



THE HARRIER



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

NO. 23– Spring 03

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Winter is beginning to loosen its grip and lengthening days are a welcome sight. There are now plenty of signs of life stirring. Spring flowers are blooming, cheering us up on colder days. Ravens have begun courting and nest building, whilst our other resident birds still wait for warmer times. In February young badgers are born but won't emerge from the sett for around another six to ten weeks. Frogs have also started to spawn and Herons are constantly on the alert to feast on most anything that moves. Our winter visitors have begun to return to northern climes and we await, with anticipation, the return of our summer ones. The Swallow, a harbinger of summer, particularly gets us thinking of warmer, longer days yet to come.

There are plenty of lectures and outings during the year, so hopefully most of you will come along, support the club and join in. See you there!

Yellowhammer Update: Winter 2002/2003.

You have heard the saying



that someone is a 'Jinx'. Well, when regional development minister Peter Robinson spoke of Northern Ireland's need for urgent rain in April 2002, that was the start of our Summer Jinx.

From that day on we had virtually continuous rain until late September. The result was a number of barley fields left unharvested. The resultant stubble over the winter meant a bounty for wild birds.

Our normal large winter flock of Yellowhammers split into three large groups of around 50-60 birds, and several smaller groups of between 9 and 20 birds at different locations. The Beattie's Road site was abandoned in early December, and two of the large groups

concentrated on feeders in Spirehill Road. The other large group fed mainly in stubble on Chambers' farm over a mile away.

However, total birds exceeded last winter's maximum of 150-200 birds, and NIOC put the total number of birds in the area at around 280. This is a substantial increase despite the inclement weather. It also shows that the birds are quick to respond to an available natural source of food.

CJs' Wildbird FoodTM again provided an invaluable food supply for our project, and when the birds had finished the usual quota by the end of December CJs' did not hesitate in providing additional feed.

The summer rain did not halt our Yellowhammer expansion and birds were nesting in at least four new areas. We recorded 79 pairs breeding and look forward to a continued increase in population.

An addition to the programme was the inclusion (agreed by CJs'), of Riverdale Primary School at Legacurry, Co. Down. A ground feeder, large bird excluder and seed, were provided and were in place by late October. P5 recorded their first Yellowhammer on the 7th January and are now recording the various species of birds that

come to the feeder as well as any other wildlife. CJs' provided each class with species identification posters and each class has a large chart on which to place their sightings. Headmaster Trevor Carruthers welcomed the fact that CJs' included the school in the NIOC project. Once we get a few photos and results of the survey we hope to place them on our website:

www.nioc@fsnet.co.uk

NIOC and CJs' feel this will not only be an interesting project for the children but an educational one as well. Hopefully this will help create our future ornithologists and scientists.

In addition to Yellowhammers, the available seed and winter stubble encouraged a number of other species. Of interest were:

Spirehill Site:

- 22 Skylark
- 2 Tree sparrow
- 1 Barn owl
- Irish hare and Stoat.

Off New road:

- 60+ Linnet and 9 Skylark.

Windmill Road:

- 2 Barn Owls
- 30+ Linnet
- 21 Golden Plover
- 41 Goldfinch in my garden (Windmill Road).

The surprise and mystery of the project so far was the appearance of 54 Tree Sparrows on Baillies Mills Road January 2003. The NIOC were thrilled. The birds were feeding on stubble and I hurriedly

contacted Gareth Proffitt of CJs' and ordered three additional ground feeders and seed. NIOC got in touch with the Technology Department of Friends Grammar School in Lisburn who agreed to make some nestboxes for the birds to encourage them to stay on. Unfortunately as soon as this was all set up the birds disappeared again. NIOC now have the task of re-locating the birds before an embarrassing nestbox erection ceremony.

NIOC are once again indebted to CJs' Wildbird Foods Ltd. for their generous support of conservation and education within Northern Ireland. Hopefully with CJs' support generations to come will have the delight of seeing Yellowhammers in the wild.

Charles Gary Wilkinson.

Northern Ireland Ornithologists Club

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The following is an article reprinted from The Belfast Telegraph dated Friday, 13 January 1939.

A Motley Crowd.

(Birds to be Seen in Belfast Migration Highways and Many Quiet Haunts)

There is no need to travel far in a city like Belfast in order to find various species of birds, for Belfast can boast of having a large bird population. That population is greater in winter than in summer, due to the fact

that the city is much warmer than the open country, and forms a better hunting ground so far as food is concerned. In close proximity to Belfast to all bird students the variety of birds is a matter of constant interest and surprise. Let us therefore consider the birds which during more or less recent years have been observed in Belfast and its environs. There are more quiet bird haunts within a radius of two or three miles of the City Hall, such as the Belfast Waterworks and along the Lagan Valley. Both these places are migration highways and this fact swells our list of visitants considerably.

Winter brings the Redwing and Fieldfare, and in severe weather that beautiful bird the Waxeering, and also the Snow Bunting. The tiny Goldcrest, the smallest British bird which crosses the North and Irish Seas and defies every stormy blast in order to be at home along the hedgerow at the Waterworks, where scores of Wigeon from the Arctic regions frequent the pond, while the Redshank, Razor Bill and Cormorant are also to be found there. The Kingfisher and Dipper are constantly to be seen fishing by the edge of the pond.

Chiff Chaff and Willow Wren

Spring brings the Chiff Chaff and Willow Wren to the Waterworks, Belfast Castle grounds and Lagan Valley, where the Sand Martin and Swallow are also to be seen. Wheatears constantly pass by on migration, both in Spring and

early Autumn, and also at these seasons the Sandpiper is observed.

The Corncrake is to be heard in almost every suburb of the city, while the Cuckoo may be heard in North Belfast and along the Lagan Valley. The Swifts are lovers of the city, when in summer they may be observed pursuing their mazy wandering through the air unsubdued of wing. The Whitethroat and Flycatcher come to Alexandra Park, where the Moorhen, Coot and Dabchick frequent the pond. And that somewhat rare visitor, the Redstart, is sometimes met with in the Cavehill district. Wherever there are quiet, wooded gardens and plantations in our public parks, Blackbirds, Missel Thrushes, Dunnocks, Wrens and Robins are met with, and their songs are a feature in early Spring. Magpies are met with in the fields out of town. Even the pheasant is met with in the Allotment Gardens, Westland Road. The Sparrow Hawk and other raptorial birds may be seen hovering over in search of prey, while the Skylark song is a feature of some golf greens within the city boundary. Flocks of Greenfinches haunt the grain sheds at the docks, and Starlings locally are augmented by arrivals from the Baltic, and lively scenes take place at nightfall around the City Hall, where they come to roost.

Along Lough Shore

Along the shores of Belfast Lough sea birds are to be seen in large numbers, but more so in Autumn and Winter, when many species return,

accompanied by their young. On the Sloblands beyond the Twin Islands many migrants come from the frozen waters of the Arctic Circle. It may be said that we have the Seagulls always with us, but more so in winter, when the days are short and winds blow chill. Bringing a note of freshness and freedom from the deep sea, almost all six species of Gulls are met with in the city.

The wading birds are numerous on the Sloblands especially; Curlews, Sandpipers and Redshanks may be seen feeding on the mudflats left uncovered by the receding tide. The heron is also to be seen,

though not in such numbers as in Thomson, the Belfast naturalist's day, who records seeing them in large numbers. The falling off in these birds is no doubt due to the "New Cut", as it used to be called, the Victoria Channel diverting the former flow of the tide and making an increased "scour", which gradually swept all the mud or ooze from the bank, and with it the ribbon or grass wrack. This wrack was the haunt of multitudes of eels, which formed the principal food of the Heron, and in those days a Heronry was situated in the wooded grounds of Parkmount, but it has long since vanished.

Cormorant and Redbreast Merganser are met with also close to the docks. Amongst the ducks which visit the lough in Winter are the Scaup and Common Scoter. A Scaup duck shot some time ago had a ring



on its leg bearing the following :- PS SKOVGAARD, VIBORG, DENMARK. This gentleman stated that the duck was rung in Arctic Iceland, and had flown 1,000 miles in order to reach the lough. The Scaup is locally called Black Wigeon and the Scoter Black Duck. Both are expert divers. The Eider is a somewhat rare visitor, but the Golden Eye, Wigeon, Teal and Tufted Duck are all found in the lough in Winter. The Pochard, more commonly called in England the Dun bird, and locally the Red Headed Wigeon, is another of the diving ducks found in winter. Mallard in hundreds are met with, and sometimes Whooper and Berwick Swans. Brent Geese, commonly called the "Barnacle", is the only one of the family frequently met with. The Red Throated Divers have at times been seen in the lough. Manx Shearwaters, Guillemots and Razor Bills are also to be noted in some years, while in others not one puts in an appearance.

The Commoner Birds

Even then the possibilities of Belfast as a wild bird resort are not quite exhausted, as there are many other birds of the common variety not yet mentioned - the perky city sparrow and, of course, the pigeons, which are a feature of everyday city life. With an abundance of bird sanctuaries in and around the city we have no need to fear that our local birds will continue to increase and flourish in our midst.

T McC

NB The nomenclature, punctuation, spelling etc of the original have been preserved.
Dave Craig,

Field Trips to Dumfries and Galloway.



The following account should whet your appetite for our next trip to Dumfries and Galloway

Our Galloway trips have now become a regular event and every February/March along with an occasional spring and November trip we descend on the hapless natives. We usually base ourselves at the Douglas Arms Hotel, Castle Douglas, where good food combined with good company make the field trip an excellent social event too.

The Winter trips regularly encounter Barn Owl, Hen Harrier, Red Kite, Merlin, Peregrine, Short-eared Owl, Black-necked Grebe, Slavonian Grebe, all three Divers, Goosander, Smew, Scaup, Common Scoter, Pintail, Greenland White-fronted Goose, Barnacle Goose Pink-footed Goose, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Nuthatch, Willow Tit, Tree Sparrow, Twite, Yellowhammer, Brambling, Siskin, Crossbill, Grey Partridge and Black Grouse. Less regular

are Long-eared Owl, Tawny Owl, Water Rail, Blackcap, Goshawk, Golden Eagle, Red Grouse, Green Sandpiper and Green Woodpecker.

Rarities over the years have included Lesser White-fronted Goose, Red-breasted Goose, Bean Goose, Little Owl, Waxwing, Bittern, Common Crane, Bittern and Ring-necked Duck.

Our Spring trips have a different cast but include some winter birds such as Great Spotted Woodpecker and Willow Tit. However, our emphasis moves to the deciduous woods for Pied Flycatcher, Spotted Flycatcher, Tree Pipit, Redstart, Wood Warbler, Garden Warbler, Nuthatch and summer visitors such as Marsh Harrier, Little Tern, Corn Bunting and now Osprey. We occasionally use our Spring trips to have an evening watch for Nightjar near Newton Stewart. Subsequently we base ourselves at Eddie Gladstone's B&B ***Corsbie Villa***, which is reasonably priced and has a late bar for residents.

There is nearly always a surprise in store and I can honestly say the region provides the best all year round birdwatching, from the small birds like Willow Tit at Raiders Road, to incredible views of Golden Eagles up in Glenmore of Fleet. Talk to anyone who has been and you will find they enjoyed the trip and have been more than once.

Gary Wilkinson



Some of the crew at Dumfries and Galloway

RIGHT TO ROAM: LAND ACCESS LAW MAKES HISTORY.

While we are on the topic of Scottish field trips, the following has been taken from the Walkingwild Web Newsletter.

Scotland's new 'right to roam' laws allowing responsible access for all to the countryside have been welcomed by outdoor groups.

Environment and Rural Development Minister Ross Finnie welcomed the overwhelming support of the historic bill, which was passed with 101 votes to 19. He said: "For the first time, the Bill establishes a right of responsible access to land and inland water for recreation and passage. The Scottish Outdoor Access Code to be put out to consultation will provide guidance on the rights and responsibilities of public access to the countryside.

"These new rights of access, will encourage visitors to the many beautiful and remote parts of Scotland.

'Right to roam' will see responsibilities placed on visitors to the countryside, as well as landowners. Local authorities will be obliged to plan paths to ensure access. The move has been welcomed by outdoor groups, including the Mountaineering Council of Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage.

Hopefully this will also have an impact on birdwatching visitors, allowing us to seek our feathered friends even further afield.