

BIRDING PLUS Ireland in Spring

May 6, 2010 to May 16, 2010

Guided by

Terry McEneaney, Eugene Byrne, Peter Clarke, John Rowlett

As the Icelandic Eyjafjalljökul volcano spilled ash into the atmosphere, it never crossed my mind we wouldn't make it on our flight to and from Ireland. But the irony here is that Ireland 12,000-10,000 years ago had massive amounts of ice just like the Iceland and Greenland of today. The ice cap and ice bridges melted and so did the remaining glaciers, causing a rise in sea level and separating this land from Britain, thus creating one of the most special places on earth, called Eire or Ireland, a land of the green, the Emerald Isle, or better yet "Hibernia"--a warm winter resting spot in the boreal or north latitude found next to the Gulf Stream. Then came the human inhabitants, by either a land bridge or hide boats and a unique culture was formed. The Stone Age soon turned into the Bronze Age, and then arose the Celts of the Iron Age and Druidism was formed. Then came Christianity, the Vikings, and the Normans. But through all of these changes, a vibrant culture was presented to the world that was unique in spirit, language, history, literature, music, and song. The music was spread first vocally, and then accompanied by instruments. The music survived in kitchens of people's private homes and was known as a "sessun," then was spread by sailors and travelers thus forming a public institution known world wide as an "Irish pub."

Our excuse to come to Ireland was to watch birds but who were we kidding? The people and culture were equally high on the list. We chose to be in southern Ireland in May, because we were looking for one of Ireland's driest, warmest, and sunniest months. We also wanted to see the resident birds and newly arrived migrant birds that spent the winter in North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa. But high on the list were also nesting seabirds, many returning for the first time this year from the vast open oceans. So what were the birding highlights? If you might ask? We ended up finding 98 species of birds on this spring southern Ireland Field Guides bird tour. Although the spring was two weeks behind schedule and birds were late in arriving, we were impressed with the diversity of species we encountered. Most impressive were the skulky Old World warblers (Blackcap, Sedge, Reed, and Grasshopper warblers) and the more visible Willow Warbler. Then there were the incredible numbers of nesting seabirds (Atlantic Puffin, Northern Gannet, Northern Fulmar, Black Guillemot, Common Murre, Razorbill, Black-legged Kittiwake). But our favorite birds were those that gave us good looks and showed some form of classy behavior, such as the aerial displays of a corvid called the Red-billed Chough, or the bird of the shadowy reeds and waters edge, known as the Water Rail. A Pied Wagtail's head-dipping display was nothing shabby nor were the nictitating membrane and contrasting throat of the White-throated Dipper; the Grey Wagtail displaying in front of a waterfall; aerial displays of Meadow Pipits; Eurasian Skylarks doing the aerial act they do best. Also remarkable were the colorful and ventriloquial European Robin, the delicious chocolate plumage of the Dunnock, and the colorful harlequin makeup of the Eurasian Goldfinch. But we were rewarded with two rare bonuses as well: a Red Grouse head-periscoping and wing-fluttering in the heather, and a Red Kite circle-soaring for quite some time overhead, showing off its color and true *Milvus* shape.

We not only observed some great birds, but we saw some amazing landscape. Our visit included: the "shangri-la" area of Ireland, namely Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains National Park; an inland salt water natural area near Skibbereen; the ancient forests, tall mountains, and blue lakes of Killarney and Killarney National Park; the spectacular and most colorful Dingle Peninsula and Sleat Head; the lengthy sand beach or strand of Inch Strand; the expansive seascape of the Cliffs of Moher; and what I like to call "the most beautiful seabird colony on earth," the magical Skellig Islands. But in true Irish form, you always save the best for last. We forgot to mention the round towers, castles, monasteries, Celtic

crosses, Irish elk skulls, peat bogs, turf fire smoke smell, the solemn famine sites, the pastoral setting, the landscape of inspiration, and the true heart and soul of Ireland--none other than the Irish pub. And we visited plenty of Irish pubs, some you will never forget, and met a lot of interesting and talented people. We had some great laughs, heard some fabulous stories, and met some real characters only Ireland can claim. But it is music that transfixes people, and we had our share of the great traditional Irish music and fun known as craic, and of all different persuasions. We were transfixed in another world, a world that appears at times to be a dream, and it was Ireland. On behalf of Eugene, Peter, John, and myself, we hope you enjoyed this warm and enchanting place called Eire. May the wind be forever at your back! Terry

List total: 98 bird taxa and 11 mammal taxa

*If marked to left of list, * = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic,
N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant*

Triplist file: irs10-JLR

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

GRAYLAG GOOSE (*Anser anser*)

N MUTE SWAN (*Cygnus olor*)

Just about daily.

COMMON SHELDUCK (*Tadorna tadorna*)

A number of these huge ducks seen well across the south.

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*)

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

Daily.

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*)

COMMON POCHARD (*Aythya ferina*)

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

GRAY PARTRIDGE (*Perdix perdix*)

Two standing in a field glimpsed as the coach traveled past.

I RING-NECKED PHEASANT (*Phasianus colchicus*)

Some fine views of this fine, introduced species.

WILLOW PTARMIGAN (RED GROUSE) (*Lagopus lagopus scotica*)

One of the highlights of the trip was seeing this grouse's periscoping head and neck attentive to playback as it moved through the heather. A great scene.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

LITTLE GREBE (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*)

Several nice individuals, some really ruddy in appearance.

N GREAT CRESTED GREBE (*Podiceps cristatus*)

Nice studies, a few observed dancing their ritual performance.

Procellariidae (Shearwaters and Petrels)

N NORTHERN FULMAR (*Fulmarus glacialis*)

Many seen, some extremely close to us on the cliffs where they nest.

MANX SHEARWATER (*Puffinus puffinus*)

A few seen near Skellig Michael.

Sulidae (Boobies and Gannets)

N NORTHERN GANNET (*Morus bassanus*)

Fabulous studies of this beautiful Sulid of the north.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

GREAT CORMORANT (NORTHERN) (*Phalacrocorax carbo carbo*)

Both species of cormorants were seen nicely, a few places together.

N EUROPEAN SHAG (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*)

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GRAY HERON (*Ardea cinerea*)

Seen daily.

LITTLE EGRET (*Egretta garzetta*)

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

RED KITE (*Milvus milvus*)

Wow! What a treat to see this marvelous kite over its old resident grounds; the repatriation of this species may be successful if farmers can be persuaded not to hunt them.

EURASIAN SPARROWHAWK (*Accipiter nisus*)

EURASIAN BUZZARD (*Buteo buteo*)

Light and dark morphs seen.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

EURASIAN KESTREL (*Falco tinnunculus*)

Several seen, often hunting the grassy median and borders along the highways.

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*)
One glimpsed by Terry only at Slea Head.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

WATER RAIL (*Rallus aquaticus*)

Another highlight was coaxing this most furtive species into view from the reed beds. We had a few sensational looks.

COMMON MOORHEN (EURASIAN) (*Gallinula chloropus chloropus*)

EURASIAN COOT (*Fulica atra*)

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*)

One near the airport at Shannon our last afternoon.

COMMON RINGED PLOVER (*Charadrius hiaticula*)

Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers)

EURASIAN OYSTERCATCHER (*Haematopus ostralegus*)

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

COMMON REDSHANK (*Tringa totanus*)

Seen perhaps best at Lady's Island Lake. A lifer for Rosemary, who was no stranger to Ireland.

WHIMBREL (EUROPEAN) (*Numenius phaeopus phaeopus*)

EURASIAN CURLEW (*Numenius arquata*)

b BLACK-TAILED GODWIT (*Limosa limosa*)

A late migrant that might have overwintered and not returned to the breeding grounds.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

N BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE (*Rissa tridactyla*)

A lovely gull, doing nicely on the western cliffs and the Skelligs.

BLACK-HEADED GULL (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*)

MEW GULL (EUROPEAN) (*Larus canus canus*)

HERRING GULL (EUROPEAN) (*Larus argentatus argenteus*)

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL (GRAELLSII) (*Larus fuscus graellsii*)

One of the prettiest of the large gulls.

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL (*Larus marinus*)

N ARCTIC TERN (*Sterna paradisaea*)

A sizable colony breeding at Lady's Island Lake.

SANDWICH TERN (*Thalasseus sandvicensis sandvicensis*)

Also seen at Lady's Island Lake.

Alcidae (Auks, Murres, and Puffins)

N COMMON MURRE (*Uria aalge*)

The common Alcid nesting in Ireland; seen well at the Cliffs of Moher and on the Skelligs.

N RAZORBILL (*Alca torda*)

Also nesting at the same locales at the other Alcids. A smart-looking bird, much blacker in strong sunlight than the murres.

N BLACK GUILLEMOT (*Cephus grylle*)

A few seen from a distance; when swimming under clear water, this bird shows off its scarlet feet and legs.

ATLANTIC PUFFIN (*Fratercula arctica*)

Seen at their burrows on the Cliffs of Moher and the Skelligs. One of the fanciest Alcids.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

I ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*)

STOCK DOVE (*Columba oenas*)

Seen along the cliffs at Shea Head, where they are local residents.

COMMON WOOD-PIGEON (*Columba palumbus*)

Almost daily; the common, really big Columba.

EUROPEAN TURTLE-DOVE (*Streptopelia turtur*)
One glimpsed by some of the group.

- I** EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE (*Streptopelia decaocto*)
Quite common and doing well in Ireland.

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

- b*** COMMON CUCKOO (*Cuculus canorus*)
Heard in the beautiful old woodlands of Killarney, where those of us landlubbers enjoyed a morning walk of singular beauty. It was not responsive to playback and may have arrived only recently in this late spring.

Apodidae (Swifts)

- b** COMMON SWIFT (*Apus apus*)

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

COMMON KINGFISHER (*Alcedo atthis*)

As hard as we looked for this local species, we failed as a group to find one on this trip; but at Glendalough Bryant saw one fly over the river after we had all scattered out along the trail.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

- E** EURASIAN JAY (*Garrulus glandarius hibernicus*)
One suspicious bird put in an appearance in time for us to appreciate its subtle colors; a beauty, this species is among the quieter of the Holarctic jays, whereas there are a number of quiet jays to be found in the Tropics. This subspecies is one of the three subspecies endemic to the isle.

EURASIAN MAGPIE (*Pica pica*)
Common and seen daily.

RED-BILLED CHOUGH (*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*)
Another highlight of the tour was the exciting performance of these strange Corvids (the only ones that don't predate young) at Slea Head, as in response to playback they swooped low over us--red bill in the lead, primaries flared. Lisa got some fine photos of these birds!

EURASIAN JACKDAW (*Corvus monedula*)
Daily.

- N** ROOK (*Corvus frugilegus*)
Daily.

HOODED CROW (*Corvus cornix*)
Daily.

COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*)
Not so common anymore in Ireland.

Alaudidae (Larks)

- b** SKY LARK (*Alauda arvensis*)
What a great display of these sublime songsters!

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

- bN** BARN SWALLOW (RUSTICA) (*Hirundo rustica rustica*)
Daily.

- bN** COMMON HOUSE-MARTIN (*Delichon urbicum*)
Summer residents.

Paridae (Chickadees and Tits)

- E** COAL TIT (*Parus ater hibernicus*)
One of the three subspecies endemic to the isle.

GREAT TIT (*Parus major*)
Seen well repeatedly.

- N** EURASIAN BLUE TIT (*Cyanistes caeruleus*)
Seen and enjoyed daily.

Aegithalidae (Long-tailed Tits)

- N** LONG-TAILED TIT (*Aegithalos caudatus*)
Seen well, including adults feeding a bunch of fledglings.

Certhiidae (Creepers)

EURASIAN TREECREEPER (*Certhia familiaris*)

Similar to our Brown Creeper.

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

N WINTER WREN (EURASIAN) (*Troglodytes troglodytes indigenus*)

Seen and heard daily. A super little bird with a very big voice.

Cinclidae (Dippers)

E WHITE-THROATED DIPPER (*Cinclus cinclus hibernicus*)

Excellent studies of a pair as they negotiated the river. This is one of the three subspecies that are endemic to the isle, hence "hibernicus."

Regulidae (Kinglets)

GOLDCREST (*Regulus regulus*)

Pretty little "kinglets."

Phylloscopidae (Leaf-Warblers)

b WILLOW WARBLER (*Phylloscopus trochilus*)

Wonderful studies of this summer resident that winters in sub-Saharan Africa.

b COMMON CHIFFCHAFF (*Phylloscopus collybita*)

Another long-distance migrant that summers in the British Isles and northern Europe. Similar to the preceding species, although the song is very different.

Acrocephalidae (Reed-Warblers and Allies)

b SEDGE WARBLER (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*)

Wonderful looks at this difficult-to-see warbler; we also enjoyed its song-flight performances.

b EURASIAN REED-WARBLER (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*)

A bigger relative of the preceding species; also seen exceptionally well.

Sylviidae (Old World Warblers)

BLACKCAP (*Sylvia atricapilla*)

Great studies in the woodlands of Killarney, but our first look at this fine songster came on the lovely grounds of the Glenview Hotel.

Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)

b SPOTTED FLYCATCHER (*Muscicapa striata*)

Seen at Killarney by the group headed to the Skelligs.

N EUROPEAN ROBIN (*Erithacus rubecula*)

One of the finest birds of Ireland, an ambassador forever welcoming, always confiding, full of song on even the least auspicious day.

b NORTHERN WHEATEAR (*Oenanthe oenanthe*)

Quite a few seen well; a good-looking bird, that male.

STONECHAT (EUROPEAN) (*Saxicola torquatus hibernans*)

Seen well in the Wicklows.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

N EURASIAN BLACKBIRD (*Turdus merula*)

We had some nice music from this legendary songster, a bird quite reminiscent of a black American Robin.

SONG THRUSH (*Turdus philomelos*)

Nice studies on several occasions.

MISTLE THRUSH (*Turdus viscivorus*)

Almost daily. A big thrush with a repetitive song that pleases--almost thrasher-like in quality.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

I EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

Prunellidae (Accentors)

DUNNOCK (*Prunella modularis*)

Seen on several days, but smashing views were had of a bird that Lisa nicely captured digitally.

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

GRAY WAGTAIL (*Motacilla cinerea*)

Nice views of birds at a waterfall, Killarney.

WHITE WAGTAIL (BRITISH) (*Motacilla alba yarrellii*)

This taxon is often referred to as Pied Wagtail, the subspecies that occurs in Ireland. We had a demonstrative nuptial performance by a male in front of a female.

MEADOW PIPIT (*Anthus pratensis*)

Some nice views of this common pipit.

ROCK PIPIT (*Anthus petrosus*)

A few seen here and there, best perhaps at Shea Head.

Emberizidae (Buntings, Sparrows, and Allies)

YELLOWHAMMER (*Emberiza citrinella*)

Seen fleetingly, though heard; this one we just didn't get a good look at this time.

REED BUNTING (*Emberiza schoeniclus*)

Super studies through the scope at this fancy bunting.

Fringillidae (Siskins, Crossbills, and Allies)

N COMMON CHAFFINCH (*Fringilla coelebs*)

Common and widespread.

EUROPEAN GREENFINCH (*Chloris chloris*)

EUROPEAN GOLDFINCH (*Carduelis carduelis*)

Some good looks, first at the Bunratty Hotel.

TWITE (*Carduelis flavirostris*)

One bird seen by Terry and John in the Slea Head area; this bird has become scarce in Ireland.

EURASIAN BULLFINCH (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*)

Nice looks at a pair by Jim and John in Killarney; surprisingly, this pair disappeared before we could get others on the birds.

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

I HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*)

Mammals

OLD WORLD RABBIT (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*)

NORTHERN (BLUE) HARE (*Lepus timidus*)

EUROPEAN RED SQUIRREL (*Sciurus vulgaris*)

The "tassle-eared" squirrel some of us saw so well in the woodlands at Killarney must have been this species, a squirrel larger and more "tassle-eared" than our Red Squirrel in North America. There are no other possibilities.

EASTERN GRAY SQUIRREL (*Sciurus carolinensis*)

BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN (*Tursiops truncatus*)

RED FOX (*Vulpes vulpes*)

EUROPEAN RIVER OTTER (*Lutra lutra*)

Seen by Jim and Pam at Skibbereen.

GRAY SEAL (*Halichoerus grypus*)

Seen near the Skelligs.

FALLOW DEER (*Dama dama*)

SIKA DEER (*Cervus nippon*)

RED DEER (*Cervus elaphus*)