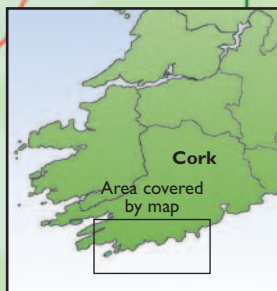


Where to watch

By **Ciarán Cronin**

* The headlands, islands and bays further west in West Cork will be covered in the next issue.



0 Distance (kilometres) 10

Schull

Skibbereen

Baltimore

Chough
– Ciarán Cronin

Top 5 sites:



5 Cape Clear

I Old Head of Kinsale

Target species: Sooty Shearwater, Peregrine, Black Redstart, Ring Ouzel, Yellow-browed Warbler, Firecrest, Pied Flycatcher, Chough.

Access: From Kinsale town take the R600 over the bridge and continue 3km. Turn left onto R604 (signed 'Old Head') and continue 5km to Speckled Door pub, above small harbour. Turn left at the pub for the Old Head. Public access through the golf course to the tip is by permit only.

Habitats: Rocky foreshore, cliffs, small gardens, farmland.

Birds: The harbour below the Speckled Door is always worth a look and often holds terns and gulls (including Mediterranean Gull), Black Guillemots and occasional Purple Sandpipers. There is a chance of seeing divers and Slavonian Grebe. On the headland itself, check all the hedgerows and gardens you pass for migrant birds, and keep your eyes open for a passing Merlin, Hen Harrier or Short-eared Owl in autumn.

About 1km from the pub there is a farm on your right-hand side with pine trees ("the Plantation") where many rarities have been found, including Hawfinch and Grey-cheeked Thrush. The Plantation provides your best chance of seeing Yellow-browed Warbler, Pied Flycatcher and Firecrest. Other scarce migrants have included Reed Warbler, Garden Warbler, Tree Pipit, Yellow Wagtail, Wryneck,

Red-backed Shrike and Red-breasted Flycatcher, and Black Redstarts are regular.

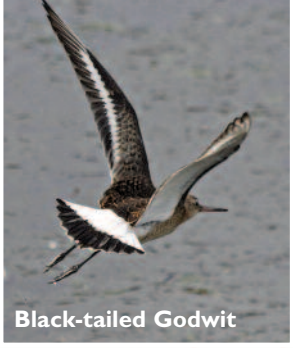
Follow the laneway past the Plantation to the west side of the Head, checking for migrants along the way. Alternatively, continue on the main road past the Plantation, checking the gardens, hedges and fields, and keep an eye out for Whinchat and Ring Ouzel. About 1km past the Plantation, where the open fields begin, there is a path down past a farm (the "Magic Garden") and on into a sheltered area of bushes with a small stream. This often holds migrant warblers, and the fields are good for finches, pipits and wagtails.

Returning to the main road, continue checking fields along to the last accessible area, by the signal tower and castle. Choughs are present all year on the Head, especially at the cliff edges and fields near the castle, an area also excellent for Peregrine and Black Redstart.

In summer, the cliff-top beside the Golf Club entrance is an excellent place to get close views of thousands of breeding seabirds. Care is required here, as it is enticing to get too near the unprotected cliff edge. Fulmar, Kittiwake, Cormorant, Shag, Guillemot and Razorbill are all likely. In southwesterly winds, look for passing seabirds: you may well pick out a Sooty Shearwater amongst Manx Shearwaters.

From the signal tower, return the way you came or continue the loop down the west side of the head, then back to the pub.

Sooty Shearwater
– Eric Dempsey



Ciarán Cronin
Black-tailed Godwit

2 Clonakilty

Target species: Pectoral Sandpiper, Curlew Sandpiper, Ruff, Black-tailed Godwit, Spotted Redshank, Mediterranean Gull, Ring-billed Gull.

Access: From Cork, take the N71 to Clonakilty – or you can take the R600 from Kinsale to Clonakilty (via Timoleague Estuary). Just after the roundabout as you enter Clonakilty, there are some red benches that provide a good view of the inner estuary. Follow the N71 west from the Red Benches and take a left past the ‘Model Railway Village’ to view the west side of the estuary. Follow this road for 2km and turn right onto the causeway, before Inchydoney. The pool on your right (White’s Marsh) is a favoured wader roost at high tide. At the end of the road, take a left: Clogheen Marsh is on your right at the end of the estuary.

Habitats: Tidal estuary and mudflat, brackish lagoons.

Birds: Clonakilty Estuary contains large numbers of waders during autumn: check thoroughly for something more interesting. As the tide rises, waders and gulls are pushed up towards the Red Benches and can be viewed with ease. Redshank, Greenshank, Black-tailed Godwit, Bar-tailed Godwit, Lapwing, Common Sandpiper, Turnstone, Knot, Dunlin, Curlew and Whimbrel are almost always present. Scarcer waders such as Spotted Redshank, Ruff, Little Stint and Curlew Sandpiper are also regular in autumn. The western side of the estuary can provide close views of larger waders, such as Greenshank, Curlew, Black-tailed Godwit and Whimbrel. Mediterranean Gulls can be expected amongst the gull flocks, but look closely for Ring-billed, Glaucous, Iceland and Yellow-legged Gulls. Bonaparte’s and Laughing Gulls have also been recorded here.

White’s Marsh (and nearby Clogheen Marsh) can provide excellent views of roosting waders and are the best areas to check for an occasional Pectoral Sandpiper, while Ruff are regular here in the autumn. Don’t forget to report any colour-ringed Black-tailed Godwits seen in the area, with full details of the ring sequences. In recent years, rarer species such as Lesser Yellowlegs, Semipalmated, Baird’s and White-rumped Sandpipers and American Golden Plover have been seen. Cattle Egrets have been a feature in recent years, so check any egrets in the fields along the way.

At all areas, do look through the large flocks of ducks. Mallard, Wigeon and Teal dominate, but Shelduck, Shoveler and Pintail are regular. Both American Wigeon and Green-winged Teal have been seen here, and White’s Marsh and Clogheen Marsh occasionally hold a Garganey.



Ring-billed Gull

Michael Davis

3 Galley Head

Target species: Peregrine, Black Redstart, Ring Ouzel, Barred Warbler, Yellow-browed Warbler, Firecrest, Pied Flycatcher, Chough.

Access: Continuing works at the lighthouse means that the tip of Galley Head (beyond the castle walls) is off-limits this year. From Clonakilty, follow directions to Clogheen Marsh (as above). Continue up the hill past the Marsh and through the village of Ardfield. The road passes Red Strand and goes uphill. Take a left beyond the houses and after 1km you will reach a small crossroads. From here, straight ahead is for the lighthouse, left for Dirk Bay, and right (downhill) for Shite Lane.

Habitats: Sea bay, coastal grasslands, scrub woodland, hedges, gardens.

Birds: Dirk Bay often holds Great Northern Diver, and Gannets can often be seen patrolling or feeding here. The hedgerows and fields on the way down usually contain Whitethroat and Sedge Warbler in season, but check all birds for something more unusual. At the bottom of the bay there is some dense woodland and Fuchsia hedges. Patience is required here, and a good ear for bird calls, but in October, Yellow-browed Warbler is frequent, while Firecrest and Pied Flycatcher are always a possibility. The area has had some extreme rarities in the past, with American birds in the shape of Philadelphia Vireo, American Redstart, Hermit Thrush and Swainson’s Thrush, and ‘eastern’ rarities including Radde’s Warbler and Greenish Warbler.

Going straight ahead at the crossroads brings you to the tip, which is off-limits this year, but is usually an excellent site for seawatching. The castle walls often hold a Black Redstart. Turning



Pectoral Sandpiper

Dick Coombes

right at the crossroads brings you downhill to an area of fields and hedgerows locally known as Shite Lane. This extensive area should also be checked for migrants, and the hedgerows here are your best bet for finding Ring Ouzel and Barred Warbler, or possibly even a Red-backed Shrike. Chough and Peregrine may be seen anywhere in the Galley Head area.

Where to watch ... on the West Cork Coast



Rónán McLaughlin

Mediterranean Gull



Ciarán Cronin

Ring Ouzel

Habitats: Rocky headlands, coastal heaths, bogs, marshes, farmland.

Birds: Cape Clear Island is Ireland's most famous location for rare and scarce bird sightings, as well as being one of the country's premier seawatching sites. When conditions are right, almost any migrant species that has ever been seen in Ireland is a possibility. Autumn is the best time to visit, both for migrant birds as well as for seawatching. Late July to early September is the best time for seawatching, while mid-September to late October is the peak time for land-based migrants.

Check the gardens in Baltimore, especially around the small bay. Yellow-browed Warbler, flycatchers and Firecrest are all regular here in autumn, while divers, Black Guillemots and mergansers frequent the bay. The gulls around the fishing boats at Baltimore often include a Glaucous or Iceland Gull, while an Ivory Gull frequented this area earlier this year. Keep an eye out for seabirds during the ferry crossing, as shearwaters are not infrequent, and you may see a Grey Phalarope or European Storm Petrel. Black Guillemots are common at the entrance to North Harbour on Cape Clear.

On Cape itself, follow the road past the shop. The garden behind Cotter's Pub, "Cotter's Garden" can be viewed from the top of the hill, and often holds interesting birds. From here, you can go left to "the Waist" to view the scrub under Ciarán Danny Mike's pub. Check the bushes for passerines, and look for Water Rail in the stream at the Waist. Continue on to the Youth Hostel garden, from where you can head up the Glen to make a loop walk around the north of the island.

To go seawatching, walk along the shore path past the Youth Hostel and head up the hill, taking a right after 100m, and follow the signed hiker's trail to the tip of Pointanbullig headland. This is a safe location for seawatching, and you can expect to see Manx Shearwater, Gannets and Fulmars. In the right conditions, Sooty, Balearic, Great and Cory's



Eric Dempsey

Barred Warbler

4 Rosscarbery Estuary

Target species: Curlew Sandpiper, Ruff, Black-tailed Godwit, Spotted Redshank, Mediterranean Gull, Ring-billed Gull.

Access: The N71 from Clonakilty brings you directly to Rosscarbery. As you approach the causeway heading for the village, there is a lay-by on the left providing parking and a bird information notice. Alternatively, at the other end of the causeway you can turn left opposite the Celtic Ross Hotel and walk along the road down the west side of the estuary, finishing at a pier on the outer estuary.

Habitats: Estuary and mudflat, open sea.

Birds: At the first parking area you can get good views of many common waders, as well as the now ubiquitous (in Cork, at least) Little Egrets. At low tide there is usually a small roost of gulls near the car park, and this often contains Mediterranean and Ring-billed Gulls, and sometimes a rarer Yellow-legged Gull.

Opposite the Celtic Ross Hotel, the small pool by the roadside can often hold Kingfisher, and good views of Snipe and Water Rail can sometimes be had here. In the corner of the estuary, you may see Turnstone, while throwing some bread (as the locals do) will attract many gulls: these will often include an Iceland or Glaucous Gull.

A bit further along this road, a rising tide can bring many of the smaller waders close enough to view without a telescope. The species found here (including rarities) are similar to those listed for Clonakilty, but of the more regular birds, this area usually holds more Sanderling, Ringed Plover and Knot as well as a large flock of up to 2,000 Golden Plover. Greenshank are more common towards the outer estuary, and from the pier at the end of this road it is worth checking the sea for divers and grebes, while Long-tailed Duck are very scarce but possible to see here also.

Peregrines often hunt the estuary, while Hen Harrier, Buzzard, Osprey and White-tailed Eagle have also been seen in the area.

5 Cape Clear Island

Target species: Sooty Shearwater, Balearic Shearwater, Peregrine, Black Guillemot, Black Redstart, Ring Ouzel, Barred Warbler, Yellow-browed Warbler, Firecrest, Pied Flycatcher, Chough.

Access: There are regular ferries (no cars) to Cape Clear, departing from Baltimore and Schull. For main island ferry, see www.capeclearferry.com. For others, see www.cailinoir.com and www.capeclearferries.com. The BirdWatch Ireland-run Bird Observatory beside the harbour on Cape Clear provides accommodation (advance booking essential) and the resident warden can provide information. Apart from the 'Obs,' there is a Youth Hostel, self-catering cottages, B&Bs and a campsite.



Firecrest

Shearwaters, European Storm Petrels, Grey Phalaropes, Great and Arctic Skuas are all likely. Pomarine and Long-tailed Skua as well as Sabine's Gull are less common, while rare seabirds such as Wilson's Petrel, Fea's Petrel and Black-browed Albatross have been seen. Seawatching is possible from other locations, but these are more dangerous, so consult the warden.

Alternatively, from Cotter's Garden you can turn right (south) and take either of two cul-de-sacs at the fork, to the southern half of the island. Barred Warblers favour the dense brambles near the West Bog, and this area always holds a few Chough and, occasionally, Ring Ouzel.

There is nowhere on Cape where good birds have not been encountered. From late September to November, there will almost certainly be a few Yellow-browed Warblers, Pied Flycatchers and Firecrests present. Other regulars include Turtle Dove, Wryneck, Redstart, Reed Warbler, Garden Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Hoopoe, Lapland Bunting, Yellow Wagtail and Tree Pipit. Less regular are Red-breasted Flycatcher, Icterine Warbler, Melodious Warbler, Red-backed Shrike, Golden Oriole, Subalpine Warbler, Woodchat Shrike and Common Rosefinch. The list of rare species seen on the island is mouth-watering and includes American passerines as well as Siberian vagrants. Here's a sample: Sardinian Warbler, Olivaceous Warbler, Bonelli's Warbler, Pallas's Warbler, Lesser Grey Shrike, Serin, Red-eyed Vireo, Black-and-white Warbler, Northern Oriole, Bobolink, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, White-throated Sparrow, Rustic Bunting, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Grey Catbird, Northern Waterthrush, Siberian Thrush, Scarlet Tanager.

Chough, Raven and Peregrine breed on the island and can be encountered anywhere, but keep an eye out for Merlin, Short-eared Owl and Hen Harrier, as these often pass through.

Top 10 birds:

1 Sooty Shearwater

Look for these amongst Manx Shearwaters passing any headland, but Cape Clear in August or September provides the best chances.

2 Black-tailed Godwit

These will be present on almost any estuary from early July, but the west side of Clonakilty on an incoming tide will provide excellent views.

3 Pectoral Sandpiper

Look amongst the grassy borders of White's and Clogheen Marshes, especially in September.

4 Mediterranean Gull

Look amongst the gulls at Rosscarbery, especially the closer birds by the lay-by on the east side. Best numbers in late August and September.

5 Ring-billed Gull

Possible in any gull flock, but Rosscarbery, from September onwards, is the most regular site.

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Pied Flycatcher

6 Ring Ouzel

Always scarce, and often seen only briefly, but the West Bog or the Glen on Cape Clear Island in October provides the best chances.

7 Barred Warbler

Scarce, irregular, and often secretive when present. Look in bramble hedges around the West Bog on Cape Clear from mid-September.

8 Firecrest

Cotter's Garden on Cape Clear from mid-September often has a Firecrest present.

9 Pied Flycatcher

Possible in any area of coastal trees from September onwards. Cotter's Garden on Cape Clear often has one in the sycamores.

10 Chough

Widespread throughout the year on most headlands in West Cork. Reliably seen near the castle on the Old Head of Kinsale.