

2013 DUBLIN COUNTY BIRD RACE

A sightings round-up by Niall T. Keogh

The 23rd annual Dublin County Bird Race took place on Saturday 5th January 2013. Nine teams met at 08:00 at Booterstown DART Station car park & then raced around the county trying to see as many species as possible before meeting at Clontarf Castle at 18:00 (where eight teams finished). By the end of the day, a cumulative total of **112 species** of bird were recorded by all teams (two less than the 2012 species total) with each individual team's scores as follows:

Category A

- 1st place (105 points): 'Southside Swifts' – Niall T. Keogh, Noel Keogh & Brian Porter.
- 2nd place (103 points): 'Raving Loons' – Owen Foley, Conor Foley, Donal Foley & Ciarán Smyth.
- 3rd place (95 points): 'Southern Hawkiers' – Dick Coombes, Christian Osthoff, Gerry Lyons & Des Higgins.
- 4th place (94 points): 'Northside Nightjars' – John Fox, Phillip Clancy, Ger Franck & Mir Harris.
- 5th place (87 points): 'Three Men & a Boy' – Patrick Veale, Jim Bowman, Denis Cronin & Frank Turpin.

Category B

- 1st place (84 points): 'Funny Ducks' – Robert Busby, Jimmy Noonan, Paul Jago & Tom Kealy.
- 2nd place (76 points): 'The Goold Old Boys' - Dave Fox, Maurran Fox, Paul Keating & Killian Keating.
- 3rd place (70 points): 'Dublin Dunlins' – Brian Gormley & Gareth Williams.

The decrease in diver numbers off the Dublin coast on bird race days continues. Whilst Great Northern Divers have always been scarce, Red-throated Divers are generally common, at least at certain sites. This year however, just one **Red-throated Diver** was seen in South Dublin Bay, from Seapoint with another two further to the North off Portmarnock. Singles of **Great Northern Diver** were noted from The Forty Foot & Skerries. Perhaps the Red-throats are moving South to find better feeding? An exceptionally high count of 182 off Kilcoole on 15th December 2012 seems to suggest so.

Great Crested Grebes were plentiful as ever, seen from most coastal sites featuring bays or estuaries. **Little Grebes** are more local in Dublin but were easily found at sites such as Kilbogget Park, Rogerstown Estuary & Knock Lake. Another local species in Dublin is **Coot**, but again the likes of Kilbogget Park & Knock Lake made them easy to get on the day.

Small numbers of **Fulmar**, **Gannet** & **Kittiwake** were seen from Dalkey & in Killiney Bay. Both **Gulliemot** & **Razorbill** were plentiful, especially along the South Dublin coastline and **Black Guillemot** wasn't hard to find at traditional sites like Dalkey Island & the East Pier, Dun Laoghaire Harbour.

Given the relatively calm conditions on the day, there was no trouble picking up sea duck such as **Common Scoter**, **Red-breasted Merganser** & **Goldeneye**. A small but regular flock of Common Scoter winters in South Dublin Bay with 19 recorded there from Seapoint. Scarcer sea duck were noted in the form of 2 **Long-tailed Ducks** in Sutton Creek & a single **Scaup** off Malahide. Diving duck flocks seem to be dwindling at coastal sites but **Tufted Duck** were still to be found at Knock Lake (20+) and UCD Belfield. A single female **Pochard** was with the Tufties at Knock Lake also. After six years 'service' on The North Bull Island, the female Blue-winged Teal failed to put in an appearance this year as did Green-winged Teal & Gadwall which have bolstered scores in recent years. The surprise wildfowl find of the day relates to a flock of 7 **Greenland White-fronted Geese** which flew around overhead at Rogerstown Estuary in the late afternoon. A very scarce bird in Dublin which made up nicely for the fact that no Greylag Geese were seen this year.

It was an excellent day for Birds of Prey with many teams recording several species each. Two **Merlins** were seen, one at the Vico Road & another at Rogerstown Estuary and **Peregrines** were

sighted at several localities (Vico Road, The North Bull Island & Rogerstown Estuary). **Buzzards**, **Sparrowhawks** & **Kestrels** were well represented, especially in North Dublin (5+ Buzzards at Rogerstown Estuary alone for example). The raptor highlight of the day came in the form of two male **Hen Harriers**, one seen at close range at Knock Lake and a 2nd-winter male at Rogerstown Estuary (where up to 3 birds have been seen recently). A tough species to get on the race in the past so a most welcome addition to the list this year.

No unusual wintering waders such as Ruff or Spotted Redshank were seen this year but thankfully **Purple Sandpipers** didn't go into hiding as they can sometimes, and were picked up at several sites (Dalkey Island, East Pier Dun Laoghaire, Skerries & Balbriggan). **Water Rail** was heard calling at dusk at Knock Lake as per usual but a regular showy bird was seen at UCD Belfield. No Little Gulls or white-winged gulls were found this year but **Mediterranean Gulls** were no trouble to find at their usual haunts in South Dublin Bay, single adult **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** were seen at Merrion Gates & in Scotsman's Bay and the regular adult **Ring-billed Gull** was day roosting at Merrion Gates up until midday.

The mild, calm weather early on in the day provided perfect conditions for finding passerines. **Siskins** & **Lesser Redpolls** were calling overhead throughout the day. **Bullfinches**, **Blackcaps**, **Long-tailed Tits** & **Goldcrests** made themselves known in suburban parks & gardens. Small flocks of **Redwing** were scattered about and **Fieldfares** were a welcome sight in North Dublin (including 20+ at Turvey Parklands). **Treecreeper** was seen at Cabinteely Park, **Grey Wagtails** were present at several sites, 40+ **Skylarks** were in a stubble field at Baldoyle, **Stonechats** (a difficult bird to get last year) were seen at Howth, Baldoyle & Rogerstown Estuary and a wintering **Chiffchaff** was present at Kilbogget Park. No Black Redstarts were seen this year however continuing a poor run of luck for this species. Single **Kingfishers** put in an appearance at Booterstown Marsh & Broadmeadows whilst **Dippers** were recorded at Loughlinstown & along the Dodder. Large flocks of **Woodpigeons** around Newbridge Demesne & Turvey Parklands contained many **Stock Doves**. A hybrid **Carrion Crow** was present at The River Santry outflow on The North Bull Island & **Jay** was heard calling at UCD Belfield. **Raven** was a tough bird to get on the day. Two were seen around the Vico Road/Sorrento Point area. It was encouraging to see good numbers of **Yellowhammers**, **Tree Sparrows** & **Reed Buntings** in stubble fields around North Dublin. A good mixed flock of finches & buntings is currently present at Turvey Parklands, making use of the sacrificial crops planted for wildlife as well as grain thrown down by birders & photographers which in turn has attracted in some easy to find **Brambling** (12 seen there the day after the race).

A month ago you couldn't go anywhere in Dublin without bumping into a flock of **Waxwings**. It seems that most of these birds have dispersed since then but luckily for one team, a flock of c.20 showed up on Kincora Drive near Clontarf on the day. Nice to get them on the race list for the year.

Bird Race Team Pics Below by Dick Coombes:



Southside Swifts (L-R: Noel Keogh, Brian Porter & Niall T. Keogh)



Raving Loons (L-R: Ciarán Smyth, Donal Foley, Conor Foley & Owen Foley)



Southern Hawkers (L-R: Des Higgins, Dick Coombes, Christian Osthoff & Gerry Lyons)