

# IRELAND, July 2006



*Puffin (Photo: Stefan Magnusson)*

*Trip between 22-29 July 2006 conducted by:*

*Arne Holgersson  
Stefan Magnusson*

# A taste of Ireland

## Trip report 22-29 July 2006

Found a gap in vacation to go birding last week in July. Only question was “where to go” at this time when the southern parts of WP are at its hottest. Seawatching on Ireland was an interesting alternative. It would probably be too early in the season for good numbers of seabirds (mid August probably the start of it). But on the other hand: if only hard winds from the NW-SE sector, mist and rain could turn up we could probably see a few of the sought after species. If not adult waders should be starting to show up and harbours could provide some interesting gulls.

Found a good round-ticket between Malmö and Dublin at Ryanair. Marketed at 50 Eur, some interesting surcharges (including taxes) such as: “7 Eur per bag of luggage” and (even more interesting!) “10 Eur charge for paying the tickets with VISA” we soon ended at some 120 Eur per ticket. Still a very good price.

Car was rented at Avis for some 220 Eur a week. Nights at B&B (30-35 Eur per person and night). Total for the trip (including gas, food and some boatrips) was about 700 Eur per person (and week).

Left-hand traffic (and in particular sitting on the right side with gears and head mirror on left side) was a bit odd at first. Roads are sometimes very narrow. Vegetation/walls are built up right next to the lanes, so at some times there is only width for one car. Many (even larger) roads take you right in to the city centres and sometimes the signposting disappears at roadforks where it is most needed.

But in total the traffic and driving is very good in Ireland. The Irish seem just as nice in traffic as they do when you meet them other places. There is a calm atmosphere over it all.

### Sat 22 July

Late in the afternoon started to drive from Dublin airport towards Lady Island Lake (south-east corner of Ireland). Winds were very moderate and on the S sector, but still with some rain in the air, why we decided to start on the south coast.

Got down to Lady Island Lake one hour before dark and gave it a quarter of an hour, but did not find any roseate terns. A little egret feeding. Hurried down to the coast to get a taste of some Manx's and some storm-petrels. Soon did. A mediterranean gull in a flock of black-headed on the water.

### Sun 23 July

Seawatching at the shore south of Lady Island Lake. Lots of Manx shearwaters and storm petrels to our delight. Well... at least for the first two hours. An adult roseate tern showed up right in front of us for a few times in the morning. Two adult sanderlings on the beach and at least four mediterranean gulls (2 ad in different moult, 1 3cy, 1 2 cy) among the blackheaded. One little egret flew by.



*Fulmar (Photo: Stefan Magnusson)*



*Kittiwake (Photo: Stefan Magnusson)*

When leaving a bunch of birders lining up on the beach. Hmm... In Sweden this would mean rarity... and indeed it was! Killian Mullarney in head of some birders showing a black-tern of American race in the large tern-flock on the beach. How wonderful! Not knowing ANY characters separating it from the European race – and feeling a good bit stupid because of that - we took a good look at it, listening to the characters repeated to us by the Irish birders.

Had a good laugh in meeting the author of our bird-book (not to say looking at a real rarity!) on a small beach in Ireland.. Picked for a visit by us by the purest of luck when looking for a good seawatching-spot at the map! Imagine the odds...

Tacumshin lake was visited without any luck (sun-haze, heat, high water and seemingly no waders made us reluctant to walk around the larger lake). Lady Island Lake was visited for short stops at two occasions, but no roseates found (guess we were simply not looking at the right island).

Ending at the shore in the evening, seawatching for an hour, but nothing new. Surprised by Mediterranean gulls turning up in the flocks. One fresh juvenile and a bunch of adults in different moult.

### **Mon 24 July**

Drive all the way to Mizen head. A few stops on tidal wader-grounds. Lots of black tailed godwits, two knots, and another two Mediterranean gulls (one juvenile and one 3cy). A few whimbrels along the larger curlews.

Seawatching at Mizen head in the evening proved good (still no winds at all). Large flocks of Manx's, puffins among the other auks, storm-petrels. One sooty shearwater. Choughs on the slopes, rock pipits and two great shearwaters. Of course among fulmars, gannets, shags and kittiwakes which were seen almost everywhere along the coast.

We wondered why we only saw adult kittiwakes. Not a single juvenile bird on the ocean so far.

### **Tue 25 July**

Early morning at Mizen. Still just a gentle breeze from the south. Counted up to 200 Manx's a minute in the largest of bursts. About 10 storm-petrels a minute at highest on a line very far out (probably meaning more than 30 passed out there). 20 puffins. Arne called for attention on 4 skuas passing in a flock. Looking lazy, broad-armed and heavy the first three passing but the last bird interrupting the path and went into the bay perhaps to find some gulls to harass. A definitive undeveloped pale (2 cy?) pomarine skua (with short, but thumb-shaped tail extenders).

With all probability all four birds were pomarines.

Two peregrines showed up during the day. First a worn bird with a brownish hue (2 cy) and an hour after an adult bird.

Afternoon trip out to Cape Clear. Tired but walked out against “Blannan” and seawatched for an hour (before the food-and-beer urge got to high). Three sooty shearwaters in this short while gave some hope for the next morning.

Arne fed an unshy pull robin with excellent Salmon from the local pub.

### **Wed 26 July**

Morning at “Blannan”. Hardly any wind at all and the flocks of Manx’s spread all the way out against the horizon making it hard to cover all birds (we blame this on the no-wind conditions).

Still one line of birds (rounding “Blannan”) showing up extremely close and Arne, eager to get as close as possible, was bombarded by the Graellsii-gulls, to Stefans great amusement.

Among the closest Manx’s one Balearic shearwater showed up very nice, but sadly we soon got fed-up by not being more rewarded scanning through the flocks of Manx’s. Soon gave it up to get on the noon-ferry to the mainland. Lots of black guillemots around the island.

This must be a wonderful site when winds are roaring in autumn!

Met an Irish birder on the evening rout towards Brandon point (another mentioned seawatching site which was our next planned stop). Got a real advice to avoid Brandon point and instead head for a visit to the seabird colonies at Skellig islands. Gave it a real thought and decided to give the Skellig’s a shot.

### **Thur 27 July**

Real lucky to get on the boats as boats had been fully booked for some time. Mist and rain was shredding around the island as we landed on the great Skellig island. Really surprised to have seen a hundred puffins wheeling around already when landing, mostly due to the boatmen having told us only “four or five” were still on the island (at the end of breeding season).

Arne half an hour before Stefan on the island (due to us not having booked boats) and when meeting again Arne is smiling and pointing downwards the sea. Took a look down at the Kittiwake colony and giving it a reluctant “thumbs up”. Arne shaking his head once more, smiling hysterically and pointing down the cliff. Getting closer and realizing him pointins at something black, white and orange only 2 metres away from him.

PUFFINS!

J-sus!!!



*Heavy rain and no puffins in sight (Photo: Stefan Magnusson)*

Two hours almost not talking to each other just melting the enormous impressions of the large island providing such wonderful birds flying by at arms-length.

And the puffins.

Way back boat rounded also little skelligs and a 25.000 gannets on this, the worlds next largest, gannetry. Amazing to see these birds in such numbers and concentrations. Three storm petrels on way home.

But how could we manage NOT seeing any Manx's on this boat-trip?

Evening heading by car towards Bridges of Ross (perhaps currently the most appreciated seawatching site in Ireland). Sothern harbour of the car-ferry over Shannon river two mediterranean gulls (ad and 3cy). Half a minute of birding in the evening (just mapping the road to the site) we manage to see two great skuas.



*Mediterranean gull (adult moulting into winter plumage) (Photo: Stefan Magnusson)*



*Mediterranean gull (3cy moulting into winter plumage) (Photo: Stefan Magnusson)*

## Fri 28 July

Last real birding day, and early morning at Bridges of Ross. Two dark arctic skuas (subadult/adult) keeping the gulls at guard but otherwise very still. No wind at all but a bit rain in the air. No Manx's at first and it all seemed very quiet. A danish co-birder joining us just when flocks of Manx's start to show up. A bunch of sootys intermingled. Still no wind but a bit rainy, birds are in two lines. One close and one almost out in the horizon.

Two or three large birds passing all the way out in the horizon (needing 60X zoom to be found) showing good characters for cory shearwater (gull-large in size compared to the tiny Manx's, underparts wholly white (including body) and underwings bordered with a black frame (ruling out any gull). Upperparts seems wholly "yellowish-brown", flight very lazy on bowed wings and not at all like greater on their stiffer wings and faster flight. Still with shearwater arches. There really was no alternative but the distance made us hope for closer views to be able to make a certain ID. Only a few minutes later two birds showing up a bit closer, in the line of Manx's made it possible to rule out greater and characters were seen better. Wonderful! This certainly was not expected on a calm day in July!

Strangely for half an hour it seemed like conditions had improved (but still no winds to talk about). Manx's increased, 5-6 Cory's where identified (more were seen and quite a few large silhouettes against the sky were seen very far out on the ocean), sootys increased and a wonderful close observation of a Balearic shearwater among the Manx's. A storm-petrel flew by but showed all good for common. 2 great skuas. All good birds flying south. One great skua going north, only to destroy the pattern. Two subadult skuas passing south quite close harassed some greater black-backed gulls and showed all good characters for pomarine skua. Moments after one full adult pomarine with "clubs" with a subadult relative adding up to four identified pominaries! About 14 small skuas where left unidentified to far out (most probably arctic, though). One poor kittiwake was harassed by four skuas simultaneously. All skuas moving consequently south (ruling out double-counts).

Time was getting late and we had to make a drive all the way to Dublin this evening. Felt so lucky to be rewarded this day for our project of days of hard seawatching in July under "no or wrong"-wind conditions.

Set aim for Shannon Airport Lagoon for a quick stop mostly to see the site. A small lagoon and a large tidal sand-bank divided by a grassy pier (good to watch the birds from). Counted a 66 dunlin, 21 red knot (but not so red actually), 1 curlew sandpiper, 2 common snipe, 1 whimbrel and 473 black-tailed godwits. Most, at this time of mid-day, were standing far out on the sand-bank appearing as black silhouettes against the sun and in sun-haze (dilluting the picture). So was also the sleeping bird Arne picked out in line of the black-tailed godwits.

"Stefan, take a look at this bird...". It was a lot smaller than the godwits and the breast gave a "reddish" impression over the distance. We started questioning if it could be an adult red knot but Arne had noted a very long bill on the bird. As soon as the bird turned again and showed its long bill we were quite certain it was an adult long-billed dowitcher (or at least a dowitcher) we were looking at. Still the distance was quite large, there were some haze and the bird seemed almost black in the complete "backlight" of the sun. The only alternative left was bar-tailed godwitt (but we also understood that this alternative actually stood out as quite absurd on the small bird...).



We called the Irish birdline about the bird and had a (quite fast...) meal at the golf-club to wait out better conditions. Soon found the bird again among red tailed godwits (now closer to the pier) and we could only confirm our first identification “long billed dowitcher”. An adult bird in active wing-moult.

The first Irish birders showed up as we were leaving and we could only agree on a perfect way to end a great week.



*Long-billed Dowitcher (Photo: Stefan Magnusson)*

### **Sat 29 July**

One final “Full Irish breakfast” and then off to Dublin airport for the return back to Malmö, Sweden.



*Arne comparing two bowls of Guinness. (Photo: Stefan Magnusson)*

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Above all thanks to all nice Irish and danish birders we met on the trip, providing invaluable help in routeplanning, identification as well as contributing to some great moments!

Will surely return to Ireland, next time perhaps in mid August when the sea would offer more of it's gold.

Thanks to all of you!

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Arne and Stefan

## **ACCOMODATION**

(All to be recommended, 30-35 Eur per person a night in doubleroom + breakfast)

- 22/7-23/7 B a B between Tagoat and Killinick road N25.
- 24/7-25/7 B a B 5 km east of Mizen Head
- 25/7-26/7 B a B Cape Clear 028 – Family owner/operated.  
Ciarán & Mary O’Driscoll. [capeclearcottages@eircom.net](mailto:capeclearcottages@eircom.net) 391 53
- 26/7-27/7 B a B Portmagee ”The Ferry Boat Guesthouse”:  
+353 (0) 669477163
- 27/7-28/7 Lighthouse Inn Kilbaha (right by the takeoff to Bridges of Ross)
- Maureen Walsh @0659058358 - +353(0)659058008 – [info@loopheadclare.com](mailto:info@loopheadclare.com)
- 28/7-29/7 B a B Rathcoole – 01 4588007

## **BOATS AND FERRIES**

Baltimore – Cape Clear: [www.emara.com/ferry/media/timetable](http://www.emara.com/ferry/media/timetable)

Skellig Island: Pat Joe Murphy’s Sea Cruise:

- 066-9477156
- mobile 087-2342168 or 087-6451909

## SPECIES ACCOUNT

Br o R (Bridges of Ross)  
 MH (Mizen Head)  
 CC (Cape Clear)  
 LiL (Lady Island Lake)  
 Sh (Shannon Airport Lagoon)  
 CP (Carnsore Point)  
 DuG (Dungarvan)  
 RC (Ross Carbery)  
 BB (Bantry Bay)  
 SkI (Skellig Islands)

Stormfågel	Fulmarus glacialis	Fulmar	x
Gulnäbbad lira	Calonectris diomedea	Cory's Shearwater	5-6 Br o R 28/7
Grålira	Puffinus griseus	Sooty Shearwater	1 MH 24/7 + 2 MH 25/7 + 2 CC 25/7, 11 Br o R 28/7
Mindre lira	Puffinus puffinus	Manx Shearwater	x
Balearisk lira	Puffinus mauretanicus	Balearic Shearwater	2 st CC 25/7 + Br o R 28/7
Stormsvala	Hydrobates pelagicus	Storm-petrel	CP, MH, SkI, Br o R
Havssula	Morus bassanus	Gannet	x
Storskarv	Phalacrocorax carbo	Cormorant	x
Toppskarv	Phalacrocorax aristotelis	Shag	x
Silkeshäger	Egretta garzetta	Little Egret	x
Gråhäger	Ardea cinerea	Grey Heron	x
Knölsvan	Cygnus olor	Mute Swan	x L i L
Grågås	Anser anser	Greylag Goose	x L i L
Gravand	Tadorna tadorna	Shelduck	x
Kricka	Anas crecca	Common Teal	3 Sh
Gräsand	Anas platyrhynchos	Mallard	x
Sjööorre	Melanitta nigra	Common Scoter	x
Sparvhök	Accipiter nisus	Sparrowhawk	CP
Tornfalk	Falco tinnunculus	Kestrel	x
Pilgrimsfalk	Falco peregrinus	Peregrine Falcon	1 ad + 1 2cy MH
Fasan	Phasianus colchicus	Pheasant	x
Rörhöna	Gallinula chloropus	Moorhen	RC + Sh
Sothöna	Fulica atra	Coot	x
Strandskata	Haematopus ostralegus	Oystercatcher	x
Större strandpipare	Charadrius hiaticula	Ringed Plover	x
Tofsvipa	Vanellus vanellus	Lapwing	CP + LiL + Sh
Kustsnäppa	Calidris canutus	Knot	2 ad DuG + 21 ad Sh
Sandlöpare	Calidris alba	Sanderling	2 CP
Spovsnäppa	Calidris ferruginea	Curlew Sandpiper	1 ad Sh
Kärrensäppa	Calidris alpina	Dunlin	X (66 Sh)

Roskarl	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	Turnstone	CP ca 10
Rödbena	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	Redshank	X
Gluttsnäppa	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	Greenshank	x
Drillsnäppa	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	Common Sandpiper	L i L
Rödspov	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	Black-tailed Godwit	X (fex 150 RC + 472 Sh)
Småspov	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	Whimbrel	4 RC + 1 BB + 1 Sh
Storspov	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	Eurasian Curlew	X
Enkelbeckasin Större beckasinsnäppa	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i> <i>Limnodromus</i> <i>scolopaceus</i>	Snipe Long-billed Dowitcher	2 Sh 1 ad Sh
Bredstjärtad labb	<i>Stercorarius pomarinus</i>	Pomarine Skua	1 (prob 4) MH, 4 Br o R (1 ad + 3 subad)
Labb	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>	Arctic Skua	4 Br o R 28/7 (14 unid. Br o R)
Storlabbb	<i>Catharacta skua</i>	Great Skua	2 MH 2 Br o R 27/7 + 3 Br o R 28/7 CP 3 ad + 1 2cy + 1 1cy + 1 3cy, RC 1 1cy, 1 3ad Bantry 1 3cy, Tarbot 1 3cy + 1 ad
Svarthuvad mäs	<i>Larus melanocephalus</i>	Mediterranean Gull	
Skrattmäs	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	Black-headed Gull	X
Fiskmäs	<i>Larus canus</i>	Common Gull	X
Silltrut	<i>Larus fuscus graeillssi</i> <i>Larus argentatus</i>	Lesser Black-backed Gull	X
Gråtrut	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	Herring Gull	X
Havstrut	<i>Larus marinus</i>	Great Black-backed Gull	X
Tretåig mäs	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	Black-legged Kittiwake	X
Småtärna	<i>Sterna albifrons</i>	Little Tern	1 CP
Kentsk tärna	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>	Sandwich Tern	x
Rosentärna	<i>Sterna dougallii</i>	Roseate Tern	CP (at least) 1 ad
Fisktärna	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	Common Tern	x
Silvertärna Amerikansk svarttärna	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i> <i>Chlidonias niger</i> <i>surinamensis</i>	Arctic Tern Amerikan Black Tern	x 1 st 2cy CP 23/7
Sillgrissla	<i>Uria aalge</i>	Guillemot	x
Tordmule	<i>Alca torda</i>	Razorbill	x
Tobisgrissla	<i>Cephus grylle</i>	Black Guillemot	x
Lunnefågel	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>	Atlantic Puffin	X (2 CP, 5+20 MH, at least 300 great skellig island, 5 Br o R)
Tamduva	<i>Columba livia</i>	Rock dove Common Wood	x
Ringduva	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Pigeon	x
Turkduva	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	Eurasian Collared Dove	x
Tornseglare	<i>Apus apus</i>	Common Swift	X
Sånglärka	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	Skylark	X
Ladusvala	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Barn Swallow	X
Hussvala	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	House Martin	X
Ängspiplärka	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	Meadow Pipit	X
Skärpiplärka	<i>Anthus petrosus petrosus</i>	Rock Pipit	X
Engelsk sädesärta	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>	Pied Wagtail	X
Gärdsmyg	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Winter Wren	X

Järnsparv	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	Dunnock	1 CC
Rödhake	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	European Robin	X
Svarthakad buskskvätta	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	Stonechat	X (1 st CP + 10 CC + 2 Sh)
Stenskvätta	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	Northern Wheatear	2 CC
Koltrast	<i>Turdus merula</i>	Common Blackbird	X
Taltrast	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	Song Thrush	X
Gräshoppångare	<i>Locustella naevia</i>	Grasshopper Warbler	2 CP + CC
Sävsångare	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	Sedge Warbler	CP + CC
Törnsångare	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	Whitethroat	CP + CC
Kungsfågel	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	Goldcrest	RC
Blåmes	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>	Blue Tit	X
Talgoxe	<i>Parus major</i>	Great Tit	X
Skata	<i>Pica pica</i>	Common Magpie	X
Kaja	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	Jackdaw	X
Råka	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	Rook	X
Kråka	<i>Corvus corone cornix</i>	Hooded Crow	X
Korp	<i>Corvus corax</i>	Common Raven	X
Alpkråka	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>	Chough	5 MH 4 CC
Stare	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Common Starling	X
Gråsparv	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	House Sparrow	X
Bofink	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Chaffinch	1 Sh
Grönfink	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	European Greenfinch	X
Steglits	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	European Goldfinch	x
Hämpling	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	Common Linnet	X
Gråsiska	<i>Carduelis flammea cabaret</i>	Redpoll	1 Sh
Sävspurv	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	Reed Bunting	2 SH