

Where to watch

NORTH FINGAL (DUBLIN)

By Julie Roe & Sean Pierce

Above: View of Red Island, Skerries, from South Strand. – Julie Roe



Common Scoters – Graham Catley

Top 5 sites:

1 Loughshinny & Baldongan

Target species: Iceland Gull, Short-eared Owl, Tree Sparrow

Access: Loughshinny is located between Rush and Skerries on the R128. For Loughshinny Harbour, take the right turn at Ballykea Cross. For Baldongan, take the left turn at Ballykea Cross and continue for 2km. Park by Baldongan Castle.

Habitats: Coastal harbour, sea cliffs, intertidal sandflats, open/arable farmland.

Birds: Loughshinny Harbour has been a regular site for Iceland Gull, especially in early spring. In summer, look across to the cliffs at Drumanagh for breeding Fulmar.

The coastline from Loughshinny north to Skerries holds winter finches and buntings and has several local roost sites of importance for waders, including wintering Whimbrel, geese and terns in season.



Tree Sparrow

John Fox

Baldongan is a good site for raptor-watching. Buzzard, Merlin, Peregrine, Sparrowhawk and Kestrel are regular, while Red Kite, Hen Harrier and Osprey have been recorded. Barn Owl has been recorded recently, Long-eared Owls breed locally and in winter Short-eared Owls occur, occasionally in big numbers. The grasslands are a regular inland site for Greylag Geese, and the area supports good numbers of winter thrushes, finches, Skylark, Yellowhammer and Tree Sparrows.



Rockabill



Great Northern Diver – Zöe Devlin

2 Skerries

1 Loughshinny

0 Distance (kilometres) xx



Short-eared Owl, Ashbourne, Co Meath. – Eric Dempsey

2 Skerries Coast & Islands

Target species: Eider, Roseate Tern, Purple Sandpiper

Access: Follow the R128 north to Skerries. At Skerries, take the coast road along the South Strand. For Skerries Harbour and Red Island, keep right at the end of South Strand, follow the Harbour Road and take a right at the harbour for Red Island car park.

Habitats: Coastal harbour, rocky coastline, intertidal sandflats, offshore islands.

Birds: The Skerries islands are best viewed from the R128 (opposite Shenick Island) and South Strand, and from Red Island. In spring, good numbers of Red-throated Divers and occasional Black-throated Divers can be seen feeding in the sea off the islands. Spring passerines include Whinchat, Grasshopper Warbler, Yellow Wagtail and White Wagtail. Between April and July, scan for Eider on the sea around the inner islands.

Fulmars breed on Shenick Island, and St Patrick's Island holds the largest breeding colony of Cormorants on the east coast (922 nests in 2009) and a small colony of Shags. The three species of tern which breed on the islets of Rockabill – Common, Roseate and Arctic – can be seen feeding offshore, and in late July and August large post-breeding flocks roost at low tide on the beach at South Strand and are joined by Sandwich and occasional Little Terns. Throughout the year, South Strand attracts large flocks of mixed gulls. Watch for Mediterranean Gulls in late summer and for Glaucous Gulls in winter.

Ospreys are regular on passage at Skerries. Red Island (joined to the mainland by a causeway built in the 1750s) is the best sea-watching point in North Fingal, and is best watched from August to October in east to southeast winds with precipitation, fog or low mist. Great, Long-tailed, Parasitic (Arctic) and Pomarine Skuas, Black Tern and Mediterranean and Sooty Shearwaters are all regular. Sabine's Gull, Cory's and Great Shearwaters, Little Auk, Long-tailed Duck, Grey Phalarope and Bonaparte's Gull have also been recorded. Large numbers of Manx Shearwaters (2,000-3,000 per hour) can be recorded during August-September. Storm Petrels are regular in some years and scarce in others, while Leach's Petrels occur rarely.

Red Island is a reliable site for Black Redstart and is one of the best sites in Fingal for Purple Sandpiper. Rock Pipits are present here throughout the year.

3 Balbriggan Coast & Harbour

Target species: Common Scoter, Black Redstart, Purple Sandpiper

Access: From Skerries, follow the R127 north along the coast road to Balbriggan Harbour.

Habitats: Rocky shoreline, intertidal sandflats and coastal harbour.

Birds: At high tide, the rocky shoreline north from Skerries is a regular site for Mediterranean Gulls and a roosting site for migrant terns in both spring and autumn. On the sea, north from Skerries, watch for Great Northern Divers and Common Scoters. Along the R127, 2.5km north of Skerries there is a rocky area which remains exposed at most high tides; it is known locally as Long Leg. This is a good roost-site for waders, gulls and terns, and rarities seen here have included Black Tern, Sooty Tern and White-billed Diver.

Balbriggan Harbour is another reliable site for Black Redstart, Purple Sandpiper, Glaucous and Iceland Gulls. In summer, look for Black Guillemots breeding in the harbour wall.

Snow Bunting



Shay Connolly

Where to watch ... on the North Fingal Coast

View of Shenick Island from Skerries. – Julie Roe

Black Redstart



Cóilín MacLochlainn

Purple Sandpiper



Eric Dempsey

4 Gormanston Beach & Lowtherstone

Target species: Common Scoter, Lapland Bunting, Snow Bunting

Access: For Lowtherstone, follow the R132 (formerly N1) north from Balbriggan for 0.75km and take the first turn to the right. Park along the track or at the farm complex, but please do so respectfully – this is a working farm: don't block access! For Gormanston Beach, continue for 2km and take the right turn at the Delvin Bridge.

Habitats: Coastal stubble fields, rocky shoreline and intertidal sandflats.

Birds: The stubble fields at Lowtherstone are one of the best winter sites for finches, buntings and larks in Fingal. In winter, check the fields for Lapland and Snow Bunting. Good numbers of Short-eared Owls are present in most years. Hen Harriers have been recorded hunting over the fields and Merlins regularly hunt along the shoreline.

Lowtherstone, in addition to winter stubbles, has good seawatching for sea ducks (including Common Scoter), divers and migrant seabirds, at Bremore Point, while its potential for spring passerine migration deserves further examination by Irish birders.

The mouth of the River Delvin at Gormanston is an important roost area for waders, gulls and terns. Check for Little Gulls, Mediterranean Gulls and Black Tern.

Eider (male)



Graham Catley

Female Eider with chicks. – John Carey



Top 10 birds:

1 Roseate Tern

Summer. In 2009, over 1,500 young fledged from Rockabill Island. In July and August the best viewing points for post-breeding flocks are at the South Strand, Skerries and Gormanston Beach.

2 Eider

Spring/summer. For the last number of years a pair of Eiders have bred on the Skerries islands. In late April the pair can usually be seen off St Patrick's Island, and in late June and July the female and her young may be seen feeding off the inner Skerries islands.

3 Short-eared Owl

Winter. Lowtherstone, Shenick Island and Baldongan.

4 Purple Sandpiper

Winter. Along the rocky shore at Red Island and Balbriggan Harbour.

5 Tree Sparrow

All year. Coastal stubbles south of Skerries, Lowtherstone and Baldongan.

6 Snow Bunting

Winter. Lowtherstone, Red Island, coastal stubbles south of Skerries and Balbriggan.

7 Lapland Bunting

Winter. Coastal stubbles at Lowtherstone, south of Balbriggan and from Skerries to Loughshinny.

8 Black Redstart

Winter. Skerries Harbour and Balbriggan Harbour.

9 Common Scoter

Winter. North of Skerries Harbour to Gormanston.

10 Buzzard

All year. Common over farmland in Fingal.

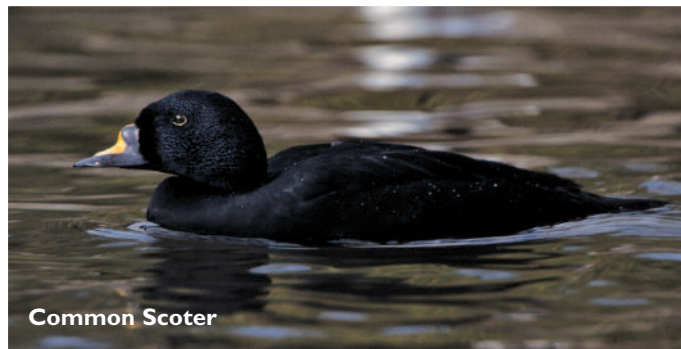
5 Knock Lake

Target species: Buzzard, Great Crested Grebe, Gadwall, Scaup

Access: From Balbriggan, continue south to Balrothery and take the road opposite the Balrothery Inn. After 1km take the first left and continue for 1km until you see the lake on your left.

Habitats: Shallow artificial lake and reedbeds set in undulating arable farmland.

Birds: This is the only substantial body of freshwater left in North Fingal. Mute Swan, Coot, Little Grebe, Great Crested Grebe, Mallard, Gadwall, Pochard, Scaup, Water Rail, Buzzard and Sedge Warbler are regular. Tufted Ducks breed at the site. Osprey, Marsh, Hen and Montagu's Harriers, Red-crested Pochard, Garganey, Lesser Scaup, Ring-necked Duck, Ruddy Duck, Whooper Swan, Green Sandpiper and Grey Phalarope have all been recorded. A significant hirundine migration can be witnessed in both spring and autumn at the lake.



Billy Clarke

Common Scoter



Shay Connolly

Buzzard



Oran O'Sullivan

Lapland Bunting