

Birds I've seen so far

By Patrick Bailey (Limerick Branch)

I am a sixteen-year-old birdwatcher from Pallasgreen, Co Limerick. I have been interested in the natural world ever since I was a toddler. I remember in my pre-school being fascinated by the frogspawn which one of the teachers had collected into a see-through container. This sparked my curiosity in wildlife.

I first remember becoming interested in birds when we moved to Ireland from England, when my Grandad showed me Swallow nests in our shed. The abundance of wildlife, shown to me by my family, around the house never ceased to amaze me and I have always been on the lookout for wild animals ever since.

I have had memorable encounters with White-Tailed Eagles in Killarney, Ring-billed and Caspian Gulls in Limerick city and Hawfinches in Curraghchase Forest Park, but my most memorable birding experience was three years ago at a sand quarry in East Leake, Nottinghamshire, in the midlands of England, where seven European Bee-Eaters had been attempting to nest. Many birdwatchers from miles around had come to see them, and we were lucky enough to have been in England at the time the birds were there! I remember turning the corner to where the viewing spot was and seeing all seven birds circling and coming in to land on the other side of the quarry. It was amazing to see these exotic-looking animals!

I have also had many memorable experiences birding from home, my favourite being during the so-called 'Beast from the East' cold snap in February 2018. In the morning, there were many flocks of Lapwings flying

over the house and surrounding fields, including one of about twenty or thirty birds which landed in a nearby field and spent the day there. Also, in the fields were many Redwings and Fieldfares, along with a small group of Golden Plovers. I had never seen Lapwings or Golden Plovers near the house before. Later on in the day, a Merlin came hunting and chased after the Golden Plovers!

On the feeder, we had the usual common species for our garden, along with less common Siskins and Redpolls. We also had a first for our area, two Bramblings, which came to the feeder along with a mixed flock of finches. There were several hundred birds at the feeder at one time. Also seen around or from the garden were Meadow Pipits, Buzzards, Bullfinches and Starlings.

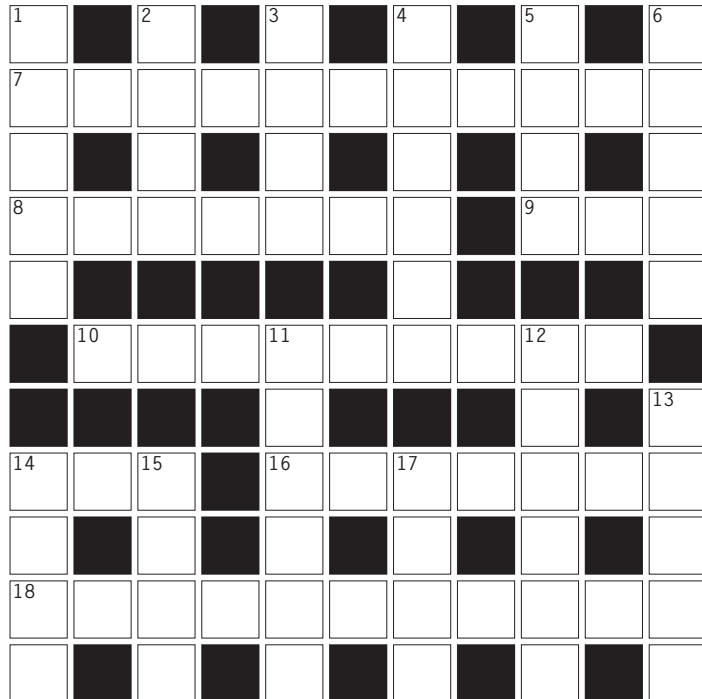
I love wildlife, as there is always something new to see and find that excites me every time I go outside. I often find myself looking towards the sky or out of the school bus window to see what is there. Also, I find that birdwatching is an escape from everyday life. This certainly has been the case for me, and I'm sure for many people over the past year, during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this confusing time, the constance of nature has been a big help for me in getting through lockdown. My highlights of lockdown were hearing my first Cuckoo at Lough Gur and seeing a pair of Buzzards successfully raise a chick. I look forward to the end of the restrictions so that I can go out further afield in search of more of these fantastic animals ■



Patrick Bailey

Crossword No 70

Complete this crossword correctly and you are in with a chance to win a copy of *A Life in the Trees* by Declan Murphy. Send your entry to BirdWatch Ireland Crossword Competition, Unit 20, Block D, Bullford Business Campus, Kilcoole, Co Wicklow, to arrive not later than Friday, March 19th, 2021. The winner of Crossword No 69 was Angela Mason, of Kilcoole, Co Wicklow, who won a copy of *Wildwoods* by Richard Nairn.



CROSSWORD compiled by COILÍN MacLOCHLAINN

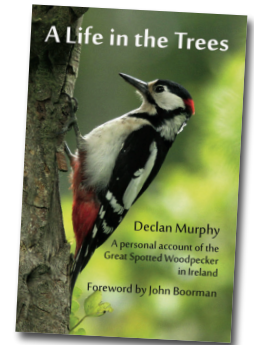
Clues

Across

- 7 Nondescript, streaky passerine of heathland, featured in this issue (6,5).
- 8 Fourth longest river in Africa, it flows along the border between Zambia and Zimbabwe (7).
- 9 Common name for area of oceanic water (3).
- 10 White Arctic seabird with wedge-shaped tail (5,4).
- 14 Small perching bird that could be great or long-tailed (3).
- 16 Name given to otter's dropping (7).
- 18 Northernmost sea, surrounded by Eurasia, North America, Greenland and Iceland (6,5).

Down

- 1 To astonish greatly or overwhelm with wonder (5).
- 2 A tract of land on which crops and/or livestock are raised (4).
- 3 Small, almost blind mammal with long snout is a character in *The Wind in the Willows* (4).
- 4 In the Northern Hemisphere, it begins on February 1st (6).
- 5 Mimics – or chimpanzees, gorillas and orang-utans (4).
- 6 Smallest member of weasel family native to Ireland (5).
- 11 Finch with striking lime and yellow markings (6).
- 12 To linger aimlessly or hang around with no purpose (6).
- 13 To be frugal, or genus of very small waders (5).
- 14 Small duck that gives its name to blue-green colour (4).
- 15 Tiny parasitic arachnid that attaches itself to skin of deer, sheep or even humans to feed on blood (4).
- 17 Our most common large crow (5).



A Life in the Trees

Declan Murphy
A personal account of the Great Spotted Woodpecker in Ireland
Foreword by John Boorman

Please provide your name and address when posting the completed crossword to us. You may use the boxes below or provide your details separately.

Name

Address

E-mail address (optional)

Mobile phone (optional)

Answers to Crossword No 69

Across: 1. Dipper. 3. Ibex. 7. Bunting. 9. Zoa. 10. Turkey. 13. Bats. 14. Hide. 15. Waddle. 19. Ski. 20. Greylag. 22. Yogi. 23. Magpie.

Down: 1. Debut. 2. Pen. 4. Buzzard. 5. X-rays. 6. Egg. 8. Ice. 11. Redwing. 12. Yew. 14. Husky. 16. Ate. 17. Eagle. 18. Age. 21. Lop.