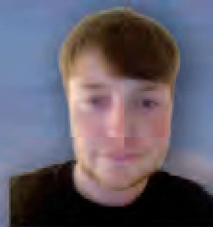


Site Guide

by **Cian Cardiff**



Cahore Marsh, Co Wexford

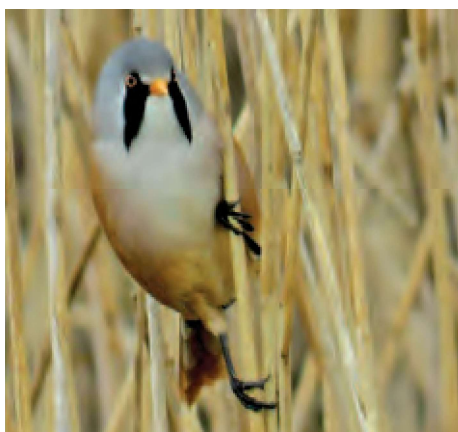
South end of Cahore Marsh in July 2018, when the water levels were very low. **Photo:** C  il  n MacLochlainn

Cian Cardiff takes us on a guided tour of one of Wexford's lesser known birding hotspots.

Cahore Marsh in north County Wexford is one of my favourite sites to go birding in, and I feel privileged that it is so close to where I live, in the Gorey area.

I have been going birding there for over two years now and trying to find rare vagrants from Europe and North America. On several occasions I have succeeded; for example, in late June 2017, I found only the ninth Irish record of **Marsh Warbler**.

Birding at Cahore Marsh on a warm summer's day is very satisfying. You can listen to many summer migrants in full song, all trying to outcompete each other. The species include migrants such as **Sedge Warbler**, **Reed Warbler** and **Cuckoo**, while resident species include **Bearded Reedling** and **Water Rail**; the latter can be heard calling away in the reedbeds, mainly in the early hours of the morning and in the evening.



Bearded Reedling at Cahore. Photo: Cian Cardiff

The marshland and dunes are well known for their great variety of wild flowers, and many species of butterfly and dragonfly can be found during the summer. These can entice a variety of birds, including occasionally a **Hobby**, a very elegant summer-migrant falcon which feeds on freshly emerged dragonflies.

The birding can be good at any time of year; however, as we shall see.

The south end

Often the most watched area of the marsh, the south end is located just north of Ballinoulart car park and can be covered in a short walk.

Rarities such as **Siberian Chiffchaff** and **Pied Flycatcher** have been seen in the trees around the car park itself. From here, you can walk north along the track, viewing the marsh to your left and the dunes to your right. **Wheatears** occur commonly along the track in spring and autumn.

The south end is one of the best places in Cahore for watching **Cuckoos**, which perch on the fence posts. The songs of **Skylarks** and **Linnets** fill the air. You may also see **Irish Hares**.

The south end is also great for raptors, with **Hen Harrier**, **Merlin**, **Kestrel**, **Sparrowhawk** and **Peregrine** all being seen here regularly. This is also a great place for **Marsh Harriers**, a rare visitor, mainly in spring and autumn.

The central marsh

The track from Ballinoulart brings you to a small bridge over a broad channel, where there is a pump that controls the water levels in the marsh. From the bridge you can walk west, going a short distance inland. This brings you to two small huts beside a water channel and a body of open water with reedbeds.

This is one of the best places in Ireland to hear and see **Reed Warblers**. In high summer, the reedbeds are full of them, with adults in song and bringing food to nestlings or newly fledged young.

To continue north along the central marsh, cross the two small bridges over the water channels beside the huts. From here you can enter a field and follow the inside edge of the marsh north, or you can decide to walk along the top of the dyke into the marsh itself (in winter, the water levels can be high and thigh waders may be needed, so don't take any risks).

If you take the dyke route, you will reach an area of raised ground overlooking the central marsh. It gives good views over the entire area.

The central marsh is filled with large clumps of marsh grass, often making viewing difficult. However, it is a super site for species such as **Black-tailed Godwit**, **Ruff** and **Lapwing**, especially in autumn and winter.

Rarities I have recorded here include **Garganey**, **Ruddy Shelduck**, **Glossy Ibis** and **Yellow Wagtail**. Also, the **Marsh Warbler** I found in 2017 spent its time in the reedbed here. Bear in mind, also, that **Cetti's Warbler** could be found here, as it has been spreading westwards in Britain in recent decades and breeds in Anglesey, just across the Irish Sea.

I would generally retrace my steps from here, returning to Ballinoulart car park, but you could continue further north to view the back marsh (see next page).

Old Bawn

Old Bawn, at the northern end of the marsh, can be very good for viewing wintering waterbirds, even from the car.

Drive down the Old Bawn Road from Clonevin (at the church) and view the fields on either side, near the end. They flood in winter and attract birds such as **Glossy Ibis** and **egrets**.

Stop at the little bridge before the car park and scan the north end of the marsh. **Swallows**



Mature dunes, Cahore
Photo: C  il  n MacLochlainn

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The channels fill in winter and, when there is heavy rain, the fields flood and provide good feeding for species of duck such as **Wigeon, Teal, Shoveler** and **Gadwall**.

If you park in the Old Bawn car park and walk south, parallel to the marsh, you can view more of this area.

This is a large area that cannot be viewed from the south end, as the central reedbed blocks the view. But if you walk south from Old Bawn car park you can view it to your right, though the birds are generally at a distance.

(Alternatively, you can take the cul-de-sac south from the Old Bawn Road. Park before the end and walk to a field gate before a large house surrounded by trees. You will need permission to enter here, and there are also cattle around, so care must be taken.)

This is one of the best parts of the marsh, where many different species can be found in winter; including flocks of **Greenland White-fronted Geese**, **Greylag Geese**, **Whooper Swans** and many duck species.

As the water recedes in spring, large areas of vegetation are exposed, attracting **Grey Herons, Little Egrets** and **Cormorants**. A small heronry in the conifers surrounding the house at the end of the cul-de-sac can hold roosting vagrants such as **Glossy Ibis, Cattle Egret** and **Great White Egret**, mainly in spring.

If you approach the marsh from the north end, starting either in Cahore itself or at the end of Old Bawn Road, you can walk south through the sandhills or alongside them on the landward side.

In summer, the paths and dunes are alive with butterflies, notably **Common Blue**, **Meadow Brown** and **Dark Green Fritillary**, but



The dunes are mature, with wet dune slacks at the back. The flora is rich, with species such as **Bird's-foot Trefoil**, **Scarlet Pimpernel** and **Sand Pansy** everywhere. A great many rare wild flowers are found here (and in the polders), including **Tubular Water-dropwort**.

In summer, you will find **Kestrels, Cuckoos** and **Skylarks** in the dunes, while in winter you may come across a **Short-eared Owl**, a species which hunts by day.

Leary's Lough is a small lake located just south of Ballinoulart. It is surrounded by extensive reedbeds. It can be viewed by making your way from the car park and walking south through the dunes. In spring and autumn, look out for migrants such as **Willow Warblers, Chiffchaffs, Swallows, martins** and more.

The lake's nesting species include **Mallard**, **Sedge Warbler**, **Reed Bunting**, **Little Grebe** and **Water Rail**. **Reed Warblers** are presumed to nest here also. The lake is visited by **terns**, **gulls**, **Little Egrets** and **harriers**. Winter visitors include **Teal** and **Tufted Duck** ■

