

2013 WICKLOW COUNTY BIRD RACE

A sightings round-up by Niall T. Keogh

The Wicklow County Bird Race took place on Saturday 9th February 2013. Four teams met at Bray Promenade at 07:30 and then raced around the county trying to see as many species as possible before meeting at The Beehive Inn at 18:30. By the end of the day, a cumulative total of **104 species** of bird were recorded by all teams (eight less than the 2012 species total) with each individual team's scores as follows:

Category A

- 1st place (95 & ½ points): 'The Southside Swifts' – Niall T. Keogh, Noel Keogh & Brian Porter.
- 2nd place (92 points): 'The Montagus' – Jim Sheehan, Mick Boyle, Stephen McAvoy & John Tyner.
- 3rd place (90 & ½ points): 'The Peckers' – Dick Coombes, Christian Osthoff & Gerry Lyons.

Category B

- 1st place (78 points): 'The Finches' – Domhnall Finch, Kieran Finch, Conor Finch & Fergus Finch.

Calm & overcast conditions in the morning were favourable for finding birds on the sea. **Red-throated Divers** were plentiful right along the coast with the scarcer **Great Northern Diver** noted at three locations (Greystones, Kilcoole & off Broad Lough). **Great Crested Grebe** is a rare bird on the Wicklow coast so one off Bray Harbour was most welcome. A pair in full breeding regalia was seen at the Vartry Reservoir, the only known breeding site for the species in the county. **Coot** is another species with limited distribution in Wicklow and two also at the Vartry Reservoir were the only birds seen on the day. **Water Rails** were heard squealing at several locations with one bird seen out in the open at the BirdWatch Ireland Kilcoole Reserve.

The three regularly occurring species of auk were easily found along the coast with **Guillemots** outnumbering **Razorbills** and **Black Guillemots** seen at usual haunts such as Bray Head, Greystones & Kilcoole. Some **Fulmars** were already back at Bray Head, circling offshore near the breeding ledges. Quite a few **Gannets** were seen on the day with 15+ heading North off Kilcoole alone. Only a handful of **Kittiwakes** were seen but again from the likes of Bray & Kilcoole.

Unusual duck have been few and far between this winter so a male **Pochard** at the Vartry Reservoir was the only quack of note on the day. The regular wintering flocks of 43 **Whooper Swans** & 200+ **Icelandic Greylag Geese** were present in fields along the coast between Kilcoole & Newcastle whilst an adult **Dark-bellied Brent Goose** was seen in The Breaches. A further 7 Whooper Swans were feeding at the North end of the Vartry Reservoir.

It was an exceptional day for Birds of Prey with teams logging 12+ **Buzzards**, 4+ **Sparrowhawks**, 5+ **Kestrels** & 2 **Peregrines** across the county. A male **Hen Harrier** was also seen at Broad Lough and a pair of **Long-eared Owls** was still present & displaying at a traditional site in the south of the county.

Scarce waders took the form of 3 **Purple Sandpipers** at Greystones, a **Woodcock** at Black Hill and 3 **Bar-tailed Godwits**, c.120 **Golden Plover** & 2 **Jack Snipe** at Broad Lough (one of which was seen out in the open, displaying the characteristic 'bobbing' behaviour). The 'resident' adult **Ring-billed Gull** was seen on several occasions at Bray Harbour where an adult **Mediterranean Gull** was also present. An additional Mediterranean Gull, this time a 1st-winter was at Broad Lough, an adult **Little Gull** was present offshore from Six Mile Point and single **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** were noted at Bray, Kilcoole, Delgany & Broad Lough.

With a calm morning and sunny afternoon, it was a good day for finding & seeing passerines. The stubble field near the entrance to Newcastle Airfield held a mixed flock of finches & buntings which included 4 **Brambling**, several **Yellowhammer** & good numbers of **Reed Bunting**. An excellent opportunity to get these species with relative ease from the side of the road. A flock of up to 4 **Crossbill** flying South West over Kilcoole was a great find. Flocks of **Redwing** & **Fieldfare** were

encountered at several sites as were singles or pairs of **Stonechat** which seem to have bounced back nicely from their steep decline a few winters ago. Wintering **Blackcaps** were picked up in gardens in Enniskerry, Greystones & Delgany. **Linnet, Lesser Redpoll, Siskin, Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush & Collared Dove** were plentiful or easy to get on the day.

Dippers were present as usual at traditional sites along the River Vartry at Ashford & at Hunter's Hotel, single **Grey Wagtails** were seen at Greystones, Ashford & Glendalough and a total of three **Kingfishers** were noted, at Vartry Reservoir, Ashford & Broad Lough. **Treecreepers** were spotted in woods at Killruddery, Vartry Reservoir and Ashford and a single **Waxwing** which was found in Newtownmountkennedy was a great species to get on the race list. With their spread across the county in recent years, it was no surprise that some **Great Spotted Woodpeckers** were found this year; two at Glendalough and a single bird near Dunran Demesne. Several **Ravens** were seen throughout and **Jays** were recorded at Glendalough & Clonmannon.

Species generally seen on most race days but absent in 2013 include Goosander, Common Scoter, Tufted Duck, Merlin & Black Redstart.

Race team pics below by Dick Coombes:



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



The Montagu's (L-R: John Tyner, Mick Boyle, Jim Sheehan & Stephen McAvoy)



The Peckers (L-R: Gerry Lyons, Dick Coombes & Christian Osthoff)



The Finches (represented here by Domhnall Finch and his much loved prizes!)