

## 2012 DUBLIN COUNTY BIRD RACE

A sightings round-up by Niall T. Keogh

The 22<sup>nd</sup> annual Dublin County Bird Race took place on Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> January 2012. Seven teams met at 08:00 at Booterstown DART Station car park & then raced around the county trying to see as many species as possible before meeting at Clontarf Castle at 18:00. By the end of the day, a cumulative total of **114 species** of bird were recorded by all teams (same total as 2011) with each individual team's scores as follows:

### Category A

- 1<sup>st</sup> place (104 points): 'The Southside Swifts' – Niall T. Keogh, Noel Keogh, Brian Porter & Alan Lauder.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> place (99 points): 'The Raven Loons' – Robert Vaughan, Shane Farrell, Conor Foley & Donal Foley.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> place (95 points): 'The Southern Hawkers' – Dick Coombes, Christian Osthoff, Gerry Lyons & Declan Murphy.
- 4<sup>th</sup> place (93 points): 'The Northside Nightjars' – John Fox, Phillip Clancy, Ger Franck & Mir Harris.
- 5<sup>th</sup> place (86 points): 'The Stringer's Quartet' – Ian Stevenson, Patrick Veale, Jim Bowman & Denis Cronin.

### Category B

- 1<sup>st</sup> place (67 points): 'The Good Old Boys' – Dave Fox, Maurran Fox, Paul Keating, Killian Keating & Jimmy Walsh.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> place (65 ½ points): 'The Dublin Dunlins' – Paul Hillis & Brian Gormley.

As has been the case for the past few years, Divers have been rather scarce this winter. Small numbers of **Red-throated Divers** were present whilst the only **Great Northern Divers** noted were singles at Howth Harbour & off Sutton. Contrastingly, numbers of **Great-crested Grebes** along the Dublin coastline seem to be holding well with 435+ counted in Dublin Bay in recent weeks. No scarce grebes were seen this year however.

Just one **Fulmar** was found, present on the cliffs between Skerries & Balbriggan. Small numbers of **Gannets** were seen off Howth & feeding in Dublin Bay also. **Kittiwakes** were rather plentiful however, with sightings coming from Skerries, Howth & a nice feeding flock in South Dublin Bay off Dalkey Island. **Guillemots** & **Razorbills** were around in good numbers, especially in the northern half of the county with a notable evening passage off Skerries. A few Guillemots were even present at the breeding ledges on Ireland's Eye. **Black Guillemots** were easily found at their regular haunts in the southern half of the county also.

There was no shortage of **Goldeneye** & **Red-breasted Mergansers** at the usual sites such as Swords Estuary and a flock of 43 **Tufted Duck** were also present at Knock Lake. There was however, a complete lack of **Pochard** at these two sites where they would normally be expected. The only Pochard seen on the day were at Ballymount Park. Small flocks of **Common Scoter** were also to be found in Dublin Bay & off Skerries. The North Bull Island female **Blue-winged Teal** (now present for its 6<sup>th</sup> winter) was on show at her regular spot at The River Naniken outflow whilst a female **Gadwall** nearby was another good bird for the day. A male **Green-winged Teal** was a nice surprise find on the outer estuary at Rogerstown,

from Spout Lane. No Greylag Geese were seen this year although they can be notoriously difficult to locate.

It was an excellent day for Birds of Prey with many teams recording most or all of the five regular species. Two **Merlins** were on the north saltmarsh at The North Bull Island with additional singles seen at Rogerstown & Knock Lake. **Peregrines** were sighted at several localities whilst **Buzzards**, **Sparrowhawks** & **Kestrels** were also found to be relatively plentiful on the day. In addition to these, 6 **Red Kites** from the North Dublin re-introduction program were also seen around the Lusk area, although these are not counted towards the race totals.

All of the regularly occurring wader species were seen including **Purple Sandpipers** at several traditional sites, a **Spotted Redshank** at Merrion Gates & a **Ruff** associating with the Black-tailed Godwits at Broadmeadows, Swords Estuary. **Water Rail** were also heard calling at dusk at Knock Lake. **Mediterranean Gulls** were plentiful at their usual haunts in South Dublin Bay, an adult **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was picked up flying through Dalkey Sound, a **Little Gull** was on the Dublin side of the border at Gormanstown & the regular adult **Ring-billed Gull** was day roosting at Merrion Gates. The recent white-winged gull influx along the west & south coast of Ireland has evidently spread around to the east coast as a 2<sup>nd</sup>-winter **Glaucous Gull** was at Balbriggan Harbour, an adult **Iceland Gull** was offshore from Skerries & another Iceland Gull, this time a 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup>-winter bird flew along the seafront at Clontarf.

It was a day of mixed fortunes with regards to passerines, with some species notably absent or hard to get. For example, **Blackcaps**, **Long-tailed Tits** & **Mistle Thrushes** were plentiful whilst only a handful of **Redwing**, **Fieldfare** & **Lesser Redpolls** could be found. Quite a few **Grey Wagtails** were recorded which is encouraging given their decline as a result of the past two hard winters. **Treecreepers** were to be seen at Cabinteely Park, a good site for this species. No Great Spotted Woodpeckers or Waxwings were found this year in comparison to several sightings of both species on the 2011 race. A **Kingfisher** started the day off nicely at Booterstown Marsh whilst several **Dippers** were recorded, including two at Blackrock Park. A pure **Carrion Crow** was present along with the long-staying hybrid at The River Santry outflow on The North Bull Island. Another **hybrid Carrion X Hooded Crow** was also seen at Cabinteely Park. A **Jay** near Cabinteely was a good bird to get as they can be hit & miss whilst **Ravens** were present at quite a few sites on the day (Deansgrange, Dalkey, Rogerstown etc). Good numbers of **Yellowhammers** & **Tree Sparrows** were to be found in stubble fields around north Dublin, particularly between Rogerstown & Skerries. A very interesting looking **leucistic Reed Bunting** was at Knock Lake...not the sort of bird you'd like to have jump out in front of you on Cape Clear in October! **Stonechats** & **Black Redstarts** were again very hard to find this year. Stonechats were present at only two sites, Balbriggan & Broadmeadows Estuary. Furthermore, just a single Black Redstart was seen (at Dillon's Park in Dalkey) which is surprising given the influx on to the east coast earlier this winter.

Bird Race Team Pics Below by Dick Coombes:

The Southside Swifts  
The Raven Loons  
The Southern Hawkers  
The Good Old Boys



