

# Where to watch

By **Kieran Grace & Pete Wolstenholme**

\* See *Wings Autumn 2009* for West Cork 1 (Kinsale to Cape Clear).



0 Distance (kilometres) 7.5



## 2 Dursey Island & Garinish

**Black-throated Diver**  
Winter visitor to Bantry Bay.  
– (Mike Langman, RSPBimages.com)



## Top 5 sites:

### 1 Bantry Bay & Glengarriff

**Target species:** Glaucous Gull, Iceland Gull, Mediterranean Gull, Black-throated Diver, Blackcap.

**Access:** The Beara peninsula is served by the N71 road from Bantry towards Killarney. Turn off onto the R572 at Glengarriff. This leads to Adrigole and the thriving fishing port of Castletownbere.

**Habitats:** Tidal inlets, sessile oak woodland, fishing harbours.

**Birds:** The town creek in Bantry town can hold scarce gull species during late autumn to early spring. Look for Iceland, Glaucous, Mediterranean and Ring-billed Gulls. Black-throated Divers are seen every winter in the sound between Bantry and Whiddy Island. They can be viewed from the path along the shore at Bantry air-strip.

Glengarriff Forest Park is a superb sessile oak wood on the outskirts of Glengarriff town on the N71 road to Kenmare. It contrasts sharply with the stark and rugged landscape of the Beara peninsula generally. Breeding Blackcaps are common in the wood, while Wood Warbler was recorded there many decades ago.

As one progresses westwards along the Beara peninsula, the inlet at Adrigole and the fishing harbour at Castletownbere (including the pier area on nearby Dinish Island, which is accessible by road) all offer the chance of unusual gulls. The inlet at Adrigole has also produced American Wigeon and Goosander in recent years in winter, so it should be carefully checked.

### 2 Dursey Island & Garinish

**Target species:** Black Redstart, Lesser Whitethroat, Yellow-browed Warbler, Pied Flycatcher, Firecrest, Chough.

**Access:** From Castletownbere, travel westwards in the direction of Allihies, keeping to the southern side of the peninsula until one reaches Barnes Gap. Here, take the left-hand turn, signposted for Dursey Island. This brings you to the Dursey cable-car, which services the island. It also passes the turn-off for Garinish Pier, approximately 2km before the cable-car.

The timetable for the cable-car is usually 09:00-10:45 hours and 14:30-16:00 hours, but it runs from 09:00-10:00 and 14:00-15:00 hours on Sunday: these times may vary and should be checked locally.

As the island has no shops or running water, visitors should ensure they have adequate food, water as well as suitable clothing and footwear when visiting.

**Habitats:** Rocky headlands, cliffs, small gardens, hedgerows.

**Birds:** Dursey Island is approximately 7km long, and interesting birds can turn up anywhere. There are a few private gardens, but the habitat is primarily grass fields and low hedgerows. Viewing is mostly possible from the paths. The cliffs at the western end are spectacular, as are the views. The grass sward at the tip is very attractive to Choughs, flocks of which can sometimes exceed 50 birds.

Land migrants can be found anywhere on the island. Regular autumn passage migrants include Black Redstart, Yellow-browed Warbler and Firecrest, while some of the rarer species seen there have included Ovenbird, Northern Parula, Eastern Olivaceous Warbler and Arctic Redpoll.



Stephen McAvooy



Raven



**Blackpoll Warbler**

A rare vagrant from North America, this individual (photographed by Ciaran Cronin) was found by Kieran Grace at Garinish, near Dursey, on 11th September this year.

Arctic Skua



Colum Clarke



# Where to watch ... on the West Cork Coast

Barley Cove and Lissagriffin Lake. – Pete Wolstenholme

The habitat at Garinish Pier and surrounding areas on the nearby mainland is also characterised by private gardens but, once again, the habitat is primarily grass fields and hedgerows. Viewing is mostly possible from the roadways and paths. As on Dursey, land migrants can be found anywhere around Garinish, with regular autumn passage migrants including Pied Flycatcher, Lesser Whitethroat, Yellow-browed Warbler and Firecrest. Some of the rarer species seen have included Scarlet Tanager, Paddyfield Warbler, Swainson's Thrush, White-crowned Sparrow, Red-rumped Swallow and, most recently, Blackpoll Warbler and Mourning Dove.



Yellow-browed Warbler

Eric Dempsey

## 3 Croagh Bay

**Target species:** Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Greenshank.

**Access:** Croagh Bay comprises two arms of a tidal inlet snuggling behind Long Island. From Schull, take the main road (R592) west, signposted Goleen. After 0.4km take left turn, signposted Coast Road, and travel 2.6km to Croagh. Take the road down the right-hand side of the estuary for a short distance and pull in off the road on a rise to view the estuary with a 'scope. You can drive down the left-hand side of the estuary for better views of birds on that side.

The birds can be flighty, so proceeding by car is the best option. To view the western arm of the estuary (Crewe), return to the top of the estuary and turn left, at the little bridge, and go along the Coast Road for 1.5km. Then take the first proper road left, which will bring you around to the western channel where the road runs along the southern shore.

**Habitats:** Tidal estuary, salt marsh, freshwater stream.

**Birds:** This site is a little-known gem where you can enjoy a wide selection of birds and maybe even find your own rarity. We always marvel at the complete selection of waders, ducks, gulls and herons found here. The possibility of seeing a rare vagrant is enhanced by the site's plentiful mudflats and freshwater for bathing and by its geographical position. This estuary is the nearest to Cape Clear and Mizen Head and rare migrant waterbirds that have over-flown Cape or Mizen are therefore likely to put down here.

This is a pioneering site for those interested in finding rarities where they have not been recorded before. Check the fields for geese and herons. Great White Egret and Common Crane have occurred in recent times.



Skylark  
(Shay Connolly)

## 4 Lissagriffin Lake

**Target species:** Osprey, Pectoral Sandpiper, Jack Snipe, Skylark, Cuckoo.

**Access:** From the village of Goleen, take the right turn, signposted Barley Cove/Coast Road. After 4.5km, Lissagriffin Lake lies on your left. You can view the lake and the lakeshore from the road. The more adventurous birder parks at the main Barley Cove beach car-park and walks along the shore (wellies required).

**Habitats:** Tidal lake with saltmarsh, sand dunes and machair grassland. In the last few years, caravans have been removed from the dunes and the area restored to its natural state and given full SAC status (for its special birds, butterflies and wild flowers).

**Birds:** This is one of the best places in Europe for sightings of stray American waders and vagrant pipits and larks. Over the years, almost every American shorebird, and more recently rare European larks and the American Buff-bellied Pipit, have been found here, mainly in autumn. During and after Atlantic storms, American waders can turn up and the excitement can be infectious. Look for these around the lake – Pectoral Sandpipers are annual here and on one occasion three 'Yanks' – Lesser Yellowlegs, Baird's Sandpiper and Pectoral Sandpiper – literally dropped out of the sky to land here. The vagrants can be so tired you can walk right up to them.

As well as checking the lake and lakeshore, it is also worth walking through the grassland alongside, where you may put up pipits, larks, rare warblers, Snipe and maybe a Jack Snipe or Pectoral Sandpiper. Check the calls of larks and pipits as they rise: Buff-bellied Pipit and Short-toed Lark have been found here. Ospreys occur at the lake fairly regularly.

In high summer, Cuckoos sit on the goalposts of the GAA pitch, scanning for pipit nests. The drier shoreline and machair is full of wonderful wild flowers and orchids. The rare Marsh Fritillary butterfly is present from the middle of June – a time when Skylarks will be singing, the sky will be blue and all will be right with the world!



Lesser Whitethroat

Paul and Andrea Kelly (www.irishbirdimages.com)



# Wicklow Mountains National Park

**Information Office Winter Opening Hours**  
 10am - 4pm, weekends only  
 Daily opening over Christmas  
 Park Headquarters 0404 45800  
 Information Office 0404 45425  
 Education Centre 0404 45656  
[www.wicklowmountainnationalpark.ie](http://www.wicklowmountainnationalpark.ie)



**National Parks  
& Wildlife Service**

Comhshaoil, Oidhreacht agus Rialtas Áitiúil  
 Environment, Heritage and Local Government



*Peregrine Falcon*

# Top 10 birds:

## 1 Black-throated Diver

Annual in winter in the sound between the air-strip at Bantry and Whiddy Island. View from the path along the shore at the air-strip. Also found in Crookhaven Harbour.

## 2 Raven

Ravens are synonymous with Mizen Head; listen for their honking call.

## 3 Osprey

Annual visitors in the last few years at Lissagriffin Lake in autumn.

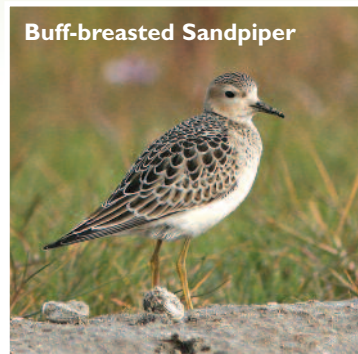
## 4 Arctic Skua

May be seen from Galley Cove, chasing Kittiwakes during southerly gales in autumn mainly. Great Skua is equally likely.

## 5 Buff-breasted Sandpiper

Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper and other American waders are regularly seen during September and October at Lissagriffin Lake and Crewe Bay.

**Buff-breasted Sandpiper**



Eric Dempsey

## 6 Cuckoo

Cuckoos are seen in the Lissagriffin Lake area during May and June.

## 7 Skylark

Skylarks, and occasionally rarer larks and pipits such as Short-toed Lark and Buff-bellied Pipit, can be found around the margins of Lissagriffin Lake and in the Crookhaven sand dunes.

## 8 Yellow-browed Warbler

Yellow-browed Warblers are found in the willow scrub on Mizen Head during autumn. Listen for their Coal Tit-like call.

## 9 Lesser Whitethroat

The main garden at Mizen, as well as gardens in Crookhaven, can hold migrant Lesser Whitethroats in October. Listen for their 'tak' call.

## 10 Red-eyed Vireo

Four Red-eyed Vireos have been found on Mizen Head in autumn.



**Red-eyed Vireo**

Tom Shevlin (www.wildlifemaps.com)



Stonechat

Kestrel

Mistle Thrush

Meadow Pipit

Long-tailed Tit

Grey Wagtail

## 5 Mizen Head

**Target species:** Arctic Skua, Raven, Cuckoo, Yellow-browed Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Red-eyed Vireo.

**Access:** From Lissagriffin Lake, take the turn left for Barley Cove, Cannawee and Mizen Head.

**Habitats:** Rocky headland, maritime grassland, hedges, gardens.

**Birds:** Mizen offers birding similar to that on Cape Clear but with easier access, being on the mainland. The birdwatching is at its best in March-April and September-October. During an easterly gale or when an anticyclone lies over Russia or Scandinavia, rare eastern vagrants can make landfall here. Search in the lee of hills and in sheltered valleys, and look along boreens and into gardens for passerines, particularly where there are sycamores or willows. (Always seek permission to enter any lived-in garden, and park sensibly: do not block gateways or boreens.)

The first Irish record of Blyth's Reed Warbler was obtained here in 2007, just days after Ireland's first ever Buff-bellied Pipit was found at Lissagriffin.

Seawatching from Mizen can be good during strong southerly winds. The best seawatch points are at Mizen Head itself (Mizen Vision café), Three Castle Head and Brow Head (this headland has good cover and is good for land migrants in the autumn). You can also seawatch from the roadside at Galley Cove, near Crookhaven.

Cetaceans feature strongly from September to December, and Porpoise, Common and Bottlenose Dolphins, Minke and Fin Whales are regular at this time.

A number of Cork birders set up Crookhaven Bird Observatory in 1981. It is manned every October (tel. 087-220 4841) and will provide bird news, a map and a guide to the area.

Dermot O'Sullivan, owner of Sullivan's Bar in Crookhaven, can advise on any recent sightings in the area, besides making a wonderful seafood chowder and bowl of fresh shrimps!