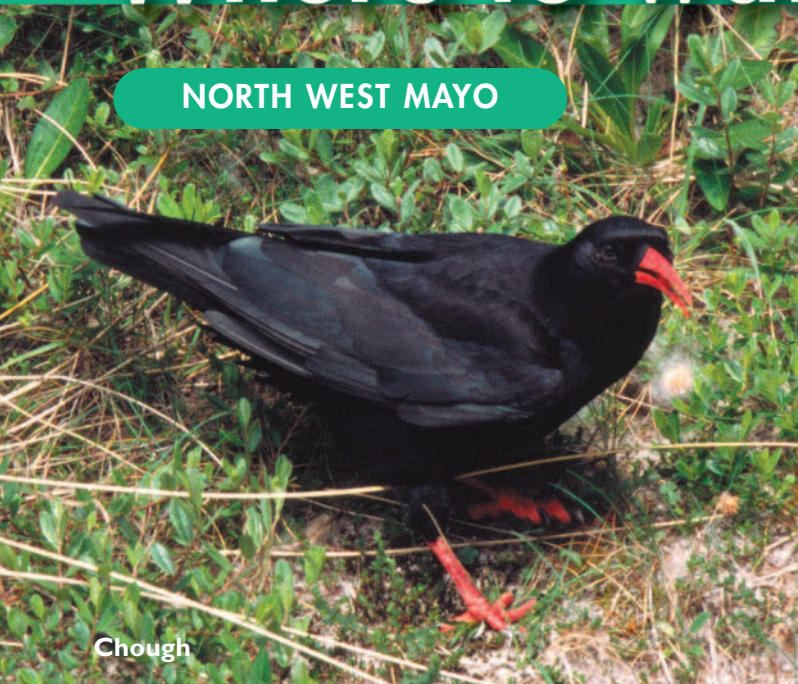


Where to watch by Dave Suddaby



NORTH WEST MAYO



Chough

Andrew Kelly



Twites

Tom Cuffe

Top 5 sites & Top 10 birds

Mullet peninsula & north Mayo coast

Windswept headlands on the western seaboard have a magical feel. The northwest Mayo coast, which includes the Mullet peninsula, is no exception. Here, extensive machair grasslands, golden sandy beaches, sheltered bays and inlets, cliffscapes and offshore islands provide the visitor with a memorable experience. This spectacular landscape contains an impressive array of birds throughout the year.

1 Erris Head

Target species: Twite, Chough

Situated at the northern tip of the Mullet is the isolated townland of Glenlara near Erris Head. Driving over the 'bog,' keep a look out for Merlin in pursuit of Stonechats and Meadow Pipits. Passing between the few houses of Glenlara, park at the end of the road that looks out into Broadhaven Bay at Danish Cellar.

The area surrounding the car park is the best place to look for breeding Twite and Chough which come here to feed. During the spring months scan the bay for Great Northern Divers, and around the car park through the summer look for Wheatears, Rock Pipits, Rock Doves and Raven. Carefully walk out to the Gubastuckaun headland which offers good views over Broadhaven Bay, with the

possibility of rafting Manx Shearwaters, feeding Gannets and glimpses of Minke Whale.

1 Twite

Present on the peninsula throughout the year, the small breeding population is confined to the heather/bracken cliff-slopes of Erris Head. At the car park, singing males, feeding adults and family parties can with patience be seen along the fence lines from late April through to late August.

2 Chough

The characteristic piercing 'chowah' calls can be heard during summer as the local breeding pairs tumble and display overhead and feed on the short coastal grasslands. During autumn, family parties join together and move to the machair grasslands.

2 Termoncarragh & Annagh

Target species: Barnacle Goose, Lapwing

To the west of Belmullet is Termoncarragh Lake, best viewed from the graveyard to the west of the lake. On bright mornings the light can be against you. During the winter, look for feeding Barnacle Geese along with Whooper Swan, Greenland White-fronted Geese, Chough, Rock Dove and Twite. Further to the west is the BirdWatch Ireland reserve of Termoncarragh Meadows which is managed for breeding Corncrakes, and to the south is Annagh Marsh, another BirdWatch reserve. From April to July, the marsh holds an assemblage of breeding waders which can be viewed from the roadside. A late evening visit to the marsh in June can provide a surreal experience with 'squealing' Water Rail, 'crexing' Corncrake, 'drumming' Snipe and 'reeling' Grasshopper

Warblers under cover of darkness. During the autumn, with favourable onshore winds, Annagh Head can offer some excellent seawatching.

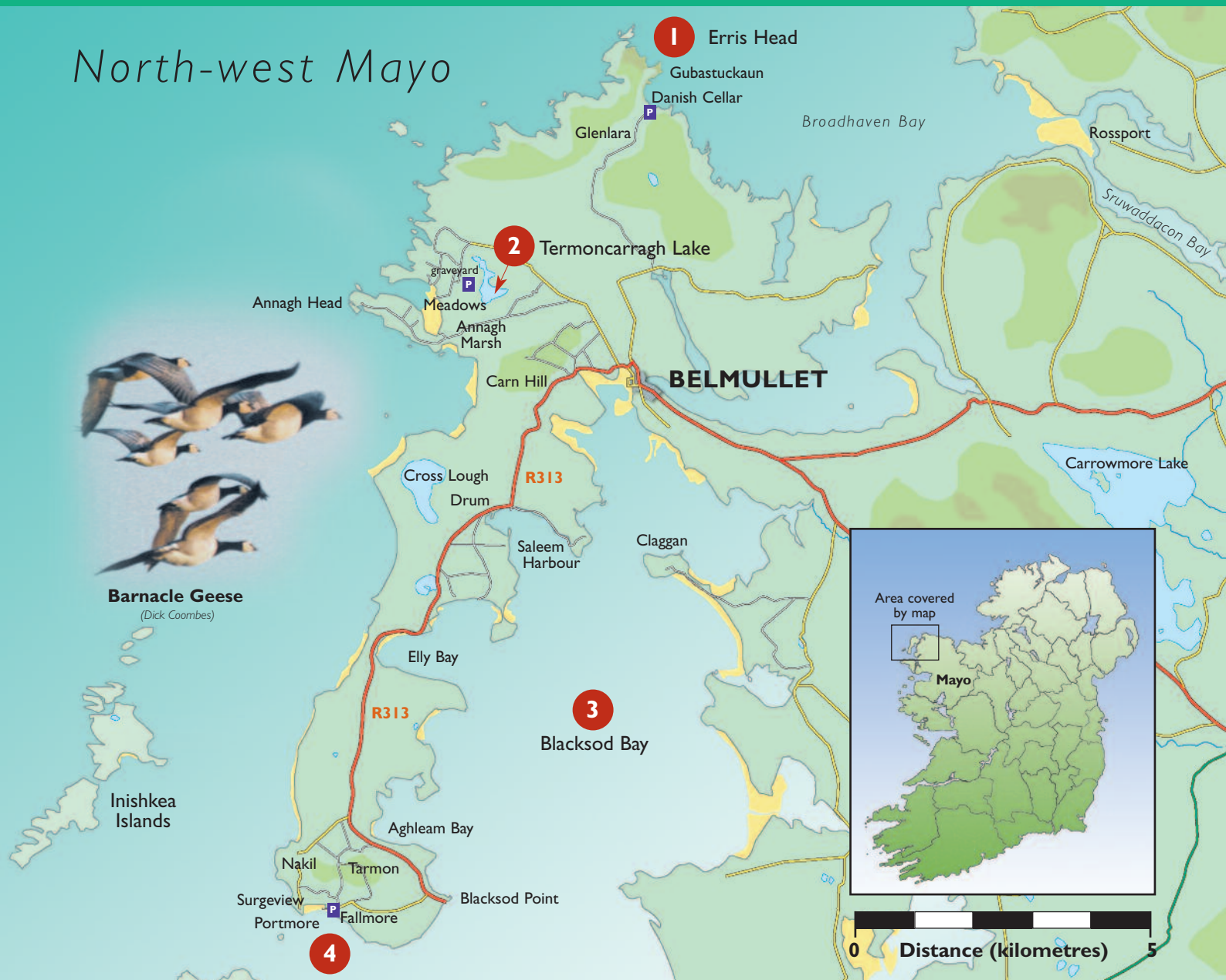
3 Barnacle Goose

Skins of Barnacle Geese can be seen flying back and forth from the Inishkea Islands to the Belmullet peninsula from late autumn until mid-April, when they depart for Greenland for the summer. Their favourite feeding areas are the flat grasslands around the lake, particularly those en route to the graveyard.

4 Lapwing

From late March, the 'sky dance' of the males with their distinctive 'peewit' song can be observed over their favourite fields at Annagh as they display to the arriving females. From July, moulting adults and fledged chicks start to gather in their wintering flocks.

North-west Mayo



Map by C  il  n MacLochlainn

3 Blacksod Bay

Target species: Great Northern Diver, Common Scoter

Blacksod Bay can be viewed from several points off the R313, with the most productive viewing areas being at Saleem Harbour, Elly Bay, Aghleam Bay and Blacksod Point on the Mullet peninsula, or from Claggan on the east side of the bay. From late September to late April, scan the bay for wintering Great Northern Divers and Common Scoters, along with Slavonian Grebes, Red-breasted Mergansers and Pale-bellied Brent Geese. The beaches also provide favourite feeding and/or roosting areas for Oystercatchers, Golden Plovers, Bar-tailed Godwits, Redshanks, Sanderling and Dunlin, amongst others. During the summer, Little and Sandwich Terns can be seen feeding in the bay and these can attract summering Arctic Skuas.

John N Murphy



Great Northern Diver

5 Great Northern Diver

Up to 50 birds winter in the bay, with numbers during late April swelling to a maximum of 150 birds, many in full summer plumage as they migrate north to their breeding grounds. On calm spring days their wailing song can be heard as they pair-bond.

6 Common Scoter

Birds start arriving to moult from July onwards and increase to up to 800 birds for the winter. During February, courtship displays start in earnest with the males chasing each other incessantly.

Where to watch ...in Northwest Mayo



Tree Sparrow

Christopher J Wilson



Courting Kittiwakes

Mike Brown

4 Fallmore

Target species: Corncrake, Tree Sparrow

Situated at the southern tip of the Mullet peninsula are the townlands of Fallmore, Portmore, Nakil and Surgeview. Passing through Fallmore, drive to the car park just past the graveyard.

From the car park, walking back to Fallmore brings you past the best area to look for Tree Sparrows, while a late evening walk in May or June anywhere in this area provides some of the best opportunities for hearing singing Corncrakes. Walking along the beach, Ringed Plovers, Wheatears and Rock Pipits can be seen feeding along the tide edge, and Black Guillemots and terns can be seen feeding offshore. During the winter, Purple Sandpipers feed and roost amongst the seaweed-draped rocks.

7 Corncrake

The distinctive rasping 'crex crex' song of the Corncrake is most frequently heard from the meadow grasslands around Fallmore, Nakil and Surgeview. Other areas on the peninsula to listen for it include Carn Hill, Drum, Annagh and Termoncarragh. Occasionally they can be heard singing during the day, at which time they are occasionally seen.

8 Tree Sparrow

The Mullet's small isolated breeding population is confined to the old outbuildings of Fallmore, Nakil and Surgeview. During the spring the males sing from the gable ends of these buildings and from late July they form communal roosts in the trees at Tarmon.

5 Downpatrick Head

Target species: Kittiwake, Guillemot

A spectacular headland, alive with the characteristic 'buzz' of a seabird colony during the summer months, Downpatrick Head is located approximately 5km north of Ballycastle off the R314 along the north Mayo coast.

Park at the end of the road and look for feeding Choughs, Ringed Plovers, Wheatears and Rock Pipits. Walk carefully up to the cliff edge and view the 'seabird city' with the impressive Dún Briste stack just offshore. The cliff offers excellent views during the summer of breeding Fulmars, Kittiwakes, Guillemots and Razorbills, while offshore there can be loitering Great Skuas, passing Manx Shearwaters, Sandwich Terns and Puffins. During the autumn, with favourable onshore winds, this and the nearby headlands at Kilcummin can offer some excellent seawatching with shearwaters, petrels and skuas passing close inshore.

9 Kittiwake

Up to 1,000 pairs nest on the cliff ledges. June is a particularly busy time as the adults constantly fly back and forth bringing food for their chicks. At this time their characteristic 'kitt-i-waake kitt-i-waake' call fills the air. By late July the colony becomes quiet as the year's young fledge.

10 Guillemot

Guillemots are the 'penguins of the northern hemisphere.' They are tightly packed onto the ledges during the summer as they incubate their pear-shaped eggs standing up. Before fully grown and encouraged by the adult, the chicks leap into the sea on calm June nights. Look closely for the bridled form.



Downpatrick Head is situated on the north Mayo coast near Ballycastle, 40km east of Erris Head.

Eddie Dunne



Corncrake