

# North Bull Island Bird Report 2011



Edited and compiled

by

Tom Cooney

## Editorial

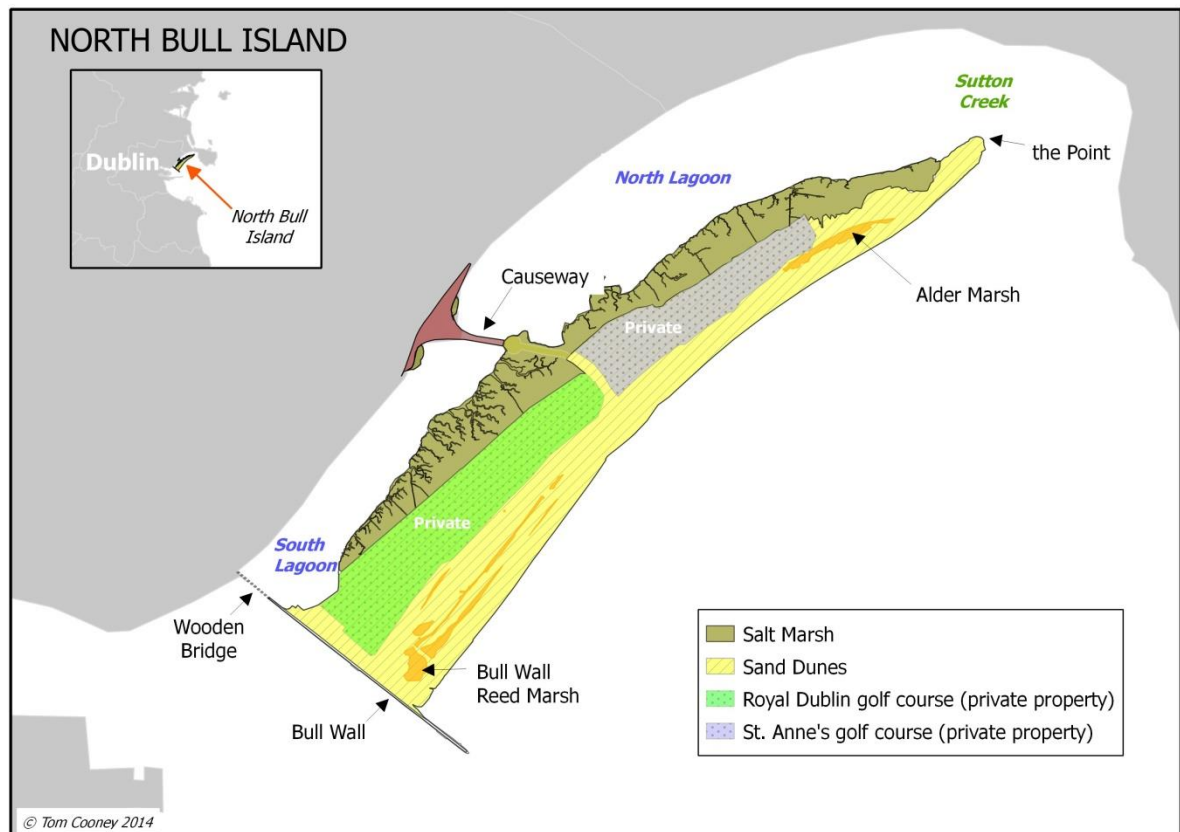
This is the first annual bird report for North Bull Island in Dublin Bay.

It is hoped that this new online report provide an outlet for birdwatchers to publish their observations. The report is privately produced and all members of the public are welcome to participate and contribute their observations and photographs.

A total of 131 species were reported from 1st January to 31st December.

Desert wheatear and yellow-legged gull were added to the island list in 2014.

The islands second white-winged black tern and third semipalmated sandpiper were recorded in September. The only other American species in 2011 were two buff-breasted sandpipers and the returning female blue-winged Teal. Passage migrants were generally scarce but grey phalarope, green sandpiper, whinchat and whitethroat were each recorded for the first time in several years. A wheatear remained on the island for several days in December. The regular birds of prey in winter were joined by a short-eared owl.



*North Bull Island with some bird watching locations mentioned in this report.*

## List of Contributors

Records for this report were received directly from observers listed below via email or text. Additional records were also sourced from websites including Irish Birding ([www.irishbirding.com](http://www.irishbirding.com)) and Tolka Branch Birdwatch Ireland ([www.dublinbirding.ie](http://www.dublinbirding.ie))

### Observers:

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*Cover photo: Desert Wheatear (John Fox)*

# Systematic List

The sequence and scientific nomenclature largely follows The British List (7th Edition) (Dudley *et al.* 2006) including subsequent recommendations of the Taxonomic Advisory Committee of the AERC (Crochet *et al.* 2010) and the Taxonomic Sub-committee of the British Ornithologists Union (Sangster *et al.* 2007, Knox *et al.* 2008, Sangster *et al.* 2009).

## **MUTE SWAN** *Cygnus olor*

Occasional throughout the year

Three on 8<sup>th</sup> September, two on 20<sup>th</sup> November and one on 16<sup>th</sup> December were the only birds reported.

## **WHOOOPER SWAN** *Cygnus cygnus*

Scarce visitor

Seven flew north over the saltmarshes on 6<sup>th</sup> November.

## **WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE** *Anser albifrons flavirostris*

Rare

Single birds were seen flying over the island on 6<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> November.

## **GREYLAG GOOSE** *Anser anser*

Rare

One from 26<sup>th</sup> August to at least 1<sup>st</sup> September was probably a feral bird.

## **BRENT GOOSE** *Branta bernicla hrota*

Common winter visitor

The first birds of autumn were a party of four on 28<sup>th</sup> August on the northern end of the island and by mid October 560 were present. The main arrival of wintering birds was in late October and early November.

### **Dark-bellied Brent** *B.b. bernicla*

Rare winter visitor

One was present on a number of dates from 5<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> November (F. Turpin *et. al.*)

## **SHELDUCK** *Tadorna tadorna*

Resident, common winter visitor

An early build-up of numbers was noted on 16<sup>th</sup> October with 306 birds on the mudflats (S. McNamara).

## **GADWALL** *Anas hyemalis*

Very scarce winter visitor

Male and female were present on the southern mudflats from 10<sup>th</sup> December (Niall T Keogh *et al.*) to 17<sup>th</sup> with the female remaining into 2012.

Although still very scarce on the island Gadwall have become more frequent in recent years and are probably under-recorded.

**BLUE-WINGED TEAL** *Anas discors*

Rare

A female from 2010 was last seen on 20<sup>th</sup> February. The female returned on 24<sup>th</sup> September and remained into 2012.

Presumed to be the returning bird seen in previous winters.

**LONG-TAILED DUCK** *Clangula hyemalis*

Irregular and scarce winter visitor

A juvenile female, a first winter male and an adult female were present in Sutton Creek from 30<sup>th</sup> October to late November (S. Farrell *et. al.*). The adult female was present on 3<sup>rd</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> December (J. Rod, S. Farrell, P. Mac an Bheatha) and the first winter male was present again on 21<sup>st</sup> December (Niall Keogh, Andrew Power, Fearon Cassidy).



**COMMON SCOTER** *Melanitta nigra*

Regular winter visitor in small numbers

Up to five were present daily in Sutton Creek from 21<sup>st</sup> November into 2012.



**GOLDENEYE** *Bucephala clangula*

Uncommon winter visitor

Two on 20th November in Sutton Creek were the first birds of the winter 2011/2012. One or two in Sutton Creek and off the Bull Bridge into 2012.

**RED-BREASTED MERGANSER** *Mergus serrator*

Regular visitor in small numbers

The highest number roosting on the northern saltmarshes was 16 on 2nd October. Smaller numbers were present off the beach and Bull Wall. The only other high count was of 26 off the point on 21<sup>st</sup> December. A pair was present regularly at high water at the River Santry outflow from late October.

**LITTLE EGRET** *Egretta garzetta*

Resident

Numbers have not fully recovered following the severe winter weather of 2009/2010 and 2010/2011. In autumn over 30 were present daily up to early December with a peak of 46 on 1st September. Fewer than normal were present in December with up to ten on most dates.

**GREY HERON** *Ardea cinerea*

Common resident

The highest count of the autumn was 37 on 1st September.

**SPARROWHAWK** *Accipiter nisus*

Regular visitor

Single birds were present daily from summer to late December. Two were present on 18th September and 30th October.

**COMMON BUZZARD** *Buteo buteo*

Rare

One flew over the point on 26<sup>th</sup> November.

**WHIMBREL** *Numenius phaeopus*

Regular passage migrants, rare in winter

Migration was well below normal. One on 8<sup>th</sup> April was the only spring record. Up to four were reported on five dates between 1<sup>st</sup> September and 9<sup>th</sup> October.

One bird was reported in 2010 and two on one date in 2009. This species is under reported.

**RUFF** *Philomachus pugnax*

Regular but scarce autumn passage migrant

Up to four were present daily from 14<sup>th</sup> August to 18<sup>th</sup> September (S. Farrell *et al.*).

None were reported in 2010.

**CURLEW SANDPIPER** *Calidris ferruginea*

Autumn passage migrant, rare in winter and spring

Autumn passage was low with about half the annual average recorded on 22 dates from 27<sup>th</sup> July to 21<sup>st</sup> November. An adult in partial summer plumage on 27<sup>th</sup> July was very early. Autumn passage started with three on 18<sup>th</sup> August, increasing to seven on 12<sup>th</sup> and peaking with ten on 25<sup>th</sup> September. Up to three remained until 29<sup>th</sup>. In

October two were present on 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> but singles birds were seen on several dates up to the 21<sup>st</sup> November.

In 2010 autumn passage ranged from two to a maximum of eight on four dates from 3<sup>rd</sup> September to 16<sup>th</sup> October.

**LITTLE STINT** *Calidris minuta*

Regular autumn passage migrant, rare in spring

Autumn passage was below the average with single birds recorded on eight dates from 27<sup>th</sup> August to 29<sup>th</sup> September. Two were present on 28<sup>th</sup> and three on 4<sup>th</sup> September.

None were reported in 2010.

**BUFF-BREASTED SANDPIPER** *Calidris subruficollis*

Rare

One on 27<sup>th</sup> September was joined by another on 30<sup>th</sup> and both remained until 4<sup>th</sup> October (T. Cooney, S. Farrell *et. al.*). These are the first records since 2008.



**SEMI-PALMATED SANDPIPER** *Calidris pusilla*

Rare

A juvenile was present on the northern end of the saltmarsh on 26<sup>th</sup> September (T. Cooney).

This is the third record for the island

**GREY PHALAROPE** *Phalaropus fulicarius*

Rare passage migrant

Adult, Royal Dublin Golf Course on 18<sup>th</sup> September (Proinsias Mac an Bheatha).





**GREEN SANDPIPER** *Tringa ochropus*

Scarce passage migrant in autumn, rare in winter and spring

One was heard calling over the northern saltmarsh on 2<sup>nd</sup> September (T. Cooney).

**SPOTTED REDSHANK** *Tringa erythropus*

Scarce passage migrant, very scarce in winter.

One on the 11<sup>th</sup> January was the only record for the early part of the year. In autumn there were six records of single birds in 26<sup>th</sup> August, 8<sup>th</sup> September, 11<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> October and 21<sup>st</sup> November.

In 2010 there were single birds in August, September and November.

**JACK SNIFE** *Lymnecryptes minimus*

Very scarce passage migrant and winter visitor

Two were flushed singly on the northern end of the island on 30<sup>th</sup> September, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> December. One was seen feeding on the open saltmarsh with Redshanks on 11<sup>th</sup> December. One flew over the causeway on 24<sup>th</sup> December.

In 2010 one was reported in December.

**LITTLE TERN** *Sterna albifrons*

Scarce summer visitor, former breeder

The only records were of birds roosting at the in autumn as follows: two on 2<sup>nd</sup> and three on 31<sup>st</sup> August, two on 2<sup>nd</sup> September.

**BLACK TERN** *Chlidonias niger*

Irregular and scarce autumn migrant

An immature bird was present on 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> September (A.G. Kelly *et. al.*).

**WHITE-WINGED BLACK TERN** *Chlidonias leucopterus*

Vagrant

An adult in winter plumage was seen at the point on 24<sup>th</sup> September for several minutes before flying northwards across Sutton Creek (S. Farrell, T. Cooney).

This is the second island record.



**SANDWICH TERN** *Sterna sandvicensis*

Common passage migrant, occasional in summer

A peak of 147 birds roosted with other terns and gulls on the northern saltmarshes on 2nd September. Smaller numbers also roosted at the point on various dates.

**COMMON TERN** *Sterna hirundo*

Common in summer

Frequent around the island and off the Bull Wall in summer. In autumn small numbers roosted regularly with other terns at the point. The maximum was 12 on 31st August.

**ROSEATE TERN** *Sterna dougallii*

Very scarce passage migrant, rare in summer

Two at the point on 31st August and one on 11th September were roosting with other terns and gulls.

**ARCTIC TERN** *Sterna paradisaea*

Uncommon summer visitor

Occasional offshore in summer with only five reported roosting at the point on 31st August.

**LITTLE GULL** *Larus minutus*

Scarce visitor

Adult at the point on 25<sup>th</sup> August (Tom Cooney, Shane Farrell) and a first year near the causeway on 29<sup>th</sup> September (Shane Farrell).

**YELLOW-LEGGED GULL** *Larus michahellis*

Rare

One was seen near the causeway on 24 July 2011 was the first record for the island (R. Busby). This is the first record for the island.

**GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL** *Larus marinus*

Present throughout the year, common in autumn and winter

A roosting flock of 70 on the northern mudflats on 31st October was the only large count of the autumn.

**STOCK DOVE** *Columba oenas*

Very scarce

One on 17th July and two on 28th May were the only records. On both occasions the birds were drinking water at the outflow of the River Naniken south of the causeway.

**CUCKOO** *Cuculus canorus*

Very scarce summer visitor

One on 11th May was the only spring record and a juvenile was present in the Alder Marsh area from 6th to 16th September.

**SHORT-EARED OWL** *Asio flammeus*

Scarce and irregular winter visitor

One on many dates from 20th October to late December (S. Farrell *et al.*).

This is the first record since April 2009.

**KINGFISHER** *Alcedo atthis*

Scarce but regular winter visitor

One was present occasionally at the River Santry outflow from 16th October to the end of the year.

**MERLIN** *Falco columbarius*

Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor

Single birds were seen on fifteen dates from 9<sup>th</sup> October into 2012. Two were present on 6<sup>th</sup> November and 22<sup>nd</sup> December.



**PEREGRINE** *Falco peregrinus*

Regular visitor

Single birds reported in January with two present on 10<sup>th</sup> January. In the latter part of the year birds were recorded from 26<sup>th</sup> August onwards with up to three hunting together from 8<sup>th</sup> September into 2012.

**CARRION CROW** *Corvus corone*

Scarce resident

One on 9<sup>th</sup> January was the only report for the early part of the year. From 16<sup>th</sup> September onwards an adult was present occasionally and on some dates with a hybrid carrion x hooded crow. A hybrid was present from late summer into 2012 but two were seen on 9<sup>th</sup> October and 26<sup>th</sup> December.

**HOODED CROW** *Corvus corone cornix*

Resident and regular visitor

The largest gathering reported was a flock of 42 on 18th September.

**RAVEN** *Corvus corax*

Scarce but regular visitor

One on 3rd September (G. Franck) and two on 6<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> December.

**GOLDCREST** *Regulus regulus*

Scarce passage migrant mainly in autumn

Only three records for the latter part of the year. Single birds were present in the Alder Marsh on 13th September and 3rd October with two there on 4th October.

**SAND MARTIN** *Riparia riparia*

Regular passage migrant, occasional in summer

Autumn passage was about average with up to 50 per day in mid September.

**SWALLOW** *Hirundo rustica* / **HOUSE MARTIN** *Delichon urbicum*

Regular passage migrants

From mid-September to early October several thousand Hirundines were observed moving south across the island daily. Swallows were more common than House Martin with a ratio of 2:1.

**CHIFFCHAFF** *Phylloscopus collybita*

Scarce but regular passage migrant

Small numbers were seen in the scrub near the causeway and in the Alder Marsh between 13th and 24th September with a peak of four on 24th September.

**WILLOW WARBLER** *Phylloscopus trochilus*

Scarce but regular passage migrant

A very poor year with only three reported in autumn. Single birds were reported on 29th and 31st August and 5th September.

**BLACKCAP** *Sylvia atricapilla*

Scarce migrant

One heard on 24th September on the mainland end of the causeway. A male was present in the Alder Marsh on 3rd and 4th October. A male and female were in the Sea Buckthorn near the Interpretative Centre on 4th December. These were joined by another male from 6<sup>th</sup> December. Both males remained into 2012. A female was seen in the Buckthorn near Bull Wall on 5<sup>th</sup> December.

**WHITETHROAT** *Sylvia communis*

Very scarce and irregular passage migrant

One on 26th September near the Interpretative Centre.

**GRASSHOPPER WARBLER** *Locustella naevia*

Rare passage migrant

One was flushed from the dunes near the Alder Marsh on 13th and 16th September. It is assumed the both records refer to the same bird.

**SEDGE WARBLER** *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

Scarce passage migrant

Single birds were seen in the Alder Marsh area on 8th and 12th September.

**FIELDFARE** *Turdus pilaris*

Passage migrant and winter visitor, occasionally in large numbers

During the extreme cold weather of late 2010 and early 2011 flocks of 100 to 200 were seen in various parts of the island.

**SONG THRUSH** *Turdus philomelos*

Passage migrant and winter visitor

Small numbers were present during the severe cold winter of 2011/2012. Single birds present frequently in the vicinity of the Interpretative Centre from December into 2012.

**REDWING** *Turdus iliacus*

Passage migrant and winter visitor

Over one hundred were present in January after heavy snowfalls. The only reports in the latter part of the year were of single birds were present on 10<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> December.

**WHINCHAT** *Saxicola rubetra*

Scarce and irregular passage migrant

A female or immature on 12<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> September near the Alder Marsh.

**STONECHAT** *Saxicola torquata*

Uncommon resident

Numbers appear to have decreased considerably since the two recent cold winters. Two near Royal Dublin Golf Course in November and December and on near the causeway on several dates in December.

**WHEATEAR** *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Common passage migrant, occasionally breeds

Passage between 26<sup>th</sup> August and 30<sup>th</sup> October peaked with 30 on the northern saltmarsh on 11<sup>th</sup> September. The total on the island during peak migration was probably over 50 birds

A first winter female was present at the causeway from 11<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> December. This is the second overwintering in recent years.

**DESERT WHEATEAR** *Oenanthe deserti*

Rare

A male was present at the point on 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> November (S. Farrell).

This is the first record for County Dublin and the 6<sup>th</sup> for Ireland.



Desert Wheatear (John Fox)

**PIED WAGTAIL** *Motacilla alba yarrellii*

Resident and passage migrant.

**White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba alba*

Scarce passage migrant

Five on 11th September and two on 16th, 25th and 29th may have involved the same birds (A.G Kelly, S. Lawlor, T. Cooney).

**ROCK PIPIT** *Anthus petrosus*

Scarce resident and uncommon winter visitor

The largest number reported was 20 near the point on 11<sup>th</sup> December (S. Farrell). Single birds occasionally near the Causeway and Bull Wall in winter.

**GREENFINCH** *Carduelis chloris*

Scarce resident and common winter visitor

The largest flock was 50 near the Interpretative Centre on 4<sup>th</sup> December but small flocks of 20 were present throughout the autumn and winter 2011.

**LINNET** *Carduelis cannabina*

Resident and very common winter visitor

In autumn several flocks of more than 100 birds were present on the northern saltmarshes. Up to 100 fed on the shoreline and dunes near the point and Bull Wall from mid-November onwards.

**REDPOLL** *Carduelis flammea cabaret*

Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor

Three near the causeway and two in the Alder Marsh on 24th September. Two were in the Alder Marsh on 3rd October and two in scrub near the Interpretative Centre on 4th December. Six on 9<sup>th</sup> December in scrub near the Bull Wall.

**GOLDFINCH** *Carduelis carduelis*

Scarce resident, common passage migrant and winter visitor

The largest flock reported was 200 near the causeway on 16th October.

**SNOW BUNTING** *Plectrophenax nivalis*

Irregular winter visitors

Two on 20th November on the northern end of the island were the only records. These are the first records since December 2010.