



Number **15** Summer 2018

BIRD DETECTIVES

The magazine for Junior Members of BirdWatch Ireland



FOCUS ON
IRISH
RAPTORS



SUPER RAPTOR
POSTER INSIDE!

SPRING ALIVE:
SWIFTS





Welcome!

Hi everybody!

My friends in BirdWatch Ireland get lots and lots of questions about all different kinds of birds, but they tell me that people ask more about birds of prey than any others. I'm not surprised: they are such exciting birds to see, and they always seem so mysterious.

With this in mind, Barney Owl and I thought it would be a good idea to tell you lots about Ireland's birds of prey, or "raptors", as they are also called. Barney in particular knows a lot of fascinating secrets about birds of prey because, well... he is one!



If you happen to see any birds of prey when you are out birdwatching, or even when you are simply playing in the park or looking out of your kitchen window, why not write to me and tell me all about them? If you can draw a picture or take a photo of the bird, that's even better! You might even get to see your work in print in a future issue of *Bird Detectives*.

This issue isn't entirely about raptors, though. This is the time of year when our summer migrants have returned to nest here in Ireland, and we need your help so that we can keep track of them.

The last of all our migrants to arrive each year is the amazing Swift, so to welcome them back we've prepared a special article all about them for you on pages 14 and 15. Once you see one, please remember to log your sighting for us at www.springalive.net, where you can also track the journeys of these remarkable birds across Europe. Remember, every record counts!

One of the most amazing of our summer visitors, the Swift



pau.artigas: Wiki Commons

Finally, don't forget that BirdWatch Ireland's branches all over Ireland have lots of free events planned for members right throughout the summer, all over Ireland. Why not go along to one of them with your family and see how many birds, butterflies and other creatures you can see? Full details of the events are in *Wings* magazine, which you will have received with this issue of *Bird Detectives*, and you can also find them at www.birdwatchireland.ie – have fun!

Shelduck Holmes

Editorial Address: Bird Detectives, BirdWatch Ireland, Unit 20 Block D, Bullford Business Campus, Kilcoole, Greystones, Co. Wicklow, A63 RW83. Edited by Niall Hatch, with special thanks to our contributors this issue: Ricky Whelan, John Lusby & Barbara Sullivan. Design by Michael O'Clery. Cover pic: White-tailed Sea Eagle, by Natalia Borodina.



Where's Barney?

Barn Owls have to search far and wide to hunt for mice. There are **5 BARNEY OWLS (with red and white shirts!)** and **5 MICE** hidden throughout this magazine...

See if you can find them all! (Answer on back page).





Interview:

Cian Cardiff



We interview a young birder who is based in Co. Wexford

Bird Detectives interviews Cian Cardiff

Cian Cardiff is a young birder who is currently living in Co. Wexford. Cian has a massive interest in birds and finding rare and scarce species. His home-patch is the marshes and lagoons of Wexford, the Mecca of Irish birdwatching.

Cian's interest in birds has grown over the years and if he's not at college or working part-time you know you will find him and his spotting scope down at one of the local marshes. We took some time to catch up with Cian...

Cian you're 19 now but your love for birds and birdwatching began much earlier in life. Tell us how you got into birdwatching?

I firstly got into birdwatching on a trip to Portugal with my family. While watching the White Storks nesting I felt in love with birds from that moment.



Marcin Karetta

The beautiful White Stork, a species which triggered Cian's interest in birds

Tell us about the kind of stuff you get up to (seawatching, listing, twitching, etc.).

I mainly visit my local marsh in Wexford and look for rare birds that may have come in from Europe or even America! This is a great way to relax and enjoy some time away from work and college.

Wexford is home to you but also home to some of the best birdwatching spots in the country: tell us about those.

For me and most other birdwatchers County Wexford is definitely one of Ireland's best places to go and look for birds. There are several sites such as:

- Tacumshin Lake: A stunning lake located right on the south coast.
- Lady's Island Lake: A large lake which is one of the best sites to visit in summer, when several tern species breed, including Common, Arctic, Sandwich and Roseate Terns.
- Carne beach: A super white sandy beach with a tiny harbour, which is brilliant for viewing flocks of Sanderling and Bar-tailed Godwit and for checking around the rocks for migrant Black Redstarts in spring and autumn.
- Bannow Bay: A large inlet in the southern half of the county, which is super for looking at huge numbers of waders in winter and a very good site for the stunning Kingfisher.
- Kilmore Quay: A small harbour in south Wexford, where Great Northern Divers can be viewed up close in winter each year.
- Saltee Islands: These two islands, known as Great Saltee and Little Saltee, are located just off the Kilmore Quay coast. They are extremely

Here are Cian's favourite birding spots in Wexford

Bannow Bay
Kilmore Quay
Saltee Islands



Cahore Marshes
Carne Beach
Lady's Island Lake
Tacumshin

Best birding spot, Tacumshin



Google Earth . Image ©Digital Globe

Cian's favourite birds and places

important breeding grounds for many different sea birds, such as Razorbills, Cormorants, Gannets and so much more. This is also a super spot for visiting migrants in spring and autumn that may be lost!

- Cahore Marsh: A long stretch of marshland located in north Wexford, and my own local "patch". One of the best sites in Ireland to find one of our rarest breeding birds, the Bearded Reedling.



Cian Cardiff

Bearded Reedling at Cahore Marsh - one of the best places in Ireland to see this rare breeding bird.

What's your favourite bird species and why?

It must be the Little Ringed Plover, which is a spring and autumn migrant from Europe. Only a small number breed in Ireland each year. I have loved them ever since I found a couple of birds on my local patches. Their yellow eye ring is just stunning, and their short "pyu" call is simply lovely to my ears. For many, their favourite bird would be an owl species or something, but for me it's the simple things!



Cian Cardiff

Cian's favourite bird, a Little Ringed Plover

For those of us not in the know, what's seawatching and are seawatchers all crazy?

Seawatching mainly involves sitting in an area with a spotting 'scope looking out to sea watching the sea birds passing by. It is magical if you visit the right sites to see the late summer and autumn seabirds on the move. Are they all crazy?! I think so, but don't tell anybody!



Dick Coombes

Seawatchers - The Crazy Bunch!

If you could wave a magic wand and do something for nature/environment what would that be?

I would make all the marshes in Ireland nature reserves for birds and other wildlife.

Interview by Ricky Whelan



FOCUS ON

Irish Raptors



Barney Owl introduces us to Irish raptors



Raptors are powerful birds which hunt (or 'seize!') other animals or feed on dead animals, which is called **scavenging**.

All raptors have some similar features. But they look different because they are each specially

designed to survive in different **niches** – the position an animal occupies in an ecosystem. These are called **adaptations**.

Some raptors might look a bit different to each other, but if you take a closer look, you will see that they all have some common features...

Merlin

Sharp talons

Excellent eyesight

Golden Eagle

Check out their 'Eagle-eyes' and strong, hooked beak

Dick Daniels Wiki Commons

Adaptations

My wing feathers have special **soft edges** and barbs which makes my flight silent.

This means I don't scare away small mammals before I can catch them!

Look at all the cool adaptations which I have so that I can find and catch food at night-time!



Mike Brown

I have **amazing hearing!** This is my best hunting tool. Look at my heart-shaped face. This acts like a satellite dish to help me

hear the slightest noise... even something which is as quiet as a mouse! My hearing is so good I can catch small mammals in pitch darkness by listening for them!



M.O'Clery

I have **long legs** so I can dive into deep vegetation, and **sharp talons** to catch rats and mice!



Barn Owl Trust.





Nesting

Now the fun starts... four of the eggs hatch in early June. That's four more hungry mouths to feed!

The busiest time of the year for us raptors, and probably the most important, is the breeding season. We need to find a mate, choose a nest, lay eggs, and then take care of and feed their hungry chicks!

Take a look at just how busy my breeding season is!

In February, Bernadette Owl and I choose a perfect nest, really deep down a chimney of an old castle



Bernadette lays six small white eggs at the start of May. She has to sit on them to keep them warm (incubation) pretty much non-stop for 31 days. I have to catch enough food to feed both of us.

For two days before the chicks hatch they call from inside the egg, so we know they are coming!



Every night I try and catch as many rats, mice and other small mammals as I can to feed the chicks... exhausting... thankfully I am an excellent hunter!



At the end of July, after around 60 days, the chicks are nearly ready to start exploring outside the nest and ready to take their first flight.



At the end of the summer, it's time for them to leave and to go and find a suitable place to live for themselves. I need a break before next breeding season!

Raptor workbooks for primary schools were produced in association with Clare, Galway and Tipperary County Councils and funded by the Heritage Council. To view the workbooks visit:

<https://heritage.galwaycommunityheritage.org/content/category/topics/raptors>

Background, M.O'Clery. Adult Barn Owl with chicks, R.T.Mills. All other photos, J.Lusby/M.O'Clery.

Threats to raptors



When you look at a raptor... especially a large powerful predator like a Golden Eagle, it's easy to think that nothing can effect it, that it is invincible... but this is definitely not the case.

Did you know that in the past in Ireland at least seven raptor species have become extinct? And some of the raptors such as Hen Harrier are in serious trouble at the moment. Lets take a look at some of the threats to raptors.....

Chuck Abbe: Wiki Commons



Golden Eagle

Habitat loss: A habitat is the place an animal lives. Good habitats for raptors have suitable places to nest and plenty of food. If the habitat changes and there are no longer safe places to nest or enough food... then this is bad news!

Persecution: You can see below how owls and other raptors can be accidentally affected by rat poisons.

Unfortunately, other raptors have been targeted and shot and poisoned on purpose. This is one of the reasons that so many raptors went extinct in Ireland in the past... but it still continues today.

Barry O'Mahoney



Hen Harrier, which was shot

But there is good news too!

Re-introductions: So, even though White-tailed Eagles were once driven to extinction, they are now nesting in Ireland again because they were re-introduced.



Red Kites can be seen again in parts of Ireland - What a sight!

Two other raptors also became extinct in Ireland but have been brought back through re-introduction projects.

They are the Golden Eagle and Red Kite. Golden Eagle chicks were brought over from Scotland to County Donegal, and Red Kite chicks were brought over from Wales to Wicklow and County Dublin.



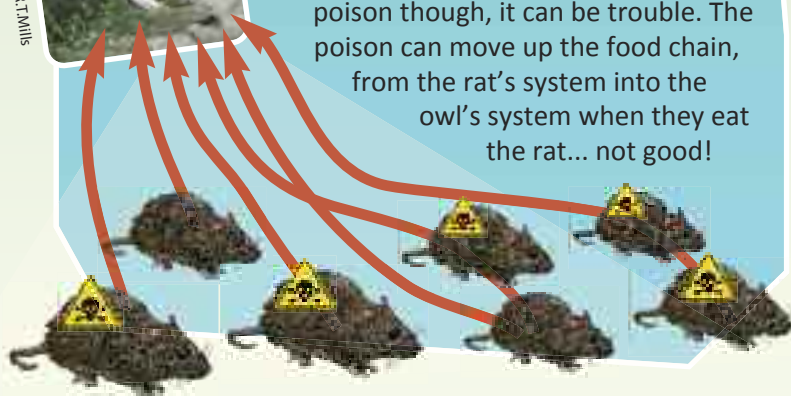
How rat poisons can travel up the food chain

Barn Owls can catch up to 25 rodents in a single night to feed their chicks.

If they catch a rat that has eaten rat poison though, it can be trouble. The poison can move up the food chain, from the rat's system into the owl's system when they eat the rat... not good!



R.T.Mills





Sherlock
Holmes

Hen Harrier

Buzzard

Red Kite

Kestrel

Irish Raptors



Golden Eagle

Merlin

Sparrowhawk



Short-eared Owl

Peregrine Falcon

ite

White-tailed Sea Eagle

Barn Owl

hawk

Long-eared Owl

Photo credits Background, M.O'Clery; Female Kestrel, M.Finn; male Kestrel, J.Fox; Buzzard, S.Connolly; Hen Harrier, S.Connolly; Short-eared Owl, S.Connolly; Peregrine, M.Finn; Peregrine in flight, C.Clarke; Barn Owl, M.Brown; Sparrowhawk in flight, Wikimedia.org - C.Knoch; Sparrowhawk, Wikimedia.org - P.Dalous; Merlin, S.Connolly; Long-eared Owl, R.T.Mills; White-tailed Eagle, V.O'Sullivan. Red Kite, S.Connolly.

A blooming marvellous time of year!

MAY ACTIVITIES

By Barbara Sullivan

O.O. Sullivan

All photos: Barbara Sullivan

Some fantastic projects for you to do this spring

It's May and there's no missing the changes happening in nature.

The more time we spend in the outdoors, the more we become tuned into the developments that are happening around us, big and small.

For example, the variety of wildflowers you will be able to spot is just exploding! This is great news. Not only do they look beautiful but they help feed our pollinators! And, of course, the birds nesting season is well and truly under way.

Here are some activities that explore wildflowers and plants some more, and that help us recognise the incredible work our nesting birds do!

Project 1

Printing with plants

Create beautiful prints using flowers and leaves.

You will need:

- Two pieces of cotton (cut to same size)
- Mallet, rolling pin or rounded stick
- Flat surface (such as chopping board)
- Access to common and abundant plants



Gather all your bits, and get busy!

Gather some fresh flowers and leaves - make sure they are common and abundant species that are not poisonous!



Arrange your flowers and leaves on the cotton

Place one piece of the cotton on your working surface and arrange the gathered plants on it to make a design.

When you are happy with your design, place the second piece of cotton on top.

Barbara Sullivan delivers forest school and nature connection programmes for children, families and adults through her company "Reconnect with Nature". Barbara is a member of the Heritage in Schools specialist panel and available for school visits. Contact Barbara on reconnectwithnatureirl@gmail.com or visit www.reconnectwithnatureirl.com for more details.

Use your mallet to repeatedly hit the cloth all over. You will begin to see the colour transfer into the cotton. Keep going until you can see your design coming through.

Open up the cotton, remove the excess plant pieces and display your art!

This is a great way to decorate cotton shopping bags, to make bunting or you could even craft a stick picture frame to display your picture in!



Display your finished prints!

Project 2

Bird Nest Challenge

Here is a challenge you can set yourself and some friends!

You will need:

- Bird guide book
- Suitable nest building material close by
- Clay

First, take some time to observe the birds in your area - who shares this space with you?

Why not take some time to look through one of your bird books to learn more about their behaviour, favourite foods, and you can read about what materials they like to use to build their nests and how many eggs they lay.



Find some nest material – dried leaves, moss, feathers, twigs...

Then, it's time to start your challenge! Go and

forage for suitable nest building material in your area - dried grasses, small bendy twigs, moss and other easily sourced materials make excellent building

materials.

To start making the nest, take some of the longer grasses or twigs and wind them around themselves – this should look like a rough circle – and then tuck in the ends. Then finish up the nest by making it cosy using softer lining materials.

When you're happy with your nest you can take some time making eggs for it, or if you're feeling creative, why not make some chicks!



Finished!



How did it go?

Imagine you only had one beak to complete this task - this could be compared to you trying to build a nest using only one hand, representing a beak! Aren't birds amazing?

Why not make some eggs to put in your nest too?

Practice your identification skills!



Test your identification skills! See if you can name each raptor... I have given you some clues!



CLUE: Hovers!

1. Name?

Irish name?



CLUE: went extinct in Ireland, but re-colonised

2. Name?

Irish name?

3. Name?

Irish name?

CLUE: The fastest!



4. Name?

Irish name?

CLUE: Those aren't ears!

CLUE: dances in the sky!



5. Name?

Irish name?

6. Name?

Irish name?

CLUE: The farmers friend



7. Name?

Irish name?

CLUE: The smallest... but fiercest!



CLUE: Eats more than Sparrows!

8. Name?

Irish name?

Answers on back page

Photos: Background, M.O'Clery. Female Kestrel, Michael Finn. Buzzard, Shay Connolly. Hen Harrier, Shay Connolly. Peregrine, Michael Finn. Barn Owl, Mike Brown. Sparrowhawk, wikimedia.org - Pierre Dalous. Merlin, Shay Connolly. Long-eared Owl, Richard T. Mills.

Help Barney owl get back to his nest



How quickly can you solve Barney's problem? Time yourself! Then see if a friend can do it faster!

Home sweet home!



Like all raptors, I have to find the best places to hunt. These places can be a lo-o-o-ng way from my nest. Can you see the way back to my nest in the old castle?





SPRING ALIVE SWIFTS

The Mitsubishi Corporation Fund for the Tongue and Abri



Graham Catley

Swifts spend almost all of their lives in the air: they eat, drink and even sleep while flying!

Swifts

The Swift is sooty brown all over, but against the sky it appears black. It has long, scythe-like wings and a short, forked tail. You could mistake it for a Swallow, but the easiest way to tell them apart is to remember that Swifts don't bend their wings while flying. It's also nearly impossible to see them land – their nesting places are hidden away in roofs and they fly in and out very quickly.

Swifts have an unusually long lifespan for a bird – some can live to the age of 21!

Unlike Swallows, Swifts never perch. You might see screaming parties of them careering madly at high speed around rooftops and houses, mainly in towns and cities, especially towards dusk.

Swifts are superb fliers, and spend almost the whole of their lives on the wing. They land only to breed. They even sleep on the wing!

They are easiest to observe in built-up areas, where they build their nests in the cracks and holes in buildings, and sometimes in specially provided nest boxes. Remember that Swifts are very common in towns and cities, but can be rather hard to spot in the countryside.



BirdLife

Close-up showing a Swift's head, with a broad mouth for catching insects in flight



When you see Swifts this summer, please report them at www.springalive.net



Screaming flocks of Swifts often appear over rooftops in towns and cities, especially in the evening

What do Swifts eat?

Swifts eat nothing but flying insects and small spiders floating in the air.

Swifts' nests

Swifts place their nests in hollow spaces in buildings and ruins, in deep holes between bricks, air-holes, under tiles and in other well hidden cavities, between rocks, in hollows and in special nest boxes.

The nest is bowl-shaped and formed of light blades of grass, leaves, feathers, plant fluff, petals, moss, seeds and rubbish (e.g. pieces of paper, etc), glued together with saliva.

Wintering sites

Swifts spend the winter in Africa, south of the Sahara, and some fly as far as South Africa.



Swifts can have difficulty finding suitable places to nest when they return to us from Africa. One way that BirdWatch Ireland and other organisations have been helping them is by putting up specially-designed nestboxes for them, high up on the outside of tall buildings.

Illustrations: Michael O'Clery

An adult Swallow

Swallows of all ages have white bellies

A Swift

Metallic-blue backs

An adult Swallow

A young Swallow

Young Swallows have a shorter tail

Swifts are larger, and all-dark

How do I tell a Swift from a Swallow?

Swifts are noticeably larger than Swallows, and their wings are longer, significantly narrower, and scythe-shaped.

Unlike Swallows, Swifts do not bend their wings while flying. Also, a Swift's tail is wider and shorter than a Swallow's.

You should remember that generally you will see Swallows in the countryside and Swifts in the city or towns.

Swift Migration

Swifts need warm weather to provide a constant supply of flying insects, so they spend only about three months in northern Europe each year. They arrive from central Africa in early May. Swifts start their return journey in mid-July, before the nights become too cool. They can't roost overnight during the journey, like Swallows do, so they travel quickly.

Youngsters are independent as soon as they leave the nest, and set out immediately on migration. By mid-August, most Swifts have reached central Africa. They do not spend the winter in one place, but travel around to find the best food supplies and weather conditions.



Shelduck Holmes Competition Page

Word Search



Find the eight species of birds
Jackdaw, Jay, Starling, Rook,
Magpie, Raven, Hooded Crow and Chough.

To enter

- Fill out your age, name and address on a blank sheet of paper.
 - Find all the Birdwords in the Word Search and answer the ten True or False questions (you can photocopy this page if you prefer).
 - 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 September 2018.

Competition

10 out of 10 – TRUE or FALSE?

Test your knowledge of Ireland's birds and you have a chance of winning a bird book. The first three correct answers out of the Shelduck burrow win!

- Q1** Blackcaps winter in Irish gardens – **TRUE or FALSE?**
- Q2** Choughs nest in trees – **TRUE or FALSE?**
- Q3** Robins sing in winter – **TRUE or FALSE?**
- Q4** Buzzards are vegetarian – **TRUE or FALSE?**
- Q5** Goldcrests weigh just 6 grams, less than a 20 cent piece – **TRUE or FALSE?**
- Q6** Cuckoos build a nest – **TRUE or FALSE?**
- Q7** Willow Warblers are summer visitors to Ireland – **TRUE or FALSE?**
- Q8** Redwings are members of the Starling family – **TRUE or FALSE?**
- Q9** Dippers can nest in nest boxes – **TRUE or FALSE?**
- Q10** Swifts nest in bushes – **TRUE or FALSE?**

1st Prize National Geographic Kids book
"Everything Birds of Prey" - value €10.00.

The winner of the Autumn 2018 Bird Word Search was Amy Orpen, age 11, Bere Island, Beara, Co. Cork.



Did you find all five Barney Owls and all five mice, hidden throughout the magazine?

They were at:
Barney Owls – pages 6, 11, 12, 14 & 15.
The Mice – pages 4, 5, 10, 13 & 14.

Did you find them all?

Identification skills answers

1. Kestrel - Pochaire gaoithe
2. Buzzard - Clamhán
3. Peregrine - Fabhcún gorm
4. Long-eared Owl - Ceann cait
5. Hen Harrier - Cramán na gcearc
6. Barn Owl - Scréachóg reilige
7. Merlin - Meirliún
8. Sparrowhawk - Spioróg



Solution to the maze