

# North Bull Island Bird Report

## 2017



Edited and compiled

by

Tom Cooney

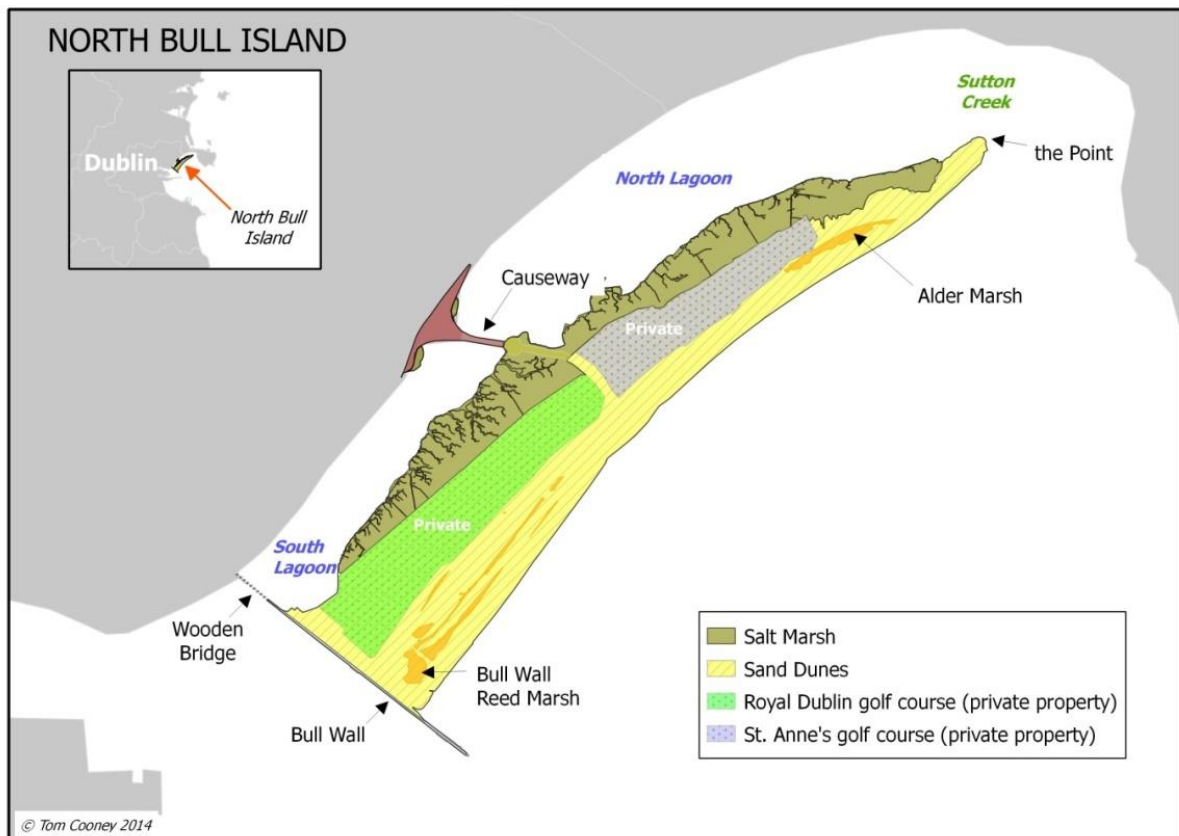
## Editorial

This is the seventh annual report summarising bird occurrences of interest on North Bull Island, Dublin Bay, Ireland.

North Bull Island became Ireland's first bird sanctuary in 1931 and is now a designated National Nature Reserve (NNR), Special Protection Area (SPA) for birds and Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for habitats.

There were no additions to the island bird list in 2017. Rare birds were generally in short supply however; following storm Ophelia in mid-October the island's third Leach's Storm Petrel was recorded. Nearctic waders were represented by the first Buff-breasted Sandpiper since 2011 while Pectoral Sandpiper occurred for the second year in succession. The third Yellow-legged Gull was reported in spring.

Species recorded occasionally or intermittently were Great Skua, Coal Tit and Long-tailed Tit. Other scarce but generally more frequently observed species were Green Sandpiper, Fulmar and Ring-billed Gull. Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint and Ruff were all recorded in autumn but in very low numbers. Unusual passage migrant passerines were generally quite scarce in spring and autumn with Whinchat being the most notable. As the year drew to a close Snow Bunting put in a brief appearance.



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

## Acknowledgements

This report would not be possible without the support and cooperation of birdwatchers who contributed observations and photographs in 2017. I wish to thank all contributors listed below.

## List of Contributors

Tara Adcock	Tom Doyle	Michael Nolan
Mark Carmody	Jim Duffy	David MacPherson
Tom Carroll	Ciaran Dunne	Paul McMahon
Brian Carruthers	John Fields	Tom O'Flynn
Victor Caschera	John Fox	Sean A O'Laoire
Tom Clear	Ger Franck	
Mark Collins		
Tom Cooney	Matt Garland	Brian Porter
Frank Corcoran	Niall Griffin	
		Shane Thomas Quinn
Mick Derwin	Jennifer Harrison	
João de Brito		Hubert Servignat
Ross Bodwen	Gilly Irwin	
		John Tuohy
Dave Daly	Liam Kane	Frank Turpin
Fintan Damer	Eva Keating	
Hugh Delaney	Michael Keating	Robert Vaughan
Mick Derwin	Edd Kealy	
Gary De Lacy	Niall T. Keogh	
	Noel Keogh	

Cover photo: Whimbrel by Sean A O'Laoire

# Systematic List

The sequence and scientific nomenclature follows Gill, F. & Donsker, D. (eds). 2017. *IOC World Bird List* (v 7.3). Available from [www.worldbirdnames.org](http://www.worldbirdnames.org).

**BRENT GOOSE** *Branta bernicla hrota*

Common winter visitor

Spring: One on 14th May (Mark Collins).

Autumn arrivals: One on 9th September (Tom Carroll).



Brent Goose (Photo: Sean O'Laoire).

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

Very scarce winter visitor

One on 24th and 30th March was probably the same bird present up to 27th April with two on 1st May (Hugh Delaney, Tom Cooney). One on 29th and 31st October November (Mark Collins, Tom Cooney) and was presumably the same bird on 15th and 19th November (Ger Franck, Ciaran Dunne).

**GREYLAG GOOSE** *Anser anser*

Very scarce visitor

Three flew over the island on 18th April (Tom Cooney).

**MUTE SWAN** *Cygnus olor*

Regular throughout the year

Up to four occasionally from January to March with a peak of ten on 26th March (Mark Collins *et al.*). Peak of sixteen in 1st September with up to twelve to fifteen occasionally up to December.

**WHOOPER SWAN** *Cygnus cygnus*

Very scarce winter visitor

January: Ten over the island on 20th (Hugh Delaney). March: Four over the island on 25th (Seán A O'Laoire) and probably a different group of four on the southern mudflats on 26th (Brian Gormley). Two passed over the island on 30th (Alan Dalton). October: five flew south over the island on 9th and four flew north on 31st (Tom Cooney). November: nine flew south over the Wooden Bridge on the 9th (John Fox).



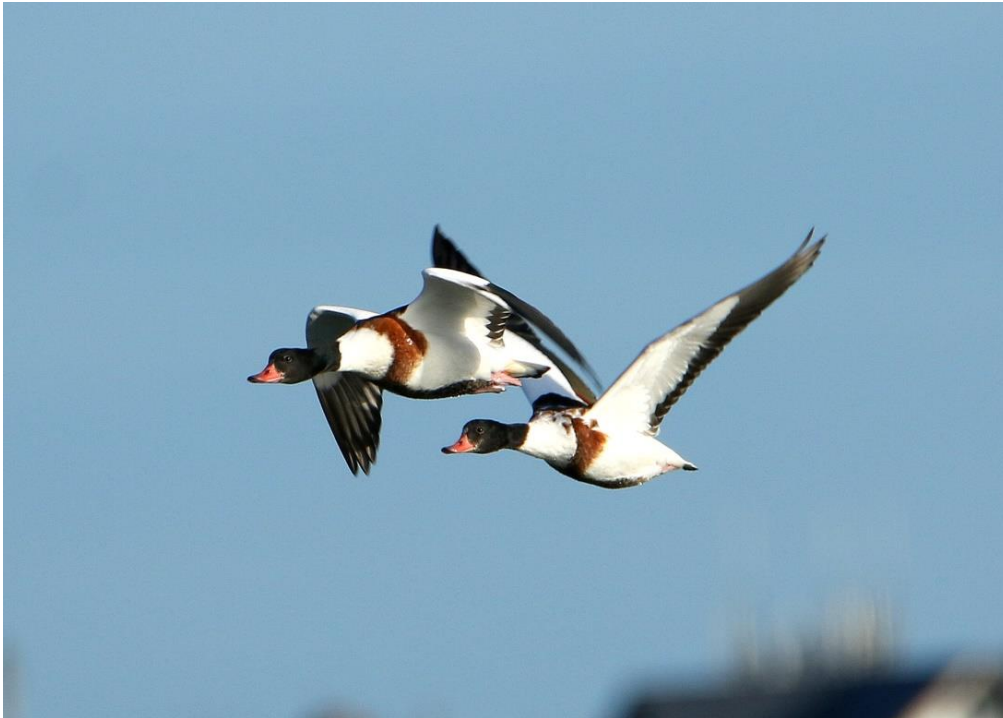
Whooper Swans (Photo: John Fox).

**SHELDUCK** *Tadorna tadorna*

Resident, common winter visitor

At least two pair bred successfully.

Count: 1,155 on 4th November (Tom Doyle, Eva Keating).



Shelduck (Photo: Mark Collins).

**SHOVELER** *Anas clypeata*

Winter visitor

Last date: Four on 16th April (Terry Carruthers).

Autumn arrivals: Two on 19th August (Mark Collins).



Shoveler (Photo: Sean O'Laoire).

**WIGEON** *Anas penelope*

Common winter visitor

Late date: Male on 27th April (Tom Cooney).

Count: 745 on 4th November on the north mudflats (Tom Doyle)

**PINTAIL** *Anas acuta*

Winter visitor

Late date: One on 28th April (Mark Collins).

Autumn arrivals: Two on 17th September (Tom Carroll, Mark Collins).

Count: 124 on 26th January (Hugh Delaney).

Although the North Bull is still one of the most reliable sites in Ireland to see this species at close quarters, the wintering population has declined considerable in recent decades.



Pintails (Photo: Sean O'Laoire).



Male Pintail (Photo: Sean O'Laoire).

**TEAL** *Anas crecca*

Common winter visitor

Latest date: Nine on 23rd April (Ciaran Dunne).

Summer: Male on 9th and 12th June (Tom Carroll, Tom Cooney).

Autumn arrivals: Three on 5th July (Ger Franck).

Count: 380 on 26th September (Niall T. Keogh) and 840 in channel on north mudflats on 4th November (Tom Doyle).

Records at coastal sites in summer are quite scarce.



Male Teal (Photo: Sean O'Laoire).

**TUFTED DUCK** *Aythya fuligula*

Resident

Several birds observed occasionally.

**COMMON SCOTER** *Melanitta nigra*

Regular winter visitor in small numbers

One off the Bull Wall on 21st September (Ciaran Dunne).

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

Scarce winter visitor

Female in Sutton Creek on 3rd February (Tom Cooney). One near the Wooden Bridge on 10th December (Frank Corcoran).

**GOLDENEYE** *Bucephala clangula*

Scarce winter visitor

Sutton Creek: Three on 5th January (Niall T Keogh, Brian Porter) with up to two regularly until 24th March (Shane Thomas Quinn, Edd Kealy, Hugh Delaney, Tom Cooney, Tom Carroll).



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

Regular in small numbers but very scarce in summer

Sutton Creek: February: 27 on 10th, 54 on 14th (Ciaran Dunne). March: 22 on 14th (Hugh Delaney). October: 21 on 7th and 29 on 8th in Sutton Creek (Sean A O'Laoire). 26 on 10th at the Bull Wall (Ger Franck, Jim Duffy).

Up to ten or more on most dates in Sutton Creek, north lagoon and off the Bull Wall.



Red-breasted Mergansers (Photo: Sean O'Laoire).

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

Uncommon winter visitor

Four on 7th January (João de Brito). Two off the beach on 9th March (Hugh Delaney).

**GREAT NORTHERN DIVER** *Gavia immer*

Scarce winter visitor.

Two on 19th January off the north end of the beach (Tom Cooney). One in Sutton Creek on 10th and 19th December (Ciaran Dunne).

**LEACH'S STORM PETREL** *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*

Vagrant

One feeding in the north lagoon on 17th October (Tom Cooney). A second bird may have been present.

This is the first record since 1988 and occurred when Storm Ophelia arrived in Ireland.

**FULMAR** *Fulmarus glacialis*

Rare

One off the North Bull Lighthouse on 22nd September (Tom Cooney).

Despite the close proximity of breeding birds at Howth Head this species is rarely recorded near the island.

**MANX SHEARWATER** *Puffinus puffinus*

Occasional spring to autumn

One on 27th June off the Bull Wall and three on 7th July off the north end of the beach (Ciaran Dunne). Two seen from car ferry off the southern end of the beach on 22nd September (Tom Cooney).

**LITTLE GREBE** *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Scarce winter visitor

At high tide, up to five regularly at the Wooden Bridge or in channels in the southern saltmarsh outside the breeding season. Up to ten regularly during November and December (Mark Carmody *et al.*).



Little Grebe (Photo: Dave MacPherson).

**GREAT CRESTED GREBE** *Podiceps cristatus*

Winter visitor, occasional at other times

Bull Wall: 18 on 3rs, 23 on 31st January (Ciaran Dunne *et al.*). 41 on 12 December (Ciaran Dunne).

Sutton Creek: Eight on 17th October (Tom Cooney).

Beach north end: 47 on 8th January and 61 on 8th November (Ciaran Dunne).

**LITTLE EGRET** *Egretta garzetta*

Non-breeding resident

Autumn peaks: July: 42 on 11th, August: 83 on 22nd, September: 61 on 15th and 54 on 20th, October: 47 on 6th and 65 on 17th. (Tom Cooney, Ross Bowden, Mark Collins, Sean O’Laoire, Tom Clear, David MacPherson).



Greenshank (Photo: Alan Dalton)

**GANNET** *Morus bassanus*

Occasional offshore in summer

Reported from the Bull Wall between 17th March to 19th September. Numbers were lower than in previous years with a peak of only eight on 18 April (Mark Collins, Ciaran Dunne, Ger Franck, Jim Duffy, Niall Griffin, Tom Cooney, Alan Dalton).



Gannet (Photo: Mark Collins)

**SHAG** *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*

Scarce visitor

One at the Bull Wall on 5th May (Ger Franck). Two in Sutton Creek on 26th September (Ciaran Dunne, Niall T. Keogh, João de Brito). One on 5th (Ciaran Dunne) and three on 27th October (Mark Collins). Three in Sutton Creek on 10th December and one at the Wooden Bridge 17th (Ciaran Dunne).

**CORMORANT** *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Regular visitor all year

Thirty off Bull Wall on 4th March and 36 on 19th April (Tom Cooney, Alan Dalton).

Minimum of 65 on the breakwater rocks at Bull Wall on 25th September (Tom Cooney).

**SPARROWHAWK** *Accipiter nisus*

Regular visitor

Many reports of single birds throughout the year with two on 21st December.



Sparrowhawk (Photo: Mark Collins).

**COMMON BUZZARD** *Buteo buteo*

Scarce visitor

One on 14th May (Mark Collins) and 5th October (Edd Kealy, Ger Franck).

**WATER RAIL** *Rallus aquaticus*

Rare

One on 17th January (Matt Garland).

**COOT** *Fulica atra*

Resident

Several reports of one or two birds.

**OYSTERCATCHER** *Haematopus ostralegus*

Common winter visitor and passage migrant

Summer: Up to 300 adults and immatures throughout summer.

**LAPWING** *Pluvialis pluvialis*

Common in autumn, uncommon in winter

Autumn arrivals: Three on 2nd June (Tom Carroll).  
Count: 62 on 26th October (Mark Collins).

**GOLDEN PLOVER**

Regular passage migrant and winter visitor

March: Several hundred present throughout the month with a peak count of 900 on 10th (Ger Franck *et al.*)  
April: Numbers declined throughout the month with only 53 on the 18th (Tom Cooney *et al.*).  
July: One on 27th (Mark Collins).  
August: Three on 21st (Tom Carroll).  
September: Peak of 134 on 26th (Niall T. Keogh, João de Brito).  
October: 109 on 6th (Tom Cooney) and 700 on 10th (Ger Franck, Jim Duffy). 602 on 22nd (Tara Adcock, Mark Carmody) and 1300 on 23rd and 31st (Tom Doyle, Tom Cooney) with similar numbers in early November.  
November: Peak of 2,300 birds, counted from photograph, on 15th November (Sean O'Laoire).  
December: 350 on 10th December at the Wooden Bridge (Mark Camody).



Golden Plovers (Photo: Sean O'Laoire).

**GREY PLOVER** *Pluvialis squatarola*

Common winter visitor and passage migrant

Late records: present up to 28th May (Tom Cooney).  
Counts: 300 on 1st March (Fintan Damer). 160 on 21st September (Ger Franck, Jim Duffy) and 170 on 6th November (Mark Collins).

**RINGED PLOVER** *Charadrius hiaticula*

Former breeder, common passage migrant and winter visitor

Breeding: No birds were present at the former breeding site in summer.

Small numbers reported except in mid-summer. A minimum of 241 on 22nd August feeding on the north saltmarsh at high tide was unusual.



Ringed Plovers (Photo: Sean O'Laoire)

**WHIMBREL** *Numenius phaeopus*

Regular passage migrant, occurs in summer regularly.

Earliest spring date: Two on 13th March.

Latest autumn date: Eight on 13th September.

Summer: Present on many dates with a peak of 18 on 9th June (Tom Cooney).

Peak spring counts: April: minimum of 31 on 18th, 44 on 21st, 62 on 27th (Ger Franck, Jim Duffy, Tom Cooney, Sean A O'Laoire).

Peak autumn counts: Thirteen on 22nd and eleven on 29th August (Tom Cooney).

Spring migration in 2017 was below average. A recent study reported that North Bull Island is a regular staging area in both spring and autumn for nationally important populations.



Whimbrel (Photo: Sean O’Laoire).

**CURLEW** *Numenius arquata*

Common winter visitor, passage migrant, small number summer

Summer: Up to sixty throughout May increasing to 160 by mid-June and over 1,000 in early July (Tom Cooney).

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

Common winter visitor and passage migrant

Spring: 385 on 30th March (Alan Dalton). 203 on 23rd May (Tom Cooney).

Summer: 29 on 19th June (Tom Cooney).

Autumn: 800 on 26th September on the beach (Niall T. Keogh, João de Brito).

Small numbers present throughout summer.

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

Common passage migrant and winter visitor

Spring: 380 feeding on the beach on 13th April.

Summer: Birds were present throughout the summer with fewer than ten in mid-June.

Autumn: 760 to 800 in late September (Mark Collins, Niall T. Keogh, João de Brito).

**TURNSTONE** *Arenaria interpres*

Winter visitor and passage migrant

Count: 45 at the Wooden Bridge and beach on 8th October (Mark Collins) with smaller numbers at other times (Tara Adcock, Ger Franck).

**KNOT** *Calidris canutus*

Common winter visitor and passage migrant

Spring/Summer: April: 170 on 19th and 146 on 21st. May: up to three on several dates. June: two on 9th and five on 26th (Tom Cooney).

**RUFF** *Philomachus pugnax*

Scarce autumn passage migrant, rare at other times

Winter: One on the south saltmarsh on 25th February (Tom O’Fynn).

Autumn: One, possibly the same bird, on many dates from 18th August to 20th September (Tom Carroll, Mark Collins, Tom Cooney, Ciaran Dunne, John Fox). Two on 26th September and 2nd October (Niall T. Keogh, João de Brito, Tom Cooney).

An autumn influx of birds into Ireland during late September and early October was not detected at North Bull Island.

**CURLEW SANDPIPER** *Calidris ferruginea*

Autumn passage migrant, rare in winter and spring

Autumn: Five juveniles on 20th September with two remaining until at least the 4th October (Tom Cooney). Adult on 5th October (Edd Kealy, Ger Franck, Mark Collins, Ciaran Dunne), two juveniles on 17th (Tom Cooney) and 23rd (Tom Doyle). Juvenile on 3rd November (Mark Collins).

A poor year for this species in Ireland. Autumn passage occurred later than normal across Ireland and Britain.

**SANDERLING** *Calidris alba*

Common passage migrant and winter visitor

Peak counts: 186 on 10th March (Ger Franck) and 103 on 22nd April (Tom Cooney) with up to 65 on many dates up to late May (Mark Collins, Tom Cooney, Jim Duffy, Ciaran Dunne, Ger Franck). Up to 300 on the beach near the Bull Wall on 8th and 9th October (Mark Collins) with a peak of 400 on 17th (Ger Franck) with over 300 to the end of the month (Tara Adcock, Tom Clear, Ciaran Dunne ). Fewer than 50 birds reported in November and December.

**DUNLIN** *Calidris alpina*

Very common passage migrant and winter visitor

Spring passage: Up to 700 on 23rd May (Tom Cooney).

Summer: Present throughout summer with a minimum of five in mid-June (Tom Cooney).

Winter: 2,370 in the channel on the northern mudflats on 2nd December (Tom Doyle).

**PURPLE SANDPIPER** *Calidris maritima*

Scarce and irregular winter visitor

One on 31st August at the Bull Wall (Jim Duffy).

**LITTLE STINT** *Calidris minuta*

Regular but scarce passage migrant

Two juveniles on 20th September were probably the same birds reported up to 3rd November



(Tom Cooney, Mark Collins, Ciaran Dunne, Ger Franck, Jim Duffy).

Autumn passage occurred later than normal and 2017 was a poor year for this species in Ireland.

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

Rare

Juvenile on 20th September (Tom Cooney).

This is the first record since 2011.

**PECTORAL SANDPIPER** *Calidris melanotos*

Rare

One heard calling among a flock of common waders flying over the north saltmarsh on 22nd August (Tom Cooney). One on 20th October (Mick Derwin).

It is likely these were different birds. This is the second year in succession this Nearctic species was recorded.

**JACK SNIPE** *Lymnecryptes minimus*

Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor

One or two on the northern end of the island from 4th January to 7th April (Tom Cooney Hugh Delaney, Alan Dalton) with single birds at Bull Wall Reed Marsh on 11th April (Mark Collins) and in the northern dunes on 19th April (Tom Cooney). Autumn arrivals were considerably later than in previous years with one on 23rd October and 8th December (Tom Cooney).

**SNIPE** *Gallinago gallinago*

Regular passage migrant and winter visitor

Latest date: One on 10th May.

Earliest date: Two on 20th September.

Although birds were reported regularly numbers were well below normal in the first half of the year with a peak of only five on 9th March (Hugh Delaney). In the latter part of the year the peak count was eight on 31st October (Tom Cooney).

**COMMON SANDPIPER** *Actitis hypoleucos*

Scarce and irregular migrant

Spring: Two on 24th April in channel on north mudflats and one at the Bull Wall on 27th (Tom Cooney).

Autumn: One on 22nd August at the causeway (Tom Cooney).

**GREEN SANDPIPER** *Tringa ochropus*

Very scarce passage migrant

One on 11th July on the south saltmarsh was flushed by a dog (Tom Cooney).

**REDSHANK** *Tringa totanus*

Common passage migrant and winter visitor

Autumn passage: 800 on 26 September (Niall T. Keogh, João de Brito) on north and south mudflats. 1280 on the northern mudflats on 4th November (Tom Doyle).



Redshank (Photo: Sean O'Laoire)

**SPOTTED REDSHANK** *Tringa erythropus*

Scarce passage migrant, very scarce in winter

One on 26th March (Brian Gormley). One calling as it flew over the causeway on 23 June (Tom Cooney).

**GREENSHANK** *Tringa nebularia*

Uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor

Latest spring date: Two on 1st May.

Autumn arrivals: Five on 19th June.

Peak count: 43 on 22nd August.



Greenshank (Photo: Alan Dalton)

**KITTIWAKE** *Rissa tridactyla*

Regular visitor mainly in spring

Spring: On the port side of the Bull Wall up to fifty on 11th April and a minimum of 193 on 19th (Tom Cooney). Smaller numbers at other times up to 2nd May.

Summer: 54 on 9th June (Ciaran Dunne).

**LITTLE GULL** *Hydrocoloeus minutus*

Regular but scarce visitor

Summer: Immature on 9th June on the southern mudflats (Tom Cooney).

Autumn: Ten adults and four immatures off the Bull Wall during storm force easterly winds on 16th October. Three adults in Sutton Creek and four at the causeway on 17th October. (Tom Cooney, Mark Collins).

**MEDITERRANEAN GULL** *Larus melanocephalus*

Uncommon visitor

January: two on 7th (João de Brito). February: adult on 20th (Dave Daly). March: first year on 30th (Hugh Delaney). April: one on 1st, six second calendar years on 4th (Alan Dalton, Tom Cooney), two second calendar years at Bull Wall on 11th (Tom Cooney). June: up to three on the southern mudflats (Tom Cooney, Ciaran Dunne, Ger Franck). July: Up to four regularly including a juvenile on 23rd (Victor Caschera, Mark Collins, Tom Cooney, Ciaran Dunne). August: One on 3rd (Ciaran Dunne).

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

Very scarce visitor

River Santry outflow: Adult on 31st March (Ger Franck), adult and sub-adult on 1st April (Alan Dalton), and adult on 7th April (Tom Cooney).

It is assumed that the records of the adult bird refer to the same individual.

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

Scarce visitor

Third calendar year bird on 15th March (Hugh Delaney).

It is very likely this species is overlooked.

**LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL** *Larus fuscus*

Uncommon in summer, small numbers in winter

Eleven on 15th March (Hugh Delaney) with small numbers at other times.

**SANDWICH TERN** *Sterna sandvicensis*

Common passage migrant, occasional in summer

Earliest date: One on 14th March (Tom Cooney).

Latest date: One on 16th October (Tom Cooney).

Winter record: Adult in winter plumage at the Bull Wall on 8th December (Mark Collins, Mark Carmody).

Although the December record at North Bull Island was unusual, small numbers winter around the Irish coast annually.

**LITTLE TERN** *Sternula albifrons*

Formerly nationally important breeding population, now a rare summer visitor

One feeding in the north lagoon on 9th June (Tom Cooney).

**COMMON TERN** *Sterna hirundo*

Common in summer

Earliest date: Three on 30th March at the Bull Wall (Niall Griffin).

Latest date: One on 20th September (Tom Cooney).

In spring and summer up to forty or more were present regularly feeding in the lagoons and in the waters around the island.

**ARCTIC TERN** *Sterna paradisaea*

Uncommon summer visitor

Earliest date: One on 4th May.

The only other report was of a single bird on 9th June.

**GREAT SKUA** *Stercorarius skua*

Scarce migrant

Bull Wall: Juvenile harassing seabirds in the general vicinity of the lighthouse on 22nd September (Tom Cooney).

This is the first record for twenty years. It seems likely that this bird may have been one of a number of Great Skuas in late September in the southern part of Dublin Bay.

**GUILLEMOT** *Uria aalge*

Occasional

Bull Wall: One or two occasionally except from June to December with a peak of five on 25th September (Tom Cooney, Alan Dalton, Tom Clear, Mark Collins, Ciaran Dunne, Ger Franck).

Sutton Creek: Peak of at least eight on 17th October.

Following storm Ophelia several 'wrecked' auks were found on the north saltmarsh and in the sand dunes on 17th October (Tom Cooney).



Guillemot (Photo: Tom Cooney)

**RAZORBILL** *Alca torda*

Occasional visitor

Bull Wall: One on 10th January (Ger Franck), two on 31st January (Ciaran Dunne). Three on 29th March and two on 28th April Ger Franck, Jim Duffy). One on 7th May (Ciaran Dunne).

It is interesting that none were reported after early May.

**BLACK GUILLEMOT** *Cepphus grille*

Occasional visitor

One to four occasionally regularly off the Bull Wall (Ciaran Dunne, Niall T Keogh, Brian Porter).

**STOCK DOVE** *Columba oenas*

Very scarce visitor

River Santry outflow: One on 18th August (Ger Franck), two on 15th and one on 17th September (Edd Kealy, Mark Collins).



Stock Dove (Photo: Mark Collins)

**CUCKOO** *Cuculus canorus*

Very scarce summer visitor

Earliest date: One near the Alder Marsh on 25th April (Tom Doyle).

Other reports: One in the general vicinity of the Alder Marsh and in the southern dunes on many dates in the same area up to 16th June (Mark Collins, Tom Cooney, Jim Duffy, Ger Franck, Niall Griffin, Jennifer Harrison). Two were present on 30th May (Michael Keating).

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

Scarce and irregular winter visitor

One on several dates from 20th to 31st October (John Fields, Tara Adcock, Mark Carmody, Tom Cooney).

A bird that was present up to late November 2016 was not reported in 2017.

**SWIFT** *Apus apus*

Frequent in spring and autumn, scarce in summer

Earliest date: One over the northern end on 21st April (Tom Cooney).

Latest date: Six on 6th September (Frank Turpin).

Peak count: June: 60 on 9th and 20th (Tom Cooney).

Other reports: Up to 45 on a number of dates in May and June (Mark Collins, Tom Doyle, Jim Duffy Ciaran Dunne, Ger Franck, Michael Keating, Tom O'Flynn).

**KINGFISHER** *Alcedo atthis*

Scarce but regular winter visitor

One was reported from 8th January to 9th March and from 11th August to the end of the year (many observers). The majority of reports were from the River Santry outflow.



Kingfisher (Photo: Alan Dalton)

**KESTREL** *Falco tinnunculus*

Resident

Usually one but occasionally two present daily.

**MERLIN** *Falco columbarius*

Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor

One, possibly the same bird, on many dates from 7th January to 7th April (many observers). Female/immature on 29th August, 19th September, 3rd and 17th October (Tom Cooney, John Fields, Frank Turpin). One, possibly the same bird, from 31st October to the end of December (Tom Cooney *et al.*).

**PEREGRINE** *Falco peregrinus*

Regular visitor

One but occasionally two birds throughout the year.

**HOODED CROW** *Corvus corone cornix*

Resident

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

Very scarce

One present from 2016 was reported throughout 2017.



Hybrid Carrion x Hooded Crow (Photo: Mark Collins)

**RAVEN** *Corvus corax*

Scarce but regular visitor

Single birds reported occasionally from January to March (Niall T. Keogh, Brian Porter, Hugh Delaney, Tom Cooney, Niall Griffin). Single birds on a number of dates from 14th August to the end of the year with two on 5th and 10th October (Ciaran Dunne, Tom Cooney *et al.*).

**COAL TIT** *Periparus ater*

Rare

One at the Alder Marsh on 2nd October (Tom Cooney).

**BLUE TIT** *Cyanistes caeruleus*

Very scarce visitor

One at River Santry outflow on 6th January (Mark Collins).

**SKYLARK** *Alauda arvensis*

Resident and passage migrant

Migration: Four flew in from the sea past a car ferry a short distance outside Dublin Port on 25th September (Tom Cooney). On the same date other small flocks of skylarks and finches were observed on migration in the Irish Sea.

**SAND MARTIN** *Riparia riparia*

Regular spring and autumn passage migrant in small numbers, scarce in summer

Earliest date: One on 13th March (Tom Cooney).

Summer: Less than ten birds on most dates with a peak of twenty on a number of dates in June (Mark Collins, Jim Duffy, Ger Franck, Tom O'Flynn).

Latest date: One on 25th September (Mark Collins).

**BARN SWALLOW** *Hirundo rustica*

Summer visitor and passage migrant

Earliest date: One on 4th April (Tom Cooney, Alan Dalton).

Latest date: Two on 20th October (John Tuohy).

Spring passage: Very light passage with a peak count of only 20 on 18th April.

Autumn passage: Generally small numbers but a peak of 300 on 1st September (Ciaran Dunne).

**HOUSE MARTIN** *Delichon urbica*

Summer visitor and passage migrant

Earliest date: One on 30th March (Tom Cooney).

Latest date: One on 5th October (Edd Kealy, Ger Franck).

A minimum of 46 flew south over the north lagoon on 2nd October was an unusual number so late in the season. Many other species were observed on migration on this date.

**LONG-TAILED TIT** *Aegithalos caudatus*

Rare

Four on 9th March (Hugh Delaney) in the Alder Marsh and one at the causeway on 13th (Tom Cooney).

It likely that the bird on the 13th was one of the flock observed several days earlier.

**WILLOW WARBLER** *Phylloscopus trochilus*

Uncommon but regular passage migrant

Earliest date: One in the Alder Marsh on 29th March (Tom Cooney).

Latest date: One on 18th September (Tom Cooney).

**CHIFFCHAFF** *Phylloscopus collybita*

Scarce but regular passage migrant

Earliest date: One in the Alder Marsh on 13th March (Tom Cooney).

Latest date: One on 19th October (Tom Cooney).

Autumn passage: Two in the Alder Marsh on 13th and 19th September and one in scrub at the causeway (Tom Cooney). One near the Bull Wall on 30th September (Mark Collins).

Numbers recorded on passage were considerably below previous years.



**SEDGE WARBLER** *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

Scarce but regular passage migrant

Earliest date: One in the Alder Marsh on 21st April (Tom Cooney).

Latest date: One on the Bull Wall on 1st September (Ciaran Dunne).

Up to two were present at the Bull Wall Reed Marsh from 2nd May to 6th June (Mark Collins, Tom Cooney, Ciaran Dunne, Ger Franck, David MacPherson). One on 2nd June between to Alder Marsh and the Point was an unusual (Niall Griffin).



Sedge Warbler (Photo: Mark Collins).

**GRASSHOPPER WARBLER** *Locustella naevia*

Very scarce but regular passage migrant

Spring: Single birds flushed in the dunes on the north end on 18th April and on the southern northern end on 1st May (Tom Cooney).

**BLACKCAP** *Sylvia atricapilla*

Scarce migrant and winter visitor

Earliest date: One in song from 14th March near the Bull Wall was probably the same bird still there into late April (Tom Cooney, Ger Franck, Jim Duffy).

Autumn passage: October: male in the Alder Marsh on 2nd and two males and a female on 9th (Tom Cooney).

Winter records: One on 13th January. In December a female on 1st and male on 18th and 31st (Ger Franck).

**WHITETHROAT** *Sylvia communis*

Scarce passage migrant

Spring passage: Single birds on 26th April and 17th May.

**GOLDCREST** *Regulus regulus*

Scarce passage migrant, mainly in autumn

Spring passage: March: seven at Bull Wall Reed Marsh on 23rd (Ger Franck, Jim Duffy). In the Alder Marsh one on 24th (Tom Cooney) and two on 24th (Hugh Delaney).

Autumn passage: September: two on 13th and three on 19th (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy); four on 26th (Niall T Keogh, João de Brito). October: four on 2nd and a minimum of 21 on 9th at various locations on the north half the island (Tom Cooney). Two in the Alder Marsh on 25th and 31st October (Ger Franck, Tom Cooney). Two at the Bull Wall Reed Marsh on 1st November (Ger Franck).

Winter: November: single birds in scrub near the Bull Wall on 24th and 26th (Mark Collins). December: three on 4th and one on the 18th near the Bull Wall (Mark Collins, Ger Franck), one near the Alder Marsh on 8th (Tom Cooney).

**WREN** *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Resident

A recent study reported the islands breeding population declined abruptly in response to the severe cold winter of 2010/2011 but recovered in two to four years.

**REDWING** *Turdus iliscus*

Irregular passage migrant and winter visitor

One on 28th October (Tom Doyle).

**SONG THRUSH** *Turdus philomelos*

Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor

January: three on 13th January (Ger Franck). October: one near the Bull wall on 27th (Mark Collins) and three on 31st in the Alder Marsh. November: three near the Bull Wall on 1st, five near the Bull Wall on 15th and one on 24th (Ger Franck, Mark Collins). December: Up to five at various locations on the island throughout the month (Ger Franck, Mark Collins, Tom Cooney).

**MISTLE THRUSH** *Turdus viscivorus*

Uncommon visitor

One on the southern end of the island on 3rd March (Tom Cooney).

**SPOTTED FLYCATCHER** *Muscicapa striata*

Very scarce passage migrant

One in the Alder Marsh on 19th September (Tom Cooney).

**WHINCHAT** *Saxicola rubetra*

Very scarce migrant

Male in scrub on the northern end on 8th May (Tom Cooney).

**STONECHAT** *Saxicola torquata*

Uncommon resident

Many reports of one or two birds at different locations of the island with four near the Bull Wall in early autumn (many observers). A minimum of twelve were on the island in October and November, eight on the northern end and five on the southern end. Less than five reported in December. At least one pair bred successfully.

**WHEATEAR** *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Common passage migrant, former breeder

Earliest date: Two on 13th March (Tom Cooney).

Latest date: One on 31st October (Tom Cooney).

Spring: In April a minimum of 17 on 21st and 46 on 24th (Tom Cooney).

Autumn: Minimum of 8 on 17th October on the north saltmarsh.

Birds showing features of the Greenland *leucorhoa* race were present on many dates in March and April.



Wheatear (Photo: Mark Collins)

**HOUSE SPARROW** *Passer domesticus*

Scarce summer visitor

Up to three occasionally in scrub beside causeway at the Royal Dublin from 21st April to about mid-July (Tom Cooney, Mark Collins). Three on 5th October at the causeway and scrub beside causeway at the Royal Dublin (Edd Kealy, Ger Franck).

**DUNNOCK** *Prunella modularis*

Rare resident

Single birds reported at River Santry outflow on 5th March (Mark Collins), 10th and 27th March near the Interpretative Centre (Ger Franck).

**GREY WAGTAIL** *Motacilla cinerea*

Occasional along mainland shore

Single birds at the Santry River outflow on 8th August, 6th and 16th September (Ciaran Dunne, Mark Collins) on 23rd October (Ger Franck). One flew over the Wooden Bridge on 26th September (Niall T. Keogh, João de Brito).

**PIED WAGTAIL** *Motacilla alba yarrellii*

Resident and passage migrant

**White Wagtail** *Motacilla a. alba*

Scarce passage migrant

Spring: Two on 19th April (Tom Cooney).

Autumn: Single birds on the southern mudflats on 1st September (Tom Cooney) and on the 12th September on the southern end of the beach (Ciaran Dunne). Three on the north saltmarsh on 15th September (Edd Kealy, Mark Collins).

Migration: Three 'in from the sea' on 25th September (Tom Cooney).

**ROCK PIPIT** *Anthus petrosus*

Uncommon winter visitor, probably under reported.

One on the south saltmarsh on 7th January (Niall T Keogh, Noel Keogh, Brian Porter, Mark Carmody). From 1st to end of December one to three birds were reported from various areas on the island but mainly at the causeway and Bull wall (Mark Collins, Tom Cooney, Michael Keating).



Rock Pipit (Photo: Mark Collins)

**CHAFFINCH** *Fringilla coelebs*

Common winter visitor

Single birds the scrub near the Bull Wall on 13th January and 25th March. One on 15th November with four on 26th. Up to seven from 12th to 31st December (Mark Collins, Ciaran Dunne, Ger Franck). Single birds were reported occasionally at Santry River outflow in 2017.

**GREENFINCH** *Carduelis chloris*

Winter visitor in variable numbers

Scarce in 2017. In December up to 17 were present in scrub at the corner Royal Dublin golf course near the Bull Wall (Ger Franck, Mark Collins).

**LINNET** *Carduelis cannabina*

Resident and very common winter visitor

Autumn flocks: Flocks of over 100 birds regular from mid-August onwards with over 300 on a number of occasions (many observers). On 2nd October a minimum of 730 were counted on the north and south saltmarshes. 320 on the south saltmarsh on 8th October (Mark Collins).

Migration: Seven close to a car ferry outside Dublin Port flying in from the sea towards the island on 25th September (Tom Cooney).

Winter counts: Flocks of 120 and 190 reported on a number of occasions in January and February respectively with up to 400 on the north saltmarsh in November (Tom Cooney, Mark Collins).

**REDPOLL** *Acanthis cabaret*

Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor

January: two on 19th (Tom Cooney). March: one on 24th March (Hugh Delaney). September: three on 13th (Tom Cooney) and twelve on 26th in dunes on the southern end of the island (Niall T. Keogh, João de Brito). October: three in the Alder Marsh on 9th and six on 25th (Tom Cooney, Ger Franck). November: three at the Bull Wall Reed Marsh on 15th (Ger Franck). December: two on 1st, one on 9<sup>th</sup>, eight on 18th, one of 31st (Ger Franck, Mark Collins).

**GOLDFINCH** *Carduelis carduelis*

Common passage migrant and winter visitor, occasional breeder

Migration: Nine flew in from the sea on 25th September (Tom Cooney).

Counts: From mid-August flocks of up to 30 to 60 were reported from different areas on the island with one flock of 80 on 1st October on the south saltmarsh (Mark Collins *et al.*). Minimum of 100 on 4th October (Tom Cooney).

**SNOW BUNTING** *Plectrophenax nivalis*

Irregular winter visitors

Female on 24th November on northern end of the beach (Tom Cooney).

## Issues of Conservation Concern 2017

Although the North Bull Island is officially a Nature Reserve, Special Protection Area (SPA) for birds and a Special Area for Conservation (SAC) numerous recreational activities take place on a daily basis that have a negative impact on the islands habitats and wildlife.

The following are examples of incidents reported by birdwatchers and the general public to [www.bullislandbirds.com](http://www.bullislandbirds.com) in 2017. Whether accidental or deliberate, all of these activities caused damage to protected habitats and/or disturbance to protected bird species. The range of activities observed in 2017 were golfing in the dunes, dogs (numerous), bait digging, shellfish collecting, crabbing, jogging, walkers with dogs on saltmarshes and mudflats, canoeing (individuals), fishing, motorbikes on saltmarshes, sailing boats, paddle boarding, wind-surfing and quad bikes.

### **New Center**

Dublin City Council (DCC) is proceeding with plans for a new centre, to replace the one there at present. Although the exact details are unclear, it would appear this new building will be located beside the north saltmarsh and will undoubtedly include a shop, café, restaurant and information area etc. If this is the case then it is clear that this new development has more to do with tourism rather than the protecting and conserving the islands habitats and wildlife. Over the past 100 years naturalists and conservationists, most notably Fr. Patrick Kennedy, fought successfully to protect the island from similar developments. That was before it was a legally protected National Nature Reserve (NNR), Special Protection Area for birds (SPA), Special Area for Conservation (SAC) and proposed National Heritage Area (pHNA). Even since becoming a National Nature Reserve in 1988 the island has come under increased pressure from human activities, mainly water sports and leisure. Since then, three highly sensitive and characteristic species of this coastal site have become locally extinct as breeding species. These are the Irish Hare, Little Tern and Ringed Plover. Over the same period the non-native and highly invasive Sea Buckthorn has spread into many new areas on the island and poses a major threat to the dune habitats, native flora and fauna. It is difficult to understand how a new building, together with dining facilities, will resolve these conservation issues. It will be interesting to see which of the Irish nature conservation groups will vigorously oppose this development and which will stay quiet.

### **Unprotected nesting habitat:**

No ringed plovers or little terns were present at the former breeding site in summer. Lack of protection from human disturbance had led directly their extirpation as breeding species.

### **Water sports, Bait Digging and Dogs:**

All of these activities occur daily with the National Nature Reserve and cause damage or disturbance to habitats or wildlife. The following photographs are examples of such activities in 2017.

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