



by **Helen Boland**

The Shelly Banks, south Dublin Bay
Photograph: Mark Carmody

Dublin Bay Birds Project: five years on

The Dublin Bay Birds Project is now in its fifth year of year-round monitoring of the waterbirds of Dublin Bay ... and what an amazing five years they have been!

Dublin Bay supports internationally important numbers of waterbirds in its shallow waters and on its extensive mudflats. Since it started in 2013, the project has been gathering information on how the waterbirds use the bay for **roosting** and **foraging**, at all tidal stages, both diurnally and nocturnally, information we need in order to protect their interests.

The project has also carried out five summers of monitoring, ringing and management of the breeding **tern colonies** within the Dublin Port area.

There have been so many facets to this work – from low-tide counts to high-tide counts; to surveys of gull roosts and goose roosts; to colour-ringing and radio-tracking; to monitoring breeding terns and surveying their post-breeding roosts – and we have learned a lot!

What have we learned?

We know from the great work carried out by the **Irish Wetland Bird Survey* (I-WeBS)** since the winter of 1994/95 that Dublin Bay is important for birds in winter, but I-WeBS does not gather summer data, nor does it provide information about numbers and distribution of waterbirds at low-tide. But the Dublin Bay Birds Project has now found it to be important for birds in summer, too.

* I-WeBS is funded by the National Parks & Wildlife Service

Overall numbers of waterbirds peak in Dublin Bay in winter, whereas many species, for example **Knot**, **Grey Plover** and **Light-bellied Brent Goose**, are absent during the summer months. In contrast, we have learned that **Oystercatchers** are present all year round, in nationally important numbers.

We have also learned that **Black-tailed Godwits** occur regularly in internationally important numbers in April, with totals often exceeding those recorded mid-winter. Surprisingly, 722 Black-tailed Godwits were recorded in Dublin Bay in summer, in July 2017. Were these non-breeding birds or failed breeders passing through?

In addition to the monthly waterbird counts, we carried out a dedicated **Light-bellied Brent Goose** dawn roost survey which allowed a more accurate estimate of their numbers to be made: 7,064 were recorded in January 2017, the

highest count to date for Dublin Bay.

Colour-ringing

Last autumn, we reported in *Wings* on some of the findings from the fascinating and hugely informative GPS-tracking work that we carried out on some of Dublin Bay's wintering waders, work supported by **SEAI (Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland)** and the **Dublin Port Company**. We would like to do more of this, but for now we are focusing on birds that we have colour-ringed. Sightings of these colour-ringed birds are like jigsaw pieces that, when fitted together, reveal very important information about how birds use the bay, and where they go when they leave Dublin in spring.

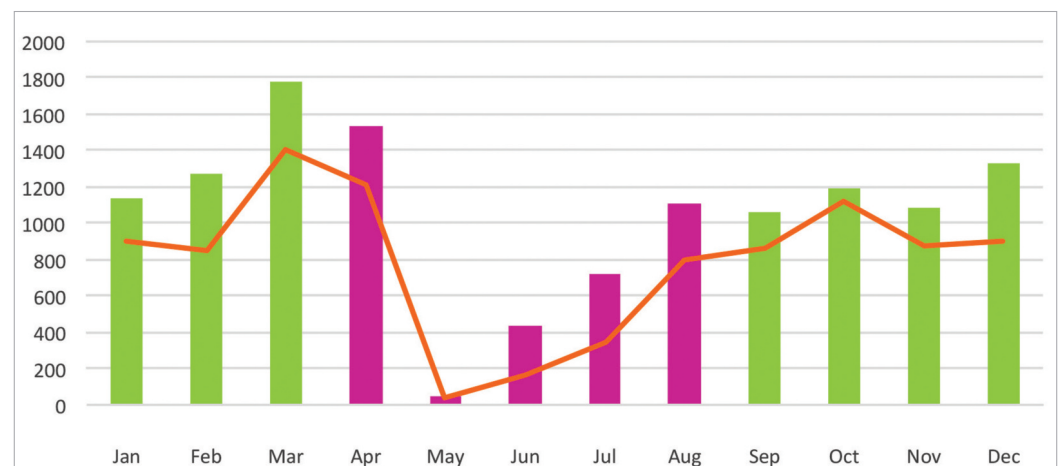
With more than 500 waders colour-ringed, and in excess of 3,000 resightings of them submitted to us so far, some interesting results

are beginning to emerge. It seems that the **Redshanks** that winter in Dublin Bay are quite site-faithful, foraging close to their roost site. Our GPS-tracking of Redshanks has added some weight to this theory.

Resightings of colour-ringed **Bar-tailed Godwits**, on the other hand, suggest that they move freely from one side of the bay to the other, with roosting and feeding options on both sides.

We have learned that Dublin Bay's wintering **Oystercatchers** breed mainly in Scotland and Iceland, and that at least some of Dublin Bay's **Bar-tailed Godwits** breed in northern Norway, migrating through the Wadden Sea in the Netherlands and Denmark.

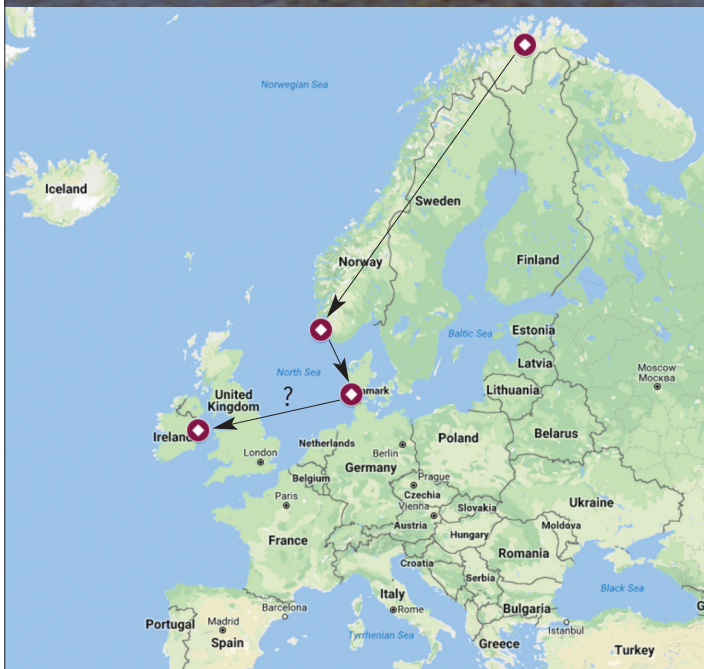
As well as bringing to light new information, the project has continued to add considerable value to existing knowledge on the distribution and movements of birds within Dublin Bay.



The number of Black-tailed Godwits recorded in Dublin Bay year-round based on peak counts between 2013 and 2017. The line refers to the mean number recorded. The 'summer' months are highlighted in pink.



Bar-tailed Godwit 'DH,' photographed in Denmark in August 2016 by Kim Fisher, who kindly reported sightings of this Dublin Bay colour-ringed bird (see below).



Bar-tailed Godwit 'DH' was fitted with colour-rings in Dublin Bay in January 2014. It has since been observed in Finnmark in northern Norway in May 2014, May 2015 and May 2016. It was seen in Rogeland in southern Norway in July 2016, presumably on its return migration, and again at an island in west Denmark in August 2016, where it was photographed (see above). We don't know for sure yet if this bird travels direct from Denmark to Dublin.

In order to try to manage and mitigate the effects that land-claim, habitat loss, human disturbance and climate change have on waterbirds, it is necessary to understand how waterbirds use sites for foraging and roosting throughout the year. The value of carrying out continuous, long-term monitoring using standardised methods – like I-WeBS nationally, and the Dublin Bay Birds Project – can not be overstated. It is through this approach that real trends and changes can be highlighted. We are delighted to be continuing the

work of the Dublin Bay Birds Project in 2018 and beyond.

➔ We are very grateful to everyone who has submitted observations of colour-ringed birds. It is only with more resightings over time that more rigour can be added to the information. To submit a sighting, please email us at dublinbaybirds@birdwatchireland.ie.

➔ Helen Boland is the Dublin Bay Birds Project Manager.



BirdWatch Ireland's Dublin Bay Birds Project is supported by the Dublin Port Company

DUBLIN BAY BIRDS PROJECT RING-READING DAY



WHEN
Feb 10th, 2018
10am - 2pm

WHERE
Bull Island Visitor Centre
North Bull Island, Dublin

Hear about colour-ring studies of bird populations in Dublin Bay.

Learn about how to read colour-rings and where to submit your observations.

Meet other birdwatchers and contribute to citizen science locally.

WWW.BIRDWATCHIRELAND.IE



**CITIZEN SCIENCE
EVENT**



Photo: John Fox

MORE INFO

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Photo: Oskar Björnstad



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3 B&B, 2 Dinners, 2 Lunches €399 pps
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