

Ireland, August 12-20 – 2005

Western and Southern parts

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Northeastern view from the Bridges of Ross, Ireland, August 2005. Photo: Måns Grundsten

Introduction

The main purpose of our visit to Ireland was to watch for seabird migration along the coasts and search for American waders. Both this goals were accomplished with success. August and September are the two best months for seabird migration. In August there are higher numbers of larger shearwaters and also bigger chances of seeing Wilson's and Fea's Petrels. In September the migration becomes more varying with more species like Leach's Petrel, Sabine's Gull and skuas in greater numbers. Watching seabirds from land can be a bit tricky since you often need favourable weather conditions to get good days. This means that for the west coast (were Bridges of Ross probably is the most famous and best place to be) the wind should be between west and north, preferably north-west to get high numbers. On the south coast (e.g. Galley Head or Cape Clear) the wind should be southerly pending from south-east to south-west to get high numbers. Generally, the opinion seems to be that these winds should be associated with low pressures (including rain) to get the best results. Longer periods with high pressure will worsen your chances of seeing any good numbers of seabirds.

Car Rental

We rented an Opel Astra (Alamo) upon arrival at Shannon Airport, we were actually very lucky since of all car rental offices there was only ONE car available, so book in advance is our advice. At Shannon Airport there are many companies like Hertz, Budget and Alamo, most of the offices are open until 24.00.

Flight tickets

We booked our tickets with RyanAir one month before departure, and paid around 60 Euros/person for the return ticket from Skavsta (S of Stockholm) to Shannon.

Accommodation

To save money we brought our own tent. We stayed one night at a camping site at Saint Margeret's Harbour, Wexford, close to Lady's Island Lake. Most nights we put up our tent at the parking lot at Bridges of Ross. This seems to be accepted. And many others have done like this before us. It was alright, obviously close to Bridges of Ross and more importantly close to the Lighthouse Inn Pub.

Literature

Books

Where to Watch Birds in Ireland, Clive Hutchinson, 1994

Collins Bird Guide, Killian Mullarney, Lars Svensson *et al.*, 1999 (Swedish version)

Field Identification of Rare Birds in Europe, Per Alström, Peter Colston *et al.*, 1991 (Swedish version)

Flight Identification of European Seabirds, Anders Blomdahl *et al.*, 2003 (Swedish version)

Routard guide Ireland, 2000

Internet sources

www.birdsireland.com

www.irishbirding.com

www.clarebirdwatching.com

www.birdguides.com/birdnews

Map

Insight Travel Map Ireland 1:300 000 (very good)



Juvenile Mediterranean Gull (left) with juvenile Common Gull (middle) and adult Black-headed Gull (right), Kilbaha, Ireland, 12th August 2005. Photo: Måns Grundsten.

Itinerary at a glance

12.8: Bridges of Ross 06.00-11.00

Quilty

Bridges of Ross 17.00-19.30

13.8: Bridges of Ross 06.00-12.00

Poulnasherry Bay

Shannon Airport Lagoon

14.8: Bridges of Ross 06.00-11.00

Clare Harbour, Wexford

15.8: Lady's Island Lake

Tacumshin

Ballycotton

16.8: Ross Carber

Clonakilty

Blennerville

Tralee

Poulnasherry Bay

17.8: Bridges of Ross 07.00-12.00

Quilty

Lough Donnell

- Doonbeg
- Bridges of Ross 16.00-18.00
- 18.8: Bridges of Ross 06.00-12.00
- Poulnasherry Bay
- Shannon Airport Lagoon
- Quilty
- Lough Donnell
- Doonbeg
- 19.8: Bridges of Ross 06.00-12.00
- Bridges of Ross 15.00-20.00
- 20.8: Bridges of Ross 07.00-10.00
- Poulnasherry Bay
- Clonderalaw Bay
- Doonbeg

Site comments

Poulnasherry Bay

Great wader-site. To locate this site, from Kilrush, drive toward Kilkee. You then pass Poulnasherry Bay on your left hand side. When you get to the northwestern corner of the bay you'll pass Lisdeen Church on your left hand side. Just past this church there is a small road going left (south). You cross a small bridge and then turn left when the road splits. Continue until another intersection, turn left again. Continue a few hundred meters, you'll then reach a bus tour company named Noel O'Shea. Just before the buses, there is a small dirt track going left (east-northeast) down to the bay. When you reach the bay you can both walk left and right and scan the shores and mudflats. We had most fortune when visiting this site on low tide.



Loop Head peninsula, Co. Clare. Handdrawn map.

Bridges of Ross

Classic sea-watching site. The Bridges of Ross is signed from the main road to Loop Head. There is a rather large parking lot where it seems not to be prohibited to camp. According to most Irish birders we met Bridges of Ross seems to be held as the foremost sea-watching site on Ireland. We spent ALL our sea-watching time here. Two different Wilson's Petrels passed during our staying before we had the chance to connect with one. On late evening the 13th a Fea's Petrel passed by, we were then at Shannon Airport Lagoon. And another Fea's Petrel passed at midday the 14th. Just hours after we left the site. Later in August and the beginning of September, the

chances of seeing both Wilson's and Fea's Petrels seem to decrease. In total we spent something like 43 hours sea-watching from Bridges of Ross.



Loop Head Peninsula, Co. Clare, Ireland, August 2005. Photo: Måns Grundsten.

Loop Head Peninsula

There are a lot of gardens from Kilbaha along the main road to Loop Head. These gardens have produced many vagrants throughout the years. The best time for passerines is in September and October. Around the lighthouse at Loop Head a few good birds have also turned up, *e.g.* Yellow Warbler. The scenery at the lighthouse is magnificent and there are nice colonies of Kittiwakes and Fulmars here. You could probably see a lot of seabirds from the head as well, but Bridges of Ross is a better alternative since you're closer to the water there. There is one small pond at Kilbaha and another one just a few hundred meters further east. Both these ponds are worth checking each day.

Doonbeg

The river Doonbeg has its mouth at the town of Doonbeg. During our staying French birders found a Lesser Yellowlegs here, the birds was very elusive though and we never connected with it. The weeks after our journey this site produced both Spotted Sandpiper and two Long-billed Dowitchers. At low tide the birds are mostly on the exposed mudflats at the beach and during high tide most of the birds fly upriver. There is a few visible mudbanks in the river which you can observe from the road running parallel to the river north from Doonbeg town on the east side of the river. We had a Kingfisher here.

Lough Donnell

There is a small lake (lough!) between Doonbeg and Quilty. This has potential for waders. American Golden Plover, Buff-breasted Sandpiper and Long-billed Dowitcher have been seen here. The lough is located at the mouth of river Annageeragh. The best view is from the south, at Craggaknork.

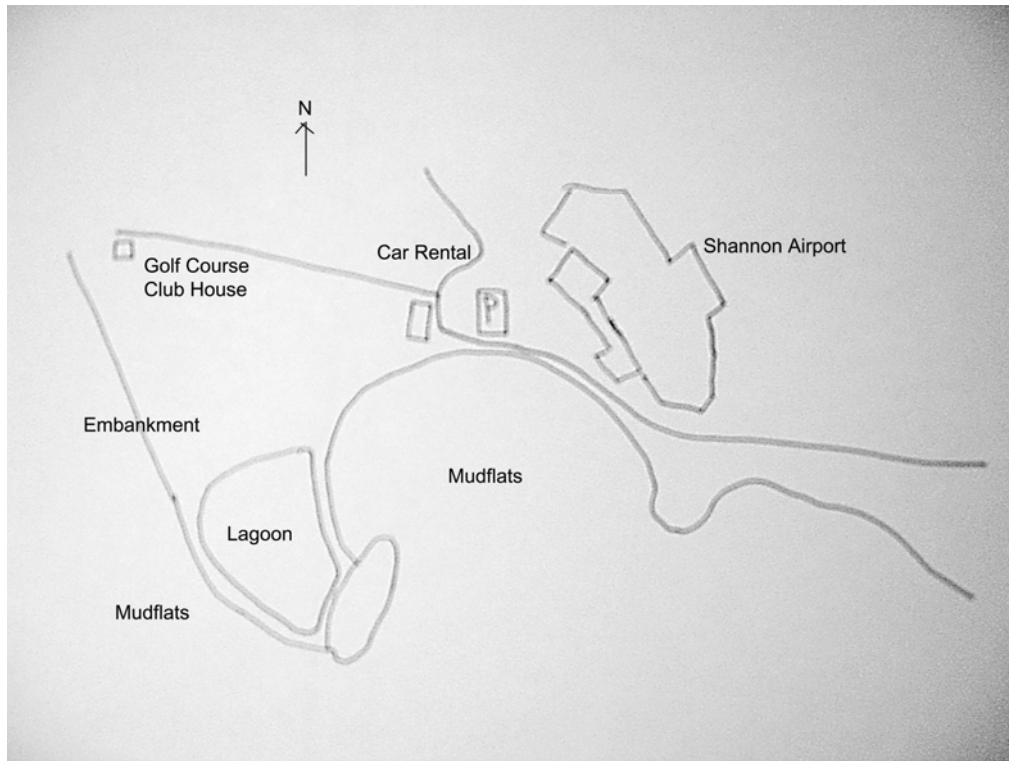
Quilty

A lot of gulls were present at the shore at Quilty. We had one Ring-billed Gull here. There is a road running parallel to the beach west and then south from Quilty. At Lurga Point (west of Quilty) we had another Ring-billed Gull. Both these birds were long-staying individuals.

Shannon Airport Lagoon

The lagoon at Shannon Airport is probably the best wader-site in Co. Clare. To reach the lagoon, drive the main road to the airport. When you get there head toward the Golf Course Club House, which is west of the main terminal. You'll pass by the different Car Rental offices. Park at the Golf Course Club House and walk south, along an embankment. The lagoon is on your left hand side. The site is best at high tide. At low tide the birds leave the lagoon the feed on the mudflats. We saw one long-staying Long-billed Dowitcher here on two

occasions. At our second visit on this site we also found one Pectoral Sandpiper. We counted 1000 Black-tailed Godwits, 1000 Dunlins and 500 Redshanks on August 18th. The list of rare birds seen at this site is truly impressive, especially when noticing the amounts of nearctic waders.



Shannon Airport Lagoon, Co. Clare. Handdrawn map.

Tacumshin

Ireland's and one of northern Europe's foremost site for waders. A heavy storm some 10 years ago formed this former tidal bay into an isolated lagoon where the level of water now is regulated by rain. When going here, to get most out of your visit you need to walk around the lagoon. This walkabout is wet, and you need proper boots or do as we did, walk barefoot. It'll take a few hours to cover this site well.

Ballycotton

Located SE of Midleton, E of Cork in Co. Cork this is one of Ireland's most famous wader-site. The western parts of the Ballycotton Bay seem to be the best area. It is really easy to understand where to look for the birds.

Lady's Island Lake

This is the classic breeding ground for the Roseate Terns. In the middle of this rather large lake there is a few smaller islands, on the northernmost one of them, there is a tern-colony consisting of some pairs of Roseate Terns. The terns leave the island during late summer and in August there are better chances of encountering them at Clare Harbour or Christchurch, or between these sites. The lake itself is easy to scan as are the islands.

Acknowledgments

We met many friendly birders during our staying in Ireland. Our warmest thanks go to John N Murphy, Co. Clare who showed us around Loop Head, gave us invaluable information about the sites in Clare and also about the south coast localities. If you ever read this, thank you John! Killian Mullarney gladly provided us up-to-date information of where to see the Roseate Terns in Wexford and was also joining us for half-a-day birding around Tacumshin. Thank you, Killian! Finally all friendly birders (Irish, British, French, and Finnish) at Bridges of Ross.

List of bird-species observed in Ireland, August 12-20 2005

Total: 122 species

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*

1 at Shannon Airport Lagoon 13th & 18th.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*
Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*
 10 at Ballycotton 15th.
Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*
Wigeon *Anas penelope*
Gadwall *Anas strepera*
Teal *Anas crecca*
Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*
Pintail *Anas acuta*
 1 at Lady's Island Lake 15th.
Shoveler *Anas clypeata*
Pochard *Aythya farina*
 1 male at Lady's Island Lake 14th -15th.
Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra*
 A few migrating at BoR.
Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*
Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*
Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*
Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea borealis*
Great Shearwater *Puffinus gravis*
Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus*
Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus*
Balearic Shearwater *Puffinus mauretanicus*

Seabirds at Bridges of Ross, August 2005

	12-aug	13-aug	14-aug	17-aug	18-aug	19-aug	20-aug
Cory's Shearwater				30	40	5	
Great Shearwater		2			5	2	
Sooty Shearwater	65	150	10	10	40	100	30
Manx Shearwater (1000s)	8	25	2	2	10	20	2
Balearic Shearwater	1	1	1	2	3	7	
Wilson's Petrel							1
Storm Petrel	10	100	15	30	20	3	20
Pomarine Skua		1					
Arctic Skua	7	10	3		3	10	2
Long-tailed Skua			1				
Great Skua	2	5	3	1		2	1

Wilson's Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*

1 bird showed off well at Bridges of Ross for a few minutes at calm weather on 20th. The whiteish fields on the upper coverts were striking, as were the lack of white markings on the underside of the arm. The bird appeared larger than Storm Petrels and was gliding more. The legs seemed long while hanging, but we never saw if they extended beyond the tail-tip. A fantastic ending to our trip to Ireland.

Storm Petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*

Gannet *Morus bassanus*

Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

20 at Shannon Airport Lagoon 13th & 18th, 1 at Poulmasherry Bay 18th.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*

1 female/1st year at Kilbaha 12th.

Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Merlin *Falco columbarius*

1 at Cross 13th.

Peregrine *Falco peregrinus*

Seen almost daily around BoR.

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*

2 at Ballycotton 15th.

Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Coot *Fulica atra*

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*

1 ad at Lady's Island Lake 15th.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Knot *Calidris canutus*

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*

We found one adult White-rumped Sandpiper at Poulnasherry Bay, Co. Clare on the evening at 16th of August. The bird was in a flock of approx 200 Dunlins and showed off well for some 30 minutes. It was slightly smaller than the accompanying Dunlins, the shape of the body was more flat and elongated. The long wings projecting well beyond the tail, together with the colourless, greyish plumage was best give-away while the square-shaped bright white rump shown in flight was diagnostic. The bird still had fine distinctive streakings on the sides of the neck (but not the whole neck, probably since the bird had started to moult into winter plumage). Unfortunately, the bird disappeared, and was not seen the following days.

Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*

We found one Pectoral Sandpiper at the Shannon Airport Lagoon on the 18th. This bird stayed for a while, and was seen by others.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina alpina*

e.g. 1000 at Shannon 18th, a few ssp. *arctica* were seen at Tacumshin and Ballycotton on 15th.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

Around 10 at Shannon 13th and 18th, 3 at Lough Donnell 18th.

Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

A few at Shannon, 32 at Doonbeg 20th.

Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus*

One winter plumaged bird at the lagoon at Shannon both 13th and 18th.



Long-billed Dowitcher with Black-tailed Godwits at Shannon Airport Lagoon, Ireland, 13th August 2005.
Photo: Måns Grundsten.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa islandica*

e.g. 1000 at Shannon 18th.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

1 at Quilty 12th, 1 at Poulnasherry Bay 16th, 4 on 18th, 1 on 20th, 15 at Clonderalaw Bay 20th.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

1 at Tacumshin 15th.

Redshank *Tringa tetanus*

e.g. 1000 at Shannon 18th.

Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

1 at Lady's Island Lake 15th, 5 at Ballycotton 15th, 1 at Clonakilty 16th.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

Turnstone *Areneria interpres*

Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus*

1 ad at BoR 13th.

Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*

Daily at BoR.

Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus*

1 1st year at BoR 14th.

Great Skua *Catharacta skua*

Almost daily at BoR.

Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*

1 juv at Kilbaha 12th and 14th, 1 ad at Ballycotton 15th, 1 ad at Blennerville 16th, 1 ad and 2 juv at W of Killimer, Co. Clare 16th, 1 juv flew NE at BoR 18.00 17th.

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*

Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis*

2 birds at Quilty 12th and one bird at the same place 18th. Both birds were probably 2nd year birds.



Ring-billed Gull, 2nd year bird at Quilty, Ireland, 12th August 2005. Photo: Måns Grundsten.

Common Gull *Larus canus*

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus graellsii*

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus argenteus*

Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*

Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*

Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*

Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii*

2 ad and one juv at Clare Harbour, Wexford 14th.



Roseate Tern, adult and juvenile(left), at Clare Harbour, Ireland, 14th August 2005. Photo: Måns Grundsten.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisea*

Guillemot *Uria aalge*

Razorbill *Alca torda*

Black Guillemot *Cepphus grylle*

1 at BoR 13th.

Puffin *Fratercula arctica*

Almost seen daily at BoR.

Rock Dove *Columba livia*

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*

Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

A few around Kilbaha, Loop.

Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

1 at Ross Carber 16th, 1 at Doonbeg at 17th and 20th.

Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

A few at the parking lot at BoR.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*

Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

House Martin *Delichon urbica*

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

Rock Pipit *Anthus petrosus petrosus*

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

I male at the small pond at Lighthouse Inn, Kilbaha. The bird had been present for quite a while.

Maybe ssp. *iberiae* or perhaps *flava*. There are some good photos on the www.clarebirdwatching.com website.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

1 at Quilty 12th, 1 at Kilbaha 14th.

Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba yarrellii*

2 White Wagtails (ssp. *alba*) at the parking lot at BoR on 12th. Ssp. *yarrellii* was widespread.

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Dunnock *Prunella modularis*

Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

Stonechat *Saxicola torquatus hibernans*

Common.

Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

2 at Kilbaha, Loop 17th.

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

1 at Tacumshin 15th, 3 at Doonbeg 17th.
Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*
1 at Loop Head lighthouse 17th.
Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*
1 at Shannon 13th.
Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*
Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*
Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus*
Great Tit *Parus major*
Magpie *Pica pica*
Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*
Seen almost daily at BoR, a larger flock of 10 at Loop Head. Also seen at Clonakilty.
Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*
Rook *Corvus frugilegus*
Hooded Crow *Corvus corone cornix*
Raven *Corvus corax*
Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*
House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*
Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*
Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*
Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*
Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*
Redpoll *Carduelis flammea cabaret*
Yellowhammer *Emberiza citronella*
1 male at Quilty 12th, 1 male at Ballycotton 15th.
Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*
Seen at Shannon

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