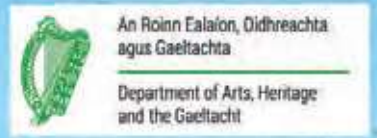


BirdWatch Ireland Reserves

Co Wexford: Wexford Wildfowl Reserve



Seirbhís Páirceanna Náisiúnta agus Fíadhúla
National Parks and Wildlife Service

The lake at the Wexford Wildfowl Reserve in winter, with Wigeon flock overhead. **Photo:** Alyn Walsh

Dave Suddaby, BirdWatch Ireland's Reserves Officer, describes the attractions of the Wexford Wildfowl Reserve.

The Wexford Wildfowl Reserve, located on the north side of Wexford Harbour, was established in 1969 under a partnership agreement with the **National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS)**. Today, following further purchases, it extends to around 200 hectares (494 acres).

During the 1800s, dykes were built and pumping systems installed to drain this former part of Wexford Harbour, producing fine agricultural land below sea level in what we term 'sloblands' or 'slobs'.

Today, the sloblands feature wet grasslands and arable land sown with fodder crops such as beet. The slobs are internationally important for wintering **Greenland White-fronted Geese** – a rare and declining subspecies of the **White-fronted Goose** – and for this reason the reserve forms part of the extensive **Wexford Slobs and Harbour Special Protected Area**.



MAP: COLIN MACLOHLAIN



Pochard. **Photo:** Graham Catley

The visitor experience

While the main conservation focus is on the wintering geese, around 250 different bird species have been recorded on the reserve, as well as many other wildlife species, so a visit at any time of year offers a different and rewarding experience.

When you arrive at the reserve on a winter's morning, the distinctive high-pitched calls of thousands of **Greenland White-fronted Geese** echo over the area as they fly to and from their roosting and feeding areas.

It is but a short walk to the visitor centre and tower hide and, from that vantage point, as you scan the wet grasslands and fodder-crop fields, the sheer numbers and diversity of the reserve's wildlife becomes apparent.



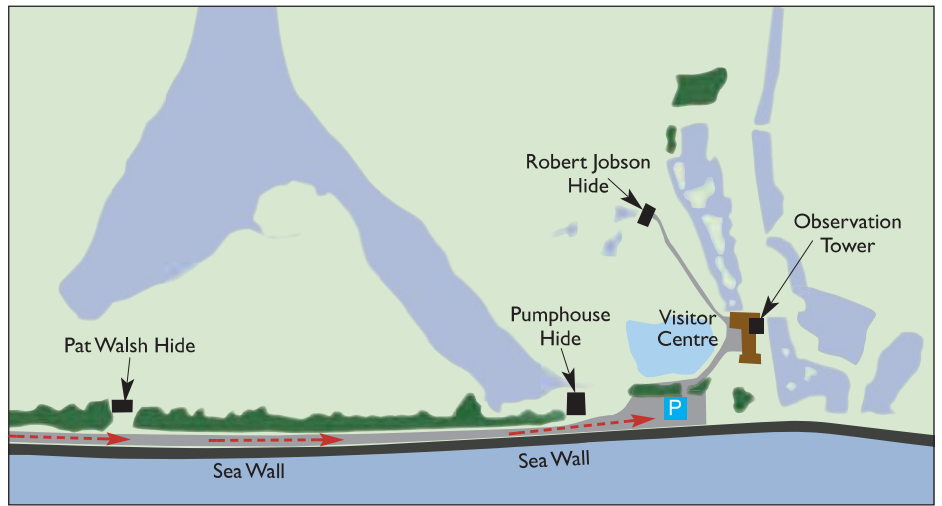
Irish Hare. **Photo:** Shay Connolly

Amongst the 6,000 or so geese, up to 600 **Whooper Swans** can be seen feeding in the fields. By scanning carefully through the flocks you may find some **Bewick's Swans**, their smaller cousin.

Up to 2,000 **Light-bellied Brent Geese** pass back and forth across the sea wall, particularly in spring, to feed on the grasslands.

Flocks of **Icelandic Black-tailed Godwits** are also a feature of a winter's birding day here on the slob, where they can be found probing the soft, well-watered soils. Winter also brings a plethora of ducks including **Mallard, Wigeon, Teal, Tufted Duck** and **Pochard**, with smaller numbers of **Shelduck, Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, Shoveler, Gadwall, Scaup** and **Pintail**.

Every now and again this impressive array of wildfowl suddenly takes flight, often in response to a raptor cruising by, either one of the local **Peregrines** or a wintering **Hen Harrier**. However, nowadays it can even be a **White-tailed Eagle** coming to hunt.



MAP: COLLIN MACDOCHLAINN

As the summer progresses and the breeding season starts to draw to a close, upwards of 250 **Mute Swans** gather and – with safety in numbers – start to renew their feathers before the winter season.

and an audio-visual display. An **observation tower** overlooks the reserve. There are also three bird hides – **Pat Walsh hide**, the **Pump-house hide** and the **Robert Jobson hide** – overlooking parts of the reserve. The visitor centre has excellent information boards and offers **guided tours** of the centre, observation tower and hides. Entry is free, but donations to help us continue our work here are welcome.

What is happening at the reserve

The aim is to manage the reserve principally for the benefit of wintering **Greenland White-fronted Geese**, to provide a real contribution to priority species conservation and, where practicable, to provide a place for people to enjoy the wildlife. To accomplish this, we support and work closely with the NPWS to:

- provide wet grasslands and arable fodder crops for wintering birds, particularly geese;
- provide safe feeding and roosting areas for wintering waterbirds;
- enhance the value of the reserve for wildlife;
- provide a positive visitor experience.

Visitor information

The reserve is situated just outside Wexford, around 5km from the bridge. Drive north and, after 3km, look for and follow the signs for the Wexford Wildfowl Reserve.

The car park and entrance gates are open every day (except Christmas Day) from 9.00am to 5.00pm. There is an excellent **visitor centre** with wheelchair access, toilets

Further information is available from the Wexford Wildfowl Reserve website www.wexfordwildfowlreserve.ie or from BirdWatch Ireland.



Hen Harrier. Photo: Neil O'Reilly

Don't miss...

- **Greenland White-fronted Geese** during the winter months;
- The spectacle of thousands of wintering waterbirds, including **swans, geese, ducks** and **waders**;
- A **Peregrine** stooping at prey or a **Hen Harrier** quartering back and forth over a reedbed on a winter's day;
- **Birdsong** filling the air in spring and summer;
- **Mute Swans** gathering to moult their feathers in summer;
- **Irish Hares** running around in the grasslands.

We hope you enjoy your visit!

BIRDWATCH IRELAND



Greenland White-fronted Geese

By April, when the last of the winter visitors leave and the breeding season begins, the air starts to fill with a mixture of bird songs. Amongst the regular songsters are **Skylark, Meadow Pipit, Stonechat** and **Reed Bunting**. As spring progresses, birds returning from African wintering grounds, including **Swallow, Sedge Warbler** and the rarer **Reed Warbler**, also start to proclaim their territories.

Along the sea wall, **Little, Common, Arctic, Sandwich** and **Roseate Terns** can all be seen, passing back and forth from their breeding colonies.

NPWS



The visitor centre and observation tower at Wexford Wildfowl Reserve.