October, a small moth was flushed from the ground and once caught was found to be a **Crimson Speckled**, only the fourteenth record for Ireland.



*Figure 24 - Crimson Speckled (Sam Bayley)*

## DRAGONFLIES

Nine species of dragonfly were recorded this year including one new species for Cape Clear – **Vagrant Emperor**, bringing the island tally to 16 species. The **Vagrant Emperor** was found on on Cotters Hill on 17<sup>th</sup> October.



*Figure 25 - Vagrant Hawker (Kerri Gorentz)*



## FISH

The 15 species of fish recorded this year were as follows:

**Basking Shark** – after the large numbers of 2016, this year was a real disappointment with just two records being two seen on 10<sup>th</sup> and one on 12<sup>th</sup> May.

A single **Oceanic Sunfish** was seen in Cape Clear waters on 10<sup>th</sup> August.

The day after Storm Ophelia (17<sup>th</sup> October) a large array of fish were found dead on the beach at South Harbour and the species present included **Conger Eel**, **Ling**, **Pouting**, **Ballan Wrasse**, **Monkfish**, **Cuckoo Wrasse**, **Pollock**, **Tadpole Fish** and **Mackerel**.

A single **Bluefin Tuna** was seen chasing a school of mackerel out of the water on a pelagic boat trip on 12<sup>th</sup> August.

The other species were **Grey Mullet** and **Common Dogfish**.

## OTHER TAXA

**Leatherback Turtle** – There were no sightings this year with the exception of a half corpse that was found on the beach in South Harbour on 21<sup>st</sup> October.

**Common Lizard** – Seen throughout the summer with the earliest sighting being 12<sup>th</sup> April and the last 29<sup>th</sup> October with the highest count being 37 on 29<sup>th</sup> August.

**Common Frog** – Possible the most exceptional sighting of the year, was a single individual found in a field between East and Central Bog on 10<sup>th</sup> August. This was a second year and represents the first record of this species or even any amphibian on the island. Where from and how it came to Cape Clear will probably remain a mystery, but although it can't be ruled out that someone brought it to the island, there is also the slim possibility that it came here as spawn on the foot of a bird, which is a regular occurrence for fish. Having found one it would be very surprising if more weren't present, but only time will tell as to whether this becomes a resident species.



Figure 26 - Common Frog (Sam Bayley)



**Portuguese Man-o-war** – 2017 was another good year for this species in Cape Clear waters and many were found washed up on the beaches. The first was seen exceptionally early in South Harbour on 21<sup>st</sup> July, whilst all other records were between 30<sup>th</sup> September and 19<sup>th</sup> October. A small influx from 30<sup>th</sup> September to 3<sup>rd</sup> October with counts of nine, 18, ten and four respectively was followed by a larger influx from 11<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> October starting with 14 on the first day to a peak of 99 on the last.



*Figure 27 - Cape Clear Island on a winter evening sunset (Sam Bayley)*

## Acknowledgements

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