

# Where to watch

By **Declan Murphy**



**Mediterranean Gull**  
(Richard Mills)



## Top 5 sites:

### 1 Howth Head and Ireland's Eye

**Access:** Follow the coastal road from Dublin through Clontarf to Howth and park in Howth Harbour car park. Alternatively, take a DART train to Howth Station. Follow the road from the harbour south to the cliff walk. A ferry service operates to Ireland's Eye daily during the summer months from the East Pier at Howth.

**Habitats:** Coastal harbour and sea cliffs.

**Birds:** The East Pier at Howth Harbour is a reliable site for Purple Sandpiper, with up to twenty birds present each winter. Black Guillemots breed in the harbour and can be seen throughout the year, as can Guillemots and Razorbills. Iceland and Glaucous Gulls are often seen following the fishing trawlers during the winter.

Black Redstarts are regular winter visitors to Balcaddan Bay, a

few hundred metres east of the East Pier. Stonechat, Raven and Peregrine are all regularly seen along the cliff walk, while Kittiwakes, Guillemots and Razorbills can be seen on the cliff faces.

Ireland's Eye is home to over 600 pairs of Cormorants, their second largest colony on the east coast. A small number of Puffins nests on the island and can usually be seen on the water around the island, along with Black Guillemots. Large numbers of cliff-nesting seabirds – Kittiwakes, Fulmars, Razorbills and Guillemots – line the cliff faces and fill the air with their cries. Peregrines breed on the island and can often be seen overhead. A colony of Gannets has occupied the stack off the eastern side of the island since the late 1980s, with over 350 pairs now nesting. These provide an unrivalled opportunity to watch this majestic seabird close to Dublin city.

## 2 North Bull Island



**Access:** Follow the coastal road from Dublin past Clontarf and take a right turn onto the causeway halfway along the island. Alternatively, take the DART to Raheny Station, located 1.5km west of the causeway. The mudflats can best be viewed from the causeway running out to the beach from the main road, or from the wooden bridge at the southern end of the island.

**Habitats:** Intertidal mudflats with a large area of saltmarsh and a sand dune system.

**Birds:** The Bull is excellent for a

wide variety of wintering waterfowl and waders. Large numbers of Wigeon, Shoveler, Shelduck, Teal and Brent Geese can be seen on both sides of the causeway, while Pintail can be seen from the northern side of the causeway. The outer part of the lagoon is good for sea ducks such as Red-breasted Merganser and Goldeneye. Large flocks of Lapwing, Golden Plover and Knot are a feature of the mudflats, as well as flocks of Dunlin, Black-tailed Godwit and Grey Plover. During the autumn, Ruff, Curlew Sandpiper, Spotted Redshank and Little Stint occur regularly, as can occasional rarities such as Buff-breasted Sandpiper and American Golden Plover. During high tide, most of the waders can be found roosting on the saltmarsh. This area is also excellent for several species of raptor. Short-eared Owls roost both on the saltmarsh and in the sand dunes while Peregrines and Merlins are regularly seen hunting over the mudflats and perching on fence posts.

Snow Buntings can sometimes be found on the seaward side of the sand dunes, feeding in the marram grass. The Alder Marsh at the back of the north dunes attracts Cuckoos and other migrants in autumn.

## 3 Sandymount Strand



**Access:** Follow the coastal road south from Dublin towards Blackrock. The strand can be accessed from the railway crossing at Merrion Gates. Alternatively, take the DART to Booterstown Station. Booterstown Marsh is located 0.5km

further south and can best be viewed from the Booterstown DART Station car park.

**Habitats:** Intertidal mudflats and freshwater marsh.

**Birds:** Large flocks of Bar-tailed Godwit, Oystercatcher, Dunlin, Ringed Plover and Sanderling frequent the large expanse of mudflat at Sandymount Strand during the winter months. Good numbers of Light-bellied Brent Geese can also be seen from September into April. During August and September a large evening roost of terns can be located on the strand about two to three hours before dusk. The birds are primarily Common and Arctic Terns, but smaller numbers of Roseate and Sandwich Terns can be found amongst them. Up to five Black Terns can be found in most years, roosting amongst the other terns, and rarities such as White-winged Black Tern have been recorded. A large evening gull roost is also located here and several Ring-billed Gulls can usually be seen, as well as Mediterranean Gulls and occasionally Iceland and Glaucous Gulls.

At high tide, many waders roost in Booterstown Marsh, the only Dublin feeding ground for Black-tailed Godwits south of the city. Snipe, Kingfisher, Greenshank and Water Rail can also be seen here.

## 4 Dún Laoghaire



**Access:** Follow the signs south from Dublin along the coast road for Dún Laoghaire Ferry and park near the ferry terminal. Alternatively, take the DART to Dún Laoghaire Station.

**Habitats:** Coastal harbour and rocky shoreline.

**Birds:** The two piers, each extending for over a mile, provide excellent viewing points for seabirds in south Dublin Bay. Red-throated and Great Northern Divers, Common Scoters, Great Crested Grebes, Red-breasted Mergansers and Goldeneyes can all be seen during the winter

months, along with Guillemots and Razorbills. Black Guillemots breed within the harbour at the ferry terminal and can be seen throughout the year, while Little Gulls can regularly be seen feeding offshore. At high tide, a large flock of Dunlins and Ringed Plovers roosts near the end of the piers. Purple Sandpipers can be found feeding at the very end of both piers.

In early spring, migrants such as Wheatear, Sandwich Tern and Swallow can all be found along the West Pier. The base of the East Pier is a regular haunt of Black Redstart in winter, with one or two usually present along the shore from the pier to the old baths.

Sandycove, 1km further south, is an excellent site for Mediterranean Gulls; they are also often seen both in the harbour and along the piers. Ross's Gull, a rarity from the Arctic, appeared one winter and remained in the area for a number of weeks.

## 5 Dalkey



**Access:** Follow the coast road south from Dún Laoghaire for approximately 6km. Alternatively, take the DART to Dalkey Station. From Dalkey, take the road to Coliemore Harbour. During the summer, a ferry service operates to Dalkey Island from the harbour.

**Habitats:** Rocky coastline and offshore islands.

**Birds:** Maiden Rock, just north of the main island, is a breeding site for Common Terns with smaller numbers of Arctic and Roseate Terns breeding each year. Shelducks breed on Dalkey Island and are present throughout the year along with good numbers of Cormorants and Shags. Rafts of Razorbills and Guillemots can be seen in winter.

The rocky shoreline around the island provides feeding grounds for Purple Sandpipers and Turnstones, while Mediterranean and Little Gulls can often be found in Dalkey Sound. Short-eared Owls occur on Dalkey Island during the winter and can sometimes be seen hunting there in the late afternoon from the mainland.

During autumn, Sorrento Point, located a short distance south and accessed through Dillon's Park, provides an excellent seawatching site. Good numbers of Gannets, Manx Shearwaters, Kittiwakes and Fulmars can be seen, with smaller numbers of Arctic Skuas and Storm Petrels. During strong onshore winds, Great and Pomarine Skuas, Great, Cory's and Sooty Shearwaters and Sabine's Gull have all been seen. Migrant warblers and flycatchers are seen on passage and Icterine Warbler has been recorded.

# Where to watch ... in **Dublin Bay**

## Top 10 birds:

Dalkey Island, Co Dublin

### 1 **Black Redstart**

Winter. Usually found singly in small sheltered coves. Its red tail is easily seen in flight as it flycatches along cliff faces and walls. Black Redstarts tend to be site-faithful, with birds returning to the same sites each year. Regular sites include Dún Laoghaire's East Pier, Dún Laoghaire's Old Baths, Howth's East Pier and Sorrento Point.

### 2 **Short-eared Owl**



Winter. Usually seen when flushed from grass cover in coastal fields and saltmarsh. Can sometimes be seen hunting in late afternoon or perched on posts. Found on North Bull Island and sometimes on Dalkey Island.

### 3 **Roseate Tern**

Summer. Arguably our most beautiful tern and one of Europe's rarest seabirds. Small numbers breed each year at Dalkey and large autumn roosting flocks can be seen both at Sandymount Strand and on Maiden Rock, Dalkey.



Gannet

Shay Connolly

### 4 **Goldeneye**

Winter. A sea duck often found in Dublin Bay. Usually seen in small flocks. It can often be seen displaying in late winter and early spring.



Goldeneye

Clive Timmons

### 5 **Mediterranean Gull**

All year. Although most numerous in winter, birds can be encountered amongst gull flocks throughout the year all along the Dublin Bay coastline. The most reliable place to see them is at Sandycove, south of Dún Laoghaire, where up to 40 birds have been recorded together in autumn.

### 6 **Purple Sandpiper**

Winter. A specialist wader of rocky shores, the Purple Sandpiper can be found feeding amongst seaweed at the water's edge. Birds can easily be found at the end of the piers at Howth, North Bull Island, Poolbeg and Dún Laoghaire.

### 7 **Gannet**

Summer. Our largest seabird and a spectacular fisher as it dives into the water from a height of 10–40 metres. Gannets can be seen feeding offshore along the entire Dublin coastline and beside their breeding colony on Ireland's Eye.

### 8 **Puffin**

Summer. Everyone's favourite seabird, the charismatic Puffin can be seen on Ireland's Eye where it breeds in small numbers.

### 9 **Snow Bunting**

Winter. A visitor from Iceland which occurs in small numbers in most years. Look for flocks along the dunes on North Bull Island and on the Dún Laoghaire and Howth piers.

### 10 **Pintail**

Winter. One of our most beautiful and elegant ducks, the Pintail can be found in good numbers feeding on the mudflats on North Bull Island.



Pintail

Michael Finn