



Wexford Naturalists' Field Club,
c/o Wexford Wildfowl Reserve, North Slob, Wexford, Ireland.

WNFC Newsletter

Issue Number 44

December 2016

Welcome to the December issue of the WNFC Newsletter. The WNFC Committee wishes all its members a Happy and Peaceful Christmas and a New Year full of potential and joyous activity.

UPCOMING CLUB EVENTS

Unless otherwise stated all lectures are held at 8pm in The Pumphouse at Wexford Wildfowl Reserve (TO76239).

January Thurs. 5th - 'Wexford North Slobs: Origin and Changes', by Dominic Berridge, Warden, Wexford Wildfowl Reserve.

Saturday 14th - Field Trip to Cahore Marsh, to see birds and other Wildlife, with Janet Whelehan. Meet at 11am in car park at Cahore, (T217480). Bring a packed lunch. We will look for birds and other wildlife near Cahore Pier, before heading to Old Bawn and a walk by Cahore Marsh. Short Eared Owl, Marsh Harrier and Merlin are birds that have been sighted here.

February, Thurs. 2nd AGM 7pm followed at 8pm by 'The Art of Bird Identification - a Forty Year Perspective on Birding and Field Guides', by Killian Mullarney, Ornithologist and Bird Artist. Killian is going to talk about the advancement in bird identification over the last 40 yrs and in particular the work put into the Collins Bird Guide, of which he is co-author. If anyone wants their book signed, Killian will oblige. He will also have some copies for purchase on the night.

Saturday 4th:(Note change of date from 2nd Sat., to suit the tide) 'Bird-watching in Carne', walk led by Killian Mullarney.

March Thurs. 2nd Gerald Barrett-Hamilton Memorial Lecture, 'Hares in Ireland' by Dr. Rebecca Jeffrey, Science and Biodiversity Section NWPS. We welcome Rebecca back to give us an update on the Irish Hare, which she lectured on in 2005.

Sat. 11th: Enniscorthy River Walk with Simon Collins. Meet at 10am at Riverside Park Hotel, Enniscorthy (S972393). We had a very enjoyable walk on this route with Simon in December 2012. The repeat of the walk was cancelled due to bad weather in Dec.15. Hopefully we will have better luck this time.

NOTES TO MEMBERS –

A Copy of the **2017 Programme of Events** is included with your Newsletter. Thanks to all members who gave suggestions for lectures and field trips. We hope that as many members as possible will take part in our activities. Among our other events this year are 2 Workshops, which are being held as part of the club's contribution towards raising awareness of the '**All Ireland Pollinator Plan 2015-20'**

We are also delighted to have been asked by Wexford Library to join them in their 'Chris Wilson memorial lecture', to be held in the Library in May.

By popular request we will also be making a return trip to Stradbally, Co. Laois, where we will once again have a guided tour of managed woodland with Woodsman, Eoin Donnelly. Also if possible, Eoin will give a demonstration on the Art of Charcoal making. Definitely dates for your diary. When attending Field Trips, please bring field guides, lenses and binoculars (if you don't have the latter contact Janet Whelehan to borrow a pair from the club). Most importantly bring a pad and pencil to record what you see. The library (open post lectures in the Visitor Centre at the reserve) have guide books to borrow, which can be checked out on www.wexfordnaturalists.com/library.

AGM NOTICE

February, Thursday. 2nd AGM 7pm.

Members are reminded that Committee Members are elected under a new nomination procedure (adopted at the 2011 AGM; see section 4 of the Club Constitution). Persons who wish to stand for any position on the Committee, Officer or General member, should submit their names, plus that of a proposer and seconder, to the Club Secretary for receipt at least 21 days (this year that will be 12th Jan 17) before the AGM which is being held on Thursday 2nd Feb 2017. Nomination forms available by email from info@wexfordnaturalists.com or at meeting. Officers are Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Secretary, and Treasurer, and there can be up to 6 General members. WNFC, c/o Wexford Wildfowl Reserve, North Slob, Wexford. Website: www.wexfordnaturalists.com; Email: info@wexfordnaturalists.com

Any nominee who is unopposed will be automatically elected at the AGM. Where there is no nominee for an Officer position, or the number of General members falls short of 6, the vacant positions may be filled by election at the AGM itself. Elections by secret ballot will only occur at the AGM, where there is more than one candidate for an Officer position or where the nominations for General member exceed 6."

Welcome to New Members Julie Kendall, Ger and Gene Draper and Simon O'Carroll. May you enjoy all the club has to offer.

Co. Wexford's Importance for Fish: the following points evolved from recent research by the Marine Institute and Declan Quigley of the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority at a

lecture given to the club by Dr. Igoe. Wexford has over 139 marine species in its coastal waters, and a wide range of Freshwater and estuarine fish such as the Twaite Shad and European Smelt. Although possessing no large lakes Wexford has the river Slaney and many small streams vital for Sea Trout and Salmon. An industry that provides over 240 million to the exchequer each year. Therefore it is very important to protect this environment from pollution. Fishing for Sea Bass, Mackerel, Pollock, Red Mullet and Flounder is an important recreation and tourist industry garnering over 50 million for the national exchequer per year. Wexford also has an important spawning area for fish off its coast, but where changing migratory patterns have been noted, probably due to climate change. A message to us all to act responsibly to 'do our bit' to prevent exacerbation of this phenomenon. The rivers in Wexford are particularly vulnerable to pollution, due to the dominant soil type, which does not lend itself to interception of pollutants. Dr Igoe stressed the importance of people behaving responsibly by maintaining their sewage systems to avoid unnecessary pollution. All of us must play a role in ensuring our waterways remain healthy and productive to ensure the future of our fisheries. Edited by Lynn Cassidy.

Kerry Deer: Although the proposed trip to the deer rut in Kerry was cancelled due to lack of numbers, a few intrepid club members made their own way there, but unfortunately viewed no 'rutting' but heard plenty of bellowing. The Red deer is Ireland's largest land mammal and the only species native to Ireland, the Killarney herd are believed to be descendents of the original ice-age survivors. Thanks to the Irish Deer Society they were brought back from the brink of extinction to approximately 6 - 700 strong. With a small herd translocated to Inishvickillane Island, to retain purity of stock. The stags weigh up to 220kg and Hinds 110kg and are reddish brown in colour or more greyish brown and shaggy in winter. The calves born in May to mid-June after 229 days gestation, are spotted up till two months old to aid camouflage. The adults may retain spots along the spine with a tail stripe extending along the spine. Red deer are mainly grazers but can be destructive when young shoots of shrubs and trees are available. The upland populations even encroaching on lowland arable crops in harsh winters. The Rut occurs in October as Testosterone levels peak in the males, who then become intolerant of the other males and try to form harems of hinds which they will defend by 'head to head' combat. Their neck and testicle size increases and the velvet from antlers is purged. These have been cast in Spring and re-grown for the rut. Stags can lose up to 20% of their body weight during the rut and this coupled with serious injury can result in failure to survive the winter. Conflict can also result in fatality, nature ensuring "survival of the fittest" only. Edited from the Irish Deer Society.



photo by Janet Whelehan.

Johnstown Castle Field Trip - an informative and enjoyable outing which was well attended. Interesting historical facts were given by Peter Miller. For example the estate was used as an airship base in 1917, has been a farm, a sawmill and housed soil testing laboratories in the past. The property boasts a pair of Eileen Grey designed gates. The 2 lakes were manmade circa 1860. Improvements to the grounds are to occur over the next 20 years or so, to incorporate a safer entrance to the grounds, new car parks, restaurant with al-fresco eating facilities and views across the lower lake, around which there will be a walk-way, where the public will have a chance to view otters and deer, which now reside on the estate. The Great Spotted woodpecker has been seen here as has an Osprey, which stayed for 2 weeks last year. A population of bats, last count 750, mainly Pipistrelle and also Daubenton's, breed here. Interestingly females can retain the male sperm to time conception with other females so that birth is en masse! Spotted during the walk with Frankie Tennent, was the rare Sausage Lichen and the lovely Yellow Antler fungus. A deciduous Dawn Redwood grows in the grounds, at one time thought to be an extinct species.



Antler Fungus photo by Julie Kendall



Dave Daly and Frankie Tennent giving Club members information on the plants and birds in the grounds of Johnstown Castle. (photo by Janet Whelehan).

Editor's Tidbits - Whilst it is fun to spot the migrant Whooper Swan, scientists are now asking us to take note of the phenomena of 'Wind Surfing Mute Swans'. It is something we may already have seen but not recognised. It takes great effort for the swan to take flight, so instead it makes use of the

air current beneath the wings and literally wind surfs the short distance on the water to a new feeding zone.

Great Crested Grebes eat their own feathers and regurgitate them to their young. But their glorious feathers were their nemesis in the past as they were brought to the edge of extinction by ladies demanding them for their fashionable hats!

NEW INSECT DISCOVERY

I was extremely surprised and delighted to record a spectacular new insect for Ireland from the Wexford Wildfowl Reserve in August. The new species is the Water Stick Insect *Ranatra linearis*. There should be no difficulty in anyone recognising this species the problem is seeing it as it is very cryptic when hiding amongst dead plant material. It is coloured like a dead plant and has long spindly mid and hind legs, a very long and thin body which ends in a spike-like breathing siphon. It uses this to draw air down to the body. There are no obvious antennae but it generally sits with its front legs held out in front. These are armed with spikes and a grasping claw which are used to catch and hold its prey. It is an ambush predator.

The Water Stick-Insect is in the same family as the Water Scorpion *Nepa cinerea* an abundant Irish aquatic species. You can see its similarity to *Nepa* as it shares features like the breathing tube, the short beak for stabbing prey and the spiked front legs. But whereas the Water Scorpion has a broad flat shape, the water stick insects have become thin and long. Adults grow to 35cm which probably makes it the longest native Irish insect (the introduced and completely unrelated true stick insects are much larger). Despite its shape and length Water Stick-insects can fly (which must be a peculiar sight!) and that is probably how it got to Wexford. The species has been spreading north and west in Britain and some seem to have managed to fly across the southern Irish Sea to colonise Ireland. It will be interesting to see how far it spreads. The picture shows one of the two individuals I found in August. It is an immature one probably about 25mm long.



Article and photo by Brian Nelson.

Greenland Geese - Wexford's Immigrants

The 'Slobs' of Wexford have attracted The White Fronted Greenland Geese since 1910, when they were first recorded here. It is Europe's rarest goose, first recognised by Dalgety and Scott in 1948. Two races exist together, the European A.a. albicans and the Greenland A.a. flavirostris, the latter is an Amber listed, endangered species. But the two races are very difficult to differentiate between. The Greenland is darker

with heavier barring. The Geese begin to arrive from late September and leave around the end of April, when you will see them flying in skeins of about 20 or so. Wexford hosts approximately 9,000 Greenland geese. They migrate over a distance of 6,000k's each year, can reach speeds of 70k and can use up 1/3rd of their body fat during migration. To accommodate this exertion their body organs shrink in size whilst their belly swells with stored fat. They then make use of the Northerly winds to migrate to Ireland and the Southerly ones to return to Greenland via Iceland each way. For safety they roost on the sandbanks of Wexford harbour then return at dawn to the marshland for feeding on rye, buttercup and clover roots and root crops specially grown for them. The Greenland has a lifespan of up to 20 years, reaches sexual maturity at 3 yrs but although breeding can be once a year not all geese breed each year. They form strong family bonds and are monogamous, youngsters staying with the parents for 1 to 2 yrs. A decline in numbers was noted elsewhere between the 1950's and 1970's but the 'Slob' population remained steady, (Rutledge and Oglive 1979) debated whether this was due to the displacement of birds from elsewhere. In 1983 The National Parks and Wildlife Services', initiated 'marking' with an orange collar, which could be sighted at 800mtrs, to allow undisturbed observation of family structures and movements of the birds. They are also recorded in Greenland, Scotland, Iceland and other countries in Ireland (countries of the migratory route). Currently the biggest threat to the Greenland goose is a change in farming practices, which reduce the supply of fresh grass in Spring. The geese depend on this food source to fatten up for the return migration. The 508 acres of the Wexford reserve may not be enough to sustain the population, the geese eat 6-800gms per day, a 1/3rd of their body weight. This together with climate change, competition from other geese, and their own breeding pattern may pose a future threat to their sustained numbers.

Edited from NPWS, Birdwatch Ireland, Wexford Wildfowl Reserve and Animal Diversity Websites.

RECORDING

To help achieve one of the Club's objectives "to collect and record information regarding the natural history of County Wexford" we welcome records from members of any species they see or hear. Records can be submitted by email to records@wexfordnaturalists.com or preferably enter them online at wexfordnaturalists.com/recording/records-submission. Don't worry if you don't have internet access as records can also be posted to the Club or given to the Records Officer or any member of the committee. All records are shared with the National Biodiversity Data Centre and, once checked and validated, are added to the Centre's database and can be viewed on Biodiversity Maps <http://maps.biodiversityireland.ie/> If you have any queries or need help with the online recording form please talk to Mary Foley.

Species of the Month – to encourage the submission of records for the past number of months we have highlighted a different 'Species of the Month'. For December and January we want to encourage you to take part in Birdwatch Ireland's Garden Bird Survey. This survey takes place between December and February each year and very little experience is required. It is a great way to get to know your garden birds better. You can spend as little or as much time as you like recording and your data can be submitted on line or the survey form can be downloaded, filled out and posted to BirdWatch

Ireland. The 2016/2017 survey starts on Monday 5th December. For more information, and to download the form, check out www.birdwatchireland.ie/Ourwork/Researchmonitoring/GardenBirdSurvey/tabid/121/Default.aspx

Survey forms will also be available from the Club Records Officer.

If you don't want to commit to the survey please submit your records for garden birds, or indeed any species, to the Club by any of the means outlined above.

Hedgerow Survey

Over the past four years a number of members have taken part in the Club's Hedgerow Survey where once per month, every month, they have walked along a one kilometre stretch of road, with hedgerows along each side, and recorded what they saw. The survey, in its present form, will be discontinued at the end of 2016. From January 2017 we would like members to take part in a new recording initiative where they record what they see in the hedgerows when out for a walk. You can walk the same route each time or take a different route, record weekly, monthly or occasionally. Unlike the previous survey you don't need to commit to returning to the same area each month. The recording can be done on part of your route, if you are going for a longer walk, or you can go out with the specific purpose of recording, it's up to you. We don't expect you to be able to identify everything you see but please record the species you *do* know. If you only want to record birds or butterflies or some other group, that's okay. A number of members already record in this way and with more people taking part we hope to gain a greater number of records from a wider area of the county.

Records can be submitted in the usual ways, email to records@wexfordnaturalists.com or enter them online at wexfordnaturalists.com/recording/records-submission. When using the online form under "Habitat type" please scroll down the list and click on "Hedgerows". Don't worry if you don't have internet access as records can also be posted to the Club or given to the Records Officer or any member of the committee.

CONGRATULATIONS

We congratulate Zoe Devlin on receiving the 'Distinguished Recorder Award 2016', from the National Biodiversity Data Centre, for her contribution in promoting Ireland's Wildflower recording and for producing identification aids to encourage recorders. For it is by documenting biodiversity that the knowledge base of species is extended, which can then help in its conservation, by recognising the changes that are occurring to Ireland's Biodiversity.

Zoe has had a lifelong love of wildflowers beginning with interest in 'weeds' that grew between her father's vegetable crops. Later she was enthralled by a magnified view of an orchid, firing her enthusiasm for taking courses and workshops to further her botanical knowledge. In 2009 Zoe started a website of all her photographic records and was approached by Collins Press to publish her records, which resulted in publication of the 'Wildflowers of Ireland - A Personal Record' in 2011. This was followed by 'Wildflowers of Ireland' in 2014, which has been reprinted three times and now colour codes species to aid identification. Zoe has supported the Data centre, not only through her own submitted records, but by promoting the Centre's recording initiatives

and sharing her knowledge via the centre's workshop programmes. Zoe also enthuses club members with her Wildflower field trips. You can follow Zoe on her face-book page 'Wildflowers of Ireland'.



Photo by Janet Whelehan

ARTICLES FOR NEWSLETTER

Compiled and edited by Lynn Cassidy. Thanks to all who contributed. The next newsletter will be published in March 2017. Items for inclusion may be passed onto me at any club event or via email to newsletter.wnfc@gmail.com

We would like to wish all WNFC Members and their families a Happy Christmas and a Peaceful and Prosperous New Year