



**BirdWatchIreland**  
*protecting birds and biodiversity*

# Annual Report 2024







BirdWatch Ireland staff and volunteers meet the public at the Bord Bia Bloom festival in Phoenix Park, Dublin in 2024. **Photograph:** Niall Hatch

BIRDWATCH IRELAND is the largest independent conservation organisation in Ireland. A registered charity, its aim is the conservation of wild birds and their natural habitats. Established in 1968, it has over 15,000 members and a growing network of local branches. It manages nature reserves which protect threatened habitats and the wildlife that relies on them, works to conserve Ireland's biodiversity, produces a range of media to raise wider awareness of nature conservation in Ireland, and carries out important education, survey and research work.

BirdWatch Ireland is the official Irish partner of BirdLife International, the world's largest partnership of conservation organisations, which strives to conserve birds, their habitats and global biodiversity.

The key aims of BirdWatch Ireland are:

- To maintain and, where possible, improve the conservation status of all Irish bird species
- To prevent the extinction of any Irish bird species in the wild
- To conserve, and where appropriate, improve and enlarge sites and habitats important for birds
- To help through birds to conserve biodiversity (other wildlife) and thereby improve the quality of people's lives
- To integrate nature conservation with sustainable development
- To educate and promote awareness of our birdlife and habitats



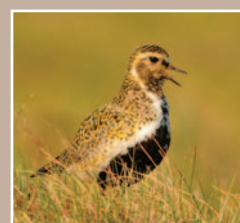
#### **BirdWatch Ireland Directors in 2024**

**James Fitzharris** (Chairman)  
**Jonathan Taylor** (Secretary)  
**Des Fagan** (stepped down August 21st 2024)  
**Yvonne Kelly** (appointed August 21st 2024)  
**Congella McGuire**  
**Alan Mulligan**  
**Conor O'Brien**  
**Eugene O'Brien**  
**Frances Threadgold**

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*BirdWatch Ireland is the BirdLife International  
partner in the Republic of Ireland*



**COVER  
PHOTOGRAPH:**  
**Golden Plover**  
By John Carey

# Welcome

## Report from the Board

We are pleased to report that BirdWatch Ireland had another very successful year in 2024, both from an operational and a financial perspective. This continued the positive trend from 2022 and 2023.

Details of the many conservation, monitoring, policy, research and related activities undertaken in 2024 can be found in this report. These examples exemplify our constant efforts to protect wild birds and biodiversity in Ireland, as part of our major contribution to preserving our precious natural heritage.

While the financial position of BirdWatch Ireland will always be challenging and need constant monitoring, it continues to improve steadily. We recorded a healthy, positive surplus of €317,000 in 2024, with the cash position continuing to improve.

Our operational and financial success is a clear manifestation of the professionalism, expertise, dedication and commitment of all the staff, ably led by **Linda Lennon**, our CEO. Linda, who joined us in 2022, has decided to step down in July 2025 after the end of her contract. As a result of her excellent work, we believe that the organisation is on a robust footing, both financially and operationally.

Linda has had a transformative effect on BirdWatch Ireland during her tenure, thanks to her outstanding leadership. We are very appreciative of all her efforts over the past three years and we wish her well for the future.



Dr Andrew Kelly, the newly appointed CEO of BirdWatch Ireland

We also take the opportunity to welcome Linda's successor as CEO, **Dr Andrew Kelly**, who has a strong background of leadership in a range of other organisations, and we are confident he will continue to build to ensure that BirdWatch Ireland stays at the forefront of responsible environmental advocacy in this country.

The Board would also like to put on record their sincere thanks and appreciation to their Chair, **Jim Fitzharris**, who steps down from this role at the end of his term at the 2025 AGM. Jim has helped to steer the organisation to a more sustainable financial position, as well as achieving full compliance with the Charities Governance Code. The Board has decided to appoint Jim as President of BirdWatch Ireland, which will enable them to benefit from his considerable experience.

We would also like to express sincere thanks, on our own behalf and that of our members, to the BirdWatch Ireland team for all their hard work in 2024. This has enabled the organisation to continue to thrive. We are also very appreciative of their combined efforts in enabling us to develop and publish our new Strategy which sets out our priorities for the next six years.

BIRDWATCH IRELAND



Linda Lennon, BirdWatch Ireland CEO, stepping down in July 2025

*Continued next page....*



## Report from the Board (*continued*)

Our members also helped shape our Strategy by completing surveys and attending an online event.

We were also delighted to see so many branches represented at our face-to-face event in Limerick in 2024 and very much appreciate their support, which they show in so many ways. This includes holding talks and events as well as offering up thousands of days' volunteering, from enhancing habitats and carrying out surveys across the country, to recruiting new members. These combined efforts have been invaluable in helping us go from strength to strength.

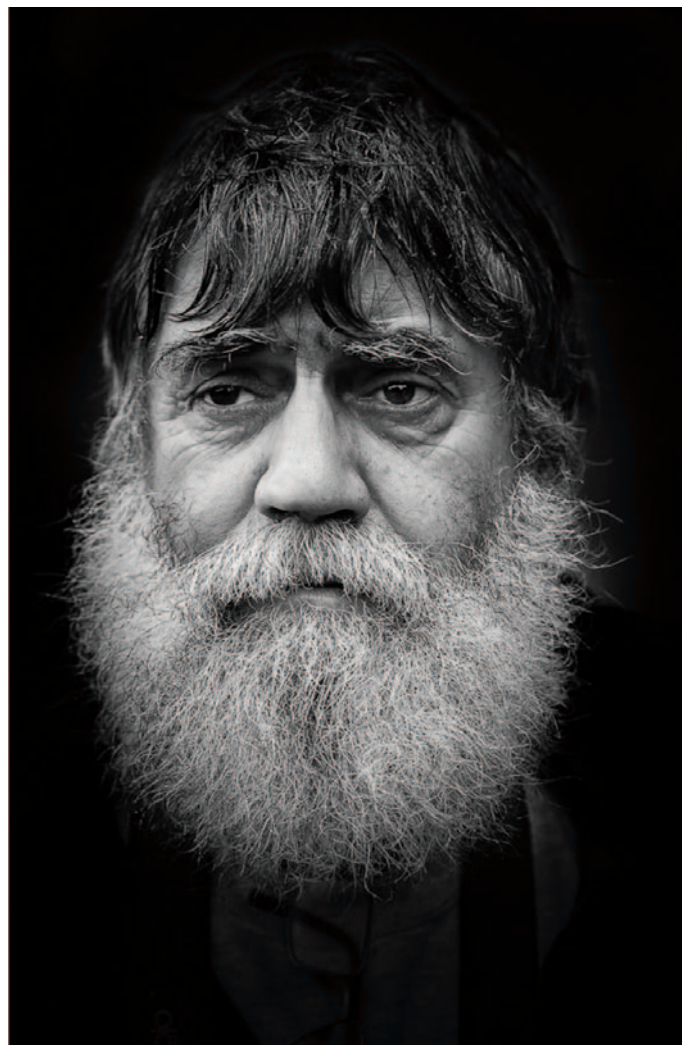
We launched an appeal during the year to support the work we are doing on **Hen Harriers**, one of Ireland's most alluring but most endangered raptors. This followed a public campaign to "**Save the Sky Dancer**," where we asked members and supporters to make submissions in support of three critical actions we felt were needed in the **Hen Harrier Threat Recovery Plan**. Hundreds of people responded, not just with submissions, but with photographs, videos and even poetry.

Thank you to all members and supporters who helped us with this campaign and who also gave so generously to the appeal, which to date has raised over €34,000. Already these funds are helping us produce a report on population declines, supported by video footage, which we hope will inspire more people to support our actions to save this iconic bird.

The Board has met for eight Board meetings since the last AGM in August 2024, with the customary excellent attendance record of all Board members.

As is shown in the AGM Notice of Meeting, two existing Board members will fall to retire by rotation at the 2025 AGM: **Alan Mulligan** and **Conor O'Brien**. Alan is being proposed by the Board for the position as Chair of the Board to replace Jim Fitzharris. The Board is also proposing Conor O'Brien for re-election to the Board.

**Frances Threadgold**, who joined the Board in 2023, resigned from the Board in February 2025, and we wish to acknowledge her contribution to the work of the Board during her term of office.



Steve Wing (1957-2024)

We are very pleased to propose two new candidates for election to the Board: **Dr Lorraine Benson** and **Dr Mícheál Ó Briain**.

We wish to thank all our members and donors for your support, which is crucial to the success of BirdWatch Ireland.

Finally, on a very sad note, one of our staff members, **Steve Wing**, the Wildlife Officer at Cape Clear Bird Observatory, died suddenly on September 19th, 2024. A full tribute to Steve can be found on page 18 of this Report.

**Jim Fitzharris, Congella McGuire, Alan Mulligan, Conor O'Brien, Eugene O'Brien, Jonathan Taylor and Yvonne Kelly**

# Annual Report 2024

## Good News

Some of BirdWatch Ireland's most notable works and successes in 2024

**1** In 2024, BirdWatch Ireland managed tern colonies at Rockabill Island (Co Dublin), Dublin Port, Kilcoole Beach (Co Wicklow) and Lady's Island Lake (Co Wexford). These are the most important breeding sites for each of Roseate Tern, Common Tern, Arctic Tern, Little Tern, Sandwich Tern and Mediterranean Gull in the Republic of Ireland. Management of these colonies involves habitat management, predator control, ringing and nest monitoring to ensure a successful breeding season and the continued collection of important scientific data.

**2** Each of the tern colonies we managed had largely successful seasons in 2024. This was particularly important, given that they had suffered significant losses in 2023 due to avian influenza.

**3** At Rockabill and Dublin Port, Roseate Terns, Common Terns and Arctic Terns had a very successful season, with >1 chick fledged per pair on average, which is above the level needed for a tern population to remain stable or increase.

**4** The Kilcoole Little Tern Project reached its highest number of breeding birds ever, making it the largest colony of this diminutive seabird species in Ireland or the UK. It also had a successful breeding year, with >1 chick fledged per pair.

**5** We have also begun a specialised project accurately to determine survival rates of Little Terns at the colony, which is one of only two such projects in the Irish and British bird ringing scheme.



BRIAN BURKE

Rockabill, Co Dublin: home to Europe's largest Roseate Tern colony

Tern numbers and their productivity at the east coast tern colonies wardened by BirdWatch Ireland in 2024.

Site	Species	Pairs (trend since 2023)	Productivity
Rockabill	Roseate	1,776 ↑	1.2
Rockabill	Common	810 ↓	1.0
Rockabill	Arctic	20 ↓	0.0
Lady's Island	Sandwich	1,588 ↑	0.6
Lady's Island	Roseate	260 ↓	0.6
Lady's Island	Common	668 ↓	1.0
Lady's Island	Arctic	576 ↓	0.8
Dublin Port	Common	273 ↓	1.6
Dublin Port	Arctic	13 ↓	1.7
Kilcoole	Little	285 ↑	1.1

PAUL LYNCH



Roseate Tern, one of BirdWatch Ireland's flagship conservation species

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## Good News (*continued*)

RICHARD T MILLS



Gannet colony on Great Saltee Island, Co Wexford

**6** We were also able to assist the **National Parks and Wildlife Service** with the ringing of Little Tern chicks at its new conservation project at **Cahore** in north Wexford.

**7** At **Lady's Island Lake** in Co Wexford, productivity of Roseate and Common Terns was >1 chick per pair, and Arctic Terns fledged 0.8 chicks on average per pair.

BRIAN BURKE



A ringed Little Tern at the colony in Kilcoole, Co Wicklow

**8** Due to the severe avian flu outbreak at seabird colonies across Ireland in 2023, the number of pairs of **Common Terns** returning to breed in the **Dublin Port tern colony** in 2024 declined by 50%, with **Arctic Tern** numbers down by 38%. It was the lowest number of Common Terns nesting in Dublin Port in 19 years.

**9** However, despite the reduced numbers, it was a successful year in terms of productivity (nesting success), and avian flu was not detected at any stage of the season. Two 20-year-old Arctic Terns and a 20-year-old Common Tern, all originally from Rockabill, were amongst the highlights from our ringing efforts.

**10** In Galway, we commenced the colour-ringing of Common Tern chicks at **Lough Atalia**, which will help provide important information on the colony into the future, and will help to develop our knowledge of how this species fares on the west coast, given that much of our knowledge is limited to the east coast and Cork.

**11** In partnership with **BirdLife International** and with funding from the **Flotilla Foundation**, BirdWatch Ireland undertook an analysis of seabird data to identify **marine Important Bird Areas (IBAs)** in Ireland. By collating and analysing existing datasets on population monitoring and seabird tracking using BirdLife International IBA criteria, we identified **73 Important Bird Areas** for seabirds in Irish waters, consisting of 49 coastal sites and 24 marine sites.



This is a first for our organisation, and is highly significant for seabirds in Ireland, since IBAs have been recognised by the European Court of Justice as critical scientific data to support designation of **Special Protected Areas** for seabirds.

**12** BirdWatch Ireland undertook **censusing and productivity counts** at important east coast seabird colonies, including **Bray Head, Howth Head, Ireland's Eye, Lambay Island, Loughshinny and Skerries Islands**. This work was an important follow-on to recent work for the **Seabirds Count** census, and has helped provide up-to-date baseline breeding numbers in advance of potential marine renewable energy development in the Irish Sea. Also, it has helped us identify further research and conservation priorities for species with reduced numbers and poor productivity – ie, low number of chicks fledged.

This work was funded by a consortium of four offshore windfarm companies: **North Irish Sea Array Windfarm Ltd, Codling Wind Park Ltd, Dublin Array Offshore Wind Farm Project (Bray Offshore Wind Ltd / Kish Offshore Wind Ltd) and Oriel Wind Farm Ltd**.

**13** The additional monitoring we undertook at six east coast seabird colonies will further our knowledge of 10 breeding seabird species at a time when there are many potential pressures on the horizon for them. This information will help us better understand previous and future changes in their numbers and distribution and thus help evaluate the potential impacts (or lack thereof) of future offshore development.

**14** The seabirds on our **Puffin Island Reserve** off the coast of Co Kerry were surveyed during 2024. Twelve species were recorded and estimates of breeding numbers included 7,400 pairs of **Puffins**, 3,500 pairs of **Manx Shearwaters** and 3,350 pairs of **European Storm-petrels**. The reserve forms part of the **Páirc Náisiúnta na Mara**, also called the **Kerry Seas National Park**, which was created in April 2024.

**15** Our monitoring efforts at the **Cliffs of Moher, Co Clare** and **Downpatrick Head, Co Mayo**, as well as at the tern colonies we



Puffins on Tory Island, Co Donegal

work at, will help improve knowledge of each of these species in an Irish context, and will feed into the **Seabird Monitoring Programme for Britain and Ireland**.

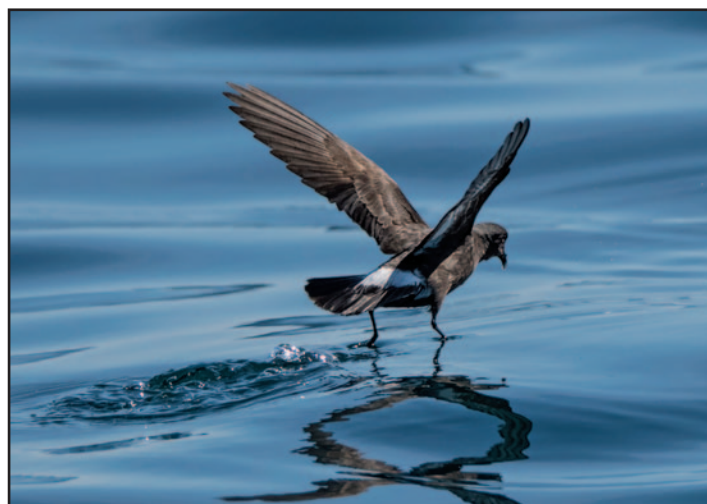
**16** BirdWatch Ireland undertook **breeding wader surveys** at seven sites across County Donegal in 2024, which collectively held 95 pairs of waders. Five of the sites had predator exclusion fences, which were maintained during the breeding season and held 84 pairs.

**17** We also undertook three community engagement events on **Tory Island, Co Donegal**, one of which was at **Scoil Naomh Cholmcille**, which has 21 pupils; this included a 'walk and talk' to view **breeding waders** on the island.

**18** BirdWatch Ireland is a partner with **Donegal Acres Cooperation Project (CP)** and, through this work, we have helped to shape the national programme of measures which **Acres CP**, the agri-environment scheme of the **Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine**, aims to deliver for farmland birds, namely **Corncrake, breeding waders and Chough**.

**19** After 12 years of good service, the predator exclusion fence at our **Annagh Marsh Reserve**, near **Belmullet, Co Mayo**, was replaced and upgraded during 2024, resulting in the continued protection of **red-listed breeding waders**. This was a successful collaborative working partnership with the **LIFE on Machair** and the **Conservation Measures Unit** teams.

**20** In 2024, over 70 pairs of breeding waders in total were recorded at **Annagh Marsh**, making this site one of the most important breeding wader colonies in Ireland. With increased protection, the numbers of chicks reaching the flying stage is near the two chicks per pair level; this success is starting to result in new pairs spreading into former breeding areas on the **Mullet Peninsula**.



European Storm-petrel: 3,350 pairs of these tiny seabirds nest at our Puffin Island reserve off the County Kerry coast

RICHARD T. MILLS

MOLLY BELL

*Continued next page....*

## Good News (*continued*)



Cuskinny Marsh Nature Reserve on Great Island, Co Cork, close to the town of Cobh

**21** Also, on the Mullet Peninsula, our Termoncarragh Meadows Reserve recorded five male **Corncrakes** holding territory in our fields.

**22** Our Shannon Callows lands in Offaly and Galway were formerly a stronghold for Corncrakes. Though that species no longer breeds there, these lands are now an important site for red-listed breeding **Whinchats**, with several pairs recorded during a survey in 2024.

**23** During 2024, we were bequeathed the open water and reedbed area associated with **Cuskinny Marsh Reserve**, near Cobh, Co Cork. For many years the BirdWatch Ireland Cork Branch, with support from the local community, had worked closely with the owner through a long-term lease agreement to enhance its wildlife value.

**24** During 2024, our East Coast Nature Reserve, near Newcastle, Co Wicklow welcomed **Seamus Bridgeman** as the new Site Warden. He and the reserve volunteers worked tirelessly on maintaining and upgrading the reserve infrastructure and habitats throughout the year.

**25** The BirdWatch Ireland Fingal Branch, with support from the local community, continued to improve the access at our **Rogerstown Estuary Reserve** in north Co Dublin, in order to provide safe access to our **Ger McCann Hide**, overlooking the saltmarsh and mudflats on the north side of the estuary.

**26** Countryside Bird Survey (CBS) training workshops were held in Creggan Court Hotel in Athlone, Co Westmeath, and Cabragh Wetlands, Co Tipperary, with strong attendance and positive engagement. Supported by the **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)**, these sessions effectively introduced CBS methods to new volunteers, resulting in 30 new squares being allocated. These workshops continue to play a key role in expanding survey coverage.



RICHARD T. MILLS

Whinchat: a red-listed species which breeds at our reserve lands on the Shannon Callows





Counters of the Dublin Bay I-WeBS team at the Bull Island lagoon, Dublin

**27** During the 2024 season, the release of 30 new CBS survey squares contributed to a record total of 330 squares being successfully surveyed – the highest number of completed squares in any CBS breeding season to date.

**28** To further support volunteers in the field, updated CBS Square Packs were introduced in 2024. These now include details on species previously recorded in each square, as well as enhanced maps featuring satellite imagery to assist with survey planning and navigation.

**29** The Irish Wetland Bird Survey (I-WeBS) ran two workshops over the 2023/2024 season. The workshops, which were run with funding from the Local Biodiversity Action Fund, took place on September 23rd at Knocknacarra Community Centre, Galway, and on October 6th at the Marine Institute in Galway.

One hundred and seventy people attended across the two days, resulting in roughly 30 new volunteers. The new counters were a big help in contributing towards excellent survey coverage across Galway Bay this season.

**30** We had a massive influx of younger people joining our Dublin Bay I-WeBS team, and we were able to develop the skills of the volunteers and add to the social aspect of the count. The new counters joining were mostly college students, but we also had interest from the new volunteer conservation park rangers; we helped improve their identification skills for their conservation work on Bull Island.

A massive thank you to everyone else who volunteered on an I-WeBS count this season; 283 counters counted 303 sites and 821 subsites.

**31** The Dublin Bay Birds Project Team continued its year-round waterbird surveys, as well as management of the wader colour-ringing database, which now contains over 9,500 resightings from Ireland and abroad of waders that have been colour-marked by the team in Dublin Bay.

Several of 'our' Oystercatchers were again seen in Scotland in the spring and summer of 2024, adding to the knowledge we have amassed of movements of this species between the two countries over many years.

Huge thanks to Dublin Port for their continued funding and support of this work.

**32** BirdWatch Ireland's Brent Goose Ambassador Project, delivered in partnership with Dublin City Council through the Local Biodiversity Action Fund, featured in episode 12 of the children's TV series *Where the Wild Geese Go* in October 2024. Andrew Lynch, our Countryside Bird Survey Coordinator, featured on behalf of the Urban Birds Project.

**33** The Irish Garden Bird Survey (IGBS) continues to be hugely popular – nearly 1,600 households took part in winter 2023/2024. Both old and new participants contributed to Ireland's longest-running and most popular wildlife citizen science survey, and continue to help us understand and monitor how some of our common and not-so-common birds fare in the winter months.

Many thanks to Ballymaloe for their continued sponsorship of the survey, and to the many citizen scientists nationwide who send us their data each winter.

*Continued next page....*

## Good News (*continued*)

ANDY HAY / RSPB-IMAGES.COM



Nightjar: confirmed at two sites in the south-east of Ireland in 2024

**34** Cape Clear Bird Observatory (CCBO) welcomed dozens of visiting birdwatchers and nature enthusiasts in 2024, to take part in our 'Weekends with the Warden' and 'Seabirds to Songbirds' courses. Participants experienced the wonders of Cape Clear Island and learned about BirdWatch Ireland's work by participating in activities with **Steve Wing** and **Dick Coombes**. Activities included wildlife walks, bird-ringing, seawatching and much more.

**35** Bird-ringing at the **Constant Effort Sites (CES)** scheme site on **Cape Clear** continued to be an important element of our surveys and monitoring programme for the island in 2024. The scheme provides valuable information on the abundance of adult and juvenile birds, their breeding success and their survival rates at numerous sites around Ireland and Britain.

**36** We undertook the most extensive survey for **Nightjars** in Counties **Kilkenny** and **Wexford**, employing passive acoustic monitoring, supported by **Kilkenny** and **Wexford County Councils** and the **National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS)**, and confirmed the presence of **Nightjar** at two sites in the south-east in 2024, including the only known successful breeding of **Nightjar** in the country. We are hopeful that **Nightjar** will continue to re-establish in the coming years. A short video on **Nightjar Survey 2024** is available at: <https://bit.ly/bwi-nightjars>.

**37** Twenty-four triple-cavity Swift nest boxes were installed in **Co Louth** by BirdWatch Ireland in 2024. This project was commissioned by **Louth County Council** through the Local Biodiversity Action Fund, in response to the **2022 Louth County Swift Survey** results.

**38** Six double-cavity Swift nest boxes and a solar-panelled caller system were installed on behalf of **Dublin City Council** at the **ESB** substation in **Prospect Square, Glasnevin**, working with the local community group **Prospect ACA Glasnevin** and **Dublin City Council**, with funding from **Dublin City Council** through the **Local Biodiversity Action Fund**.

**39** Fifteen Swift nest boxes were installed by **Kilkenny County Council** at the **Local Area Office** in **Thomastown (3)** and **St Stephen's Barracks (12)**, with oversight from **BirdWatch Ireland**.



Swift: a key conservation priority species for BirdWatch Ireland

BEN ANDREWS / RSPB-IMAGES.COM



**40** The Clare Church Biodiversity Project for Swifts successfully installed four double-cavity Swift nest boxes at four churches across Co Clare, based on recommendations from BirdWatch Ireland. The project has been recommissioned for 2025 and is funded through the Local Biodiversity Action Fund.

**41** BirdWatch Ireland successfully carried out surveys of breeding Swifts in Galway city and in Gort, Co Galway, and in east Cavan. We also completed a resurvey of Co Meath following on from an initial survey in 2019 – this recorded a 49% increase in the breeding population of Swifts between 2019 and 2024. These surveys were funded through the Local Biodiversity Action Fund.

**42** We continued to improve and refine survey methods for breeding Merlin and, working with the NPWS, we conducted a survey for breeding Merlin and identified all breeding pairs in the Connemara Bog Complex SPA and surrounds, using drone and thermal surveillance technology.

**43** We worked with Coillte to enhance survey techniques and improve protections for forest-nesting birds and published recommendations for improved protections from disturbances for sensitive birds nesting in or close to plantation forests.

**44** We conducted surveys, nest-finding and monitoring of Golden Plovers using drone and thermal surveillance technology for the first time, in the Connemara Bog Complex SPA, working with the NPWS.

**45** We worked with the NPWS and dedicated survey teams to locate nests and monitor breeding Hen Harriers across the SPA network in 2025, using drone and thermal surveillance survey techniques, and provided information on nest locations and breeding success to inform conservation and nest protection measures.



MIKE BROWN

Hen Harrier: surveyed in 2024 using drone technology

**46** We also employed drone mapping to survey and monitor Cormorant breeding colonies in 2025.

**47** We continued our Barn Owl county surveys, with surveys completed in Counties Cavan, Longford, Monaghan and Kildare in 2024, supported by the local authorities and the Local Biodiversity Action Fund through the NPWS.

**48** We continued our successful Barn Owl Nest Box Scheme, with dedicated nest box projects across several counties in 2025, including Clare, Cork and Westmeath, supported through the Local Biodiversity Action Fund.

**49** We ringed Barn Owl broods at 177 nests in 2024, the most broods ringed in a single year since our Barn Owl monitoring efforts were initiated, supported by Dublin Zoo and our Barn Owl Appeal.

**50** We prepared scientific papers on the discovery and potential impacts of the Field Vole in Ireland in 2024.

**51** We continued our work to learn more about breeding bird populations on blanket and raised bogs, including collaborating with Atlantic Technological University (ATU) to understand the effects of forest-to-bog restoration works on breeding birds.

**52** We produced a short video on the wildlife of Roundstone Bog in Connemara with Galway County Council and the NPWS – it is available to watch at this link: <https://bit.ly/bwi-roundstone>.

JOHN CAREY



Golden Plover: for the first time in 2024 we used thermal surveillance technology to locate their nests

Continued next page....

## Good News (*continued*)

**53** The Irish Breeding Curlew EIP ended in 2024, with the completion and publication of the final report – see <https://bit.ly/bwi-curlew-eip>.

This €1.8 million multi-partnership project involved BirdWatch Ireland, the Irish Natura and Hill Farmers Association (INHFA), the Irish Grey Partridge Conservation Trust and Teagasc, funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine through its European Innovation Partnership (EIP) fund.

The key aim of the Curlew EIP was the development and trial of agri-environmental measures to stem the decline of Ireland's breeding Curlew population (along with other wader species) for inclusion in Ireland's new agri-environmental programme under the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) 2023. Many of the measures trialled were adopted by ACRES Cooperation (CP) agri-environment scheme, either directly or in a revised form.

**54** The Curlew EIP played a significant role in the development of Ireland's new CAP. Work by the Curlew EIP, and by BirdWatch Ireland (which developed hotspot maps), showed that many important areas for breeding Curlew and other waders fell outside of ACRES CP areas. This was instrumental in securing the inclusion of a National Breeding Wader EIP in the new CAP.

The National Breeding Wader EIP came on stream later in 2024. Many of the measures developed by the Curlew EIP will be implemented and further developed by the National Breeding Wader EIP going forward.

**55** August 2024 saw the publication of the BirdWatch Ireland Strategic Plan 2024-2030, which was officially launched at our AGM that month. This landmark new strategic plan involved extensive collaboration between BirdWatch Ireland staff and a wide range of stakeholders. As part of this, questions were posed to BirdWatch Ireland's branches regarding their perception of BirdWatch Ireland's strengths, weaknesses and opportunities, while views were also sought on the state of conservation in Ireland in general.

Additionally, strategic planning workshops with BirdWatch Ireland staff and Board members were facilitated by RSPB and BirdLife International. Feedback from these questionnaires and workshops, in addition to templates provided by BirdLife International and RSPB, helped to shape the new strategy plan.

To download a copy of the BirdWatch Ireland Strategic Plan 2024-2030, please visit <https://bit.ly/birdwatch-strategy>.

**56** The first Irish record of Field Vole in the diet of Barn Owls, summering waders at Dundalk Bay, the genetic distinctiveness of Ireland's Wrens, the breeding population of Rooks in Co Cork, disturbance caused to waterbirds by marine traffic in Cork Harbour, and the breeding calendar of the Common Swift in Ireland were just some of the many topics covered in the 46th edition of *Irish Birds*, published in November 2024. As Ireland's only ornithological journal, *Irish Birds* is a necessity for all serious birdwatchers and scientists working in the Irish conservation sector.



**57** Running for five days across the June bank holiday weekend, the Bord Bia Bloom festival in Dublin's Phoenix Park is BirdWatch Ireland's largest public engagement and membership recruitment event of the year. The 2024 event proved to be our most successful to date, producing in excess of 400 new memberships and thousands of euro in donations.

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to our wonderful team of volunteers who so kindly and graciously contributed their time, expertise and effort into making this event such a success and without whom our participation would not be possible.



Rosalind Skillen in Puffin outfit promotes BirdWatch Ireland at Bloom 2024



**58** Key media highlights in 2024 included regular public information slots on RTÉ One's *Today* programme and Virgin Media One's *Ireland AM* programme, multiple appearances on RTÉ Radio One's *Mooney Goes Wild* and regular expert contributions to RTÉ programmes such as *Drivetime*, *Liveline*, *Today with Claire Byrne*, *The Ray D'Arcy Show* and *Morning Ireland*, as well as to multiple prominent radio stations, including *Newstalk*, *Today FM*, *East Coast FM*, *LMFM*, *C103 FM*, *Shannonside FM*, *Connemara Community Radio*, *Ocean FM* and *BBC Radio Ulster*.

**59** In May, BirdWatch Ireland staff and branch members participated in RTÉ Radio One's seven-hour *Dawn Chorus Live* broadcast, helmed by **Derek Mooney** and featuring contributors across Ireland. The main broadcast location was BirdWatch Ireland's *Cuskinny Marsh Nature Reserve* near Cobh, Co. Cork, where the main presentation team of **Niall Hatch** and **Jim Wilson** were based.

**60** 2024 saw the successful conclusion of our *Communicating the Wonders of Irish Wildlife* project, funded by the **Heritage Council**. This project was developed in response to the markedly increasing interest in nature across Ireland, coupled with growing concern amongst the general public over the twin climate and biodiversity crises. As a result, our organisation has been receiving an ever-growing number of queries about birds, other forms of wildlife and environmental issues.

This increased demand on our time and expertise has been especially notable since Covid, a period which also saw a significant decline in our income as a charity and increased strain on our resources and capacity. A concurrent increase in media interest and requests for expert input and interviews, as well as requests for advice and data from state and corporate bodies, further increased the need for us to increase our capacity in this area.

**61** The *Communicating the Wonders of Irish Wildlife* project involved two strands. The first was to increase support for our communications and outreach work, involving the recruitment of a dedicated **Communications Officer** and the development of our communications activities.

The second strand was the provision of a dedicated **wildlife information helpline** and **online response service**, whereby members of the public could easily pose questions, report wildlife crimes, request assistance with bird identification and obtain advice on biodiversity-friendly actions. In total, 5,032 such queries were addressed.

**62** 2024 saw the release of additional episodes of our *In Your Nature* podcast, hosted by **Niall Hatch** and **Ricky Whelan**. Topics covered during the year included Ireland's bats, Grey Herons, farming for nature, the ethics of ecotourism, the newly published book *Step into Nature*, a special series of interviews from the **Global Birdfair** in Rutland, England, a look at the world of parasites and an exclusive interview with naturalist, author and broadcaster **Éanna Ní Lamhna**.



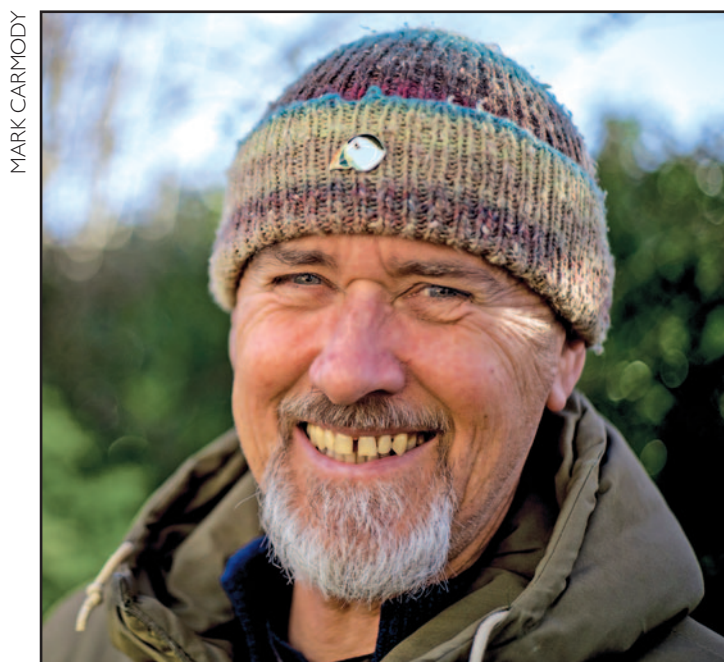
2024 also saw our first ever recording of the podcast before a live audience, when **Ricky** and **Niall** took to the stage at the **Wild Mind festival** in Fenit, Co Kerry, in May.

To listen to these and all of our other episodes of *In Your Nature*, visit <https://inyournature.buzzsprout.com>.

Edited by **Ann-Marie Kelly**, *In Your Nature*, is supported by **Laois County Council**, **Westmeath County Council**, **Offaly County Council**, the **Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage** and the **Heritage Council**.

**63** We continued our very popular "Sparkbird" feature in *Wings*, our magazine for members. In each issue, we invite different people to share what species sparked their initial interest in birds and, ultimately, helped to fuel their passion for birds and the many other natural wonders around us. It has been a great success since its launch, with members, branch representatives, BirdWatch Ireland staff and some well-known public figures taking the opportunity to share their stories.

**64** We continued our participation in **Spring Alive**, the migratory bird outreach and education project for **BirdLife International** partners across Europe, Central Asia and Africa. Ireland once again recorded the highest number of observations per capita of the key Spring Alive "Spring Messengers," namely **Swallow**, **Swift**, **Cuckoo**, **Sand Martin** and **Ringed Plover**.



Jim Wilson: co-presenter of RTÉ's *Dawn Chorus Live* programme

Continued next page....

## Good News (*continued*)



Signpost at the East Coast Nature Reserve, Co Wicklow

**65** The BirdWatch Ireland website attracted over 588,000 users and more than 2.1 million page-views, both of which represent new records. The most popular sections were the pages giving an overview of Ireland's bird species, our Irish Garden Bird Survey page and our advice page on what people should (and should not) do if they find a young bird out of its nest.

**66** The videos on BirdWatch Ireland's YouTube channel received a total of three-quarters of a million views, with the clips featuring our Barn Owl and Hen Harrier work proving especially popular, along with videos relating to garden birds and our Irish Garden Bird Survey. To see our videos, please visit [www.youtube.com/@BirdWatchIreland](http://www.youtube.com/@BirdWatchIreland).

**67** The number of subscribers receiving our free monthly email newsletter, *eWings*, exceeded 34,000 for the first time. The newsletter enjoys a click-through rate of in excess of 70%, which is exceptionally high. To subscribe to *eWings*, please visit [bit.ly/ewingsbwi](http://bit.ly/ewingsbwi).

**68** BirdWatch Ireland is extremely grateful for the generous contributions made by its corporate supporters, which in 2024 included Analog Devices, Antaris Consulting, Ballymaloe, BEM Ireland, Fusco Foods, Greenbuild, Kirby Engineering Group, Lambay Whiskey, Nourish, Pfizer, Regeneron, Virgin Media Ireland and Warbler & Wren Coffee.

**69** BirdWatch Ireland was both delighted and honoured to be among the 35 national finalists in the **National Lottery Good Causes Awards 2024**, which were held in October in Naas, Co Kildare.

**70** In addition, staff member Stephen Newton was nominated in the "Hero of the Year" category in the **National Lottery Good Causes Awards 2024** for his phenomenal work spanning several decades in the area of Irish breeding seabird conservation.

**71** BirdWatch Ireland branch highlights during 2024 included the first events organised by our relaunched **Westmeath Branch**; the publication by our Cork Branch of its **Harper's Island Wetlands Education Pack** in both English and Irish, comprising three activity books based around Harper's Island Wetlands Nature Reserve; the performance of much-needed repairs to the birdwatching hide at **Ashton's Callow** by our **Tipperary Branch**, which successfully secured funding for the works from the **National Parks and Wildlife Service**; and the holding of numerous dawn- and dusk-chorus birdsong celebration events around the country.

ROSE STAPLETON



Members of the Monaghan Branch on their dawn chorus walk in Rossmore Forest Park in May 2024





Little Tern adult and chick inside the fenced colony wardened by Fingal Branch volunteers at Portrane, Co Dublin

**72** Our Fingal Branch successfully wardened the Portrane (Co Dublin) Little Tern colony for the seventh successive year, overseen by Tom Kavanagh and Paul Lynch, with the support of Fingal County Council, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and many volunteers. The 31 breeding pairs of Little Tern produced 80 eggs, of which 68 hatched and at least 53 chicks fledged. In addition, Ringed Plover, Skylark and Meadow Pipit benefitted and all had a successful breeding season.

**73** For full details of the activities carried out by our branches during 2024, please see the separate *BirdWatch Ireland Branches Report 2024* that is available for download from our website at [birdwatchireland.ie/publications/branch-reports-for-2025-agm](https://birdwatchireland.ie/publications/branch-reports-for-2025-agm).

**74** BirdWatch Ireland collated and analysed all available scientific data against BirdLife International Important Bird Area (IBA) criteria and identified 73 Important Bird Areas for seabirds in Irish coastal and marine sites. This is a first for our organisation, and is highly significant for seabirds in Ireland since IBAs have been recognised by the European Court of Justice as critical scientific data to support designation of Special Protected Areas for seabirds.

**75** We continued to input at the highest level of policy-making on the Government's Common Agriculture Policy monitoring committee, Marine Spatial Planning Advisory Group, and the Citizen Engagement Group of Land Use Review.

**76** We also gave a statement on wild birds and biodiversity and its protection, restoration and financing at the National Economic Dialogue, hosted by the then Minister for Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform, Paschal Donohoe TD.

**77** We developed a policy position on offshore renewable energy and researched and wrote several submissions on offshore wind planning applications and consultations.

**78** We also gave input to the review of wildlife legislation and outlining areas where national law is not in line with the Birds and Habitats Directives.

**79** We advocated with national politicians and Irish Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) for successful passage of a strong Nature Restoration Law.

**80** We devised a set of wild bird and biodiversity asks to be included in the manifestos of political parties and in the Programme for Government, and some were included.

**81** We put pressure on government nationally with a campaign calling for a strong Hen Harrier Threat Response Plan and ensured it was highlighted in national media.

**82** We gave talks at meetings of twelve of our branches on seabirds and Marine Protected Areas.



Rosalind Skillen, Marine Policy & Advocacy Officer, gave talks to twelve branches on seabirds and Marine Protected Areas in 2024



## Stephen Newton retires from full-time conservation work

At the end of 2024, one of our longest serving members of staff, **Stephen Newton**, officially retired from full-time work. For almost 30 years, Steve has been the cornerstone of BirdWatch Ireland's seabird conservation work and, thankfully, is still contributing his knowledge and expertise. Here, we take a look back at some of the major achievements of his remarkable career as a seabird researcher and conservationist with BirdWatch Ireland.



Steve Newton (centre) at a ternwatch event at Colliemore Harbour, Dublin in July 1997. Also pictured (from left) Michael Ryan, Maurice Bryan, Aidan Kelly and Eugene Archer.

## Seabird censuses

There have been four major censuses of seabirds in Britain and Ireland – from the first, **Operation Seafarer** in the 1960s, to the most recent, **Seabirds Count**. Steve was an important contributor and co-author of the last two.

During **Seabirds 2000** – the third census – the first comprehensive assessments were completed for nocturnal, burrow-nesting species. Both **European Storm-petrel** and **Leach's Storm-petrel** populations were assessed using tape playback. The then-largest known population of European Storm-petrels, 27,000 pairs, was identified at a site in Kerry.

The first comprehensive survey of **Manx Shearwaters** was also conducted then. In **Seabirds Count**, the most recent census, although many seabirds are doing well in Ireland, the globally threatened **Black-legged Kittiwake**, which Steve often refers to as “the most beautiful gull in the world,” has declined by over 40% since the last census, highlighting the vulnerability of this species to impacts such as climate change, overfishing and predation at breeding colonies.

## Tagging and tracking

Working with other seabird researchers across Ireland, the UK and further afield, Steve has contributed greatly to our knowledge of

## Tern conservation work

Steve's contribution to the protection and management of tern colonies along the east coast is one of his most important and ongoing work areas.

From the late 1990s to the present day, he is best known for his stewardship of the **Roseate Tern** colony on **Rockabill**, off the north coast of Dublin. The population increased from 540 pairs in 1997 to an incredible 1,675 pairs in 2024, making it the most important Roseate Tern colony in Europe.

This was achieved through a combination of nest box deployment, wardening to prevent disturbance, and by deterring predators, particularly large gulls.

The research on diet and chick provisioning, which determined key foraging areas around Rockabill and highlighted the importance of sandeels and clupeids as a food source, provided great insights into the ecology and means of protecting these iconic birds.

Decades of ringing and resighting data have given us detailed insights into the Rockabill Roseate Terns and their connections with other colonies, for example in Britain.

Steve was instrumental in BirdWatch Ireland's involvement in other long-running tern projects, including at **Little Tern** colonies in **Kilcoole**, **Baltray** and **Portrane**, and tern colonies at **Lady's Island Lake**, the **Dalkey Islands** and **Dublin Port**.



Steve Newton (seated front row right) with members of the EU LIFE Roseate Tern Project team on Rockabill in July 2016.



the distribution of key species around our coasts and beyond. He has contributed to studies mapping and estimating breeding seabird distributions, tracking the movement of Puffins into the mid-Atlantic in winter, determining optimal feeding habitats for Black-legged Kittiwake and evaluating wintering areas and foraging ranges for key species.

## Marine IBAs

All of this work was key in Ireland being able to comprehensively identify, marine Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in Irish waters around our coast in 2024. These internationally accepted site designations should form the basis of further marine Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and be instrumental in helping to protect our important seabird populations from potential impacts of offshore wind energy developments.

BirdWatch Ireland fully supports the transition to clean energy, including offshore renewables, but they must be located in the right areas to minimise impacts on seabirds. Steve's decades of dedicated monitoring, surveying and researching Irish seabirds has contributed hugely to this important work.

In addition to his work with seabirds, Steve has also monitored, studied and shared a wealth of knowledge on other important species such as Red Grouse, Chough, breeding waders and Goosander, amongst others, and has served as the chairman of

the Irish Rare Breeding Birds Panel, and on the committee of the Irish Raptor Study Group, and led on the first Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland study to identify red- and amber-listed species here.

Steve Newton with Rockabill wardens in 2018 (from left): Luise Ní Dhonnabháin, Steve Newton, Heidi Acampora and David Miley.



Her Imperial Highness Princess Takamado of Japan (second from left) and Stephen Newton (second from right) on Rockabill, Co Dublin in 2017, along with tern wardens Shane Somers, David Miley and Caroline McKeon. The princess was especially interested in photographing Puffins and Roseate Terns on her visit to Ireland.

There are huge number of conservationists and researchers in Ireland, the UK and elsewhere who have worked under Steve over the years. His infectious enthusiasm and generous sharing of knowledge and skills while out on islands and rocky coasts helped set many on a course for a lifelong career in conservation.

More than that, Steve's tireless work has made an enormous difference to the cause of Irish conservation and to the future of Europe's seabirds, in particular its Roseate Terns.

Kittiwake with chicks on Rockabill. Steve refers to Kittiwake as "the most beautiful bird in the world."



MARK ROBINS

BRIAN BURKE





## In Memoriam: Steve Wing

A tribute to **Steve Wing**, wildlife officer at Cape Clear Bird Observatory, who died in September 2024

All at BirdWatch Ireland were deeply saddened and shocked by the sudden death on September 19th of our dear colleague and friend, **Steve Wing**, long-serving wildlife officer at Cape Clear Bird Observatory. Anyone who has had the pleasure of his company over the last 25 years, whether while being hosted by him at the observatory or simply meeting him and asking for advice, will have been struck by his friendly, informative and endlessly helpful manner.

Steve was born in 1957 in Bradfield, Berkshire. From a very early age he showed a keen interest in the natural world, attaining an "A" in nature study at his local primary school.

The family moved to Devon in 1966, where he completed his education. He then started work in a tax office, followed by a short time in a shipyard.

After a period working on building sites, Steve became a skilled mason and dry-stone waller, and this expertise was put to good use when he applied for a nine-month contract on Lundy Island off the Devon coast. There he worked on repairing Marisco Castle and walls around the island.

It was on Lundy that he met his partner **Mary Gade**. The two of them contributed many interesting bird records to the **Lundy Bird Observatory** log, including their exciting joint find of an **American Robin**.

Steve spent several years going back and forth to Lundy and then, in 1998, when the post of warden at Cape Clear Bird Observatory became vacant, he and Mary moved to Cape. The observatory was, as estate agents would say, in need of some upgrade, and Steve immediately put his building skills to use, gutting the place, putting in new stairs, stud walls, ceilings and floors, and converting an adjoining shed into a whole new kitchen. Those who knew the somewhat primitive "Obs" of old were now treated to a truly luxurious, comfortable place to stay.

Steve diligently carried out his observatory duties – everything from the domestic running of the observatory, to walking the beat around the island to count birds, running weekend courses, ringing birds and tirelessly filling out the daily log. His amiable nature made him the perfect person to act as a link between islanders and visiting birders;



Steve Wing waves goodbye to the departing ferry at North Harbour, Cape Clear. **Photo:** Dick Coombes

Steve simply got on with everybody.

There was always a warm welcome from Steve and Mary, and the pair totally immersed themselves in Cape life, involving themselves in all kinds of island activities, including Steve playing Santa Claus at Christmas. You could say, as far as the islanders were concerned, they were family.

Steve was observatory warden till 2012, and after that he and Mary ran Cotter's Pub on the island for a few years. By then they had started doing a Thai night once a week – the superb meals they produced were simply legendary.

Sadly, Mary passed away in Devon in May 2018 after a long illness and, later that year, Steve resumed his post at the observatory.

In his time on Cape Clear, Steve found many rare birds – some notable ones included Arctic Warbler, Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, Yellow Warbler and Ireland's first Chimney Swift.

He wrote two wonderful books – *The Natural History of Cape Clear 1959-2019* and *Wing It with Steve: A Bird Guide for Cape Clear*.

His demos of bird-ringing, good humour and generosity in imparting knowledge to others all left a lasting impression

on so many people. Steve would invariably be the first person they met at the pier and the person they still spoke about years after.

Steve said he would like to come back as a Chough – we will be keeping an eye out for you Steve.

**Dick Coombes**

In 2022, Steve Wing kindly agreed to be interviewed for an episode of our *In Your Nature* podcast, released in August of that year. In it, he spoke about his life, his work and his deep connection to Cape Clear Island. If you would like to listen back to it, it is available at [www.bit.ly/IYN-Steve](http://www.bit.ly/IYN-Steve)



# Summary of Accounts 2024

## FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

The details given below are a summary of accounts for BirdWatch Ireland and BWI Retail and Services Limited in 2024. A full set of accounts for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> December 2024 is available from BirdWatch Ireland on request.

	2024 €	2023 €
<b>Income</b>		
Membership subscriptions	339,490	334,189
Donations and bequests	104,518	117,160
Grants	24,886	24,886
Advertising and other income	125,396	178,313
Conservation projects	1,640,202	1,681,175
Investment income	92	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,234,584</b>	<b>2,335,723</b>

### Expenditure

Conservation project costs	1,385,855	1,460,816
Support costs	531,886	579,262
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>1,917,741</b>	<b>2,040,078</b>

<b>Net surplus/deficit</b>	<b>316,843</b>	<b>295,645</b>
<b>Reversal of building impairment</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Funds brought forward	2,906,865	2,611,220
Funds carried forward	3,223,708	2,906,865
Revaluation reserve	142,400	0

### Represented by:

Non-current assets	3,330,610	3,198,398
Net current (liabilities) / assets	732,298	430,153
Other creditors	-696,800	-721,686
	<b>3,366,108</b>	<b>2,906,865</b>

### BWI Retail and Services Limited

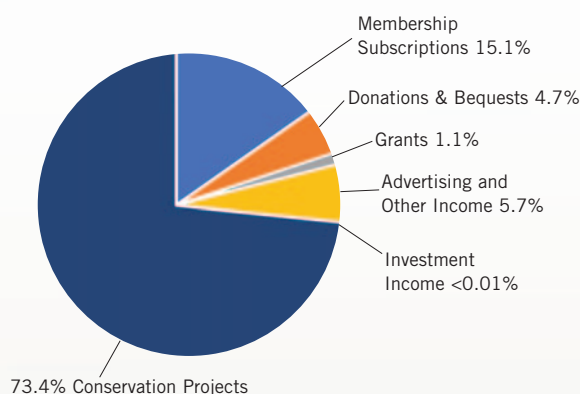
Turnover	202,136	178,668
Cost of sales	143,552	107,699
Gross profit	58,584	70,969
Administrative expenses	58,584	70,969
Interest payable	0	0
Profit before taxation	0	0
Tax on profit	0	0
Profit after taxation		
Funds brought forward	1,434	1,434
<b>Funds carried forward</b>	<b>1,434</b>	<b>1,434</b>

### Represented by:

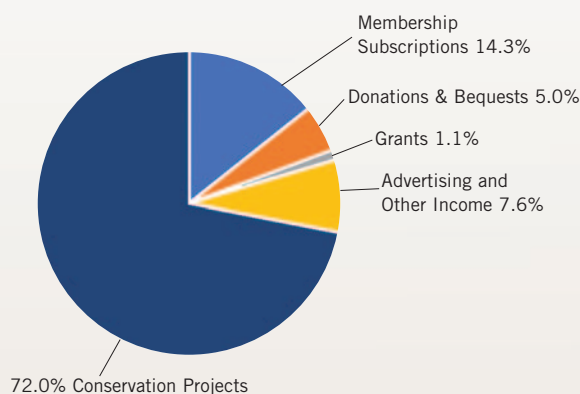
Fixed assets	1,606	976
Net current assets	-172	458
	<b>1,434</b>	<b>1,434</b>

BirdWatch Ireland gratefully acknowledges the receipt in 2024 of Annual Core Funding in the amount of €50,335 from the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications, via the Irish Environmental Network (IEN). There were no restrictions on the use of this funding and its expenditure is compliant with all relevant government circulars.

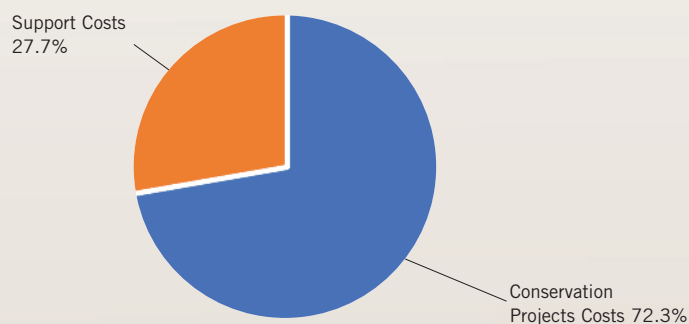
## INCOME 2024



## INCOME 2023



## EXPENDITURE 2024



## EXPENDITURE 2023

