

Number 11 Summer 2016



# BIRD DETECTIVES

The magazine for Junior Members of BirdWatch Ireland

MOONLIGHT  
SAFARI

FOCUS ON  
LAPWINGS

SPRING  
ALIVE

IRISH  
HARES





# Welcome!

## Spring sprang!

The Merry Month of May and Shelduck Holmes is well pleased with these long summer days.

There's plenty to look forward to over the next month or two: school holidays; trips to the beach; dinner from the barbie, and long evenings spent outside.

As a Bird Detective you can cram lots more into these days. There's always so much to see any time of the day or night because all our birds are busy nesting and raising young while the sun shines and food is plenty.

If you are attending *Bloom in the Park* at Dublin's Phoenix Park – Ireland's biggest garden show – over the holiday weekend in June, make sure you drop by our Bird-Watch Ireland stand where there will be lots of fun activities for kids of all ages.



Lots of fun things to do at the Bloom in the Park



Dusk is the best time to see Woodcock

Craig Nash

We reckon you could spend 22 hours of the day watching birds, starting with the dawn chorus and finishing with a moonlight safari for Woodcock and owls. What a day that would be, maybe try it over a few days. Even bird detectives need sleep and rest!

Make sure you catch a Dawn Chorus event over the coming weeks. They are organised all around the country, so check your *Wings* magazine for one near you.



Come and meet the BirdWatch Ireland team!

You can also meet the BirdWatch Ireland team and check out their knowledge of birds. See you there!

Shelduck Holmes

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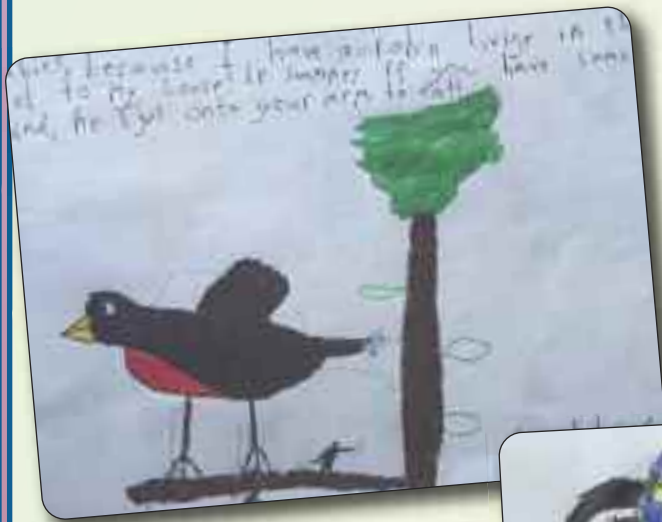
Cover pic: Blue Tit by Kevin Murphy.



# Activities

## WILD GALLERY

**Niall Hatch recently went along to meet the children of 3rd and 4th class of St. Saviours NS, Rathdrum, Co. Wicklow. They are all keen bird artists and sent him copies of their garden bird sketches. Enjoy!**



Robin (Elias)



Long tailed Tit (Lucy R)



Sparrowhawk (Joshua)



Big Bird (Dara)



Blue Tit (Lara)

# Moonlight Safari

**Assignment:** Check the evening sky for roding Woodcock

## Amazing sounds to be heard at night

Summer evenings can be long and warm, great for barbecues and outdoor eating. However, when dusk comes around, why not prepare to share a summer safari with birds and wildlife?

Choose a warm, calm, dry night. Make sure you put loads of insect repellent on to protect you from insect bites and midges, and maybe wear a fleece and a hat to stay warm and comfortable. It can quickly get chilly once the sun goes down.

Then, at dusk, as the night falls and the last glow of light is on the horizon, Robins and Blackbirds sing their final dusk chorus. Let your eyes adjust to the last of the light, and listen carefully. This is the time for the day shift to settle down for the night, and the night shift to wake and become active.

Tiny Pipestrelle bats are often the first of the bats to emerge at dusk. Try to follow their jinking, rapid flight as they chase tiny, flying insects around buildings or below trees.

Other bats can also appear, Daubenton's bats are usually found over ponds or rivers, and you might be lucky to make out the large ears on one of our bigger bat species, the Brown Long-eared Bat.



Craig Nash

## The croaking woodland wader

If you live near forestry or a wooded area, you have a good chance of seeing – or at least hearing – one of our special night birds, the Woodcock. They have a terrific display flight called 'roding', delivered by the male, high over his territory, just at last light.

Woodcock emerge from their hiding place on the ground under the forest, and then fly above the tree tops with a level flight on quick, shallow, double wingbeats, calling their distinctive squeaking, "PISSP!" call. If it flies close, you may also hear the strange, deep, pig-like croak, repeated three or four times and then ending with the louder, explosive squeak call:

"Wart... Wart... Wart... Wart... PISSP!"

If you are lucky, two or more competing Woodcock should result in plenty of calling, one of the great wildlife sights and sounds of an Irish summer.

Once the light has faded and you have enjoyed your sunset with grunting, squeaking Woodcocks, part one of the Summer Safari is complete and you can then look forward to part two and some really special night time attractions. Time to look for moths!

Poplar Hawkmoth



## Did you know?

There are over 570 species of macro moth in Ireland!





Snipe

M.O'Clery

Snipe:  
In flight -  
"Wu-u-u-u-u..."  
On the ground -  
"Wicka-wicka-wicka"..."



Assignment: Check for moths attracted to your very own moth trap

**Other night time noises**

There are lots of other night time noises you might hear. If you are near wetland scrub, listen for the continuous 'reeling' song of a Grasshopper Warbler, or the bleating "Wu-u-u-u-u..." of a displaying Snipe which sounds like a bleating goat!



M.O'Clery

Grasshopper Warbler:  
"R-r-r-r-r-r-r-r..."



R.T.Mills

Long-eared Owl:  
Male - "Hoo!"  
Female- a dove-like  
"Whurrr!"



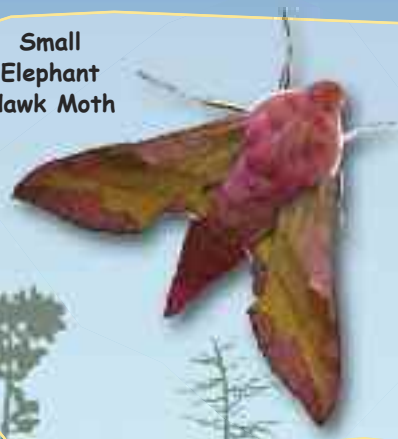
M.O'Clery

Barn Owl:  
"Shreee!"

Near woodland, listen for the low, "Hoo!" of a Long-eared Owl. Barn Owls are pretty scarce, but you just might hear one make a loud, long screech, "Shreee!"

Not all noises are made by birds though, and you might well hear the high-pitched, barking yelp of a Red Fox, or the high, whistling sounds of a deer.

Small Elephant Hawk Moth



**Attracting moths**

There are so many species of moth in Ireland, but most fly about at night so we rarely get to see even a small number of species. Why not attract moths to your garden with a few special tricks. Then you will really appreciate the huge variety of these winged wonders.



Swallow tailed Moth

## Bright ideas for seeing moths up close

Firstly, well before dusk, set up a **Moth Light**.

### You will need

- an old white sheet
- a washing line or string
- Clothes pegs
- A desk lamp, or strong torch

Nettle Tap



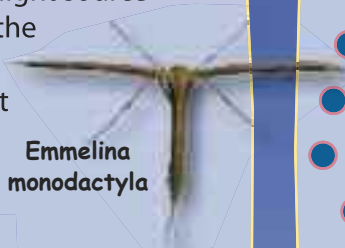
**Method** At dusk, peg the sheet to the washing line, or attach it to an outside wall if you prefer.

Six Spot Burnet



Turn on your light source and aim it at the sheet. Turn off any other lights that may compete with this light source.

Emmelina monodactyla



All moth photos: S.McAvoy

Dave Suddaby



Checking the moth traps



Leave it all in place for up to two hours to see what moths are attracted to your sheet. To help you sort out your 'catch', some of the commonest are shown here, but if you would like more information, we recommend this book: *The Usborne Spotter's Guide to Bugs and Insects*, available at Wings Shop

[www.birdwatchireland.ie](http://www.birdwatchireland.ie)

[www.birdwatchireland.ie](http://www.birdwatchireland.ie)

You could win a copy by entering our competition on page 16.



Prize

## Sweet treats for moths

Moths are attracted to nectar, just like butterflies, but they mostly prefer to feed at night. If you wish, you can attract moths to your very own Moth Café, using your very own sweet nectar treat, prepared in your kitchen!

And on today's Moth Menu, Banana-flavoured Caribbean Cola!

### You will need

- Torch or head lamp with red cellophane or filter
- A medium-sized paintbrush (1cm to 2cm wide)

And for the magic recipe, you will need:

- Brown sugar
- Cola
- Treacle
- Very ripe bananas



Large Yellow Underwing

**Method** Chop the ripe bananas, then mash them with a fork. Sprinkle on some brown sugar and add a tablespoon of treacle. Pour on some Cola, enough to dissolve the sugar, to make it spreadable, but not too runny.

Pour the mix into a pan and heat over a medium heat, stirring the mixture all the time. It should thicken as the sugar dissolves, but don't let it boil over! Once thickened to a gloop, remove it from the pan. Leave to cool, stirring to ensure you have a smooth paste. Job done!

Once the sweet treat is ready, head out into the garden before dark and, using your paint brush, smear the sweet mixture in strips, onto the bark of some trees.

Check the trees when it is completely dark, using your red head lamp or torch. Moths can't see red light, so they will continue to feed on the sweet treat as you watch.

Try and capture some pix on a smartphone – we would love to see what moths you find!



Check out  
[www.mothsireland.com](http://www.mothsireland.com)





# FOCUS ON

# LAPWINGS



John Fox

Jewel of the grasslands

## FACT FILE

### Irish name

Pilibín,  
means 'Little Philip'

### Other common names

'Green plover' &  
'Peewit'

### Wingspan

67–87 cm

### Weight

128–330g

### No. of eggs

Usually 3–4

### Incubation of eggs

27–29 days

### Fledgling period

About 40 days

### Irish winter population

About 200,000 birds

### Breeding population

Recent dramatic decline to less than 2000 pairs

### Food

Insects, spiders, snails, earthworms, frogs and seeds

### Nest

A shallow scrape on short grass

### Threats

Intensification of farming, drainage of grasslands and wetlands, ground predators

### Bird on the margins

If you go to any wet place in winter – lake, marsh, estuary or coast – chances are you will see flocks of Lapwing, or 'Green Plovers', especially if the weather is particularly cold in Europe.

They have a somewhat lazy flight, flapping and turning, and the light often catches their smart black and white plumage.

If you get a good view of them on the ground, you will notice that they have a lovely, deep green colour on the back, a long, spikey crest on their head, and a boldly marked black and white face pattern, all of which gives them an exotic appearance.

In spring and summer, some Lapwings remain to breed on Irish lowlands but they are becoming very scarce as a breeding bird and now number fewer than 2000 breeding pairs.

Lapwings are much commoner in winter when birds from Russia and Scandinavia spend the winter in Ireland. Best places to see them in winter are The Shannon & Fergus Eastury, The Shannon Callows & Wexford Harbour and Slobs.



Exotic looking  
Lapwing

Colum Clarke

**DID YOU KNOW?**  
Lapwing are also known as 'Peewits', which comes from a description of the sound that breeding birds make during their display flight



# Shelduck Holmes



Scaly  
in autumn

Oran O'Sullivan

# Lapwings

Clive Timmons



Lapwing on  
the wing



**BirdWatchIreland**  
birdwatchireland.ie  
protecting birds and biodiversity





**Egg-cellent nest**

Paul Troake



**Cute Lapwing chick**

Colum Clarke



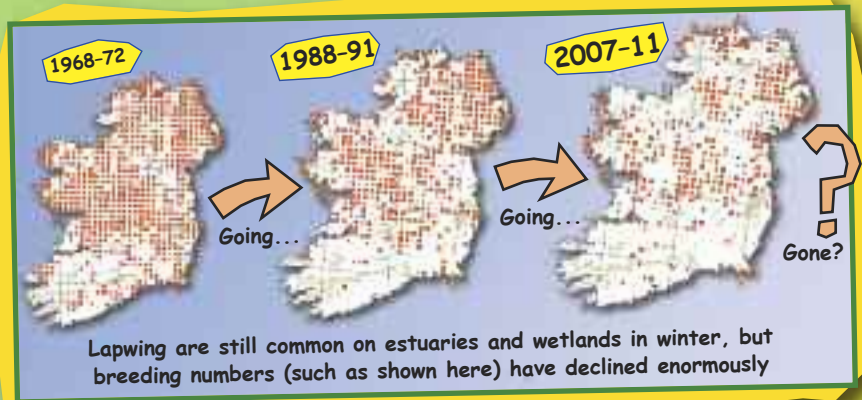
**Exotic-looking wader**

Richard Duff



**Cool hair style!**

Colm Fitzpatrick



## Breeding range

Breeding Lapwing are red-listed in Ireland as populations have decreased from an estimated 16,250 pairs in 1993 to an estimated 2000 pairs in 2008 - a 88% decrease in the Irish breeding population in just 15 years! Scary!

## Ground-nesting birds with breeding numbers in steep decline

### What Lapwings like

The best area for Lapwings to lay eggs and raise young are areas of wide open and often marshy fields that are grazed by cattle. This open landscape allows Lapwing to watch for predators and gives the young birds plenty of places to look for juicy grubs and worms. Cattle also create muddy ruts and hoofmarks which harbour lots of invertebrates and other creepy crawlies for cute Lapwing chicks to eat.



John Fox

### Threats

Very wet weather spells trouble for ground-nesting waders such as Lapwing. Eggs and young can chill very easily in wet grass, and the nests themselves can be washed away. Although cattle are a friend to the Lapwing, they can also accidentally trample nests.

Predators such as foxes and crows, are thought to have a major effect on breeding waders such as Lapwing. BirdWatch Ireland scientists have come up with a terrific way to help Lapwings nest successfully – an electric fence! When placed around Lapwing nesting areas it has proved very effective at keeping hungry predators out. The electric fence, sometimes stretching to nearly 4km in length, has to be maintained before each breeding season.

In BirdWatch Ireland, we are happy to have volunteers who sign up to take part in this major operation on the Shannon Callows and at other breeding colonies in the west and north west of the country.



**Cattle grazing, good for Lapwings, but...**

Oran O'Sullivan

Because they nest out in the open, they are often close to huge, grazing cattle which might trample their nests if there are too many feet in the fields. They are also vulnerable to predation by foxes, mink and Hooded Crows.

However, Lapwings have a few tricks to help them survive, including ganging up together to dive-bomb any intruder from a height, with dramatic tumbles and stalling, all the while calling sharply.

### Eggs and young

The nest is a shallow scrape, or bowl, in the grass. Usually three to four dark brown eggs are laid, well camouflaged on the soil. Very soon after the eggs hatch, after about four weeks, the chicks are ready to leave the nest, but are cared for by both parents until they are able to fly.



**Chicks in their nest**

Paul Troake





The Mizubashi Corporation Fund for Europe and Africa



# SPRING ALIVE

## Welcome home, migratory birds!



Countless extraordinary journeys bring our birds home

### Migratory magic

One of the most fascinating things about birds is their amazing migrations between summer breeding in Europe and winter warming in Africa to find food. Every year we are lucky to celebrate the arrival of migrants like Willow Warblers, Cuckoos, Swifts and Swallows, with **Spring Alive!**



M.O'Clery

**Willow Warbler** – one of our commonest summer migrants

Flying thousands of kilometres is naturally very tiring, though they have no choice but to migrate to survive. Pause for a moment to think of the journey these birds have undertaken. Let's just take one example, Sam Swallow, born in an old stone barn in Ireland last summer. Sam travelled to South Africa to spend the winter, but in the last few weeks, started this epic return journey.

Mike Brown

**Sam's journey starts in southern Africa...**

**Sam flies across miles of African savannah...**

Brian Dell: Wikimedia Commons

**...over vast tropical rainforests...**

V.Y. Arkhipov: Wikimedia Commons

**...across the largest desert in the world...**

Global Atlas Adventures: Wikimedia Commons



**...and finally - home, the shed where Sam was born last year!**



**...and launches out over miles of hostile ocean...**

M.O'Clery







Some of our migratory birds are in big trouble from human threats. These include climate change, and drought, which means a bigger desert to cross in Africa.

Then there are the dangers of pesticides and some changes in farming meaning less food and nest space for birds. There are also problems with powerlines and wind turbines in the wrong places, illegal shooting and trapping of birds. Phew! There's a lot of danger for birds out there!

## How much do you know about migration? Lets see!

### What can I do for the birds in my neighbourhood?

Listen out for the bird's calls and welcome them home! You can learn their calls on the **Spring Alive** website.

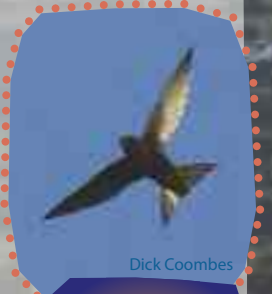
Think big about their incredible migrations and all the other people, places, nature and cultures the birds visit in Africa and Europe

### House Martins build their mud nests



### Make your garden, school, balcony and other surroundings bird-friendly

- Plant lots of native flowers – let your garden go wild!
- Use bird feeders and bird food
- Make a pond or water feature
- Keep cats away from birds
- Put up nest boxes
- Be kind to your bird neighbours – respect where they nest!
- Don't use poisonous pesticides
- Put stickers on windows to stop birds hitting them
- Clean up litter – releasing balloons and leaving out plastic rope and other rubbish can kill birds!



Swifts are a wonderful sight and sound each summer

# Quiz!

### Quiz about migratory birds

These questions are all about our common migratory birds. Have a go and see how much you know! Answers are at the bottom of page 13.

#### 1) How many insects will a Swift eat per day?

- a) 50 -1,000
- b) 1,000 – 10,000
- c) 10,000 – 40,000

#### 2) What does the word migration mean?

- a) sleeping through the winter
- b) seasonal movement from one place to another
- c) taking a holiday

#### 3) Why do birds migrate?

- a) to get a good tan
- b) because they don't like cold weather
- c) to find food

#### 4) A Cuckoo uses the African-Eurasian flyway to migrate. This means that it:

- a) likes hip hop music
- b) carries a packed suitcase at all times
- c) spends the winter in Africa and comes to the Europe in the summer to raise a family.



Cuckoo





**The more you learn about migration, the more you can help**

Go to [www.springalive.net](http://www.springalive.net) for information and tips on how to help them survive their epic journeys



**Whitethroat**

M.O'Clery

## How can we help these incredible voyagers?

### 5) When do House Martins fly when they are migrating?

- a) during the day
- b) at night
- c) between noon and six o'clock

### 6) How long does it take a Swallow to migrate from Ireland to South Africa?

- a) about 7-10 days
- b) about 6 to 8 weeks
- c) about 4 to 6 months

### 7) Which summer migrant breeds only on the highest Irish mountains?

- a) Sedge Warbler
- b) Spotted Flycatcher
- c) Ring Ouzel

### 8) What clues help migrating birds find their way?

- a) earth's magnetic field
- b) landscape features (such as mountain ranges, rivers, coastlines)
- c) wind and star patterns
- d) all of the above



**Sand Martin**

M.O'Clery

### 9) How does a Swift sleep?

- a) it leans on its friends while it is dozing
- b) in the air, with one half of its brain asleep while the other half is awake
- c) it perches on a tree to sleep

### 10) Which of these species is NOT a summer migrant to Ireland

- a) Grasshopper Warbler
- b) Whitethroat
- c) Long-tailed Tit
- d) Cuckoo

### 11) There are now fewer Swallows and House Martins than before. This is because of problems:

- a) where the birds build their nests
- b) where the birds spend the winter
- c) where the birds pass through while migrating
- d) all of the above

### 12) One way we can help more our summer migrants to survive is to:

- a) put out bird feeders
- b) use fewer pesticides
- c) put out fat balls



**Sedge Warbler**

M.O'Clery

## Answers to the Migration Quiz

1. = C. An adult swift can eat as many as 40,000 insects per day. They can bring up to 1,000 insects back to their chicks at one time.
2. = B. Migration means seasonal movement from one place to another.
3. = C. Birds will travel far for a good supply of their favorite foods. By going to Africa in the summer, migrant birds like warblers and flycatchers, will find lots of the insects they need to feed themselves.
4. = C. Spends the winter in Africa and comes to the Europe in the summer to raise a family.
5. = A. House Martins, like Swallows Swifts and Sand Martins, fly during the day so that they can catch insects as they travel.
6. = B. About 6 to 8 weeks. Most swallows leave Ireland starting in September or October. They return in April or May of the following spring.

7. = C. Ring Ouzel, a scarce summer visitor to high mountains in Kerry and Donegal.
8. = D. Birds can use each of these clues to keep from getting lost.
9. = B. After leaving the nest where they hatched, a swift will keep flying non-stop for three years!
10. = C. Long-tailed Tits are common in Ireland, but do not migrate.
11. = D. Pesticides affect the number of insects available for the birds to eat and climate change causes drought and very severe weather conditions which affect the number of birds who survive the journey. The same thing is happening where they spend the winter and where they stop to rest while migrating.
12. = B. Fewer pesticides means more insects for the birds to eat.

# Hare we go, hare we go!

Bird Detective reports...

An animal unique to Ireland – The Irish Hare

## A special species

There are relatively few species of mammal on the island of Ireland, so its pretty special to have one that is unique to us: The Irish Hare.

It is our fastest native land mammal, and can reach speeds of up to 70 km per hour. It also has the ability to make rapid changes in direction while running to help save it from predators such as dogs and foxes.

## Country cousins

In summer the Irish Hare looks very similar to its close relative in Europe, the Arctic or Mountain Hare but, unlike them, the Irish Hare doesn't turn white in winter. This is because the Irish winter is relatively mild, and snow is rare. Irish Hares are also found in lowland areas.

## A year in the life

Hares differ from Rabbits in that they live above ground, even through the breeding cycle. The young hares are born with fur and eyes open, both adaptations to the risks that hares experience on the spring meadows and because they don't have a bolthole to hide in, like a Rabbit.

Look for Irish Hares in open, grassy areas



M.O'Clery

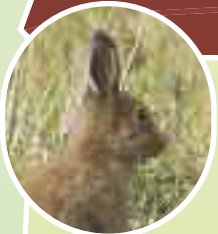
## March Madness

Although hares like to remain concealed during the day, things change in March and April. The breeding season is a long one – January to August – depending on food and weather conditions. With spring at its peak, males chase and 'kick-box' in groups, to establish dominance. The females will also cavort and box with a male. They can produce up to three litters a year, with an average of two leverets in each litter, but survival is very hard and mortality high, particularly in their first year.



Shay Connolly

## Irish Hare Fact File



M.O'Clery

- Much Larger than a Rabbit
- Doesn't make a burrow
- Pure white tail
- Ears white with distinctive black tips
- Sits upright on long back legs
- Males weigh about 3kg, females up to 3.6kg
- Large eyes set on the side of the head give nearly 360° vision
- Top speed of 70km per hour, to outrun predators



A hare makes a flattened patch within an area of cover, called a form. The young take shelter in such a place to minimise the chances of being found by a predator, and when young, rarely leave the area of the form. The mother returns only once a night to this hideout to feed them a nutritious milk. The young, called leverets, are weaned after three weeks.

### Where to see Irish Hares

Hares love open space, from coastal marshes and grassy fields, lowland bogs and upland moors. In any of these places, they need to feed on a rich variety of vegetation, the type found in old-style grasslands. In upland and bog areas, they

have a rich diet of young heather shoots, herbs, grasses and sedges, as well as shoots from willow, gorse and bilberry. Lowland hares have less choice and eat more grasses.

Andrew Kelly



Red Fox

The Wexford Wildfowl Reserve has got a designated Hare Reserve and you can view hares there from the Observation Tower.

Airport car parks are usually close to large expanses of grassland and are often the easiest place to see an Irish Hare. Check out those long-term car parks on your next early morning visit to the airport, and let us know if you have a sighting or picture.

**In folklore, the hare was associated with the grain harvest, when one sheaf of corn was left uncut in the fields so it could be used by hares to hide in.**

**Finishing the harvest was known as 'putting out the hare'**

### Threats to Irish Hares

Numbers of hares in Ireland have declined over the last 30 years.

Hares prefer unimproved land and there is much less of this habitat available to the hares as our farms are increasingly mechanised and wildlife spaces are reduced. They are also very sensitive to pesticides and, with shorter, trimmed grasses and faster machinery, young hares are more exposed to predators such as foxes, stoats, birds of prey and crows.

Disturbance is a big issue in some areas and has contributed to their decline in some well known places like the Bull Island in Dublin Bay. Pressure from stray dogs has led to a big reduction in numbers of hares.

Although hunting and coursing of hares has occurred for centuries, unlicensed hunting is a problem in some areas.

### Irish proverbs and sayings

The three traits of a hare: 'A lively ear; a bright eye, and a quick run against the hound'.

'The sleep of the hare' meant, 'to sleep with one eye open'.

'A hopper of ditches, a cutter of corn, a brown little cow without any horns'.



Sahy Connolly

# Shelduck Holmes

## Competition Page

### Competition 1

Three of these species will commonly nest in a nest box, but one **NEVER** nests in nest boxes – Which is the odd one out?

1 Blue Tit

2 Spotted Flycatcher

3 Treecreeper

4 Lapwing

Answer the question correctly and you have a chance to win a **Prize**: a BirdWatch Ireland Blue Tit Nest Box, worth €20.00.



**Prize**

### Competition 2

#### Wacky Bird Word Search

W	D	D	U	N	N	O	C	K	R	C	S
H	N	R	H	J	L	G	K	W	T	I	Q
C	A	I	F	S	V	T	R	X	J	B	S
N	Q	B	T	I	T	E	U	L	B	Y	D
I	O	K	U	R	N	V	G	C	P	H	U
F	P	C	B	T	A	N	W	G	U	K	G
F	E	A	M	N	I	M	A	G	P	I	E
A	P	L	F	L	N	K	E	K	V	N	X
H	G	B	R	F	L	B	A	S	Y	I	I
C	N	A	O	Z	R	E	Q	Z	U	B	H
Z	T	H	S	U	R	H	T	G	N	O	S
S	X	M	C	L	W	O	Y	D	M	R	H

#### Find the birds

Magpie, Blue Tit, Blackbird, Robin, Starling, House Martin, Chaffinch, Wren, Song Thrush

Solve the Wacky Bird Word Search and be in with a chance to win an **Usborne Spotter's Guide to Bugs and Insects** book, worth €7.00



**Prize**

#### To enter

- Fill out your age, name and address on a blank sheet of paper.
- Answer the questions, marking them Competition 1 and/or 2 (you can photocopy this page, or use another page, AND enter both competitions if you like).
- Post it to: Bird Detectives Competitions, BirdWatch Ireland, Unit 20, Block D, Bullford Business Campus, Kilcoole, Greystones, Co Wicklow A63 RW83.

Closing date is 30th July 2016.

Why not check out the Kids' Zone on [www.birdwatchireland.ie](http://www.birdwatchireland.ie) for lots more fun activities