

A List of Rare Birds on Cape Clear Island
Near Passerines

Compiled by Joe Hobbs

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South Dublin Branch
of
BirdWatch Ireland
www.southdublinbirds.com

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Cover: Sunrise and the Old Lighthouse ruins on Cape Clear Island, Cork.

Photo: Victor Caschera.

Introduction

Cape Clear Island is three miles distant from the Fastnet Rock. They are located at the entrance to Roaringwater Bay, Cork, at the southwest extremity of Ireland. To the south and west are the Celtic Sea and Atlantic Ocean. This note is a list of rare near-passerines recorded at both islands.

Systematic List

The Systematic List includes records that have been published in at least one of Ussher & Warren (1900), Kennedy *et al.* (1954), Irish Bird Reports (1953 to 2003) and Irish Rare Bird Reports (2004 to 2015).

Some IRBC [Appendix I](#) and [Appendix II](#) species/subspecies from 2016 and 2017 that have yet to be assessed are included when the evidence is compelling and not controversial. These are not counted in any summary of occurrences.

A list of references is on page 16. A map of Cape Clear Island is on page 18.

Ranges quoted are very general, with the intention of providing a broad indication of breeding and wintering ranges only. For polytypic species, the form that is recorded or likely to occur in Ireland is quoted. Species are monotypic unless otherwise stated.

Reports and their Citations

Irish Bird Reports from 1953 to 1976 were stand-alone publications, thereafter incorporated in *Irish Birds* until the final report for 2003.

Irish Bird Reports from 1953 to 1976 are cited thus: *IBR* 'report number': 'report page number'.

Irish Bird Reports from 1977 to 2003 are cited thus: *Irish Birds* 'volume number'('volume issue number'): 'page number'.

Irish Rare Bird Reports from 2004 onwards are published in *Irish Birds* (see the [IRBC website HERE](#) for a brief explanation of the change).

Irish Rare Bird Reports are cited thus: *Irish Birds* 'volume number'('volume issue number'): 'page number'.

Statistics

National statistics quoted are to 31st December 2015 *per* Irish Rare Bird Reports.

Locations

Specific locations on the island are quoted whenever known.

Hyperlinks

Links to web pages are indicated [in this colour](#).

Websites Cited

Irish Birding: www.irishbirding.com

Taxonomy

Scientific nomenclature and species order follows version 7.3 of the IOC World List (Gill & Donsker 2017).

Cape Clear Bird Observatory

Cape Clear Bird Observatory (CCBO) or just ‘the Obs’, was founded in 1959 by some British birders who were interested in investigating the island’s potential for observing and recording bird migration. Its first home was the old Coastguard Station in South Harbour (subsequently taken over by An Óige and run as a youth hostel for many years), then in 1960 moving to the building known as ‘Stroma’ just off the A1 (Leaca Mhór) for 1961 and 1962.

While at Stroma the observatory committee began successful negotiations to acquire Harbour House in North Harbour, eventually taking possession of the building on 22nd March 1963, where the Obs remains to this day.

In 1999 the Observatory came under the management of BirdWatch Ireland, and soon after major renovations were made to the building.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to all the photographers for allowing me include their great pictures and to Eamonn O’Donnell and Dennis Weir for all their help compiling this list and to Cólín MacLochlainn for allowing me include his superb map of Cape.

Joe Hobbs, December 2017.



The Fastnet Rock and its lighthouse,
(photo: Dick Coombes).

Looking northeast across South Harbour towards The Glen and old Lighthouse,
(photo: Neal Warnock).



West Bog looking towards the Bill of Clear,
(photo: Tom Shevlin).

Yellow-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus americanus*

Range: Southern Canada to northern Mexico and West Indies. Winters in South America as far south as northern Argentina.

Known occurrences: Two records.

1969 One: One, 13th October (*IBR* 17: 47), found dead beside the path from Central Bog to Lough Errul by Ken Preston. When discovered it was partly covered by bracken and estimated to have been dead for somewhere between four and six days. This was the fourth Irish record.

1986 One: One, Denis Burke's Garden, Cummer, 30th October (*Irish Birds* 3(3): 479, MacLochlainn 2017), found by Éamonn MacLochlainn, this was the sixth Irish record.

Status in Ireland: Very rare autumn vagrant with ten records. The first Irish and Western Palearctic record was shot near Youghal, Cork, some time in autumn 1825, and of the rest, eight were in October and one in September.

Scops Owl *Otus scops*

Polytypic with five subspecies.

Range: [n nominate ssp.] France and Italy to the Caucasus. Winters southernmost Europe, sub-Saharan Africa and southwestern Arabian peninsula.

Known occurrences: One record and one at Fastnet.

1907 One: One, Fastnet Lighthouse, 6th May (Kennedy *et al.* 1954), captured. This was the ninth Irish record.

1999 One: Adult male, Cotter's Garden, 17th to 19th May (*Irish Birds* 6(4): 563), trapped.

Early on Monday, 17th May 1999, Steve Wing had set up some nets in Cotter's Garden and The Waist in the hope of trapping and ringing some spring migrants. While Steve and Eamonn O'Donnell were in The Waist, Eamonn's four year old niece, Louise, came running up with the news there was an owl in one of the nets in Cotter's! As Steve was busy ringing, Eamonn ran to Cotter's where all he found were empty nets. Nevertheless, Louise was adamant that she had seen a '*small owl with big yellow eyes*', suggesting Scops or Little Owls. So, Steve left a repeating tape of their calls beneath the nets in Cotter's, but without success. With night approaching, a single net was left open that Steve and Eamonn monitored intermittently.

It was not looking great but lightning was about to strike twice. As Louise and her mother were going home about 10pm she headed off through Cotter's only to come racing back shouting '*the owl is in the net*'. Steve and Eamonn came running to find a Scops Owl walking up the net, making Louise the youngest ever finder of a mega-rarity! It was quickly processed and released back in Cotter's. The following evening it was briefly seen by a few birders.

Status in Ireland: Very rare with sixteen records. Despite two November records over a century apart (1883 and 2005), the pattern of occurrences strongly suggest it is an overshooting spring migrant, with four in April, five in May, one in June and two in July.



Scops Owl, in the hand,
17th May 1999,
(photo: Eamonn O'Donnell).

White-throated Needletail *Hirundapus caudacutus*

Polytypic with two subspecies. An alternative name is Needle-tailed Swift.

Range: [nominate ssp.] Central Siberia to Japan and the Kuril Islands. Winters New Guinea and eastern Australia.

Known occurrences: One record.

1964 One: One, Ballyieragh, 20th June (*IBR* 12: 30), found by P.A. Wright and W.R.P. Bourne, this was the first Irish and fourth Western Palearctic record. Both observer's had views down to ten feet for about twenty minutes.

Status in Ireland: To date, the Cape bird is the only Irish record.

Chimney Swift *Chaetura pelagica*

Range: South-central and southeast Canada to central and eastern USA. Winters western South America.

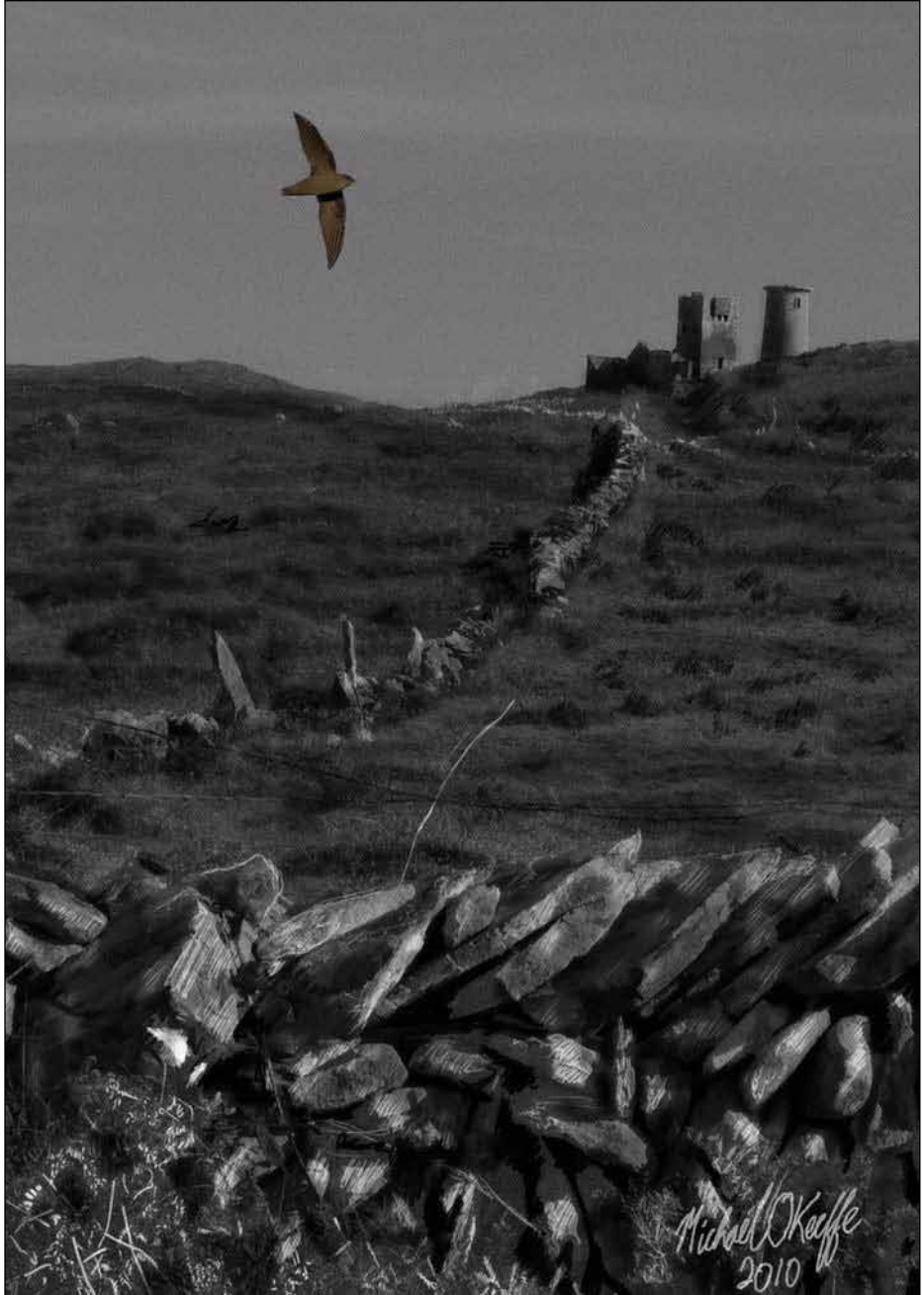
Known occurrences: Two records.

1999 One: One, Alderwood, 23rd October (*Irish Birds* 6(4): 563), found by Steve Wing, this was the first Irish record and part of an influx of seven recorded across three counties to 30th October.

2005 One: One, 29th to 30th October (*Irish Birds* 8(3): 387), this was the first of an influx of ten recorded across three counties to 9th November.

Status in Ireland: Very rare with seventeen records, all occurring during two mini-influxes in 1999 and 2005.

Chimney Swift, 23rd October 1999,
an artist's depiction of the bird's arrival on Cape over the Glen by Michael O'Keeffe.



Alpine Swift *Chaetura pelagica*

Polytypic with ten subspecies.

Range: [nominate ssp.] Southern Europe through Turkey to northwest Iran. Winters central and west Africa.

Known occurrences: Five records.

1968 One: One, North Harbour, 21st April (*IBR* 16: 39).

1978 One: One, 2nd June (*Irish Birds* 1(3): 437).

1987 One: One, Bullaun, 23rd August (*Irish Birds* 3(4): 635).

1988 One: One, Bullaun, 3rd April (*Irish Birds* 4(1): 103).

2003 One: One, 21st September (*Irish Birds* 7(4): 563).

There is also a record of one shot at sea in a position between eight and ten miles from Cape, sometime in mid-summer 1829 (*Irish Birds* 10(2): 251, Ussher & Warren 1900), this was the first Irish record.

Status in Ireland: Rare with 79 records, mainly as a spring overshoot, although it has been recorded in all months from March to September. One was found exhausted (and later died) at the Marathon Gas Platform, south of Kinsale, Cork on 9th November 1988. Astonishingly, this was the second there that year, as another was present on 29th March. Parties of five together have been seen on two occasions, at Killiney, Dublin in March 1992 and at Cork City centre in March 2002.

Little Swift *Apus affinis*

Polytypic with six subspecies.

Range: [ssp. *galilejensis*] Northwest Africa to Pakistan and south to Sudan and north-west Somalia.

Known occurrences: One record.

1967 One: One, Cummer, 12th June (*IBR* 15: 36, Sharrock 1968), found by Tim Sharrock, this was the first Irish record.

On the evening of Monday, 12th June 1967, Tim Sharrock was sitting high above Cummer watching some hirundines and Common Swifts hawking for insects, when he spotted a small swift with a gleaming white throat, black underparts and a square white rump among them. It passed both above and below him at distances down to 30 yards for about five minutes, apparently departing with Common Swifts while he was taking field notes.

Tim suspected it was a Little Swift, but the literature available in the Obs was not sufficiently detailed to confirm this. Instead, he had to wait until he returned to England a fortnight later when he was able to discuss the bird with I.J. Ferguson-Lees, and have his field notes checked by others familiar with the species, before he was able to confirm the identity as Little Swift.

Status in Ireland: Extremely rare with two records. The other was at Great Saltee Island, Wexford on 16th May 2002.

Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*

Range: Northwest Africa, southwest Europe to central Asia and South Africa. Winters west and southeastern Africa.

Known occurrences: Four records.

1959 One: One, North Harbour and Youth Hostel, 17th to 18th October (*IBR* 7: 17).

1979 One: One, Central Bog and South Harbour, 2nd to 3rd June (*Irish Birds* 1(4): 574).

1985 One: One, flying northeast over the island, 30th September (*Irish Birds* 3(2): 319).

1998 One: One, 30th April to 1st May (*Irish Birds* 6(3): 397).

Status in Ireland: Rare vagrant or spring overshoot with 64 records.

Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*

Polytypic with six subspecies.

Range: [n nominate ssp.] Western Europe to Bulgaria and the Caucasus. Winters Africa.

Known occurrences:

1898 One: Male, Fastnet Rock, 17th September (Ussher & Warren 1900), found dead, this was the sixth Irish record.

1961 One: One, Ballyieragh, 22nd to 25th September (*IBR* 9: 19).

1963 One: One, Youth Hostel, 2nd to 4th September (*IBR* 11: 29).

1964 Two: One, The Glen, 21st to 22nd August (*IBR* 12: 31); One, West Bog, 3rd to 7th September (*IBR* 12: 31).



Wryneck, The Waist, 9th (left) and 10th (right) October 2011, (photos: Graham Clarke (left), Derek Charles (right)).

1968 Three: One, near Ineerbeg, South Harbour, 1st to 2nd September (*IBR* 16: 39); One, Cotter's Garden, 10th to 25th September (*IBR* 16: 39), at sixteen days, this is the joint second longest staying individual; One, North Harbour, 4th October (*IBR* 16: 39).

1971 One: One, 21st April to 1st May (*IBR* 19: 47).

1973 Two: One, 19th to 23rd September (*IBR* 21: 25); One, 19th October (*IBR* 21: 25).

1974 Three: Two, 15th to 16th September, with one remaining to 21st September (*IBR* 22: 18); One, 27th September (*IBR* 21: 25).

1976 Four: One, 20th to 25th August (*Irish Birds* 1(1): 88); One, 29th August (*Irish Birds* 1(1): 88); One, 21st to 25th September (*Irish Birds* 1(1): 88); One, 27th September to 2nd October (*Irish Birds* 1(1): 88).

1977 One: One, 20th September (*Irish Birds* 2(1): 111).

1979 Two: One, West Bog, 1st to 6th October, when joined by a second, with one remaining to 12th October (*Irish Birds* 1(4): 575).

1980 Three: One, 5th May (*Irish Birds* 2(1): 111); One, 1st September (*Irish Birds* 2(1): 111); One, 18th October (*Irish Birds* 2(1): 111).

1981 Five: Two, 4th September (*Irish Birds* 2(2): 223); One, 5th to 7th September (*Irish Birds* 2(2): 223); One, 24th September (*Irish Birds* 2(2): 223); One, 1st October (*Irish Birds* 2(2): 223).

1983 Two: One, 19th August (*Irish Birds* 2(4): 569); One, 8th September (*Irish Birds* 2(4): 569).

1985 One: One, West Bog, 23rd October (*Irish Birds* 3(2): 319).

1986 Four: One, Lough Errul, 7th to 9th September (*Irish Birds* 3(3): 479); One, Cotter's Garden, 8th September (*Irish Birds* 3(3): 479); One, Secret Valley, 11th September (*Irish Birds* 3(3): 479); One, West Bog, 10th to 12th October (*Irish Birds* 3(3): 479).

1987 Two: One, Lough Errul, 17th to 18th September (*Irish Birds* 3(4): 635); One, The Glen, 10th to 15th October (*Irish Birds* 3(4): 635).

1988 One: One, West Bog, 30th October (*Irish Birds* 4(1): 102).

1989 One: One, High Road, 8th to 14th October (*Irish Birds* 4(2): 247).

1990 Five: One, Secret Valley, 16th October (*Irish Birds* 4(3): 450); One, The Waist, 22nd to 30th October (*Irish Birds* 4(3): 450); One, Alderwood, 24th October (*Irish Birds* 4(3): 450); One, Youth Hostel, 1st November (*Irish Birds* 4(3): 450); One, Secret Valley, 1st November (*Irish Birds* 4(3): 450).

1992 Three: One, Cotter's Garden, 27th May (*Irish Birds* 5(1): 96); One, Secret Valley and Alderwood, 19th to 27th September (*Irish Birds* 5(1): 96); One, West Bog, 25th to 27th September (*Irish Birds* 5(1): 96).

1993 Three: One, 19th September (*Irish Birds* 5(2): 224); One, 19th to 22nd September (*Irish Birds* 5(2): 224); One, 21st September (*Irish Birds* 5(2): 224).

1996 Two: One, Secret Valley, 17th to 18th September (*Irish Birds* 6(1): 82); One, The Waist, 27th September to 12th October (*Irish Birds* 6(1): 82), at sixteen days, this is the joint second longest staying individual.

Wrynecks, East Bog, 22nd April 2010 (left), Central Bog, 24th September 2013 (right),
(photos: David O'Connor (left), Peter Phillips (right)).



Wryneck, Central Bog, 8th October 2013,
(photo: Dick Coombes).

1997 One: One, 13th April (*Irish Birds* 6(2): 305).

1998 Three: One, 1st September (*Irish Birds* 6(3): 397); One, 9th September (*Irish Birds* 6(3): 397); One, 20th September (*Irish Birds* 6(3): 397).

1999 Two: Two, 23rd to 25th August, with one remaining to 30th August (*Irish Birds* 6(4): 564).

2000 Four: One, 25th August (*Irish Birds* 7(1): 102); One, 24th September to 14th October (*Irish Birds* 7(1): 102), at 21 days, this was the longest staying individual; One, 27th to 28th September (*Irish Birds* 7(1): 102); One, 29th September (*Irish Birds* 7(1): 102).

2002 Two: One, 14th to 15th September (*Irish Birds* 7(3): 405); One, 19th September (*Irish Birds* 7(3): 405).

2004 Three: One, 13th to 17th September (*Irish Birds* 8(1): 117); Two, 31st October (*Irish Birds* 8(1): 117).

2005 One: One, 19th to 20th September (*Irish Birds* 8(3): 389).

2006 Eight: At least eight, between 9th September and 20th October, with one on 9th September, four on 11th September, two on 14th September, one on 30th September, two on 7th October and one on 20th October (*Irish Birds* 8(3): 407).

2008 One: One, North Harbour, 11th to 14th September (*Irish Birds* 9(1): 96).

2009 One: One, Priest's House, 18th to 19th September (*Irish Birds* 9(2): 271).

2010 Three: One, East Bog, 22nd April (*Irish Birds* 9(3): 302); One, 9th to 10th October (*Irish Birds* 9(3): 302); One, 10th October (*Irish Birds* 9(3): 302).

2011 Two: One, The Waist, 4th to 16th October (*Irish Birds* 9(3): 476); One, Mass Track, 10th October (*Irish Birds* 9(3): 476).

2012 Three: One, Lough Errul, 9th September (*Irish Birds* 9(4): 596); One, 10th October (*Irish Birds* 9(4): 596); One, 22nd October (*Irish Birds* 9(4): 596).

2013 Three: Two, Central Bog, 24th to 25th September (*Irish Birds* 10(1): 89); One, Central Bog, 5th to 8th October (*Irish Birds* 10(1): 89).

2014 Two: One, Cotter's Garden, 9th to 10th September (*Irish Birds* 10(2): 251); One, Oilly Gully and High Road, 12th to 13th September (*Irish Birds* 10(2): 251).

2016 Two pending: One, Lighthouse, 10th October (*per* Irish Birding website); One, The Waist, 13th October (*per* Irish Birding website).

Total records: 92 records with two pending and one at Fastnet.

Of those in spring the earliest arrival was 13th April. Of the autumn records the earliest was 19th August and the latest was on 1st November.

By month:

- April - 3
- May - 2
- August - 7
- September - 52
- October - 26
- November - 2

By decade since 1960:

- 1960s - 7
- 1970s - 13
- 1980s - 19
- 1990s - 19
- 2000s - 20
- 2010 to 2015 - 13

Status in Ireland: Uncommon passage migrant with 333 records, 29 of these in spring (seventeen in April and twelve in May), and the remainder in autumn (21 in August, 187 in September, 91 in October and five in November).

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker *Sphyrapicus varius*

Range: Eastern Alaska and northwest Canada to southeast Canada and northeast USA. Winters eastern USA, West Indies and Central America.

Known occurrences:

1988 One: Immature female, High Road and Cotter's Garden, 16th to 19th October (*Irish Birds* 4(1): 102, Watmough 1988), trapped. Found by Dennis Weir, this was the first Irish and third Western Palearctic record.

Along with Nick Watmough, Anthony McGeehan and the late Willie McDowell, Dennis Weir had spent the morning of Sunday, 16th October 1988 birding around Ballyieragh. Returning along the High Road toward the Obs around noon, they decided to check out a little stand of stunted apple trees, surrounded by a circular stone wall; a place they rarely looked at. Seeing a slight movement deep in the centre of the trees, Dennis focussed his binoculars on a largely obscured bird, and observed a woodpecker-like head and a suffused yellow breast. He calmly announced '...there's a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker in here'. The bird moved deeper into cover but fortunately was soon refound, and as better views were obtained it revealed mottled black and white upperparts, a red crown, a large white wing-patch and the yellow belly that gives the bird its name. Now it was essential to get the news out, especially as many were due to depart on the 3pm ferry. Soon, birders began to hurry down the track, but their arrival seemed to spook the bird, which promptly took off and flew straight to Cotter's Garden. There it was quickly relocated, and later trapped by the warden, Dave Borton. Examination in the hand revealed it was an immature female.

Released back to Cotter's, it remained there for four days and was twitched by about 100 birders. Initially sluggish, it perked up on its final day when it was observed drilling holes and actively feeding around Cotter's, giving views down to about fifteen feet.

The two previous Western Palearctic records were an adult female found dead at Fagurhólsmyri, Iceland on 5th June 1961 and a first-winter male at Tresco, Isles of Scilly on 26th September 1975.

Status in Ireland: To date, the Cape bird is the only Irish record.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, in the hand, 16th October 1988,
(photo: Kieran Fahy)



Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Cotter's Garden, 19th October 1988,
(photos: Eamonn O'Donnell).



Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, in the hand, 16th October 1988,
(photo: Kieran Fahy)

Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*

Range: Central Europe to central Asia. Winters southern Africa.

Known occurrences: Three records.

1991 One: Adult male, Ardgart, 31st May (Farrell 1991, *Irish Birds* 4(4): 584), found by Sean Farrell and Éamonn MacLochlainn, this was the seventh Irish record.

1994 One: Second-year male, 4th May (*Irish Birds* 5(3): 335).

2012 One: Female, 27th March (*Irish Birds* 9(4): 586).

There is also a record of an adult female captured on board a fishing vessel in a position seventeen miles south of Cape Clear Island on 3rd May 1994. It was later released near Youghal, Cork (*Irish Birds* 5(3): 335).

Status in Ireland: Very rare with 33 records. Mainly occurs as a spring overshoot.

Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

Polytypic with two subspecies.

Range: [n nominate ssp.] Europe to northern India, central China and Japan. Winters Africa and southern Asia.

Known occurrences:

1961 One: One, flying south at West Bog, 14th October (*IBR* 9: 10).

1968 One: One, North Harbour and Lissamona, 16th October (*IBR* 16: 24).

1978 One: One, 19th October (*Irish Birds* 1(3): 425).

1980 One: One, 16th August (*Irish Birds* 2(1): 98).

1982 One: One, 24th October (*Irish Birds* 2(3): 385).

1983 One: One, 22nd August (*Irish Birds* 2(4): 556).

1990 One: Adult, North Harbour, 19th to 20th May (*Irish Birds* 4(3): 437).

1992 One: Adult, Lough Errul, 22nd September (*Irish Birds* 5(1): 88).

1999 One: Adult, 13th September (*Irish Birds* 6(4): 552).

2006 One: Adult, 29th August (*Irish Birds* 8(3): 398).

2007 One: One, 30th April (*Irish Birds* 8(4): 590).

2010 One: Juvenile, West Bog, 9th to 16th October (*Irish Birds* 9(2): 292).

2012 One: One, Low Road, 11th to 15th October (*Irish Birds* 9(4): 586).

Total records: Thirteen records.

By month:

- April - 1
- May - 1
- August - 3
- September - 2
- October - 6

Status in Ireland: Uncommon vagrant and passage migrant mainly in spring with 362 records.

Gyr Falcon *Falco rusticolus*

Range: Arctic regions of Europe, Asia and North America. Disperses widely following breeding.

Known occurrences: One Fastnet record.

1888 One: White or very light grey phase, Fastnet Rock, 5th December (Ussher & Warren 1900).

Status in Ireland: Rare spring and autumn passage migrant with 128 records, mainly in western counties during winter and spring.

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North Harbour and Bird Observatory (white building),
(photo: Richard T. Mills).

South Harbour and the point of Blanan and from the A1 with the Post Office centre-left,
(photo: Dick Coombes).



Olly Gully and the West Bog,
(photo: Mark Carmody).



Map of Cape Clear Island, showing places of main interest to birders, (map: C  il  n MacLochlainn).

South Dublin Branch of BirdWatch Ireland

The South Dublin Branch of BirdWatch Ireland the national NGO wild bird conservation group, has over 1000 members in the south city and south County Dublin catchment area.

When the original Dublin branch of the Irish Wildbird Conservancy split in three, the South Dublin branch was formed in 1984 as 'Dublin Southside' with Maurice Bryan appointed as chairman. Our first indoor meeting was a film show at the Hotel Victor, Rochestown Avenue on Tuesday, 6th November 1984 followed by an outing to the North Bull Island on Saturday, 10th November. By the end of 1985 the branch had changed its name to the present one and our outdoor events were moved to take place on Sundays.

The branch organises meetings, slide shows, local and coach field trips between September and June and sometimes in July. Our members are active in many local and national conservation projects. Non-members are more than welcome to all of our events.

Our indoor events take place on the first or (very occasionally) second Tuesday of the month. From September 2017 they will be held in the Killiney Function Room of the Graduate Pub. The Graduate is adjacent to Killiney Shopping Centre on Rochestown Avenue where there is ample free outdoor parking. Unless otherwise stated, our meetings begin at 8pm. Admission to indoor meetings is free, however we would be very grateful for any contribution made towards the cost of the meeting room.

Outdoor events are available to all and with the exception of trips made by coach, are free of charge. Coach outings generally cost around €35.00 per person or €25.00 for children, students or pensioners. When taking part in outdoor events, wear clothing suitable for the time of year and location and although we often take in a visit to shops around lunch time it is wiser not to rely on that completely for food and drinks during the trip.

More details of all our activities and events, both indoor and outdoor may be found on our branch website at: www.southdublinbirds.com.