



BirdWatch Ireland Cape Clear Bird Observatory

Annual Report 2016



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; bcaffrey@birdwatchireland.ie; Phone: 353 (0)1 2819878

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Introduction

This is the 25th Annual Report for BirdWatch Ireland's Cape Clear Bird Observatory for 2016. Founded in 1959, the Bird 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.

After a number of years without a BirdWatch Ireland member of staff present in the Bird Observatory, a Cape Clear Wildlife Officer was employed in 2016. Sam Bayley, took up this new part time seasonal position in May 2016.

This is a brief report to update on the survey and monitoring work undertaken during the season and to document the birds and other wildlife recorded on the island during the year.

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 69 hours of seawatching were conducted over 34 days from 18th June to 18th October, although mainly from mid-July to mid-September. Watches were mainly done from Blannan, but also from Bullig, Bill of Clear and O'Drisceoll's Castle. Most watches were conducted by the Cape Clear Wildlife Officer, but also assisted by various other BirdWatch Ireland staff and volunteers, including Dick Coombes, Larry Donnelly and Eamonn O'Donnell.

Breeding Seabird Assessment

During late June, an assessment was completed of the breeding seabirds on the eastern part of the island (not enough time to do the west as well). Most of the survey work was completed as a land based assessment, with difficult to access areas surveyed from a boat.

The timing of this survey may have missed several breeding pairs of certain species such as **Shag** and auks, which may well have already completed breeding at nesting colonies. For example, no **Guillemot** or **Razorbill** were recorded, although birds were present. Also, accurate counting of the **Fulmar** colonies was very difficult due to the inaccessible nature and restricted views of the colony. The totals recorded were as follows:

- **Shag** – 59 pairs
- **Fulmar** – 382 pairs
- **Herring Gull** – 28 pairs
- **Great Black-backed Gull** – 14 pairs
- **Lesser Black-backed Gull** – 15 pairs
- **Black Guillemot** – 6 pairs
- **Chough** – 2 pairs



Figure 1: Map of Cape Clear breeding seabird colonies.

Bird Ringing

As there was little ringing done on the islands for at least three years, considerable work was required to reinstate the three main ringing sites – East Bog, Post Office and Cotter’s Garden/Nordy Wood. Initial work on Cotter’s Garden/Nordy Wood created net rides where cutting of vegetation and trees wasn’t required (which was restricted with the start of the nesting season). Ringing was therefore restricted to this one site until September. Following this, work was undertaken on the two other sites and additional rides were also added to Cotter’s Garden/Nordy Wood. Even though the three sites were operational by the end of the season, the Post Office was only operated four times and East Bog just the once during the year.

In addition to these, a couple of extra targeted sites were created as follows:

- Trawleagaigh beach for catching Storm Petrels and Manx Shearwaters
- Observatory garden to catch birds coming to the feeders
- Mary Cadogan’s garden whoosh net was installed for catching gulls



Figure 2: A whoosh net for catching gulls in Mary Cadogan's garden.

Several ringers were encouraged to come to Cape Clear to assist with operations and stay in the observatory to gain new experience or to be assessed for upgrade. This included one from Australia, one from The Netherlands, four from England, one from Wales and 12 from Ireland. The Wildlife Officer signed up two trainees, Ian McDermott and Alan McCarthy, both from Cork, and has assessed another ringer for an upgrade to an 'A' permit.

Moth Trapping

A Robinson moth trap was used in the yard at the back of the Observatory on 47 nights from 30th May to 27th October with numbers and species recorded. In addition, Eamonn and Michael O'Donnell did several sessions on other parts of the island during June and October.

Habitat Management

In addition to the habitat management works completed to create rides for the ringing sites, additional management work was undertaken in November in the Nurdy Wood and Cotter's Garden to reduce the height of the willow canopy. Due to lack of management over the years, the willow had grown out of control, so this work will improve visibility of the site for birdwatchers as well as productivity of nets for ringing.

Throughout the year, beach cleans were undertaken on Inner Beg, South Harbour and Trawleagaigh beaches. An agreement with the island Co-op facilitated free recycling of all waste collected. In total, about 25 sacks of recycling were cleared off these beaches during the year.

Wildlife Report 2016

There was not enough time to computerise any of the data or to undertake analysis or a full report, but the following is a basic run down of the events of the year.

BIRDS

In total, 160 species were recorded on Cape Clear this year including four species seen prior and one after the Wildlife Officer was on the island and not seen during the rest of the year. Coverage before 24th May (when the Cape Clear Wildlife Officer started) was poor and thus not representative of a normal year. This report mainly relates to the period from 24th May onwards, but for completeness will be done as a chronological report.

Only notable records in January were a **Redshank** in North Harbour on 4th, a pair of **Mute Swan** in North Harbour on 5th and a **Turnstone** also in North Harbour on 26th. Only records in the following two months were of winter visiting **Rook** with two on 1st and one on 5th February and two on 14th March.

April saw a few more records with a **Hoopoe** present a few days either side of 15th an arrival of up to 4 **Collared Dove** from 23rd and a single **Redpoll** on 24th and a **Tree Sparrow** in Mary Cadogan's garden from 26th to 2nd May.

May continued with the pair of **Collared Dove** seen through the month. A **Cuckoo** was seen and heard on a few occasions early in the month (no dates), a **Spotted Flycatcher** was noted on 7th and then on 8th 20+ **Spotted Flycatcher**, a **Black Redstart** and a **Garden Warbler** were present. Nearer to the end of the month a **Grasshopper Warbler** was seen near the top of the Old Lighthouse Road.

Spring migration was still evident in June with a **Common Tern** on 6th, **Reed Warbler** on 7th, **Grey Wagtail** on 8th, **Blackcap** and **Spotted Flycatcher** on 9th, **Reed Warbler** and **Merlin** on 10th, **White Wagtail** on 11th, a **Chaffinch** on 12th, a presumed passage **Sparrowhawk** on 16th and 2 **Yellow Wagtail** on 22nd. Whilst on the sea, June saw the first skuas with single **Arctic** on 6th and 8th, **Great** on 10th (4) and 11th (1) and a **Pomarine** on 10th. Single **Sooty Shearwater** was seen on 9th and 11th, a high count of 50 **Common Scoter** on 10th and small numbers of **Puffin** were seen offshore on 8th to 11th.

By July confirmation of the successful breeding species on the island could be assessed. Although not thoroughly surveyed, it is thought that 49 species successfully bred, with highlights being **Water Rail** in West Bog, two pairs of **Little Grebe**, at least 3 pairs of **Skylark**, good numbers of **Stonechat** and **Sedge Warbler**, only one pair of **Wheatear**, a pair of **Blackcap**, a few pairs of **Whitethroat**, at least three pairs of **Chiffchaff** and one pair of **Bullfinch** having two broods. This month also saw the first signs of wader migration with single **Curlew** on 7th, two **Common Sandpiper** on 25th and a **Green Sandpiper** on 30th. A pelagic boat trip returning to Cape Clear on 17th produced a juvenile **Common Tern** and the only **Wilson's Storm Petrel** of the year in Cape Clear waters during very foggy conditions. A juvenile **Kingfisher** in North Harbour and a **Moorhen** in East Bog on 25th and single juvenile **Black-headed Gull** were in North Harbour on 28th and 30th. These were firsts of these species for the year. A **Swift** heading south on 18th was thought to be a migrant as well as being the only sighting of the month and the last of the year.



Figure 3: Bullfinch

August saw a great number of notable species especially on the sea. Fog was the theme for the first couple of weeks, starting on 1st with an amazing 500 **Manx Shearwater** and 200 **Storm Petrel** counted from the ferry between North Harbour and Gascanane Sound. **Manx Shearwater** passage was at its peak during this month building to 22,322 in 2hrs on 18th and 23,520 in 2hrs on 19th. The first **Great** and **Cory's Shearwater** were seen on 6th, seven and 15 respectively, with similar numbers seen most days through the month along with **Sooty Shearwater**. A **Balearic Shearwater** was seen on 16th and then the latter part of the month increased somewhat with 21st producing 20 **Great**, 11 **Cory's** and 124 **Sooty**, but were all usurped at 10.15 when a **Fea's-type Petrel** flew past. If that wasn't enough coastal species continued with notable gulls including six juvenile **Mediterranean Gull** on 17th, a **Sabine's Gull** on 29th, a **Yellow-legged Gull** on 30th and 31st and the first **Common Gull** on 31st. Skuas on the other hand were few and far between but single **Pomarine Skua** were seen on 12th, 16th and 17th. Half the **Sandwich Tern** records for the year came this month with ten on 12th, three on 15th and nine on 31st. Ten species of wader were seen this month, apart from the always present **Oystercatcher**, all were in single figures. This included **Curlew** (three sightings), **Whimbrel** (two sightings), **Redshank** (one sighting), **Green Sandpiper** (two sightings) and **Turnstone** (one sighting). **Common Sandpiper** were the most numerous seen on six occasions with eight together in South Harbour on 25th, but three others were the highlight with three **Grey Phalarope** past Bullig on 21st, a **Wood Sandpiper** over the Observatory on 6th (1st since 1980s) and a **Spotted Sandpiper** on 31st. The **Spotted Sandpiper** was the only Transatlantic migrant to be seen on the island this year and out of coincidence there was another seen on the same day on Skellig Michael.

On the land, August saw the first migrant warblers passing through with **Garden Warbler** seen on seven dates from 13th, **Blackcap** on four dates from 18th, and single **Lesser Whitethroat** and **Reed Warbler** on 28th and 29th, respectively. Both **Spotted** and **Pied Flycatcher** were seen on 17th with the latter also seen on 28th and 29th and the starts of hirundine migration including a single **Sand Martin** on 23rd. A single **Redpoll** was seen on 14th, single **Tree Pipit** on 25th and 26th, **Chaffinch** were seen on 25th, 27th and 28th, single **Crossbill** and **Long-eared Owl** were seen on 26th and the first **White Wagtail** on 28th. Two further sightings of **Kingfisher** came on 16th and 27th, three very early **Rook** were seen on 18th and the largest count of 17 **Chough** together on 27th probably included birds from neighbouring populations. The 6th saw a sudden arrival of first year **Sparrowhawk** and **Kestrel**

with up to three of each seen on most days after for which there were no records previously in the year.



Figure 4: Pied Flycatcher

September started with one of the most notable sea bird passages on the 3rd for over 30 years. The following is a write-up of the events of the day by Cape Clear Wildlife Officer, Sam Bayley:

Saturday 3rd September seemed no different from any of the previous few days. A small amount of rain during the morning and a light SW wind. I was doing jobs in the Observatory most of the day having done a quick beat around the Waist which didn't turn up anything unusual.

*At about 3.30pm Geoff Oliver came to the door saying Killian Mullarney was in the island and he had been doing a sea watch from Bullig point and had seen a couple of thousand **Great Shearwater!** These South Atlantic breeders do a migration past the west coast of Ireland in the Autumn. Geoff was about to leave on the 4pm ferry but graciously offered me a lift to East Bog to save me half the walk to get to the best seawatching location on the island - Blannan point. I quickly grabbed binoculars, scope and jacket and jumped into his car with anticipation and a frustrated Geoff who wanted to join me but couldn't. As I started to walk out it was obvious the SW wind was stronger than it had felt in the sheltered north harbour and waist and the sun was now coming out. I reached the watch point known as the Slab and as I sat down I did a quick scan with my bins far out and I could see a lot of large shearwaters so quickly set up my scope. I hadn't even looked close in and as I lifted the scope the sea seemed like a shearwater soup! My eyes couldn't keep up with the passage of large shears. Then almost immediately I had a smaller and paler bird come into view. Following it I realised it was a **Fea's-type Petrel!** Awesome! It was so close I could make out all the head pattern and the few flaps that it made*

showed its brilliant contrast between white body and black wings. In my haste to leave the Observatory I had forgotten my camera and had missed a golden opportunity. I followed it until it passed the point only by about 50 yards! Amazing, just a shame I couldn't share with anyone. No phone or Wi-fi signal here! After the short view I had of one here a few weeks ago it was fantastic to get a second chance and at even closer range. Could this have been the same one seen past Galley Head earlier in the day?

So, I then turned back to the shearwaters. They were passing in such a wide front and in such numbers it was just impossible to get a proper count. I was also wondering what else might turn up..... The sheer quantity of **Great and Cory's Shearwater** couldn't even be classed as groups as it was just a constant stream muddled in with **Manx Shearwater, Fulmar, Gannet, Kittiwake** and at least 50 **Common Dolphin**. An hour later and I really had to drag myself away from a spectacle that I may never see again.



Figure 5: Cory's Shearwater

My estimated totals for 16.30 - 17.30, although very conservative, were as follows:

Manx Shearwater - 6400
Fulmar - 140
Gannet - 320
Storm Petrel - 12
Sooty Shearwater - 160
Great Skua - 12
Cory's Shearwater - 3000+
Great Shearwater - 3000+
Fea's-type Petrel - 1

Walking back, I bumped into Killian and his family and told him of what I had seen. He said he hadn't seen passage like that since the late 1970s/80s. Killian's notes for his watch between 10.10 and 14.30 were as follows:

2245 **Great Shearwater**

725 **Cory's Shearwater**

c300 *Sooty Shearwater*

8 *Great Skua*

18 *Storm Petrel*

2 *Common Scoter*

Great Shearwater were passing from the very start, but seemed to increase, and come closer in from around 11.30/12.00. The *Cory's Shearwater* passage was slow at the beginning but began to increase dramatically just before I had to leave (from around 13.45, I guess). When I looked out to sea from the yurt at South Harbour around 16.00, I counted *Cory's Shearwater* passing at around 50 per minute, for several minutes...

This was just a one day event too as the following day counts for *Great* and *Cory's Shearwater* were just five of each.

Highlights of seawatching for the rest of the month produced two *Sandwich Terns* on 6th and 8th, the first *Red-throated Diver*, a *Little Auk* and a *Common Tern* on 7th, three *Arctic Tern*, a high of 11300 *Manx Shearwater*, six *Puffin* and a high of 1080 *auk sp.* on 11th.

Ten species of wader were again seen this month including *Oystercatcher*, *Common Snipe* (two sightings), *Whimbrel* (1 sighting), *Curlew* (three sightings), *Redshank* (one sighting), *Turnstone* (three sightings including seven on 20th). More notables though were two *Bar-tailed Godwit* over Observatory on 7th, a *Golden Plover* on Wheatear Fields on 11th and 12th, a *Ringed Plover* on 14th and a *Grey Phalarope* on 22nd. A couple of notable waterbirds were a *Kingfisher* on 6th, a *Moorhen* in East Bog on 6th, 13th and 14th and the first *Teal* on 23rd.



Figure 6: Golden Plover

Passage of commoner land migrants saw high counts of 130 and 120 *Swallows* on 5th and 13th respectively, *Meadow Pipit* peak of 100 on 14th, 10 *Wheatear* on 15th and a steady flow of *Grey Wagtails* throughout with a peak of ten on 23rd and 24th. Whilst scarcer migrants included a *Buzzard* on 12th, *Reed Warblers* on 13th, 14th and 24th, good counts of *White Wagtails* with 15 on 15th and 18 on 23rd, a *Rook* on 24th, a *Spotted Flycatcher* from 24th into the next month.

The first autumn island rarities came in the form of an immature/female **Marsh Harrier** on 4th and a male **Nightjar** at dawn around Waist on 13th. The 13th also saw the first eastern vagrants with a Lapland Bunting at the Old Lighthouse, followed by a juvenile **Rose-coloured Starling** around Central Bog on 15th and 16th and a juvenile **Common Rosefinch** in garden next to campsite on 23rd.



Figure 7: Rose-coloured Starling

October was completely dominated by continued easterly winds like never seen before and produced a wealth of species throughout the month. A **Yellow-browed Warbler** found on 2nd was the first of a major invasion of this species to the island with hugely conservative peaks of 32 on 8th, 30 on 13th and 25 on 15th continuing to the month's end. This was an unprecedented year for this Siberian species and was seen right across Europe, but Cape Clear was the pinnacle for this species in Ireland.

For ease of viewing the major highlight species are accounted individually below:

- A **Tree Pipit** was at Lighthouse Road on 7th and then relocated to the Old Post Office until 17th



Figure 8: Tree Pipit

- A second **Lapland Bunting** found on 1st which stayed until 7th
- An incredibly late **Nightjar** was seen at dawn in front on Cotter's Bar on 7th

- A **Firecrest** was seen at the Youth Hostel on 8th and probably same seen at Cotter's Garden on 11th, then another in Michael Vincent's Garden from 23rd to 29th
- A **Yellow Wagtail** south on 8th
- A **Red-breasted Flycatcher** at Youth Hostel briefly on 9th, a second at Michael Vincent's Garden on 15th and 16th and then a third at Secret Valley from 31st until 3rd November
- Two **Little Bunting** were found near the B&B up the Lighthouse Road on 9th, staying until 16th, a third bird was found in the horse field behind Michael Vincent's on 15th to be joined by a fourth for the next two days. A fifth was then found above the Secret Valley on 31st until 2nd November
- **Coal Tit** were seen on six dates with two on 9th and 12th and one on 13th and 24th to 26th



Figure 9: Coal Tits

- Three **Twite** flew east over the Lighthouse Road on 10th just after first light
- A **Wryneck** seen on Lighthouse Road on 10th was later seen near Nordy Wood on 13th
- **Siberian Chiffchaff** were noted from 11th with up to two until three on 30th and six on 31st
- A **Woodlark** was seen flying over the pines behind Lough Erril on 13th
- A **Wood Warbler** was seen near the Old Post Office on 13th
- A **Greenish Warbler** in Michael Vincent's Garden on 14th
- A **Western Bonelli's Warbler** was found in a small patch of willows in Comillane Bog on 15th and stayed until 18th
- A **Gadwall** was flushed from Central Bog on 18th
- **Barred Warbler** was found along the low road on 19th and refound briefly at Nordy Wood on 23rd
- Seven **Long-tailed Tit** arrived in at the west end at Olly Gully and stayed around into the next month
- A **Hume's Leaf Warbler** was seen by one lucky observer on 23rd (2nd CCBO record, 3rd Irish record)
- A **Radde's Warbler** was found at Mara Farm on 29th and stayed until 1st November

Along with all these there were several notable records of scarcer species. Wildfowl were represented by a fly by **Barnacle Goose** on 19th and an interesting species array on Lough Erril from 6th when a

Shoveler, a **Wigeon**, two **Pintail** and seven **Teal** were seen. The **Teal** fluctuated in number throughout the month with a peak of 11 on 8th, only one **Pintail** stayed to 14th, the **Wigeon** until 8th and the **Shoveler** was just a one day visitor. Waders on the other hand were far fewer with just five species seen – ever present **Oystercatcher**, regular counts of **Common Snipe** with a high of eight on 6th, a **Green Sandpiper** on 8th a **Grey Phalarope** on 11th and an early **Woodcock** on 23rd. Out on the sea, a **Great Northern Diver** was seen on 1st, five **Pomarine Skua** were seen on 3rd, a **Mediterranean Gull** on 10th and a **Sandwich Tern** on 17th.

Birds of prey included one or two **Merlin** all month, a **Long-eared Owl** on 1st and 12th, single **Short-eared Owl** on 6th, 7th, 10th and 12th and four on 13th, a **Hen Harrier** on 7th and 8th and **Buzzard** seen on six dates including a huge count of 14 flying East on 8th. Corvid sightings were highlighted by up to seven **Rook** seen throughout the month and the largest count of **Raven** were 18 on 15th including 14 flying North together.



Figure 10: Short-eared Owl

Hirundines were very scarce through the month barely reaching double figures with the last **Swallow** on 23rd, last **House Martin** on 25th and a single sighting of **Sand Martin** on 21st. **Skylark** migration peaked with 22 on 19th, **Meadow Pipit** peaks were 150 on 10th, 350 on 19th and 200 on 20th and **White Wagtail** were recorded during first half of the month with a peak of six on 12th. **Grey Wagtail** had an amazing month with passage seen daily with a huge movement of at least 35 on 8th. The 8th also had the highest count of 60 **Stonechat**, the first **Black Redstart** (with up to seven on 31st) and the first **Ring Ouzel** (up to six until 24th). Up to three **Spotted Flycatcher** were seen to 17th, a **Whinchat** was seen from 4th, two **Pied Flycatcher** and two **Redstart** were seen from 5th and 7th respectively and both species stayed to 16th.

Scarce warblers were represented by up to 2 **Reed Warbler** to 18th, up to two **Garden Warbler** from 7th to 20th, up to three **Lesser Whitethroat** from 8th to 21st and a **Grasshopper Warbler** on 10th. Commoner species had month peak totals as such – ten **Willow Warbler** on 7th, 200 **Chiffchaff** on 9th, 40 **Blackcap** on 13th and 80 **Goldcrest** on 20th.

Winter thrushes were well represented with the first **Redwing** on 5th and peaks of 200 on 20th and 420 flying East on 24th, first **Fieldfare** on 11th with peak of 25 on 24th and **Mistle Thrush** seen on just

two occasions two on 12th and one on 15th. Finch numbers fluctuated throughout with peaks of up to 250 **Goldfinch** on 8th, six **Redpoll** on 13th, 17 **Greenfinch** on 19th, 30 **Siskin** on 20th and 50 **Chaffinch** on 30th and 31st. Single **Brambling** were seen on 16th and 29th and **Crossbill** were seen on five dates; three on 7th, four on 8th, one on 9th and 19th and five on 13th.

November had far less coverage, but species persisted such as the **Red-breasted Flycatcher**, **Little Bunting** and **Radde's Warbler**. **Siberian Chiffchaff** continued with at least four to 10th, the seven **Long-tailed Tit** were still present throughout, but had reduced to five by 3rd, four **Coal Tit** were seen on 2nd and **Yellow-browed Warbler** saw three on 1st, two on 2nd and 3rd and then presumably the same single bird to 13th.

Five **Teal**, two **Purple Sandpiper**, a **Jack Snipe**, eight **Snipe**, eight **Skylark**, two **Black Redstart**, a **Ring Ouzel** and a **White Wagtail** were all seen on 1st, along with a single **Woodcock** which was also seen on 10th and two on 13th, a **Mistle Thrush** and a **Merlin** on 2nd and 3rd, a very late **Willow Warbler** on 3rd and eight **Brambling** on 13th.

Other significant counts were a peak of 50 **Fieldfare** and 200 **Redwing** on 1st, a single **Siskin** on 9th and the continued presence of **Chiffchaff** (40 on 2nd down to ten on 13th), **Blackcap** (13 on 3rd down to three on 13th) and **Goldcrest** (35 on 3rd down to 15 on 13th).

The highlight of the year though came on 15th when a female **Harlequin Duck** was seen alongside the ferry as it was heading to Cape as it was just passing Sherkin Island. This bird was unfortunately only seen by one observer and although a boat went straight back out onto the water again it could not be refound. If accepted this would be the first Irish record of this species.

The only record of note during December was of a **Hawfinch** which turned up in Mary Cadogan's garden on 6th and stayed until 11th, making the most of the bird feeders.

Bird Ringing

Although bird ringing had only taken place for six months compared to the normal eight and limited to the extent of mainly just a single site, 1,706 new birds were ringed from 52 species caught.

This was predominantly full grown birds, but did also include 14 nestlings. Compared to previous years this is the highest total since 1999 and excluding **Storm Petrel** the highest ever by over 300 birds and joint 4th for number of species ringed.

The highlights for the year included a new species for the Observatory, **Rock Dove** - with only two others having been ringed in the county before. This species has long been a resident on Cape Clear and in a particular effort to capture this species 49 were ringed.

Other notables included 2nd records of **Water Rail** and **Fieldfare**, 2nd and 3rd **Little Bunting**, 3rd and 4th **Jackdaw** and 4th **Western Bonelli's Warbler**. There were also seven species that haven't been ringed for over a decade - **Fulmar**, **Manx Shearwater**, **Sparrowhawk**, **Great Black-backed Gull**, **Black Redstart**, **Wheatear** and **Hooded Crow**.

A good number of species had their highest ever totals which included some resident species, such as **Wren**, **Dunnock**, **Robin**, **Blackbird**, **Song Thrush**, **Blue Tit**, **Great Tit**, **House Sparrow**, **Greenfinch** and **Goldfinch**. Interestingly, **Great Tit** saw only eight birds ringed during the summer months, but 54 were ringed in October, which was thought to be an influx from the mainland.

This wasn't restricted to residents though as several migrant species also had record totals such as **Grey Wagtail**, **Redwing**, **Blackcap** (by over three times), **Yellow-browed Warbler** (by nearly three times) and **Chiffchaff** (including three **Siberian Chiffchaff**).

The **Yellow-browed Warbler** total of 62 was absolutely outstanding as previously only 97 had ever been ringed, with a high of 24 in 1985.

The following is a list of the species ringed during 2016 along with brief notes on notable records:

	Full grown	Nestlings	Total	Grand Total (1959-2016)	Notes
Fulmar	1	0	1	93	1st since 1999
Manx Shearwater	2	0	2	94	1st since 2001
Storm Petrel	83	0	83	13254	1st since 2006
Sparrowhawk	2	0	2	25	1st since 2005
Water Rail	1	0	1	2	2nd ever (1 in 1997)
Herring Gull	5	0	5	332	highest total since 1993
Great Black-backed Gull	2	0	2	351	1st since 1995
Rock Dove	49	0	49	49	new species for CCBO
Swallow	7	11	18	580	
Meadow Pipit	16	0	16	434	1st since 2009
Rock Pipit	3	0	3	69	
Grey Wagtail	7	0	7	42	highest ever total
Pied/White Wagtail	8	0	8	299	
Wren	86	0	86	896	highest ever total
Dunnock	71	0	71	854	highest ever total
Robin	119	2	121	1540	highest ever total
Black Redstart	1	0	1	17	1st since 2005
Redstart	1	0	1	21	
Stonechat	11	0	11	276	highest total since 1992
Wheatear	1	0	1	33	1st since 1998
Blackbird	87	0	87	870	highest ever total
Fieldfare	2	0	2	3	2nd ever (1 in 2008)
Song Thrush	57	0	57	438	highest ever total
Redwing	24	0	24	64	highest ever total
Sedge Warbler	14	0	14	301	
Reed Warbler	5	0	5	128	
Lesser Whitethroat	3	0	3	19	1st since 2007
Whitethroat	16	0	16	225	highest total since 2002
Garden Warbler	4	0	4	130	highest total since 2002
Blackcap	135	0	135	600	highest ever total
Yellow-browed Warbler	62	0	62	159	highest ever total
Western Bonelli's Warb	1	0	1	4	4th ever (1961/1970/2005)
Chiffchaff	196	0	196	1734	highest ever total
Willow Warbler	51	0	51	1389	
Goldcrest	174	0	174	3937	
Firecrest	1	0	1	63	
Spotted Flycatcher	3	0	3	166	
Pied Flycatcher	2	0	2	215	
Long-tailed Tit	7	0	7	31	1st since 2008
Coal Tit	5	0	5	225	
Blue Tit	52	0	52	700	highest ever total
Great Tit	67	0	67	359	highest ever total
Jackdaw	1	1	2	4	1st since 1997
Hooded Crow	1	0	1	21	1st since 1988
House Sparrow	80	0	80	655	highest ever total
Chaffinch	31	0	31	228	2nd highest total
Greenfinch	84	0	84	738	highest ever total
Goldfinch	44	0	44	123	highest ever total
Bullfinch	3	0	3	22	1st since 2009
Little Bunting	2	0	2	3	2nd + 3rd ever (1 in 1999)
Reed Bunting	2	0	2	51	
Total:	1692	14	1706	34809	

Recoveries

There were seven recoveries this year, with all but one relating to birds caught on the island having been ringed elsewhere, as follows:

A first-year female **Kestrel** caught on 25th October was originally ringed as a nestling near Cleggan, County Galway on 22nd June this year. This is a great record of a dispersing juvenile bird and is only the third **Kestrel** ever to be caught on Cape Clear. The previous two were both caught in 1960.

An adult male **Blackbird** caught on 7th October had originally been ringed at Kroonspolder, Vlieland in The Netherlands 357 days prior on 16th October 2015, having travelled just over 1000km WSW.

On 7th and 8th June, two **Sedge Warbler** were caught in the Waist, having both been ringed as first year birds the prior August less than 40km apart on the French west coast. There have been six previous **Sedge Warbler** recoveries to the west coast of France and all have been caught there between 6th and 21st August showing a clear autumn migration route for this species.

A first year **Reed Warbler** caught in East Bog on 14th September had originally been ringed at a similar location to the **Sedge Warblers** above on the French west coast just 16 days earlier. This is a north-westerly movement of 688km of a bird which should be moving south-westerly.

A first-year **Lesser Whitethroat** controlled on 12th October was originally ringed 700km away at Flamborough Head on the NE England coast just four days before. This bird was still present on 19th October not surprisingly refuelling for continued migration. This species migrates differently to the rest of our warblers in that they migrate down the East coast of Africa instead of the West coast and this individual is a fantastic example of reverse migration as this bird has strongly moved West instead of East. This is the first recovery for this species.



Figure 11: Lesser Whitethroat

The only recovery of a Cape Clear ringed bird was also one of the most notable records. A juvenile **House Sparrow** that was ringed on 10th August was found dead on Sherkin Island on 15th September. Although this is a movement of just 8-km it is the only record of a **House Sparrow** leaving Cape Clear and gives a small indication of where they disperse to.

MAMMALS

A total of 16 species of mammal were recorded on and from the island in 2016. With notables as such:

- **Minke Whale** – up to five seen regularly from May to the end of August
- **Humpback Whale** – up to four on five dates in June and a single on 15th August
- **Fin Whale** – one on 4th June and five sightings in August of up to five between 13th and 29th
- **Common Dolphin** – highest spring count of 40 on 30th May, then single figures during June and July. August built up to a pod of 200 on 25th, which then seemed to break up into smaller groups seen most days through early September. Then quiet until third week of October when 40 were seen between 18th and 20th
- **Bottle-nosed Dolphin** – just seven records as follows: - three on 8th June, one on 26th July, five on 16th August, 18 on 8th, eight on 29th and 15 on 30th September and one on 16th October
- **Risso's Dolphin** – just two records of two on 18th and one on 26th August
- **Harbour Porpoise** – regular in the bay throughout the year with high counts of 17 on 13th and 15 on 14th July
- **Grey Seal** – seen throughout the year but never higher than single figures
- **Common Seal** – just three records of singles seen on 11th and 30th June and 26th August
- Bats – **Common Pipistrelle**, **Soprano Pipistrelle** and **Leisler's** were the only confirmed species all recorded on the Bioblitz in early June

Other species recorded were **Wood Mouse**, **Brown Rat** and **Pygmy Shrew**.

BUTTERFLIES AND MOTHS

20 species of butterfly were recorded this year.

Several moth trapping sessions were undertaken throughout the season but there hasn't been time to analyse the results.

DRAGONFLIES

Ten species of dragonfly were recorded including three new species for Cape Clear – **Keeled Skimmer**, **Beautiful Demoiselle** and **Southern Hawker**. The latter is only the second record for Ireland. The other species were **Emperor Dragonfly**, **Hairy Hawker**, **Common Darter**, **Migrant Hawker**, **Moorland Hawker**, **Blue-tailed Damselfly** and **Variable Damselfly**.

FISH

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

Basking Shark were seen in fantastic numbers during late May and June all around Roaring Water Bay with estimates of over 1,000 present during the spring. On Cape Clear the largest count was of nine in South Harbour on 1st June.

A single **Blue Shark** was seen in Cape Clear waters on 14th July.

A single **Oceanic Sunfish** was seen in Cape Clear waters on 14th July.

An Eel was found in a ditch on the Lighthouse Road when it was being dug out by a digger on 11th October.

OTHER TAXA

Leatherback Turtle – there were three sightings all in August, being three on 15th and singles on 25th and 30th.

Common Lizard – Seen throughout the summer with the earliest sighting being 8th June and the last 13th October with the highest count being 20 on 22nd August.

Portuguese Man-o-war – An unprecedented influx of these amazing oceanic organisms were seen in Irish waters this autumn with the largest counts coming from Cape Clear. The first one was seen on 16th September and a series of harsh south westerly storms at the end of the month produced wrecks in South Harbour of 68 on 24th and 98 on 27th. October increased again with 121 on 5th, then a change to easterlies on 8th produced 147 on Coosadouglas slip the following day and a southerly on 15th saw 150 in South Harbour again. Very quickly numbers dissipated with the last sign being 18 in South Harbour on 17th. In total, probably near enough 1,000 individuals washed up on Cape Clear beaches over just 31 days.



Figure 12: Portuguese Man-o-war

Photo credits – Yellow-browed Warblers (Sam Bayley), whoosh net (Sam Bayley), Bullfinch (Sam Bayley), Pied Flycatcher (Sam Bayley), Cory's Shearwaters (Killian Mullarney), Golden Plover (Dick Coombes), Rose-coloured Starling (Dick Coombes), Tree Pipit (Mark Stewart), Coal Tits (Sam Bayley), Short-eared Owl (Victorrio Caschera), Lesser Whitethroat (Sam Bayley), Portuguese Man-o-war (Sam Bayley)