

# North Bull Island Bird Report

## 2014



Edited and compiled

by

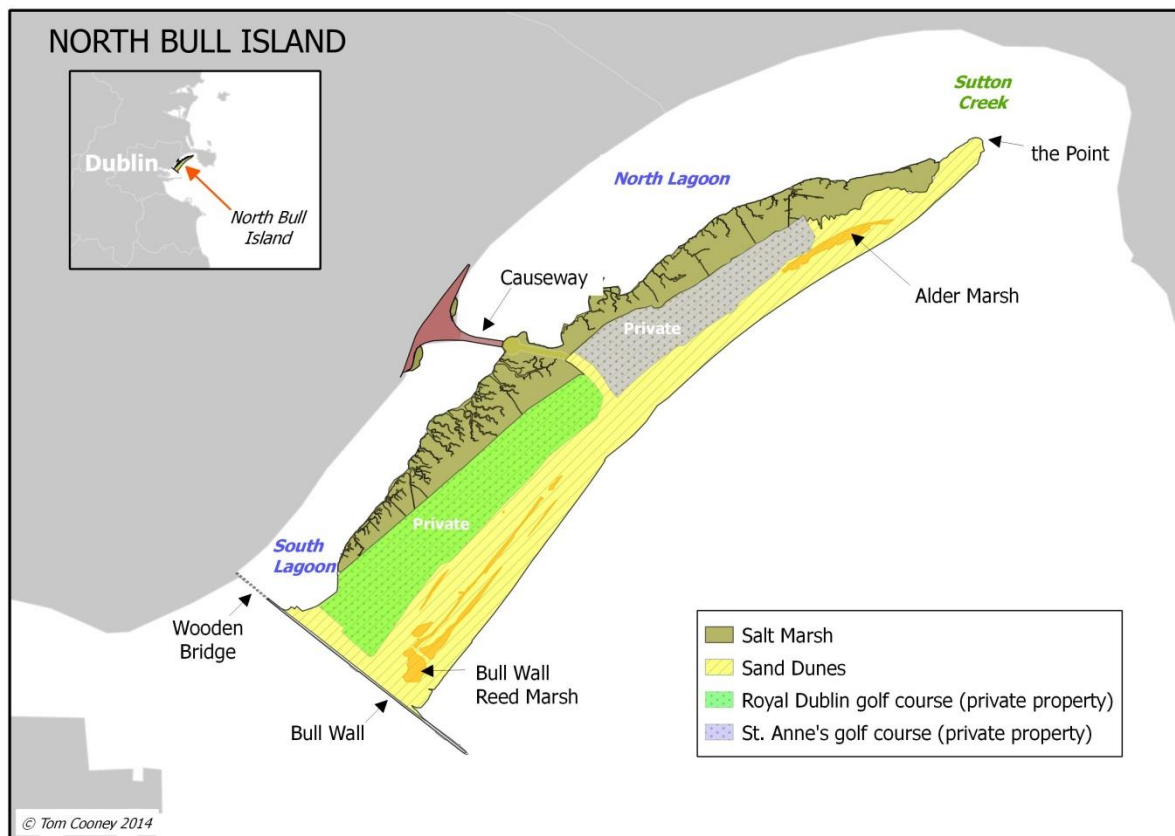
Tom Cooney

# North Bull Island Bird Report

## 2014

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

## Editorial

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

A total of 137 species were reported between 1st January 2014 and 31st December 2014.

Ross's Gull and Crane were added to the island list in 2014. The *littoralis* race of rock pipit was reported for the second time and Sabine's gull was recorded for the second year in succession. Scarce or unusual species included eider, gadwall, the *argentatus* race of herring gull, Iceland gull arctic skua, green sandpiper and black redstart.

Spring passage was lighter than in recent years although numbers of wheatears and whimbrels were above normal. Unseasonal curlew sandpipers and ruff occurred in spring along with high numbers of little gulls. Grasshopper warblers and reed warblers were present again in spring for the second and third year in succession respectively. Autumn passage of regular migrants was average but the numbers of blackcaps and curlew sandpipers were the highest for over a decade.

Small numbers of short-eared owls, long-tailed ducks, jack snipes and snow buntings were reported in the winter months.

The first complete survey of the islands breeding birds was concluded in 2014. Of particular note are the very high densities of skylarks (Amber list species) and meadow pipits (Red list species). The future of both species is inextricably linked to the fate of the islands natural grasslands. Other Red and Amber listed species of Conservation Concern in Ireland also nest on the island. In 2014 Whitethroats held territory for several weeks but did not remain to nest. For a species reported to undergoing a long term population decline in parts of Western Europe it is encouraging to note that cuckoos were present in summer for the fourth year in succession.

Throughout the year E.U. Annex I inter-tidal habitats were damaged by bait digging almost daily whilst breeding, migratory and wintering birds were harassed or disturbed mostly by dogs and a variety of sporting activities. Mammals on the island have fared just as badly. Dogs harassed seals regularly and they are also largely responsible for what appears to be the extirpation of the once abundant Irish hare for the second time in as many decades. There is also considerable concern for the future of a well-known and long established wader high tide roost within the nature reserve.

## Acknowledgements

This is a privately produced bird report and is not affiliated to any of the bird or nature organisations in Ireland. As such it is largely dependent on the support of individual birdwatchers. I thank all birdwatchers and members of the public who contributed their sightings and photographs during 2014. Finally, I wish to thank all those in Ireland and abroad who sent personal messages of support for the continuance of this annual publication.

Contribute sightings (login required): [www.bullislandbirds.com](http://www.bullislandbirds.com)  
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Cover photo: Ross's Gull *Rhodostethia rosea*

# 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*

Resident in small numbers

Count: Eleven, including some immature birds, were present in the south lagoon on 27th May (Ciaran Dunne). This is the highest number for many years.

A few were present throughout the year. In late summer two adults and eight cygnets were present (Edd Kealy) but this later decreased to four cygnets.

## **WHOOPER SWAN** *Cygnus cygnus*

Scarce visitor

Two on 2nd January (Niall T Keogh) and one on 9th April (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy). Six on 29th October (Tom Cooney). Seven adults and four immatures on 5th November (Tom Cooney).



*Whooper Swans (Tom Cooney): the bird in the centre is an unusually small Whooper Swan.*

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

Very scarce

A V-shaped skein of 123 migrated northwards across the point on 4th April (Tom Cooney).

The dearth of 'flyover' records of this species is surprising given that some of the Wexford wintering flocks probably migrate regularly along the east coast during spring and autumn passage.

**BRENT GOOSE** *Branta bernicla hrota*

Common winter visitor

Summer: Eight remained until 11th May (Edd Kealy) with two remaining until 29th.

Autumn arrivals: One on 8th September (Niall Griffin). Numbers remained low in September with only 16 on 20th. Main arrivals began in early October.



*Pale-bellied Brent Geese (Loki Csaba)*

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

Scarce winter visitor

One on 3rd May. One on 6th November and subsequent dates (Tom Cooney).



*Dark-bellied Brent Goose in May (left) (Tom Cooney)*

**SHELDUCK** *Tadorna tadorna*

Resident, common winter visitor

In January there were 295 on 2nd and 335 on 16th in the south lagoon at high tide (Niall T. Keogh). A total of 103 on 8th July (Paul McMahon).

Birds were present near Bull Wall Reed Marsh for several weeks in spring but constant harassment by dogs prevented the birds from establishing territories.

**WIGEON** *Anas penelope*

Common winter visitor

Autumn arrivals: Three on 13th August and subsequent dates were the first returning birds of autumn (Ciaran Dunne, Niall Griffin).

**GADWALL** *Anas hyemalis*

Very scarce autumn migrant and winter visitor

Three on 25th January and one on 22nd February (Edd Kealy) had been present since 2013. A male at Bull Wall Reed Marsh on 18th April (Tom Cooney).

**TEAL** *Anas crecca*

Common winter visitor

Late spring dates: One pair was present at the Bull Wall Reed Marsh and another pair near the point on 28th April (Tom Cooney).

Autumn arrivals: Three on 3rd July on southern mudflats (Niall Griffin) with small numbers reported up to mid-August.

**PINTAIL** *Anas acuta*

Common but decreasing winter visitor

Autumn arrivals: Four on 19th September (Tom Cooney). Twenty-one on 22nd September (Ger Franck).

**SHOVELER** *Anas clypeata*

Common but decreasing winter visitor, scarce at other times

Last wintering date: Two on 17th March were the last of the wintering birds.

Spring passage: Four (two pairs) on 18th April were migrants (Tom Cooney).

Autumn: Four on 29th August were the first to be reported in autumn.



*Migrant Shoveler at Bull Wall Reed Marsh (Tom Cooney)*

**TUFTED DUCK** *Aythya fuligula*

Very scarce resident

Up to ten birds were present throughout the year.

**EIDER** *Somateria spectabilis*

Rare visitor

A male and female on 15th April in Sutton Creek (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy).

After an absence of twenty-three years eiders have now occurred two years in a row. The recent sightings are likely to be connected to the expansion of the breeding population on both sides of the north Irish Sea in the last decade. In Strangford Lough alone the breeding population has surged from 20 pairs in 2003 to 350 pairs in 2013. If the Irish Sea breeding population continues to increase and spread southwards then eiders are likely to become annual winter visitors to the island in the near future.



*Male and female Eiders in Sutton Creek (Edd Kealy)*

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

Scarce winter visitor

Four of the six birds that were present since 2013 remained until 2nd January thereafter two males and a female were in Sutton Creek until 18th April (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy, Niall Griffin, Dermot O'Mahony, John Fox, Ciaran Dunne).



*Winter plumaged Long-tailed Ducks in Sutton Creek (John Fox)*

**COMMON SCOTER** *Melanitta nigra*

Regular winter visitor in small numbers

Ten on the north side of the Bull Wall on 7th February (Tom Cooney, Alan Dalton). Four off the northern end of the beach on 24th November (Tom Cooney).

Numbers in winter have decreased significantly in recent decades.

**GOLDENEYE** *Bucephala clangula*

Scarce winter visitor

Only four records of six birds from 2nd January to 22nd February (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy, Niall T Keogh).

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

Regular visitor

In the general vicinity of the Bull Wall/Wooden Bridge peaks of 20 on 30th January (Ciaran Dunne), 46 on 12th February (Tom Cooney, Alan Dalton) and 19 on 16th March (Ciaran Dunne). In Sutton Creek/North Lagoon peaks of 15 on 14th January and 14 on 28th March (Tom Cooney). In autumn peaks of 34 in Sutton Creek on 15th October (Ciaran Dunne) and 22 at the same location on 5th November (Tom Cooney). Fourthly-four in the north lagoon on 25th November (Ger Franck) with similar numbers until the end of 2014.



Male Red-breasted Mergansers at the Wooden Bridge (James Hayes).

**RED-THROATED DIVER** *Gavia stellata*

Uncommon winter visitor

Four records of five birds from 13th February to 17th April (Tom Doyle, Edd Kealy, Ciaran Dunne, Tom Cooney). One in Sutton Creek from 18th to 28th November (Ciaran Dunne, Tom Cooney, Frank Turpin, Ger Franck, Jim Duffy) with two on 6th December (Tom Coyle, John Fox).

**GREAT NORTHERN DIVER** *Gavia immer*

Scarce winter visitor.

Reported from 8th January to 7th April. Most records were of single birds but up to four were present on several dates with a peak of seven on 14th February (many observers). November: one on 21st, 24th and 28th. December: one on 6th.

**MANX SHEARWATER** *Puffinus puffinus*

Occasional spring to autumn

Earliest date: Five inshore on 16th April during an easterly gale (Tom Cooney).

**GANNET** *Morus bassanus*

Summer visitor

First report was of six off the Bull Wall (inner Dublin Harbour area) on 17th March (Ciaran Dunne) with a peak of only on eight on 17th April (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy). A few were present in the vicinity of the Bull Wall throughout the summer.

**CORMORANT** *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Regular visitor all year

Peaks of 54 on 12th February and 27 on 13th April at Bull Wall. Twelve roosting on southern mudflats on 23rd October.

**SHAG** *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*

Scarce visitor all year

One at the Wooden Bridge on 30th January, two in Sutton Creek on 22nd March and 12th April (Ciaran Dunne). One in Sutton Creek on 20th October and two on 26th November (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy, Ger Franck, Jim Duffy).

**LITTLE EGRET** *Egretta garzetta*

Non-breeding resident

Up to 15-25 present in the early part of the year rising in August to 29 on 21st and 67 on 29th. Between 30 and 50 were present regularly from September onwards.

**GREY HERON** *Ardea cinerea*

Present all year

Up to 15 birds present daily throughout the year. Numbers increased in summer and early autumn with 20 to 30 daily in both lagoons.

**LITTLE GREBE** *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Scarce winter visitor

Breeding was confirmed.

Three or four regularly at the Wooden Bridge until 17th March (many observers) and similar numbers in autumn. One on several occasions in Bull Wall Reed Marsh in April and May.



*Little Grebe (Sandra Murphy)*

**GREAT CRESTED GREBE** *Podiceps cristatus*

Winter visitor, occasional at other times

Up to 15 until early March with peak of 70 on 7th February (Tom Cooney, Alan Dalton). Up to 60 reported from 18th September (Ger Franck, Ciaran Dunne, Jim Duffy, Frank Turpin, Tom Cooney) with peaks of 81 off the beach on 1st December (Tom Cooney) and 150 on 6th (Tom Doyle, John Fox).



*Great Crested Grebe (John Fields)*

**SPARROWHAWK** *Accipiter nisus*

Regular visitor

Single birds reported in every month. Two on 15th September.

**COMMON BUZZARD** *Buteo buteo*

Formerly very rare, now scarce but regular visitor

Singles on 15th August (Niall Griffin), 29th August (Ger Franck), 7th September (John Fields), 4th October (Joe Delaney) and 1st November (Gerry Power). Two over southern end of the island on 16th September (Mark Stewart, Niall Griffin).

**WATER RAIL** *Rallus aquaticus*

Very rare winter visitor

In December one at Bull Wall Reed Marsh on 5th and another near the Alder Marsh on the 31st (Tom Cooney).

**COOT** *Fulica atra*

Rare resident

One on the sea on the Howth side of the Bull Wall on 29th December was an unusual location (Noel Keogh).

**CRANE** *Grus grus*

Vagrant

Two flew over the island on 20th December (Ger Franck, Vincent Hall, Brian Carruthers, Tom Carroll, Rachel Hynes *et al*).

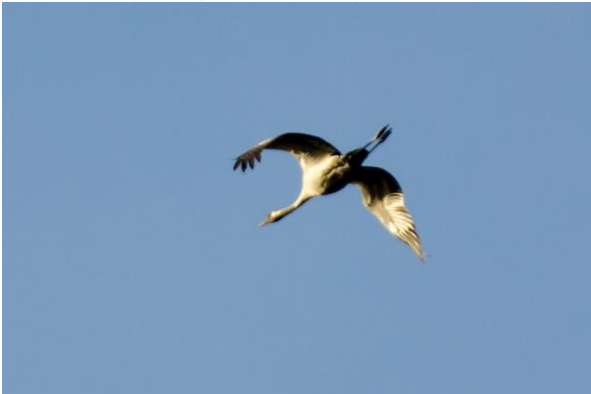
This is the first record for the island. Both birds had been seen a short time earlier in the day leaving Donabate.



*Common Crane (Tom Carroll)*



*Common Crane (Rachel Hynes)*



*Common Crane (Brian Carruthers)*



*Common Crane (Rachel Hynes)*

**OYSTERCATCHER** *Haematopus ostralegus*

Common winter visitor and passage migrant

Autumn: 294 on 21st July (Paul McMahan).

Summer: About 50 birds were present throughout the summer.

The leucistic bird reported for many years was present on 2nd August (Paul McMahan).

This bird is only ever reported during autumn passage.

**GOLDEN PLOVER** *Pluvialis apricaria*

Common passage migrant and winter visitor

Late date: A breeding plumage adult was in 'song' on 27th May over the north saltmarsh (Tom Cooney).

Autumn arrivals: One on 21st June was the first of the autumn arrivals (Aidan G. Kelly). Three to five on several dates from July to mid-August.

Count(s): 600 on 16th and 30th October and 17th December (Ger Franck, Jim Duffy *et al*). Peak of 2,500 on 1st November (Gerry Power).

**GREY PLOVER** *Pluvialis squatarola*

Common winter visitor and passage migrant

Late date: One in breeding plumage on the north mudflats on 26th May.

Summer: Four on 16th June (Tom Cooney) rising to 15 by 21st (Aidan G. Kelly).

Autumn: One on 3rd August was the first returning bird of autumn (Geoff Morgan). Over the following week numbers increased very slowly to a peak of 12 on 16th August (Niall Griffin *et al*).

**LAPWING** *Pluvialis pluvialis*

Common in autumn, uncommon in winter

Late date: Two on the north mudflats on 26th and 27th May.  
Autumn arrivals: Two daily from 26th May onwards. In June there were nine 10th, 14 on 14th and 19 on 21st. This increased to 28 by 11th July and 19 on 13th August (Ciaran Dunne).

**RINGED PLOVER** *Charadrius hiaticula*

Former breeder, common passage migrant and winter visitor

Counts of over 200 birds were made on several dates.

Nesting did not take place in 2014 although several birds were present into late May.

**WHIMBREL** *Numenius phaeopus*

Regular passage migrant.

Earliest spring date: One on 14th March (Tom Cooney).  
Spring passage: Peaks of 172 on 28th April and 164 on 9<sup>th</sup> May (Tom Cooney).  
Summer records: One from late May with two on 16th June and three on 21st.  
Autumn passage: Six on 12th July were the first of the returning birds (Ger Franck). Singles on several dates in July and August with peaks of six on 15th and 12 on 29th August (Hugh Delaney, Ciaran Dunne, Geoff Morgan, Paul McMahon, Niall Griffin, Ger Franck, Tom Cooney).

**CURLEW** *Numenius arquata*

Common passage migrant and winter visitor

Latest spring record: Two on 14th May (Tom Cooney)  
Autumn arrivals: The first of the returning birds was a single bird on 8th June (Sandra Murphy) quickly increasing to six on 14th, 87 on 15th, 106 on 30th and 220 on 4th July (Paul McMahon, Niall Griffin). 363 on 10th July (Paul McMahon).

**BLACK-TAILED GODWIT** *Limosa limosa*

Common passage migrant and winter visitor

Autumn arrivals: Two breeding plumaged birds on 15th June (Edd Kealy) with one on 27th (Frank Turpin). Number increased very slowly in June and July with a peak of 130 on 29th July (Ciaran Dunne).

**BAR-TAILED GODWIT** *Limosa lapponica*

Common winter visitor and passage migrant

Counts: 4,000 on 6th February off the Bull Wall (Tom Doyle).  
Late spring record: 120 on 8th May (Tom Cooney).  
Autumn arrivals: 57 on 30th June increasing to 497 on 21st July (Paul McMahon).

**TURNSTONE** *Arenaria interpres*

Common winter visitor and passage migrant

South Lagoon pier roost: October: 139 on 21st. November: 165 on 22nd. 145 on 24th.  
December: 160 on 4th, 149 on 5th, 157 on 17th, 124 on 25th.

The pier regularly holds roosting concentrations of national importance (threshold 120) that are equivalent to c. 25-40% of the wintering population in Dublin Bay. Over 200 turnstones have been counted at this roost site in previous years.

**KNOT** *Calidris canutus*

Common winter visitor and passage migrant

Winter counts: One thousand on the seaward side of the Bull Wall on 6th February (Tom Doyle). A minimum of five hundred were present on the south saltmarsh on 1st November (Gerry Power). 2,000 on southern mudflats on 25th November (Frank Turpin) and c.1,800 on 9th December at the Wooden Bridge (Tom Cooney).

Autumn arrivals: One on 27th July (Ger Franck), five on 1st August (Niall Griffin, Ger Franck) and singles on 7th and 8th August (Geoff Morgan).

**RUFF** *Philomachus pugnax*

Scarce autumn passage migrant, rare in spring

Spring: A male in breeding plumage on 3rd, 26th and 28th May at the Bull Wall Reed Marsh and on the north mudflats (Tom Cooney).

Autumn: August: one on 20th and 27th, two on 29th and one on 30th (Tom Cooney, Ger Franck). September: The two birds from August were still present until at least the 12th with one remaining until at least the 22nd (Ger Franck).

This spring bird was also reported from Sandymount.

**CURLEW SANDPIPER** *Calidris ferruginea*

Regular passage migrant in autumn, rare in winter and spring

Spring: One on 21st and a different bird in summer plumage on 25th April (Edd Kealy).

Autumn: August: five juveniles on 29th (Ger Franck, Tom Cooney). One on 29th (Niall Griffin) and two on 31st (Ger Franck). September: Up to three from 2nd to the 16th (Hugh Delaney, Tom Cooney, Ger Franck, Gerry Power) rising to 15 on 17th and 18th (Edd Kealy, Dan Kealy, Mark Stanley, Ger Franck) peaking with 18 on 19th (Tom Cooney), 14 on 20th (James Hayes), four on 23rd (Ger Franck, Jim Duffy) but only two on 25th (Edd Kealy). October: Six on 4th October (Joe Delaney). Singles on 5th, 8th and 15th (Aidan G. Kelly, Tom Cooney). Three at the Wooden Bridge on 17th and two on 20th at the causeway (Frank Turpin, Michael Nolan). One north of the causeway on 23rd and two on 27th (Tom Cooney, Ger Franck).

The September peaks are the highest for over a decade.



Curlew Sandpiper (Ger Franck)



Curlew Sandpipers (James Hayes)

**SANDERLING** *Calidris alba*

Common passage migrant and winter visitor

Summer record: One on 16th June (David MacPherson).

Up to 295 regularly on the southern end of the beach in the early part of the year (Ciaran Dunne, Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy, Ger Franck, John Fox, Dorothy Benson, Tom Doyle). At least 310 on many dates from August onwards (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy, Ger Franck, John Fox, John Fields, David MacPherson, Jim Duffy).



Sanderlings (Loki Csaba)

**DUNLIN** *Calidris alpina*

Very common passage migrant and winter visitor

Autumn arrivals: A minimum of five on 20th June (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy) with hundreds from mid-month onwards.

Counts: 5,500 on beach side of Bull Wall on 6th February (Tom Doyle).  
1,640 on 8th May (Tom Cooney). 60 on 11th May (Edd Kealy).

**PURPLE SANDPIPER** *Calidris maritima*

Scarce and irregular winter visitor

Bull Wall: Two on 12th February during an easterly gale (Tom Cooney, Alan Dalton). In November there were three on 6th (Tom Cooney), one on the 9th (Edd Kealy) and 14th (Ger Franck).



*Purple Sandpipers at Bull Wall (Alan Dalton)*

**LITTLE STINT** *Calidris minuta*

Regular but scarce autumn passage migrant, rare in spring

Autumn passage: September: one near the Wooden Bridge on 4th (Ger Franck), the beach on 14th (Edd Kealy), southern mudflats on 17th (Tom Cooney) and at the causeway on 25th (Edd Kealy).

It seems very likely that all reports on North Bull Island refer to the same bird.

**COMMON SANDPIPER** *Actitis hypoleucos*

Scarce and irregular migrant

Spring passage: Two on 21st April (Edd Kealy).

Autumn passage: Reported on nine dates between 19th July and 10th August. Singles on 19th, 29th July, 1st and 8th August, three on 21st July increasing to a peak of ten to fifteen on 3rd August (Niall Griffin, Ger Franck, Ciaran Dunne, Paul McMahon, Geoff Morgan, Edd Kealy, Dan Kealy). One, possibly two, on 14th September near the causeway (Gerry Power, Edd Kealy).



Common Sandpiper (Edd Kealy)

**GREEN SANDPIPER** *Tringa ochropus*

Very scarce passage migrant

Winter record: One on 2nd January (Tom Doyle).

Autumn passage: August: one on 7th (Geoff Morgan) and 10th (Edd Kealy, Dan Kealy).

**SPOTTED REDSHANK** *Tringa erythropus*

Very scarce passage migrant and winter visitor

Singles on 3rd August (Liam Kane) and 5th September (Frank Turpin).

**GREENSHANK** *Tringa nebularia*

Uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor

Spring passage: April: one on 29th April was the last reported.

Autumn arrivals: July: one on 4th July (Paul McMahan) increased to ten on 9th (Edd Kealy), 17 on 11th (Tom Cooney).

August: peaks of 32 on 8th, 39 on 19th and 57 on 29th (Geoff Morgan, Niall Griffin, Edd Kealy, Ger Franck, Tom Cooney).

**REDSHANK** *Tringa totanus*

Very common passage migrant and winter visitor

Count: 500 on 6th February at the Bull Wall (Tom Doyle).

Spring: 60 on 28th April and four on 8th May (Tom Cooney).

Summer: Two on 16th June (Tom Cooney) were the first returning birds.

Autumn passage: July: 257 on 8th, 389 on 10th and 415 on 21st (Paul McMahan).

South Lagoon pier roost: 483 on 11th April (Tom Cooney)



**JACK SNIPE** *Lymnecryptes minimus*

Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor

One or two reported on ten occasions up to 24th April (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy Ciaran Smith, Liam Kane). Up to three were present at Bull Wall Reed Marsh and on the north saltmarsh from 15th October onwards (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy, Ger Franck, Jim Duffy). Several throughout December with a peak of six on 31st ( Tom Cooney, Hugh Delaney).

**WOODCOCK** *Scolopax rusticola*

Very scarce

One on 29th October flushed by a dog in the Marram dunes (Tom Cooney).

This elusive species has been reported in four of the last five years.

**COMMON SNIPE** *Gallinago gallinago*

Regular passage migrant and winter visitor

Small numbers reported in most months except mid-summer.

Spring record: One heard “drumming” on 28th May (Tom Cooney).

Autumn passage: One on 20th August was the first returning bird of autumn.

Count(s): Minimum of nine present on the island until 8th May. Eight at Bull Wall Reed Marsh on 3rd September. A total of 23 at Bull Wall Reed Marsh and the northern saltmarsh on 10th October (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy). At least 20 birds until the end of the year.

**ARCTIC SKUA** *Stercorarius parasiticus*

Rare

A dark phased juvenile on 6th November over the north lagoon and saltmarsh (Tom Cooney).



Arctic Skua (Tom Cooney)

**BLACK GUILLEMOT** *Cepphus grille*

Small number throughout the year.

Up to four regularly at the Wooden Bridge and in Sutton Creek (many observers) with a peak of fifteen on 20th May (Ciaran Dunne).



*Black Guillemot in winter plumage at the Wooden Bridge (James Hayes)*

**RAZORBILL** *Alca torda*

Small number throughout the year

Two on 16th January and singles on 17th and 18th April (Tom Cooney, Ciaran Dunne).

**GUILLEMOT** *Uria aalge*

Small number throughout the year

Seven on 16th January, one on 30th March, two on 1st April and eight on 18th April (Tom Cooney, Frank Turpin, Ciaran Dunne).

**LITTLE TERN** *Sternula albifrons*

Former breeder, now very scarce summer migrant

Three on 28th April at the point (Tom Cooney).

A protection scheme would ensure the return of this iconic nesting species.

**SANDWICH TERN** *Sterna sandvicensis*

Common passage migrant, occasional in summer

Earliest date: Two on 28th March.

Latest date: Three off the Bull Wall on 15th October.

In spring birds continued to arrive in small numbers until a peak of 76 on 18th April (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy, Ger Franck, John Fox, Ciaran Dunne).

**COMMON TERN** *Sterna hirundo*

Common in summer

Earliest date: Two on 18th April (Tom Cooney).

The main arrival in spring was from 28th April with up to 100 birds regularly from mid-May onwards. Birds were present in the area until late August.

**ARCTIC TERN** *Sterna paradisaea*

Uncommon summer visitor

Earliest date: Two on 9th May (Tom Cooney) and one on 13th May (Ciaran Dunne).

A few birds were present occasionally from late May until mid-August.

**SABINE'S GULL** *Xema sabini*

Very rare

Juvenile from 15th September on the southern mudflats near the Bull Wall (Tom Cooney) remained in the area until the 19th (many observers).

An adult occurred in September 2013 in similar anticyclonic weather conditions.



*Juvenile Sabine's Gull (Tom Cooney)*

**KITTIWAKE** *Rissa tridactyla*

Formerly very scarce visitor, now seasonally common

Peak of 250 on 12th February (Tom Cooney, Alan Dalton, Edd Kealy, Ger Franck).

The pattern of large numbers in the early part of the year continues.



**BLACK-HEADED GULL** *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

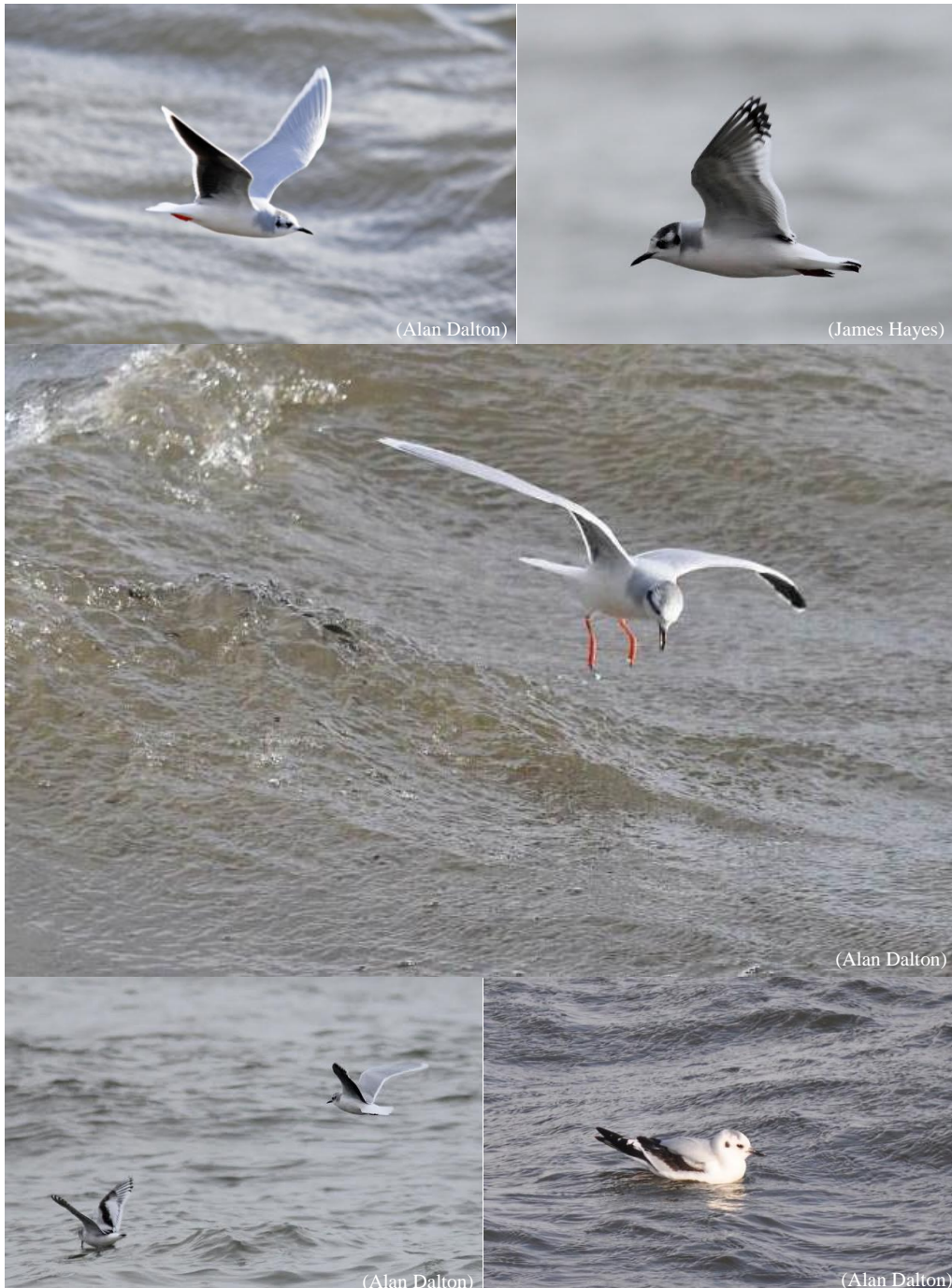
Common winter visitor

A minimum of 1,000 on 6th February on the beach (Tom Doyle).

**LITTLE GULL** *Hydrocoloeus minutus*

Occasional visitor, mainly in winter

January: adult and first year on 1st (James Hayes), seven adults and two first years on 8th (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy, Niall T Keogh). February: twenty-one adults and five first years on 12th from Sutton Creek to the Bull Wall (Tom Cooney, Alan Dalton), 35 on the beach near Bull Wall and one in the North Lagoon on 13th (Tom Doyle, Edd Kealy, Niall Griffin), 47 on 14th in all areas around the island (Tom Cooney), up to three remaining until 25th (Kevin Dooney, Tony Long). November: adult in Sutton Creek on 6th (Tom Cooney).



**ROSS'S GULL** *Rhodostethia rosea*

Vagrant

An adult in winter plumage was present off the Bull Wall from 15th January (Niall T Keogh) to at least 25th February (many observers).

This is the first record of this High Arctic species on the island. This bird also frequented the inner port area where it was last reported on 27th February. In the early part of 2014 adult Ross's Gulls were also found in Co. Galway (4th January) and Co. Cork (9th February) and Co. Wexford (20th February).



*Ross's Gull at the Bull Wall*

**MEDITERRANEAN GULL** *Larus melanocephalus*

Regular in small numbers

Up to three adults off the Bull Wall from 2nd to 16th January with one on a number of dates until 12th February (Niall T Keogh, Ger Franck, Ciaran Dunne, Tom Cooney, Alan Dalton, Hugh Delaney, Peter J Doyle, Edd Kealy, Ciaran Dunne). First year on 13th May (Ciaran Dunne).

First summer on 21st June (Aidan G. Kelly) and two on 26th June on the south saltmarsh (Ger Franck). Three adults on 2nd July and four adults on 11th in the same location (Tom Cooney). Two on 2nd July (Paul McMahan) and three adults on 2nd August (Geoff Morgan). Single birds were present on many dates including a juvenile on 3rd August and a

second summer on 7th August (Geoff Morgan). One at the causeway on 12th September (Edd Kealy) and another on the southern saltmarsh on 22nd (Ger Franck, Jim Duffy).

**RING-BILLED GULL** *Larus delawarensis*

Very scarce, mostly recorded in spring.

First-winter on 28th January (Paul Kelly). Adult on 17th March (Aidan G Kelly).

**HERRING GULL** *Larus argentatus*

Common non-breeding resident

**Scandinavian Herring Gull** *L. a. argentatus*

Very scarce, probably under recorded

An adult showing the characteristics of this race was present on 30th January (Edd Kealy).

**ICELAND GULL** *Larus glaucoides*

Very scarce visitor, mainly in spring

First-summer near the point on 25th May (Paul McMahon).

This is almost certainly the bird that was reported from other locations in May 2014.

**STOCK DOVE** *Columba oenas*

Scarce but regular visitor

One at the River Santry outflow on 6th and 13th July (Ger Franck). One at the same location on 20th and 22nd August (Ger Franck, Edd Kealy).

This species is only ever reported from the mainland side of the lagoons at the outflows of the Santry and Naniken rivers.



Stock Dove (Ger Franck)

**COLLARED DOVE** *Streptopelia decaocto*

Very scarce visitors

Two on 18th April near the Royal Dublin golf clubhouse and two near the Wooden Bridge on 16th June. One near the Royal Dublin golf course on 22nd September (Tom Cooney).

**CUCKOO** *Cuculus canorus*

Very scarce summer visitor

One in the Alder Marsh from 28th May to late June (Tom Cooney, Mark Stewart, Sean Gilmartin, Paul McMahon). In addition to the long staying bird, a second bird was observed arriving over Sutton Creek from the Howth direction on 9th June (Tom Cooney).



*Cuckoo (Tom Cooney)*

**LONG-EARED OWL** *Asio otus*

Very scarce visitor

One near the causeway on 10th August (Edd Kealy, Dan Kealy).

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

Scarce and irregular winter visitor

One on 2nd January (Tom Cooney). One, presumed to be a different bird, was present from 7th April to at least 22nd May (Tom Cooney, Ger Franck). One on 21st October (Michael Nolan *et al*) was probably one of the birds present in November. One on 9th and 14th November (Edd Kealy, Ger Franck) with up to three from 24th onwards (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy). Tide line corpse found on the tide line on 25th November (Ger Franck).



*Short-eared Owl (Tom Cooney)*



*Short-eared Owl (Ger Franck)*

**SWIFT** *Apus apus*

Frequent in spring and autumn, scarce in summer

Earliest date: One on 29th April (Tom Cooney).

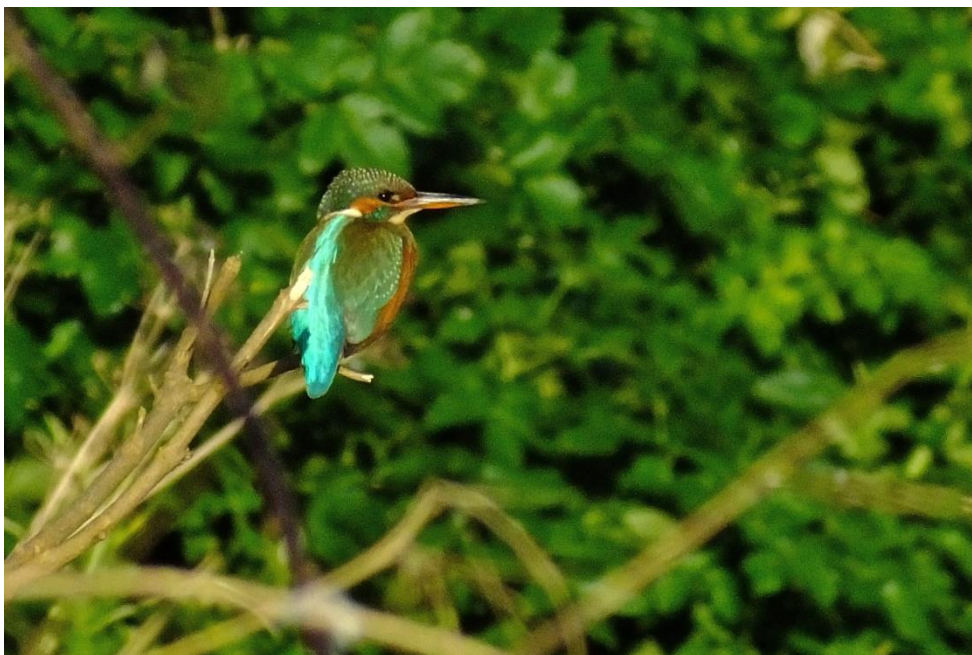
Latest dates: Eight on 30th August (Ger Franck, Edd Kealy). One on 3rd September (Tom Cooney).

Highest counts: Twenty-five on 30th June and 30 on 4th July (Paul McMahon).

**KINGFISHER** *Alcedo atthis*

Scarce but regular winter visitor

One on 11th April at Bull Wall Reed Marsh (Tom Cooney). In September one at Bull Wall Reed Marsh on 4th (Tom Cooney, Ger Franck) and River Santry outflow on 14th and 22nd (Gerry Power, Tom Carroll). One, possibly the same bird on the north saltmarsh on 17th October (Tom Cooney) and at the River Santry outflow in 25th October, 18th November and throughout December (Sandra Murphy, Sean Cullen, Ger Franck, Jim Duffy).



*Kingfisher at River Santry outflow (Ger Franck)*

**KESTREL** *Falco tinnunculus*

Resident

One or two reported in every month from many areas on the island.



*Kestrel (John Fields)*



*Kestrel (Prionsias Mac an Bheatha)*

**MERLIN** *Falco columbarius*

Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor

Singles from 16th January to 17th April (Hugh Delaney, Peter Doyle, Fintan Damer, Michael Nolan, Edd Kealy, John Fox, Mark Hanley). One on 28th May was a very late date (Mark Stewart). Female/immature from 13th October at various locations to the end of December (Tom Cooney, Frank Turpin, Ger Franck, Jim Duffy). Male on 22nd December (Tom Cooney).

On 26th November one aggressively mobbed a short-eared owl over the north saltmarsh (Edd Kealy, Tom Cooney).

**PEREGRINE** *Falco peregrinus*

Regular visitor

One or two present almost daily outside the summer months.

**CARRION CROW** *Corvus corone*

Scarce resident

One in the south lagoon on 15th August (Hugh Delaney).

**HOODED CROW** *Corvus corone cornix*

Resident

Fourthly-nine in a single flock near the point on 28th April (Tom Cooney).

**Carrion/Hooded Crow** *C. c. corone/cornix*

Very scarce

One on several dates at the River Santry outflow from 16th January to 27th March (Hugh Delaney, Edd Kealy, Niall Griffin) was also present in autumn and winter.

**RAVEN** *Corvus corax*

Scarce but regular visitor

Two on 14th March (Mark Hanley) with single birds on 28th March, 15th and 16th April (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy, Ger Franck). One on 30th August (Ger Franck, Edd Kealy). Two flew over the causeway on 12th September (Edd Kealy) and one in the direction of the city on 19th (Tom Cooney). Two on 8th December (Tom Cooney).

**GOLDCREST** *Regulus regulus*

Scarce passage migrant

Spring passage:

Single birds on 25th March (John Fox) and 1st April (Edd Kealy).

Autumn/Winter:

September: four on 3rd and 4th on the southern end of the island. Two in the Alder Marsh on 12th and two in scrub in the southern dunes on 15th and one of 16th (Tom Cooney). One at Bull Wall Reed Marsh on 17th (Edd Kealy, Dan Kealy) and two in scrub near the southern saltmarsh on 18th and 19th (Tom Cooney). Two in the Bull Wall Reed Marsh on 23rd (Ger Franck, Jim Duffy). October: One in the Alder Marsh on 3rd (Edd Kealy). Singles at the Alder Marsh and Bull Wall Reed Marsh on 16th and 17th (Tom Cooney, Paul McMahan). Three in scrub at the Bull Wall on 30th (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy). November: one in the Alder Marsh on 26th (Edd Kealy, Tom Cooney). December: two in the Alder Marsh on 8th (Tom Cooney).

**BLUE TIT** *Cyanistes caeruleus*

Rare

A family of six birds were in hedge/scrub at the Santry River outflow on 4th June and five in on 25th June (Ger Franck). Two at the same location on 25th October (Ger Franck).

These records are included in this report as the hedge/scrub at the Santry River outflow lies within the Nature Reserve and Special Protection Area for Birds (SPA).

**GREAT TIT** *Parus major*

Rare

One in the scrub beside River Santry outflow on 25th June (Ger Franck).

This record is included for the reasons given for the blue tit records above.

**COAL TIT** *Periparus ater*

Rare

One in scrub at the causeway / Royal Dublin golf course on 3rd November (Tom Cooney).

**SKYLARK** *Alauda arvensis*

Common resident and passage migrant

Autumn passage: Twenty flew southwards across island on 16th October and a minimum of 50 on 17th (Tom Cooney). Eight flew south over the Bull Wall on 30th October (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy).

**SAND MARTIN** *Riparia riparia*

Regular but uncommon passage migrant, very scarce in summer

Earliest date: One on 19th March.

Latest date: Four on 2nd September.

The main arrival in spring began on 4th April with peaks of 14 on 29th April and a minimum of 30 on 10th May. Fewer birds during autumn passage.

**BARN SWALLOW** *Hirundo rustica*

Summer visitor and passage migrant

Earliest date: Two on 1st April (Edd Kealy).

Latest date: Three on 17th October (Ciaran Dunne).

Spring passage: Minimum of 30 on 17th April with a peak of at least 400 on 10th May (Edd Kealy, Tom Cooney).

Autumn passage: Light passage. Up to 40 passing south over the south mudflats in 15 minutes on 15th September (Tom Cooney). Thirty-five flew south on 10th October (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy, Jim Duffy).

In early September daily gatherings of 50+ birds were common at the Bull Wall.

**HOUSE MARTIN** *Delichon urbicum*

Summer visitor and passage migrant

Earliest date: Eight on 9th April (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy).

Latest date: One on 21st October (Tom Cooney).

Locally bred birds were present into mid-September with c.50-100 daily.

**CHIFFCHAFF** *Phylloscopus collybita*

Scarce but regular passage migrant

Spring passage: Only two birds on 9th and 11th April (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy).

Autumn passage: August: two on 20th August (Ger Franck) near Bull Wall Reed

Marsh. September: one in the Alder Marsh on 2nd, three on 3rd in St. Anne's golf course, five in scrub beside the Royal Dublin golf course on 15th and four on 16th (Tom Cooney). Five at Bull Wall Reed Marsh on 18th and 19th (Ger Franck (Tom Cooney)). One in the Alder Marsh on 22nd (Tom Cooney) and two at Bull Wall Reed Marsh on 23rd and 24th (Ger Franck, Jim Duffy). October: one in the Alder Marsh on 6th, two on 10th and one on 13th (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy)

**WILLOW WARBLER** *Phylloscopus trochilus*

Uncommon but regular passage migrant

Spring passage: Recorded from 4th April to 5th May with a peak of 14 on 11th April (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy, Niall Griffin, Ger Franck).

Autumn passage: July: singles on 21st in the Alder Marsh (Paul McMahon) and on 30th at Bull Wall Reed Marsh (Ger Franck). August: one on 27th in the Alder Marsh (Paul McMahon) and three on 30th August (Ger Franck, Edd Kealy). September: two in St. Anne's golf course on 2nd with two in Bull Wall Reed Marsh and two in the Alder Marsh on 3rd. Singles in the southern dunes on 15th, 16th and 18th and one in the Alder Marsh on 22nd (Tom Cooney). October: one at Bull Wall Reed Marsh on 13th (Tom Cooney). November: one on 9th was extremely late (Edd Kealy).



Willow Warbler (Tom Cooney)

**BLACKCAP** *Sylvia atricapilla*

Scarce migrant and winter visitor

Spring passage: April: total of five birds reported from 7th to 15th.

Autumn passage: September: female on 2nd in St. Anne's golf course. A minimum of ten on 3rd at various locations on the southern end of the island. Female in the Alder Marsh on 12th. Male near Royal Dublin golf clubhouse on 15th. Three females and a male at the Bull Wall Reed Marsh on 16th. Male in the Alder Marsh on 17th, and male and female on 22nd at Bull Wall Reed Marsh (Tom Cooney).

October: three males on 10th (Edd Kealy, Tom Cooney).

**WHITETHROAT** *Sylvia communis*

Scarce passage migrant

Spring passage: Eight birds reported from 16th April to 30th May (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy).

Autumn passage: Two at Royal Dublin clubhouse and singles in St Anne's golf course and the Alder Marsh on 3rd September (Tom Cooney).

Birds in suitable breeding habitat in late May and June did not nest.

**GRASSHOPPER WARBLER** *Locustella naevia*

Scarce but regular spring passage migrant, occasional in autumn

Spring passage: Six reported from 11th to 19th April with a minimum of four on 17th (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy).

Autumn passage: In September one was flushed in the northern dunes on 3rd and another in the Alder Marsh on 22nd (Tom Cooney).

The pattern of spring records continues.



Grasshopper Warbler (Tom Cooney)

**SEDGE WARBLER** *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

Scarce but regular passage migrant

Spring passage: Ten reported from 15th April to 5th May with a peak of three on 3rd May (Ger Franck, Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy, Niall Griffin).

Autumn passage: July: one on 25th (John Fox). August: one on 9th, three on 23rd (Ger Franck), two on 29th (Tom Cooney), three on 30th August (Ger Franck, Edd Kealy). September: seven near the Royal Dublin clubhouse on 3rd (Tom Cooney) and one in same area on 12th (Ger Franck) with two on 15th and 16th (Tom Cooney). October: one on 11th at Bull Wall Reed Marsh (Niall Griffin).

**REED WARBLER** *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

Rare migrant

Spring passage: Two in song on 2nd May in sea buckthorn scrub near the Bull Wall Reed Marsh (Edd Kealy) with one remaining until the 3rd, 5th and 6th (Tom Cooney, Niall Griffin, Tom Doyle). One singing in the same scrub on 15th (Edd Kealy, Frank Turpin, Tom Cooney) and 21st May (Paul McMahan).

This is the third year in succession that reed warblers have occurred in spring.

**WREN** *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Resident

Although this species is recovering from the low levels after the recent severe winters nesting is still confined to the southern end of the island. In the latter part of the year birds were found in all habitats throughout the island including on beach debris.

**SONG THRUSH** *Turdus philomelos*

Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor

January: one on 28th January was the only winter record. September: one on 15th and three on 16th near the Bull Wall. October: there were two on 10th in the Alder Marsh and three near the Bull Wall on 13th. November: two on 5th, four on 17th, three on 25th. December: a minimum of four throughout the month with birds in song near the causeway on the 31st.

**REDWING** *Turdus iliacus*

Scarce passage migrant, occasional in winter

October: two on 13th at Bull Wall Reed Marsh, two on 14th at the Alder Marsh and one on northern end on 29th. November: One on 7th. Six on 9th. December: one from 1st to 4th near the Alder Marsh.

**MISTLE THRUSH** *Turdus viscivorus*

Very scarce visitor

One on the boundary between the St. Anne's Golf Course and the Alder Marsh from 26th November to at least 17th December (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy).

**SPOTTED FLYCATCHER** *Muscicapa striata*

Very scarce passage migrant

Spring passage: One in the Alder Marsh on 28th May (Tom Cooney).

Autumn passage: Singles at the Alder Marsh on 27th August (Paul McMahon) and the Bull Wall Reed Marsh on 18th September (Tom Cooney).



Spotted Flycatcher (Paul McMahon)



Spotted Flycatcher (Tom Cooney)

**ROBIN** *Erithacus rubecula*

Scarce visitor

Winter: One on 14th January at Royal Dublin golf clubhouse (Ger Franck).

Autumn: A minimum of 20 on the southern end of the island on 4th September (Tom Cooney). From mid-October onwards there were an estimated 30 to 40 robins on the island.

The numbers present in the latter part of the year are exceptional for this species.

**BLACK REDSTART** *Phoenicurus ochruros*

Rare

Adult male on 31st October at the Bull Wall (Chris Henry).

The most recent record was in November 2010.



*Black Redstart (Chris Henry)*

**WHINCHAT** *Saxicola rubetra*

Very scarce passage migrant

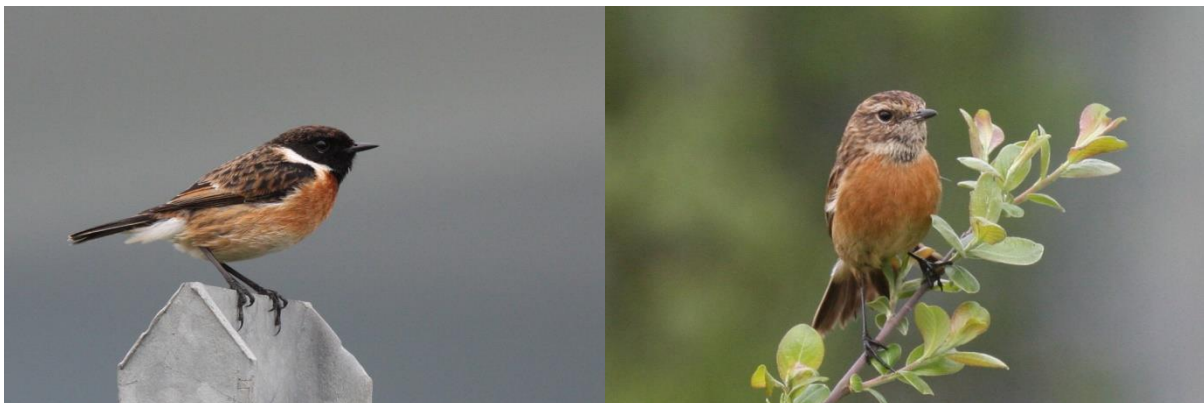
Spring passage: One on 2nd and 3rd May (Edd Kealy, Niall Griffin).

**STONECHAT** *Saxicola torquata*

Very scarce resident

Breeding was confirmed but numbers remain extremely low. Two at Bull Wall Reed Marsh on 11th (Ger Franck) and six in the Alder Marsh on 12th September (Tom Cooney). Four at the Royal Dublin golf course on 15th September (Tom Cooney). Total of 13 on 10th October in southern dunes and alder marsh (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy).

Between ten and fifteen birds were present in autumn and early winter.



*Stonechats (male – left; female – right)*

**WHEATEAR** *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Common passage migrant

Earliest date: One on 25th March near the Bull Wall (Noel Keogh).  
Latest date: One on 29th October (Tom Cooney).  
Spring passage: Recorded from 25th March to 22nd May. Peaks of 30 on 17th April (Michael Nolan) and 41 on 6th May (Tom Cooney) and 22 on 11th May (Edd Kealy).  
Autumn passage: Light passage reported from 9th August to 29th October with a peak on only eight on 8th September (many observers).

There have been no reports of nesting for many years.

**DUNNOCK** *Prunella modularis*

Very scarce or rare

One near the Royal Dublin golf clubhouse on several dates in April (Tom Cooney, Ger Franck). One or two near the golf clubhouse in autumn and winter.

Like so many other garden and woodland species dunnocks are common on the mainland several hundred meters across the lagoons but are rare on the island.

**HOUSE SPARROW** *Passer domesticus*

Occasional in spring and early summer, very rare at other times

Male and female on 1st May at the causeway (Niall Griffin) and four flew from the causeway towards the Royal Dublin golf course on 15th May (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy, Frank Turpin). At least four feeding in brambles on the side of the causeway on 28th May (Tom Cooney). One on the causeway on 25th June (Ger Franck).

**GREY WAGTAIL** *Motacilla cinerea*

Occasional along mainland side of mudflats

Two at Clontarf Road/Wooden Bridge on 8th January (David MacPherson). Singles at Santry River outflow on 22nd September (Tom Carroll), near the clubhouse on St. Anne's golf course on 16th October (Tom Cooney) and the causeway on 18th November (Ger Franck, Jim Duffy). One at north mudflats on 8th December (Sandra Murphy).

Sightings on the island are rare.



Grey Wagtail (Ger Franck)

**PIED WAGTAIL** *Motacilla alba yarrellii*

Resident and passage migrant

A minimum of sixteen at various locations on 15th September (Tom Cooney).

**White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba alba*

Scarce passage migrant

Spring: One at Bull Wall Reed Marsh on 19th April (Tom Cooney).

Autumn: One at the causeway on 29th August (Niall Griffin) and another on 12th September (Edd Kealy).

**MEADOW PIPIT** *Anthus pratensis*

Common resident



*Meadow pipits are the most common nesting bird on North Bull Island and are now a Red List species of high conservation concern in Ireland.*

**ROCK PIPIT** *Anthus petrosus*

Uncommon passage migrant, very scarce winter visitor

Winter: January: single on 2nd, 16th and 25th January at the Bull Wall (Niall T Keogh, Edd Kealy, Ger Franck, Vincent Hall).

Spring: March: one along the coastal path on 1st (Ger Franck).

Autumn/Winter: October: Twelve birds at the causeway on 3rd (Edd Kealy). Singles on 16th near the Wooden Bridge (Ger Franck, Jim Duffy) and the causeway on 23rd (Tom Cooney). Four at the Bull Wall on 30th (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy, Ger Franck, John Fox). November: up to six at Bull Wall, three at the causeway and four on north saltmarsh on several dates until the end of the month (Tom Cooney, Ger Franck). December: two at Bull Wall on 9th and three on north saltmarsh on 17th (Tom Cooney).

The arrival of birds on 3rd October coincided with a similar arrival at Tacumshin in County Wexford. It is possible that some were passage migrants of the *littoralis* race.

**Scandinavian Rock Pipit** *Anthus petrosus littoralis*

Vagrant

One on 2nd and 3rd January at the Sea Scout's (Niall T. Keogh).

**CHAFFINCH** *Fringilla coelebs*

Very scarce throughout the year

At the base of the causeway four, including a male singing, on 10th May and one on 4th June (Ger Franck). Two on 25th June at the same location with four at the same location on 25th October (Ger Franck). One at the Royal Dublin clubhouse on 15th September (Tom Cooney).

**GREENFINCH** *Carduelis chloris*

Common winter visitor

Count(s): 70 on 16th October in the northern dunes.

In autumn smaller flocks of 20 to 40 were present in different parts of the island.

**LINNET** *Carduelis cannabina*

Resident and very common winter visitor

Several flocks of 30 to 50 reported throughout the winter with the largest flock of 150 on 2nd January. Several post-breeding flocks of 200-220 reported from different parts of the island in August and September (Tom Cooney, Ger Franck, Edd Kealy) with smaller flocks into 2015.



*Linnets occur in flocks in all areas on the island in winter.*

**REDPOLL** *Carduelis flammea cabaret*

Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor

January: one on 19th and 28th in the Alder Marsh (Neil J Bourke, Tom Cooney).

September: eight flew over the southern dunes on 16th (Tom Cooney). October: one in the Alder Marsh on 16th with up to three from 17th to 20th (Tom Cooney, Paul McMahon). November: two in the Bull Wall Reed Marsh and one in the Alder Marsh on 5th, two in scrub at the Royal Dublin golf course on 9th and one in the Alder Marsh on 10th (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy).

December: two in the Alder Marsh on 8th December (Tom Cooney).

**GOLDFINCH** *Carduelis carduelis*

Common passage migrant and winter visitor, occasional breeder

Five on 9th and two on 30th April (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy). Seventy on 27th August (Tom Cooney) and c.200 on 8th September (Edd Kealy). Up to 100 on 18th September along the edge of the south saltmarsh / Royal Dublin golf course (Tom Cooney).

**SNOW BUNTING** *Plectrophenax nivalis*

Irregular winter visitors

Six from 2013 were present up to 6th February (many observers) with one or two remaining until 25th February. Two (female/immatures) flew southwards over the northern saltmarsh on 5th November (Tom Cooney).



*Snow Bunting (Loki Csaba)*



*Snow Bunting (Mark Carmody)*

**REED BUNTING** *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Common resident

In the early part of the year 20 to 30 were present in the dunes and scrub near the Bull Wall and the buckthorn on the boundary of the St. Anne's golf course.



*Reed Bunting (Joe Delaney)*

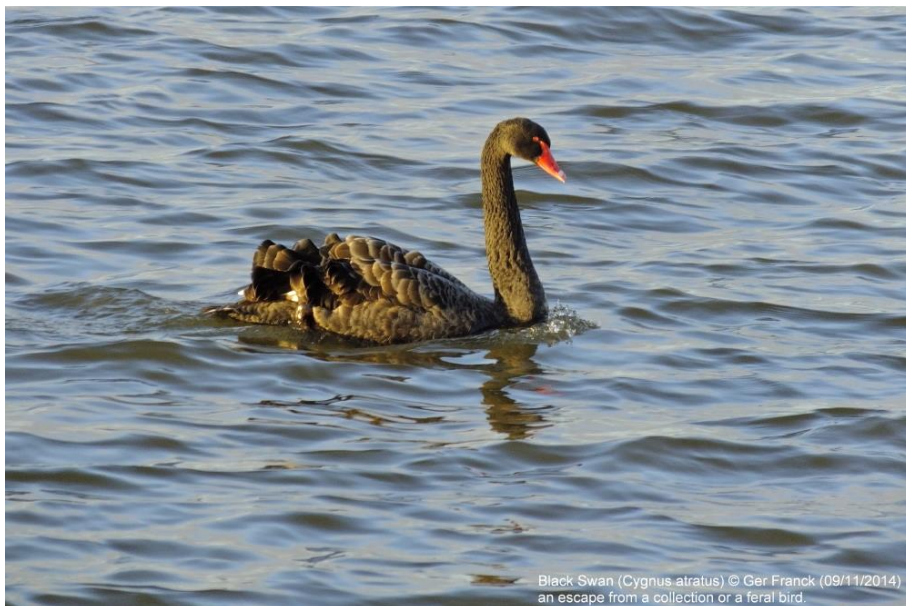
**CATEGORY E:** species that have been recorded in Ireland as introductions, transportees or escapes from captivity.

**BLACK SWAN** *Cygnus atratus*

Exotic species, origin unknown

An adult was present off the Bull Wall on 9th November (Ger Franck).

In recent decades a self-sustaining population of this Australasian species became established in the UK. Breeding has been confirmed at one location on Ireland and the number of winter records appears to be increasing. The origin of this particular bird is unknown.



Black Swan (*Cygnus atratus*) © Ger Franck (09/11/2014)  
an escape from a collection or a feral bird.

## Issues of Conservation Concern 2014

This section is produced at the request of birdwatchers and members of the public who reported many disturbances to birds and damage to habitats within the North Bull Island nature reserve, SPA, SAC and pNHA in 2014. Many of the issues referred to here were also highlighted as issues to be addressed in the islands official Management Plan which was published in 2009. The fact that these issues even exist within the nature reserve is a major concern given that North Bull Island is considered to be the most protected piece of land in the state.

**Decline in breeding bird diversity:** ringed plovers and little terns were absent again from traditional nesting area in 2014. The avoidable loss of two iconic coastal species from a National Nature Reserve, Special Protection Area for birds and a UNESCO biosphere reserve is clearly an unsatisfactory situation. Both species abandoned the island as a nesting location almost entirely due to high levels of disturbance at the traditional nesting site. Access to the nesting area by walkers (many with dogs) and joggers creates constant disturbance to the birds and prevents them from establishing nesting territories. The area is also used by wind-surfers, sand-kite surfers and sailing dinghies. In the mid-1980s a protection scheme to protect the nesting birds received overwhelming public support. The birds responded to the protection and by 1987 seven pairs of ringed plovers and 88 pairs of little terns bred successfully. As a direct consequence of the 1985-1987 protection scheme the little tern colony on the North Bull became the largest in Ireland. A similar protection scheme if correctly managed would within a few years see the return of both species to the island.

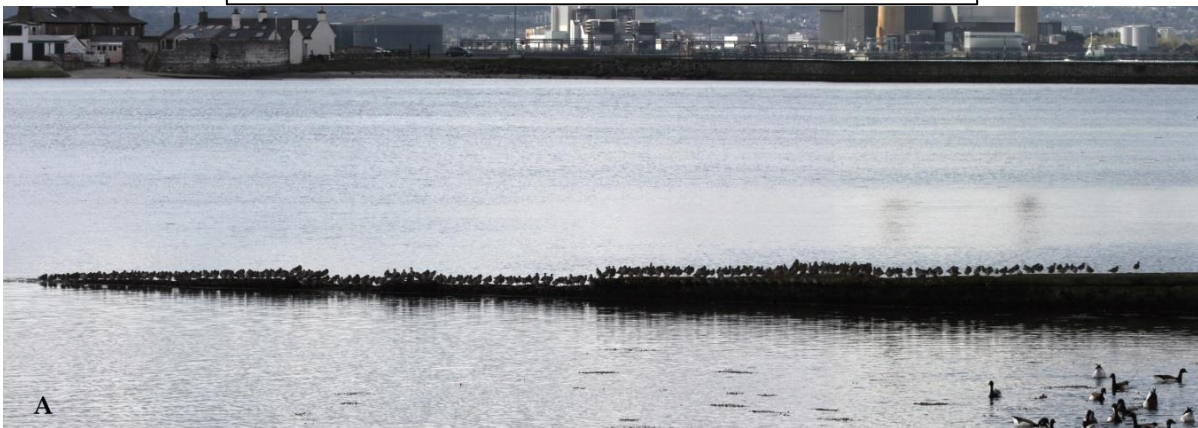
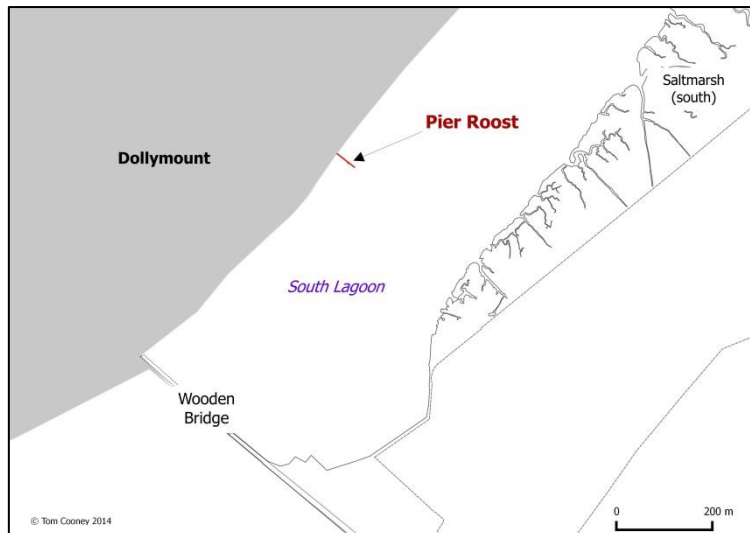
### **Important high tide roost in south lagoon at risk?**

The completion of the Sutton to Sandymount (S2S) cycleway will include a new section to be constructed between the Bull Wall and the causeway. The proposed route will include part of the disused pier known locally as 'the slipway' that extends *c.*50m into the mudflats opposite Dollymount Avenue (see map below). This roost has been in existence for many decades and the numbers of birds present is consistently high from year to year.

The roost is only accessible to birds during high tides of *c.*4.1m or less and the two main species are turnstones and redshanks. Depending on tide height and local weather conditions birds can roost 7-10m from the coastal wall (*i.e.* a buffer of at least 7m). The national threshold for turnstones of 120 birds is exceeded regularly *e.g.* 165 on 22nd November 2014 (4.1m tide), 160 on 4th December 2014 (3.9m tide) and 157 on 17th December (3.3m tide). Redshanks appear to use the pier more frequently during migration and the threshold for national importance of 310 birds is also exceeded regularly *e.g.* 483 on 11th April 2014 (3.5m tide). Redshanks are also Red List species of the highest conservation priority in Ireland (*see* Colhoun K. and S. Cummins (2013)).

These examples demonstrate that turnstones and redshanks exceed thresholds for national importance at the roost site and that the numbers of birds that occur are also a significant proportion of the total wintering/migratory populations in Dublin Bay. Other species to use the roost site include black-tailed godwit, dunlin, knot, grey heron, little egret and greenshank and harbour seals also haul out there occasionally.

It is likely that this very important and traditional roost site within the National Nature Reserve and Special Protection Area for birds will be at risk of being lost or damaged when the new coastal cycleway is constructed.



Photographs A, B, C: 483 redshanks roosting on the pier on 11th April 2014 (3.5m high tide).

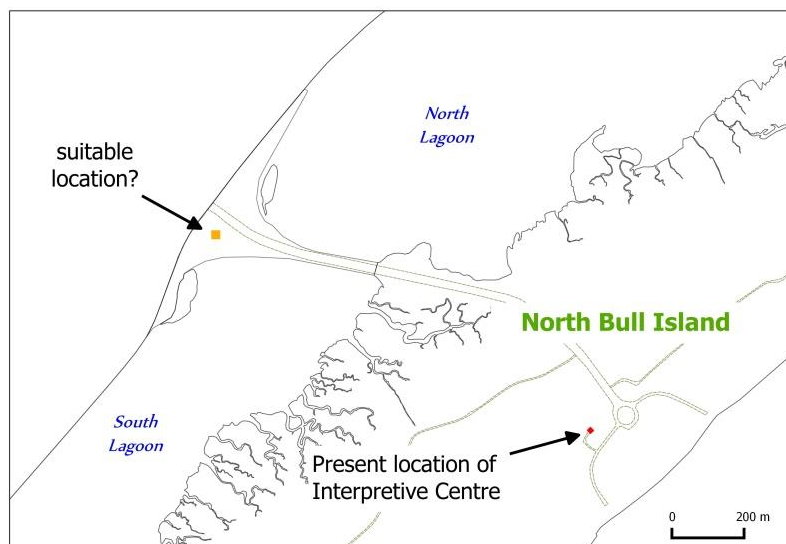


D: 139 turnstones roosting 10m-15m from the sea wall on 21st October (3.7m high tide).

Harbour seal 'hauled-out' in 2009.

**Proposed development:** there is no further information on the proposed development. Based on the chequered history of the island with regard to development proposals there is concern that this new development is being promoted entirely to facilitate tourism and commercial interests rather than protecting and conserving the islands unique ecosystems. In his unique publication *An Irish Sanctuary – Birds of the North Bull* (1953) Fr. Patrick Kennedy described the constant attempts to exploit the island for purposes other than nature conservation. In the chapter ‘Violation of Sanctuary’ he considered that a ‘cold war’ was being waged against the bird sanctuary he had helped to establish. Since the publication of his book the island and its inter-tidal areas have been designated a National Nature Reserve, Special Protection Area (SPA) for birds, Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and a proposed Natural Heritage Area (pNHA). When details of this new proposal are made public it will be interesting to see if the ‘cold war’ has finally come to an end. The acid test will be whether the plans include a conservation unit with qualified staff or a coffee shop.

When the present Interpretative Centre was opened in 1986 there was much criticism regarding its location on the island and its design. At the time many environmentalists suggested the grassland area at the mainland end of the causeway would have been more appropriate location. If this new development proposal is to proceed then relocating the centre to this mainland location would help to rectify the planning errors of the past as well as reducing pressure on the islands important and sensitive habitats.



**Water sporting activities** were reported to have caused significant disturbances of long duration to migratory and wintering birds feeding and roosting on the island in 2014. Sailing dinghy's frequently landed on the sand spit at the northern end of the island in summer and autumn. This activity disturbed potential nesters and seals from hauling-out. Although canoes / kayaks and other boats were the main sources for disturbances a hovercraft was reported to have caused considerable disturbance to waders feeding on the southern mudflats in September. In 2014 a number of water sports enthusiasts were engaged in conversation and a surprising number stated they were completely unaware the island was a nature reserve.

**Dogs** were a constant problem throughout the year. In 2014 birds, hares, rabbits, seals, humans *etc* were either attacked or harassed by dogs. Incidents were reported from all areas on the island including on the mudflats. Dogs were a major cause of the decline and extinction of Irish hares on the island. If hares are to be reintroduced to the island the issues of dogs on the island will have to be addressed permanently. The quantity of dog faeces on the island has increased significantly and may have implications for human health.

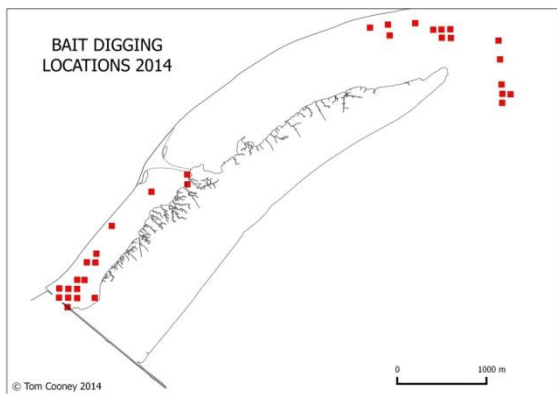


Eleven out of a total of fourteen dogs on the northern end of beach 18/03/2014 (above) with c.12 dogs on the southern end at the same time. An unknown number were also present in the sand dunes on the same date. Almost all dogs were off leashes. The 18th March was not an unusual day on the island for this sort of activity. It is considered 'best practice' to exclude dogs from nature reserves elsewhere.



Examples of dogs chase and harassing birds on the mudflats in 2014.

**Bait digging and shellfish collecting:** The map below indicates the locations where bait diggers removed organisms and in the process damaged protected E.U. Annex I habitats on an almost daily basis in 2014. Crabs and shellfish were also removed regularly from the reserve. The latter activity appeared to be carried out well organised groups. The authorities should not need to be reminded that at least 21 shellfish collectors drowned in Morecambe Bay in 2004.

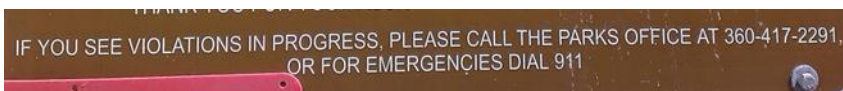


Collecting shellfish is an activity that is increasing and potentially fatal.

**Sea Buckthorn** *Hippophae rhamnoides* is an invasive shrub that poses a major threat to the islands sand dune ecosystems. Its distribution and spread on the island has been mapped annually since 2012. Although some small areas were cut / cleared in 2014 most of the long established pockets of buckthorn continue to mature and spread outwards into the dunes. Regeneration has also taken place in areas that were cut in previous years. In addition, individual plants and clusters of new plants have now become established in many areas on the island far away from the parent plants. Within a number of years each of these newly established plants will grow and form dense impenetrable scrub similar to the established thickets along the boundary of both golf courses on the island. Failure to eradicate this highly invasive scrub will lead to a loss and permanent damage of E.U. Annex I dune habitats and their associated species. Furthermore it will lead to a reduction of grassland habitat that meadow pipits (Red List species) and skylarks (Amber list species) depend on for their survival.

**How some of these issues are dealt with effectively in other nature reserves**

Nature reserves are protected areas that are set aside for conservation. In most countries the protection of reserves is taken so seriously that even potentially disruptive or harmful activities such as windsurfing, walking dogs and jogging are not permitted. In circumstances where limited leisure activities are permitted they are invariably monitored by qualified ground staff. Regulations protecting natural areas are not negotiable and when necessary offenders are prosecuted. The boundary to reserves are demarcated by unambiguous signage with lists of activities are not permitted (see below). In many instances the public are encouraged to become proactive in protecting nature by reporting violations. The introduction and enforcement of measures such as these would help to resolve some of the more immediate environmental issues on North Bull Island. A longer term protection and conservation strategy will be required to ensure that the island is managed for the benefit of nature and for for future generations to enjoy and study.



**North Bull Island Bird Reports (PDF format)**

*Free reports available for 2011, 2012 and 2013*

*For past PDF reports contact Tom : [bullislandbirds@gmail.com](mailto:bullislandbirds@gmail.com)*

