



Field Guides Tour Report

BIRDING PLUS - Ireland in Fall 2016

Nov 3, 2016 to Nov 13, 2016
Terry McEneaney & Karen McEneaney

For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, please [VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE](#).



Searching for birds along an Irish beach, also called a strand. The weather was, for the most part, unusually sensational during our tour. Photo by guide Karen McEneaney.

To me, a trip to Ireland is like going into a dream. I constantly dream of Ireland. And when I get there, my dreams and expectations not only come true but are oftentimes exceeded. Ireland is one of the most refreshing and invigorating landscapes one can ever experience in life. But the keys to this experience are the warm, funny, hospitable, and friendly Irish people, coupled with craic (fun) in an atmosphere unique to Ireland -- the "Irish Pub" experience. By this I am referring to quaint, old, darling, cozy buildings where jokes, stories, poetry, and traditional Irish music (instrumental and singing) unfold. Let's face it, birding Ireland is just an excuse to experience the Emerald Isle, to go back to the basics in life as the Irish like to call craic (pronounced "crack," meaning grand fun). I know Field Guides technically describes this tour as "Ireland in Fall: Birds, Pubs & Traditional Music" -- yet in all its simplicity it is essentially a "birds by day--pubs by night" tour.

Having traveled to Ireland for more than four decades, and having close family and musical ties there, I feel privileged and honored that I can show people an Ireland that few foreigners have ever experienced. The "craic was mighty" (meaning it was one not to be forgotten and running on all cylinders) on the 2016 fall Field Guides Ireland tour, and everyone enjoyed all aspects of the tour. Additionally, this was the best weather we have ever experienced in Ireland on a November Field Guides tour: we had only one day of overcast/rain, and nine days of refreshing sunshine. The deciduous trees still held their leaves, and the colors were similar to those seen in New England in October. This was a very rare Ireland event, and it was Ireland at its best.

The unseasonably sensational weather allowed for our other activities -- such as viewing ancient archaeological sites and visiting Irish pubs and listening to traditional Irish music -- to be that much more meaningful. We ended up with 101 species of birds and 8 species of mammals, which was predicted for a fall Field Guides tour of Ireland this time of year. Our rarest bird species for the tour included Short-eared Owl, Pink-footed Goose, Barnacle Goose, and Carrion Crow. The first three were new for this fall tour. And luckily for us, stationary cold fronts positioned further north forced boreal migrants to slowly arrive from faraway places like Iceland, Greenland, Russia, and Fennoscandia (Norway, Sweden, and Finland), particularly the likes of Whooper Swan, Bar-tailed Godwit, Greenland White-fronted Goose, and Redwing.

We were able to observe a good cross section of wintering Irish birds, while at the same time seeing an Ireland few visitors have an opportunity to experience. Let's say we got off the beaten path. Our range of interest was broad and included historic and ancient places such as the site where the Titanic was constructed and last seen off the coast of Ireland; the filming location of the movie "Moby Dick"; the departure site for many Irish emigrants headed to America; a well-rounded view of the Troubles area of Belfast; modern-day Dublin; two famine burial sites; gothic cathedrals; standing stones; ring forts; passage tombs; castles; round towers; stones bridges; and mysterious fairy trees.

But to fulfill our need for the mighty craic, we started our adventure in one of birthplaces of Traditional Irish Music (TIM) in the seldom visited small town of Keady, County Armagh, Northern Ireland. Keady is a musician's paradise and stronghold, and it's the hometown of "the godmother of Irish music," Sarah Makem, and her son Tommy Makem (of the Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem fame). Our first afternoon started with a uilleann piper playing in a relative's pub, then on other days we enjoyed all types ranging from the rural pub to the urban pub for a wonderful cross section of ceol agus craic (music and fun). But the highlight of the TIM was a special music "sessun" one evening at a relative's country farmhouse known as "Tossey's" ("the last bastion of a unique cultural experience"). Folks heard we were in the area, and more than 60 people (relatives and friends) showed up to celebrate our presence. It was one for the annals and an incredible experience. All told we visited a couple dozen beautiful Irish pubs with fabulous music and people. It was the Ireland that we know and few people ever get to see. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to show it to you!

We leave you with a few Irish sayings to keep close to the heart, but please don't take them literally:

- "pickpockets love tourists"

- "many are called but few get up"

- "I live with fear every day, but sometimes she lets me go to the pub"

- "no paths cross in Dublin without crossing a pub"

- "it never rains in a pub"

The craic on this Field Guides tour was nothing short of mighty!

Tabhair aire! Take good care! And Tog E bog E! Take it easy!

--Terry and Karen

KEYS FOR THIS LIST

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: * = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant

BIRDS

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

PINK-FOOTED GOOSE (*Anser brachyrhynchus*) – Great looks at one lone individual-Wexford Slobs.

GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE (*Anser albifrons*) – Several thousand individuals-Wexford Slobs.

GRAYLAG GOOSE (*Anser anser*) – Several individuals in two locations-Dundalk Bay and Lady's Island Lake.

BRANT (*Branta bernicla*) – Seen 5 of the 9 days in the field numbering in the thousands.

BARNACLE GOOSE (*Branta leucopsis*) – Observed several dozen-Wexford Slobs.

CANADA GOOSE (*Branta canadensis*) – Found one individual at Wexford Slobs.

MUTE SWAN (*Cygnus olor*) – Found every day.

WHOOPEER SWAN (*Cygnus cygnus*) – Incredible looks at this magnificent yellow-billed swan in flight and on the ground, most likely from Iceland.

COMMON SHELDUCK (*Tadorna tadorna*) – Found on 5 of the 9 days in the field. Dozens.

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*) – Found a couple on day 7 near Middleton.

EURASIAN WIGEON (*Anas penelope*) – Found on 4 of the 9 days in the field.

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Anas americana*) – Two individuals observed: one at Belfast Harbour the other at Lady's Island Lake. On both occasions mixed in with large flocks of Eurasian Wigeon.

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Numerous. Seen every day.

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*) – Seen on days 3 and 5.

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (*Anas crecca*) – Found on days 3-7.

TUFTE DUCK (*Aythya fuligula*) – Found on day 1 at Santry.

COMMON SCOTER (*Melanitta nigra*) – Found a couple dozen individuals on day 4 near Annagassan.

COMMON GOLDENEYE (*Bucephala clangula*) – Found a couple individuals on day 5 at Wexford Slobs.

RED-BREASTED MERGANSER (*Mergus serrator*) – Found on days 4-6.

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

RING-NECKED PHEASANT (*Phasianus colchicus*) – Found on 6 of the 9 days in the field. These pheasants are typically much darker than are found in North America.

Gaviidae (Loons)

RED-THROATED LOON (*Gavia stellata*) – Found on day 6 near Ravenwood.

COMMON LOON (*Gavia immer*) – Found on day 6 near Ravenwood.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

LITTLE GREBE (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) – Seen on days 1, 5, and 7.

GREAT CRESTED GREBE (*Podiceps cristatus*) – Found on days 4 and 6.

Sulidae (Boobies and Gannets)

NORTHERN GANNET (*Morus bassanus*) – Good views on days 5 and 6 (Rosslare and Dunmore East).

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

GREAT CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) – Found on 5 of the 9 days in the field.

EUROPEAN SHAG (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*) – Good views on day 4 (Clogher Head).

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GRAY HERON (*Ardea cinerea*) – Seen every day and quite common.

LITTLE EGRET (*Egretta garzetta*) – Seen on days 1,4,5, and 7. More numerous the further south one travels on the east coast of Ireland.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*) – Found a couple individuals on day 5 at Wexford Slobs.

EURASIAN SPARROWHAWK (*Accipiter nisus*) – A great close-up view of one individual flying over Navan Fort on day 2.

RED KITE (*Milvus milvus*) – On day 4 got spectacular views of several individuals at Meeting of the Waters and at Avoca Mills. A minimum estimate of 8-9 individuals, great fun watching these remarkable birds of the sky.

COMMON BUZZARD (*Buteo buteo*) – Seen every day-making a greta comeback in Ireland in recent years.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

WATER RAIL (*Rallus aquaticus*) – Most of the group got to see this relatively shy rail at Wexford Slobs.

EURASIAN MOORHEN (*Gallinula chloropus*) – Nearly every day.

EURASIAN COOT (*Fulica atra*) – Nearly every day.

Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers)

EURASIAN OYSTERCATCHER (*Haematopus ostralegus*) – Several thousand total - found on day 3-7.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – Not a lot of individuals- but found on days 4-7.

EUROPEAN GOLDEN-PLOVER (*Pluvialis apricaria*) – Found on day 3 and 4 (Belfast Harbour and Dundalk Bay). Hundreds in Dundalk Bay.

NORTHERN LAPWING (*Vanellus vanellus*) – Found on days 3-7, and several thousand seen total.

COMMON RINGED PLOVER (*Charadrius hiaticula*) – Found on days 4,6, and 7.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

EURASIAN CURLEW (*Numenius arquata*) – Found on days 3-7. Probably numbered in the hundreds.

BLACK-TAILED GODWIT (*Limosa limosa*) – The most numerous of the two species of godwits. Found on days 3-7 and totaling in the hundreds of individuals.

BAR-TAILED GODWIT (*Limosa lapponica*) – The least numerous of the two species of godwits found in Ireland in the winter. Found on days 4-6.

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*) – Found on the east coast of Ireland often near seaweed.

RED KNOT (*Calidris canutus*) – Found on days 4 and 6. The largest flock being near Clogher Head and totaling 60 individuals.

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*) – Only a few-dozen individuals in two different places on day 6.

DUNLIN (*Calidris alpina*) – One individual on day 6 Woodstown Beach.

PURPLE SANDPIPER (*Calidris maritima*) – One individual seen near Dunmore East.

COMMON SNIPE (*Gallinago gallinago*) – Seen on days 3 and 5--our best views were at Wexford Slobs.

COMMON GREENSHANK (*Tringa nebularia*) – Found on day 4, and a couple of individuals.

COMMON REDSHANK (*Tringa totanus*) – Found on days 3-7 and very common in winter.

Alcidae (Auks, Murres, and Puffins)

COMMON MURRE (*Uria aalge*) – Found on day 4 and over a dozen individuals.

RAZORBILL (*Alca torda*) – Far away looks at this most remarkable alcid on day 4.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

BLACK-HEADED GULL (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) – Numerous. And seen every day.

MEW GULL (*Larus canus*) – Seen three of the nine days in the field.

HERRING GULL (*Larus argentatus*) – Quite common and seen every day.

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL (*Larus fuscus*) – Found on days 3,5,6,and 7. They become more numerous the further one travels down the east coast of Ireland.

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL (*Larus marinus*) – Found on days 3-7 and more abundant as one heads down the east coast of Ireland.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – Not of the original wild variety. Seen every day.

COMMON WOOD-PIGEON (*Columba palumbus*) – Found every day and quite common.

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE (*Streptopelia decaocto*) – Found on three different days and more numerous than one would think.

Strigidae (Owls)

SHORT-EARED OWL (*Asio flammeus*) – A relatively hard bird to find anytime in Ireland. One individual flew away from our group in Lurgangreen in Dundalk Bay.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

COMMON KINGFISHER (*Alcedo atthis*) – Everyone finally got great views of this species at Wexford Slobs.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

EURASIAN KESTREL (*Falco tinnunculus*) – Found at least 4 of the 9 days in the field. Most were found near major roadways. This bird is on the decline in Ireland.

MERLIN (*Falco columbarius*) – Super views of this species up close and personal on day 5 Rosslare.

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*) – A couple individuals seen on day 7 in two different places--one being Dungarvan.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

EURASIAN JAY (EURASIAN) (*Garrulus glandarius hibernicus*) – Found on days 2 and 3 and we got lucky. Not an easy bird to see with a group. [E]

EURASIAN MAGPIE (*Pica pica*) – Seen every day.

EURASIAN JACKDAW (*Corvus monedula*) – Seen every day and numerous--probably thousands.

ROOK (*Corvus frugilegus*) – Seen every day and definitely in the thousands.

CARRION CROW (*Corvus corone*) – Found on day 7 near Middleton.

HOODED CROW (*Corvus cornix*) – Seen every day and more numerous than one thinks.

COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*) – Found on days 4-6.

Alaudidae (Larks)

EURASIAN SKYLARK (*Alauda arvensis*) – Heard only near Clogher Head. [*]

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

COAL TIT (BRITISH) (*Pariparus ater hibernicus*) – Found on days 1-3 and 6. This race has a yellowish tinge to the plumage. [E]

EURASIAN BLUE TIT (*Cyanistes caeruleus*) – Found on days 1-6.

GREAT TIT (*Parus major*) – Found on days 1-3.

Aegithalidae (Long-tailed Tits)

LONG-TAILED TIT (*Aegithalos caudatus*) – Found on days 1 and 2 and 6.

Certhiidae (Treecreepers)

EURASIAN TREECREEPER (*Certhia familiaris*) – Nice views at Ravenwood on day 6.

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

EURASIAN WREN (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) – Found every day.

Cinclidae (Dippers)

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

Regulidae (Kinglets)

GOLDCREST (*Regulus regulus*) – Seen virtually everyday.

Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)

EUROPEAN ROBIN (*Erithacus rubecula*) – Probably the most darling bird in all of Ireland. Best associated with a quaint lush Irish garden. Seen and/or heard every day.

EUROPEAN STONECHAT (*Saxicola rubicola*) – Found on days 5 and 6. Fondly found in bracken fern.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

EURASIAN BLACKBIRD (*Turdus merula*) – Seen every day.

REDWING (*Turdus iliacus*) – Seen on days 2, 3, and 4. More readily found in the north during the fall/winter.

SONG THRUSH (*Turdus philomelos*) – Seen 4 of the 9 days in the field.

MISTLE THRUSH (*Turdus viscivorus*) – Seen on three different days-including some wonderful views of this enormous thrush.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Seen every day.

Prunellidae (Accentors)

DUNNOCK (*Prunella modularis*) – Nice looks at Dunnocks on days 5, 6, and 9.

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

GRAY WAGTAIL (*Motacilla cinerea*) – Found on days 4,7, and 9.

WHITE WAGTAIL (BRITISH) (*Motacilla alba yarrellii*) – The Irish refer to the White Wagtail as the "Pied Wagtail", since on this island and the British Isles the males are more black-colored and the females darker gray than the continental morphs. Hence the race, *Motacilla alba yarrellii*.

MEADOW PIPIT (*Anthus pratensis*) – Seen on days 1 and 6.

ROCK PIPIT (*Anthus petrosus*) – Seen on days 4 and 6.

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

REED BUNTING (*Emberiza schoeniclus*) – Found on day 5-Belfast Harbour.

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

COMMON CHAFFINCH (*Fringilla coelebs*) – Found most days.

EUROPEAN GREENFINCH (*Chloris chloris*) – Found at a minimum of 4 of the 9 days in the field.

EUROPEAN GOLDFINCH (*Carduelis carduelis*) – Nice looks on day 3 in Dundalk Bay (Lurgangreen in particular).

EURASIAN LINNET (*Carduelis cannabina*) – Found on 4 of the 9 days in the field.

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) – Seen every day-quite common.

MAMMALS

EUROPEAN BROWN HARE (*Lepus europaeus*) – Found on days 4 and 6.

EUROPEAN RED SQUIRREL (*Sciurus vulgaris*) – Being outcompeted by its nemesis the Eastern Gray Squirrel. A nice look at one in Ravenwood on day 6.

EASTERN GRAY SQUIRREL (*Sciurus carolinensis*) – Seen on days 1, 8, and 9. [H]

BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN (*Tursiops truncatus*) – Found on days 4 and 6.

RED FOX (*Vulpes vulpes*) – Nice looks at one individual mousing in a pasture.

GRAY SEAL (*Halichoerus grypus*) – Nice looks on days 4 and 6.

FALLOW DEER (*Dama dama*) – A large herd in Phoenix Park.

SIKA DEER (*Cervus nippon*) – Found on day 4.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 101 bird taxa and 8 mammal taxa