

North Bull Island Bird Report

2012



Edited and compiled

by

Tom Cooney

Editorial

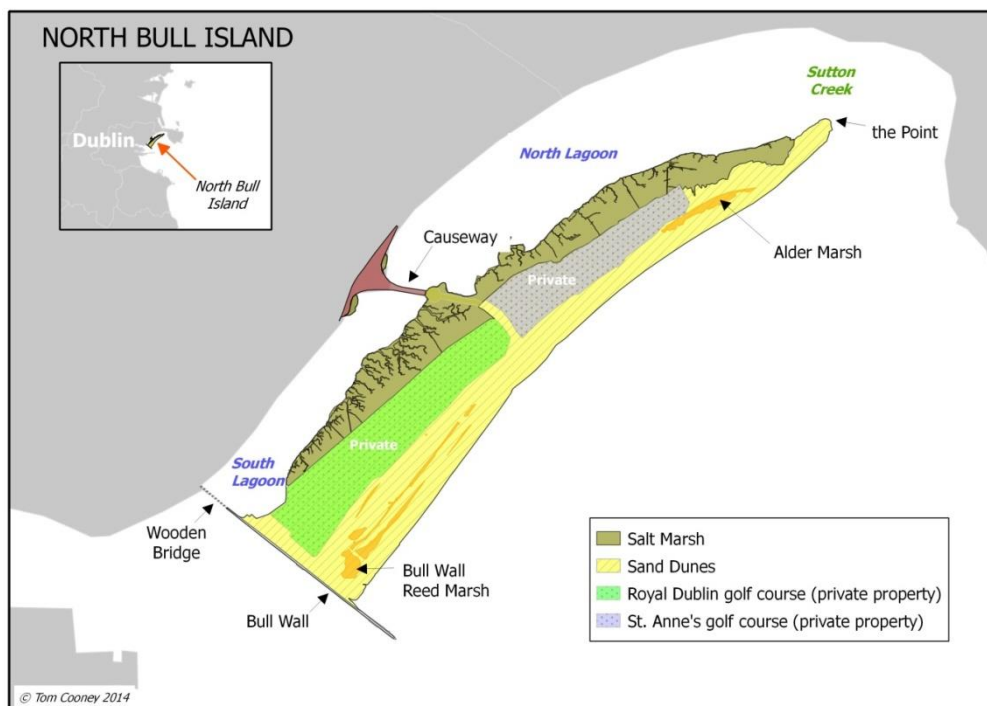
This is the second annual report summarising bird occurrences on North Bull Island.

A total of 132 species were reported between 1st January 2012 and 31st December 2012.

In 2012 three new species were added to the island list. These were lesser yellowlegs, collared dove and reed warbler. Other island rarities included marsh harrier and turtle dove. Uncommon and scarce species included house sparrow, long-eared owl and common buzzard.

Record numbers of whimbrels and wheatears were reported in spring along with an interesting range of passage migrants especially warblers. The ‘late spring’ resulted in thousands of common migrant waders passing through the island in early June several weeks later than normal. Autumn passage was quiet with very few regular passage migrant waders and passerines. This was consistent with the pattern elsewhere in Ireland. No ringed plovers or stonechats were found nesting during an extensive search of the island between April and June.

It has become increasingly obvious in recent years that recreational activities within the North Bull Island Nature Reserves are increasing at a fast pace. Some of these activities are having a negative impact on the islands habitats and species. Birds and others forms of wildlife are disturbed on a daily basis whilst other activities are considerably more harmful in nature (*see pages 31-36*). In 2012 a number of these issues were brought to the attention of the authorities responsible for protecting the islands wildlife and habitats.



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

List of Contributors

| | | |
|------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Enrique Alvarez | Sean Geraty | Colm McConnell |
| Brendan Black | Niall Griffin | Paul McCullough |
| Helen Boland | Brian Gormley | Siobhan McNamara |
| Robert Busby | Mark Hanley | Proinsias Mac an Bheatha |
| Victor Caschera | Brian Haslam | Steve Millar |
| Mark Carmody | James Hayes | Ben Mullen |
| Brian Carruthers | Des Higgins | Michael Nolan |
| Philip Clancy | Stewart Holohan | Conn O'Brien |
| Dave Clarke | Edd Kealy | Paul Quigley |
| Tom Cooney | Eva Keating | Paul Robson |
| Sinead Cummins | Robin Keating | Jan Rod |
| Alan Dalton | Niall T Keogh | Adrian Rooney |
| Mick Derwin | Noel Keogh | Paul Smith |
| Tom Doyle | Stephen Lawlor | Mark Stewart |
| Ciaran Dunne | T. Lenane | Frank Turpin |
| Gary De Lacy | Gerry Lyons | Patrick Veale |
| Noel Fagan | Gabriel Pigache | Karol Waszkiewicz |
| Shane Farrell | Andrew Power | |
| John Fields | Gerry Power | |
| Colm Fitzpatrick | Paul Quigley | |
| John Fox | | |
| Ger Franck | | |

Cover photo: Lesser Yellowlegs (Tom Cooney).

Systematic List

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

MUTE SWAN *Cygnus olor*

Occasional throughout the year

Two occupied nests in May and June. One or two were present in the lagoons occasionally throughout the year with a maximum of five on 12th October.

WHOOPEE SWAN *Cygnus cygnus*

Very scarce winter visitor

Two on 27th November (Ger Franck, Tom Cooney).

BRENT GOOSE *Branta bernicla hrota*

Common winter visitor

A few birds remained until late May with two up to 1st June and one remaining until the 12th. Four on 31st August (Tom Doyle) were the first arrivals of the autumn and by mid-September up to 500 were present.

Highest count: 2,700 on 13th December (Tom Doyle).

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

Rare winter visitor

One on 3rd and two on 4th and 10th May (Patrick Veale, Tom Cooney). One on 13th September and 3rd October (Tom Cooney).



Dark-bellied Brent Goose (13/09/2012)

SHELDUCK *Tadorna tadorna*

Resident, common winter visitor

Several pairs bred.

WIGEON *Anas penelope*

Common winter visitor

First autumn arrivals were of two birds on 15th August (Ger Franck).

GADWALL *Anas hyemalis*

Very scarce winter visitor

The male and female from 2011 were last reported on 7th January (Niall T. Keogh).

TEAL *Anas crecca*

Common winter visitor

First autumn arrivals were of two birds on 2nd August.

Six birds about 5m off the beach on 25th October were unusual.

BLUE-WINGED TEAL *Anas discors*

Rare

A female from 2011 was last reported on 7th January (Shane Farrell).

TUFTED DUCK *Aythya fuligula*

Rare

A pair was present in May and a female on 10th October (Tom Cooney). A male and female on 29th November at the Wooden Bridge (Ciaran Dunne).

The May and October records are the first sightings of birds on the island.



LONG-TAILED DUCK *Clangula hyemalis*

Irregular and scarce winter visitor

One on 29th (Gerry Lyons) and 30th October in Sutton Creek increased to four on 1st November (Tom Cooney) and five on 29th (Tom Doyle *et al*).

COMMON SCOTER *Melanitta nigra*

Regular winter visitor in small numbers

Four on 15th August off the beach were early (Ciaran Dunne, Tom Cooney).

GOLDENEYE *Bucephala clangula*

Uncommon winter visitor

One on 1st January (Gabriel Pigache). Four on 6th November (Noel Keogh) increasing to a minimum of 48 off the northern end on 29th November (Ciaran Dunne, Tom Doyle).

RED-BREASTED MERGANSER *Mergus serrator*

Regular visitor in small numbers

Up to ten birds in the lagoons throughout January and February with a male and female on 4th May and 1st June. A female off the beach on 15th August. Peaks of 31 on 29th November (Tom Cooney, Ciaran Dunne, Edd Kealy, Ger Franck, Colm Fitzpatrick) and 48 on 12th December (Frank Turpin).

RED-THROATED DIVER *Gavia stellata*

Uncommon winter visitor

Singles on 5th February, 19th March, 26th April and 2nd May. First autumn bird was present off the Bull Wall on 15th and 16th August. At least one was present on several dates from 30th October to 6th November at the Wooden Bridge and in the South Lagoon. Elsewhere birds one or two were present regularly with a peak of four on 29th November (Tom Cooney, Ciaran Dunne).



BLACK-THROATED DIVER *Gavia stellata*

Rare

One on 7th April (Proinsias Mac an Bheatha).

GREAT NORTHERN DIVER *Gavia immer*

Scarce winter visitor.

Singles on 26th April and 5th June. Two on 13th December.

FULMAR *Fulmarus glacialis*

Rare

Two close inshore on 5th June during easterly winds and heavy rain. Three off the beach during storm force NE winds on 15th August.

MANX SHEARWATER *Puffinus puffinus*

Occasional spring to autumn

At least 15 close inshore on 7th June during strong easterly winds and heavy rain. Many in the bay on 15th August were clearly visible from the beach.

CORMORANT *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Regular visitor all year

Peak of 56 on 9th June off the tip of the Bull Wall (Alan Dalton). 21 on 29th November.

Up to ten birds occurred regularly in the lagoons throughout the year.

LITTLE EGRET *Egretta garzetta*

Non-breeding resident

Birds from nearby colonies were present throughout the year with up to 15 in spring.

The post-breeding population was generally between 20 and 40 birds with a peak of 51 on 20th August.

GREY HERON *Ardea cinerea*

Present all year

Up to 20 were present in the early part of the year with a peak of 48 in autumn.

LITTLE GREBE *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Scarce winter visitor

Up to four birds at the Wooden Bridge in January and early February (Mir Harris, Ciaran Dunne, Ger Franck). Present from July onwards with seven in November to eight by mid-December (Ciaran Dunne, Ger Franck *et al.*) and a peak of 12 on 15th December (Mark Carmody).



GREAT CRESTED GREBE *Podiceps cristatus*

Winter visitor, occasional at other times

Twenty in Sutton Creek on 5th February was the largest number reported in the early part of the year. One was present up to 4th June (Ciaran Dunne). Several were present daily off the beach and in the north lagoon from 13th August onwards with a peak of at least 104 birds on 29th November (Tom Doyle, Tom Cooney, Ciaran Dunne). Up to 50 were present into 2013.

MARSH HARRIER *Circus aeruginosus*

Rare

A female was seen arriving in off the sea at dawn on 9th May (Tom Cooney). A juvenile was observed being mobbed by crows near causeway on 22nd August (Frank Turpin).



SPARROWHAWK *Accipiter nisus*

Regular visitor

Single birds reported regularly with two on 15th March and 1st October.

COMMON BUZZARD *Buteo buteo*

Rare

Two flew over the causeway on 13th October (Tom Doyle).

OYSTERCATCHER *Haematopus ostralegus*

Common winter visitor and passage migrant

A second calendar year with an exceptionally long bill was seen on 21st May (Tom Cooney). A bird with progressive greying of plumage was present again during autumn migration (Ger Franck). This bird has been seen on the island each autumn for many years.



GREY PLOVER *Pluvialis squatarola*

Common winter visitor and passage migrant

Up to 12 remained into May with three on 4th and 9th June (Ger Franck, Alan Dalton).

LAPWING *Pluvialis pluvialis*

Common in autumn, uncommon in winter

Fourteen on 13th June (Stewart Holohan) were the first birds to return after the nesting season. Twenty-three on the 9th July with smaller numbers into August (Frank Turpin *et al.*). Up to 30 birds remained into the winter of 2013.

RINGED PLOVER *Charadrius hiaticula*

Former breeder, common passage migrant and winter visitor

Up to 60 were present regularly on the southern mudflats near the Wooden Bridge between April and late May. Although ringed plovers occasionally feed in the lagoons, the spring of 2012 was very unusual for the number and regularity of the birds at this location.

WHIMBREL *Numenius phaeopus*

Regular passage migrant.

Birds were reported between 24th March and 15th October. Spring migration was above normal with a peak of 223 in May. Autumn passage was lighter with a peak of 98 in August.

CURLEW *Numenius arquata*

Common passage migrant and winter visitor

Between late May and mid-July between 60 and 160 birds were present daily. Autumn passage commenced in mid-July and increased rapidly to 1,660 by the 24th.

BLACK-TAILED GODWIT *Limosa limosa*

Common passage migrant and winter visitor

Highest count of spring was 850 on 15th April (Ger Franck). One to three birds were present up to mid-June when seven were recorded in the 13th. None reported again until two on 8th July, 49 on 9th and 200 on 16th (Franck Turpin, Tom Cooney).

Birds were only absent from the island from mid-June to early July.

BAR-TAILED GODWIT *Limosa lapponica*

Common winter visitor and passage migrant

A total of 373 on 23rd May and 300 on 6th June were unseasonably high.

KNOT *Calidris canutus*

Common winter visitor and passage migrant

From mid-April to 7th June up to 80 were present with only one or two showing summer plumage. Autumn passage commenced from mid-July with the arrival of several hundred birds.

This species is normally very scarce in June.

RUFF *Philomachus pugnax*

Scarce autumn passage migrant, rare in spring

One at the causeway on 26th March (Ciaran Dunne) and another at the same location on 18th July (Colm McConnell). Autumn passage was poor with only one on 14th and two on 16th August (Tom Cooney).

CURLEW SANDPIPER *Calidris ferruginea*

Autumn passage migrant, rare in winter and spring

Spring: May: three on 22nd (Tom Cooney).

Autumn: September: two on 16th (Mark Carmody), one on 25th (Ger Franck).
October: one on 14th (Mark Carmody) and 28th October (Ger Franck).
November: One on 6th, 7th, 17th November (Donal Foley, Tom Doyle, Gerry Power *et al.*).

The May birds which were in partial breeding plumage are only the fourth records in spring. Autumn passage was well below average throughout Ireland in 2012.



SANDERLING *Calidris alba*

Common passage migrant and winter visitor

Spring passage was late with a peak of 130 on 24th May and 160 birds on 7th June. Numbers declined sharply after 9th June. In autumn and early winter 10-40 birds were present daily. Usually confined to their preferred sandy beach habitat up to 30 and possible more were seen feeding on the mudflats from mid to late May.

A colour-ringed bird on 11th December had been ringed in Iceland on 30th May 2011.



DUNLIN *Calidris alpina*

Very common passage migrant and winter visitor

Several hundred, most in breeding plumage, remained into May but 510 on 29th May and 420 on 7th June were unusually high.



PURPLE SANDPIPER *Calidris maritima*

Scarce and irregular winter visitor

Two on 29th November at the Bull Wall.

COMMON SANDPIPER *Actitis hypoleucos*

Scarce and irregular migrant

Ten on 12th July (Edd Keady) and one on 15th August (Ger Franck).

SPOTTED REDSHANK *Tringa erythropus*

Scarce passage migrant, very scarce in winter

One on 12th February (Gerry Lyons) and 26th October (Mark Stewart).

GREENSHANK *Tringa nebularia*

Uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor

Up to 50 birds were present in the winter of 2011/2012 with most birds departing mid-April

up to 14th May. One on 13th June was the earliest returning bird but main arrivals started with one on 16th July.

LESSER YELLOWLEGS *Tringa flavipes*

Vagrant

First winter bird north of the causeway on 7th October (Paul Robson) remained until 23rd October.

This is the first island record of this long overdue North American wader.



JACK SNIPE *Lymnecryptes minimus*

Very scarce passage migrant and winter visitor

February: one on 22nd and 25th. April: two on 8th, one on 23rd. September: one on 18th. October: one on 30th. November: on 16th, 18th and 20th. December: two on 13th, one on 15th and 18th.

A minimum of three were present in December.

COMMON SNIPE *Gallinago gallinago*

Regular passage migrant and winter visitor

Three on 3rd May was the highest number reported in the early part for the year. No birds were reported again until 20th August. Up to eight were reported regularly in autumn and early winter with a peak count of 20 on 2nd November. Small numbers reported into 2013.

LITTLE TERN *Sternula albifrons*

Former breeder, very scarce summer visitor

Three on 16th August (two adults and one juvenile) in the North Lagoon at high water.

BLACK TERN *Chlidonias niger*

Scarce visitor

An immature off the point on 21st August (Tom Cooney).

It is likely that this bird was one of a number of back terns recorded in south Dublin Bay during the same period.

SANDWICH TERN *Sterna sandvicensis*

Common passage migrant, occasional in summer

The first arrivals was seven birds on 24th March (Tom Doyle) and a spring peak of only 13 on 26th was very low (Ger Franck). In autumn up to 100 were present on 16th August (Frank Turpin). Several birds were present to late October.



COMMON TERN *Sterna hirundo*

Common in summer

First birds of the year were two on 4th May. Highest count was 47 on 17th July (Ger Franck).



ARCTIC TERN *Sterna paradisaea*

Uncommon summer visitor

Sixteen on 1st August was the highest number reported.

LITTLE GULL *Hydrocoloeus minutus*

Scarce visitor

Adult on 2nd August at the River Santry outflow (Tom Cooney).

MEDITERRANEAN GULL *Larus melanocephalus*

Scarce

One on 12th February (Gerry Lyons). Three reports probably of the same bird from 19th to 30th July (Tom Cooney) and another on four dates from 17th September to 18th October (James Hayes, Ger Franck, Sean Geraty). One on 29th December (Victor Caschera).



RING-BILLED GULL *Larus delawarensis*

Rare

Adult on 28th November (Paul Smith).

STOCK DOVE *Columba oenas*

Very scarce

One on 5th April and 17th July (Ger Franck).

COLLARED DOVE *Streptopelia decaocto*

Rare

Two near the coastguard cottages on several dates in May.

TURTLE DOVE *Streptopelia turtur*

Rare

One on 8th May (Tom Cooney).

CUCKOO *Cuculus canorus*

Very scarce summer visitor

One on 12th and 13th June in the Alder Marsh.

LONG-EARED OWL *Asio otus*

Rare

Adult in the Alder Marsh during daylight on 25th May and 11th June (Tom Cooney).



SHORT-EARED OWL *Asio flammeus*

Scarce and irregular winter visitor

One from 2011 was joined by a second bird in February. Five from 22nd February until 7th March (many observers). One remained until early May but two were present on the 5th. One flew in off the sea on 14th October (Steve Millar). Singles were also reported on 29th October (Gerry Lyons), 11th November (Niall Griffin) and 18th December (Tom Cooney).



SWIFT *Apus apus*

Frequent in spring and autumn, scarce in summer

Earliest date: one on 2nd May (Paul Hennigan).

Latest date: two on 15th August (Tom Cooney).

Highest count(s): 19 on 9th June and 20 on 16th July.

KINGFISHER *Alcedo atthis*

Scarce but regular winter visitor

One on 19th August at the River Santry outflow was the first only record.

KESTREL *Falco tinnunculus*

Resident

One pair bred successfully. Birds were encountered in all areas of the island.



MERLIN *Falco columbarius*

Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor

One or two birds were present from 2011 to 10th March with one on several dates up to 3rd May. One on 24th September may have been the bird reported on several dates into November. Two female/immature types near the Bull Wall on 29th November. One on 22nd December.



PEREGRINE *Falco peregrinus*

Regular visitor

Up to three birds were present daily up to 7th February with single birds on several dates to 21st May. None reported again until 14th July. One or two were present regularly into the winter 2012/2013.



CARRION CROW *Corvus corone*

Scarce resident

A bird present in late 2011 was probably the same bird seen on 7th (Niall T Keogh) and 22nd January (Mark Carmody). Singles on 18th September, 11th and 19th October (Tom Cooney, Stephen Lawlor *et al.*) and 29th December (Victor Caschera).

HOODED CROW *Corvus corone cornix*

Resident

Highest count was 70 on 2nd May.

CARRION / HOODED CROW *C. c. corone/cornix*

Very scarce

At least one hybrid carrion x hooded crow was present throughout the year.



RAVEN *Corvus corax*

Scarce but regular visitor

Two on 6th January and on several dates in March. One or two were present regularly between September and December mostly on the northern end of the island.

GOLDCREST *Regulus regulus*

Very scarce passage migrant, mainly in autumn.

None reported in the early part of the year. Single birds reported on 6th and 20th September, 6th October and 11th December. Two on 15th October.

SAND MARTIN *Riparia riparia*

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

One over the Alder Marsh on 12th June was the first report of 2012. One on 12th June (Ger Franck) and two on 17th July (Colm McConnell).

SWALLOW *Hirundo rustica*

Summer visitor and passage migrant

Earliest Date: Eight on 13th April (Edd Kealy, Mark Hanley).

Latest Date: Six on 17th October (Ger Franck).

Breeding: Several pairs bred.

Passage: Spring and autumn passage was generally light with peak of up to 100 noted on 3rd and 5th May. Fewer were reported on autumn passage with a maximum of 50 on 27th September.

HOUSE MARTIN *Delichon urbicum*

Summer visitor and passage migrant

Earliest date: 30 on 2nd May.

Latest date: three on 12th October.

The island has a thriving breeding population and the largest post-breeding count was 160 birds on 8th September (Ger Franck).

CHIFFCHAFF *Phylloscopus collybita*

Scarce but regular passage migrant

One on 15th and six on 17th April were the only spring records. In autumn two were reported on 6th, one on 17th and two on 21st September. One on 10th October.

Siberian Chiffchaff *P.c. tristis*

One on 20th November (Tom Cooney, Ger Franck). Call heard.

This is the first record of this subspecies.



WILLOW WARBLER *Phylloscopus trochilus*

Scarce but regular passage migrant

Passage migrants were recorded on 19 dates from 6th April to 16th May and 1st August to 8th September. Maximum numbers were six on 12th April and five on 22nd.



BLACKCAP *Sylvia atricapilla*

Scarce migrant and winter visitor

In winter one was present on several dates in January up to 11th February. In spring seven birds were reported on five dates between 12th April and 27th May including one bird in song (photograph below). In autumn, single birds were recorded on 14th August, 6th September, three on 10th October and one on 16th October.

None were reported from the early part of the winter 2012/2013.



WHITETHROAT *Sylvia communis*

Rare passage migrant

Single birds present on 2nd and 5th May, three on 10th and two on 16th May. Singles on 6th and 24th June were the first records for that month. One remained for several days in June.



GRASSHOPPER WARBLER *Locustella naevia*

Very scarce but possibly regular passage migrant

Single birds on 22nd April (Ger Franck), 2nd and 10th May (Tom Cooney).

Due to its elusive nature the status of grasshopper warblers migrating through the island is difficult to define.

SEDGE WARBLER *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

Scarce but regular passage migrant

In May there were four on 2nd and singles on 7th, 9th, 10th and 16th.



REED WARBLER *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

Rare

One on 9th May singing in low scrub was the first island record (Tom Cooney).

This bird was discovered minutes after a Marsh Harrier flew over the same location.



WAXWING *Bombycilla garrulus*

Rare

A flock of 19 flew over the island on 29th December (Victor Caschera).

WREN *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Resident

The breeding population has not recovered fully following the recent cold winters. All

nesting birds were located on the southern end of the island in 2012. In autumn and early winter small numbers were reported in the dunes, Alder Marsh and scrub in the St. Anne's golf-course on the northern end of the island

SONG THRUSH *Turdus philomelos*

Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor

Several reports of one or two from January to June and again in October. From 22nd October into 2013 small numbers (up to 12 birds) were present almost daily. As song thrushes do not nest on the island therefore these birds were either passage migrants or winter visitors.

REDWING *Turdus iliacus*

Passage migrant and winter visitor.

One on 17th January. Two on 19th October. Six on 29th November. One on 11th December.

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER *Muscicapa striata*

Very scarce passage migrant

One in the Alder Marsh on 10th May.

ROBIN *Erithacus rubecula*

Resident

Very scarce in the early half of the year with a maximum of two birds being reported. From October into 2013 a minimum of six were present in various parts of the island.

The resident breeding population has not recovered from the severe winters of 2009/2010 and 2010/2011.

WHINCHAT *Saxicola rubetra*

Scarce passage migrant

Three between the Alder Marsh and the point on 2nd May and one near the Alder Marsh on 3rd May (Tom Cooney, Patrick Veale).



STONECHAT *Saxicola torquata*

Uncommon resident

Up to four wintered on the island 2011/2012. No birds were found on the island between 11th March and 23rd June despite an extensive search. A juvenile on 24th June was almost

certainly from a breeding pair on the mainland. In autumn possibly ten or more birds were present in autumn/early winter in the vicinity of the Bull Wall, the beach, Royal Dublin Golf Course, the causeway and the Alder Marsh.

WHEATEAR *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Common passage migrant, occasionally nests

Earliest date: one on 20th March (Tom Cooney).

Latest date: two on 21st October (Ger Franck).

Spring: minimum of 80 on the fence posts and on grasslands along the south saltmarsh on 2nd May. The total number of birds present on the island was c.300.

No birds were found during the breeding season.



Wheatears on fence posts Royal Dublin golf-course 2nd May.

HOUSE SPARROW *Passer domesticus*

Rare

A male was seen feeding on sea buckthorn in St Anne's Golf Course on 21st May and several females were on the island side of the causeway the same day (Tom Cooney). Two were present beside the causeway on 17th July (Ger Franck).

Although house sparrows occasionally visit the boundary of the lagoons at Dollymount and Blackbanks none have been reported on the island for at least 60 years.

GREY WAGTAIL *Motacilla cinerea*

Occasional along mainland

One on 5th May in the Royal Dublin Golf Course was the only sighting of a bird on the island. Two at the Santry River outflow on 9th and one on 28th October.

PIED WAGTAIL *Motacilla alba yarrellii*

Resident and passage migrant

At least two pairs bred.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba alba*

Scarce passage migrant.

Up to three present from 12th and 20th September (Paul Mc Cullough *et al*).

ROCK PIPIT *Anthus petrosus*

Uncommon winter visitor

The only bird reported in the early part of the year was one at the Bull Wall in May but nesting was not suspected. Singles birds were reported on 3rd (the point) and 15th November (causeway), two on 13th December (Bull Wall), three on 15th December (Causeway).

GREENFINCH *Carduelis chloris*

Common winter visitor

Small flocks of up to 30 birds were present in late summer and autumn.

LINNET *Carduelis cannabina*

Resident and very common winter visitor

Flocks of up to 100 birds were present in several parts of the island in the latter part of the year.

TWITE *Carduelis flavirostris*

Rare visitor in autumn and winter

One on 15th November (Ger Franck).

REDPOLL *Acanthis cabaret*

Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor

Up to 12 birds were present daily in the Alder Marsh from 6th September to 10th October with one or two remaining until at least the 19th.

GOLDFINCH *Carduelis carduelis*

Common passage migrant and winter visitor, occasional breeder

Large numbers were present in the latter part of the year. Between 300 and 500 birds in several flocks were present from late September and October on the northern end of the island. Similar numbers were seen on the southern end but no counts were made.

SNOW BUNTING *Plectrophenax nivalis*

Irregular winter visitors

Up to three were present from 1st to 5th November on the beach beside the Bull Wall (Ger Franck, Ciaran Dunne *et al.*).



Two first-winter Snow Buntings near Bull Wall © John Fox

Issues of Conservation Concern 2012

Although the North Bull Island is a nature reserve, Special Protection Area (SPA) for birds and a Special Area for Conservation (SAC), local and visiting naturalists have become increasingly concerned that recreational activities are having a negative impact on the islands protected habitats and wildlife. The following is a summary of the main issues of concern together with a sample of photographs illustrating the problems.

Dogs: in 2012 dogs were ‘walked’ off leashes on the salt marshes and mudflats daily and were observed harassing birds very frequently. Once abundant, the islands hare population is now perilously close to extinction. In 2012 dogs were observed flushing and chasing hares on the saltmarshes on a number of occasions.

Usually one to three dogs accompany their owners but the record for 2012 was eleven dogs being “walked” off leashes (by one individual) on the south saltmarsh and inter-tidal mudflats on several dates.

Bait digging and shellfish collecting: both of these activities involve the removal of hundreds if not thousands of organisms from the nature reserve on a daily basis. Bait digging is a particularly destructive activity as it involves physically digging-up protected EU Annex I habitat (Intertidal mud and sandflats, 1140). Usually 5 to 10 bait diggers are present daily but occasionally up to 20 or more have been counted in a single day. Both activities can also cause disturbance to the birdlife.

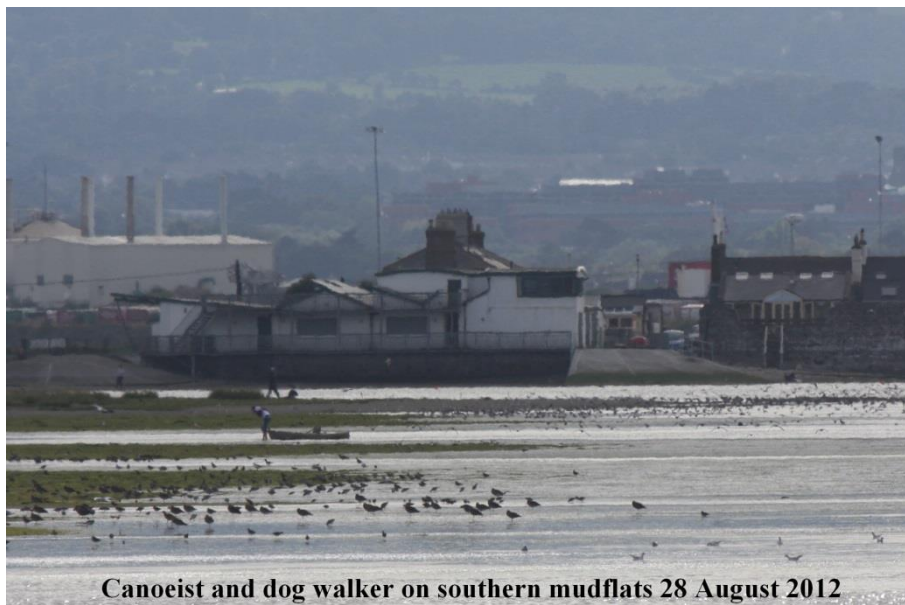
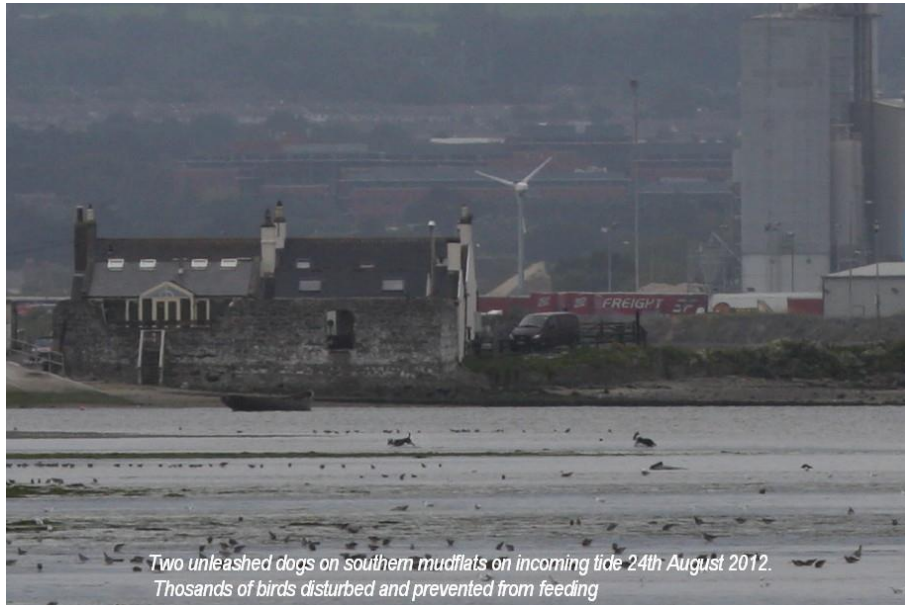
Water sports: (boating, canoeing, wind-surfing) by individuals and groups (including organised events) caused regular and prolonged disturbances to the high tide roosts in both lagoons in 2012. Motor boats have also been involved occasionally. On many occasions canoes were observed skirting the edge of the saltmarshes and entering the creeks in the saltmarshes deliberately disturbing thousands of birds roosting at high tide.

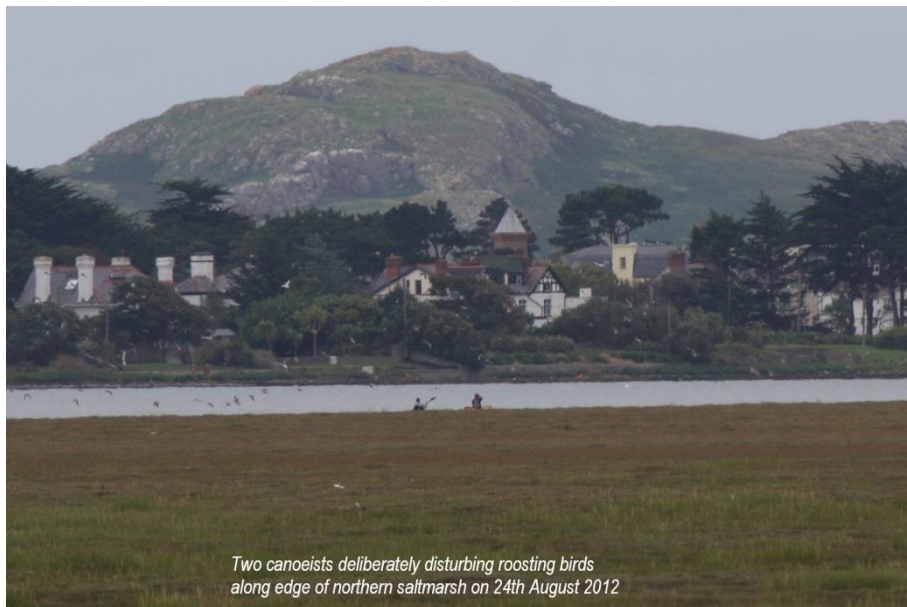
Unprotected nesting habitat: ringed plovers did not nest on the island in 2012. This is the first year no nests were located. The absence of the birds at the traditional nesting site is almost certainly due to constant disturbance caused by walkers/joggers/dogs/quad-bikes during the breeding season. This particular site was the location of Ireland’s largest little terns colony in the late 1980s/early 1990s but it was abandoned by the terns due to lack of protection.

Sea Buckthorn *Hippophae rhamnoides*. Since this highly invasive shrub was introduced to the island by both golf clubs it has spread into the public areas of the island and formed dense thickets. Isolated specimens and clumps have also been recorded at the point, Alder Marsh and throughout the full length of the sand dunes. If left unchecked this scrub would encroach upon and pose a serious threat to the islands sand dunes systems. In autumn 2012 both golf clubs and Dublin City Council started the process of eradicating sea buckthorn from the island. Considering how persistent this shrub can be and how widely distributed it is on the island (in 2012) its eradication will take many years to achieve. Although sea buckthorn does provide limited cover and feeding for a small number of passerines the overall impact of its

removal should be minimal. Very few species/nests were found utilising Sea Buckthorn during a mapping survey of the islands breeding birds in 2012.

Possible infilling of mudflats for S2S Cycle Route: local politicians have stated that due to financial constraints a ‘lower cost’ interim scheme to infill mudflats between the Wooden Bridge and the Causeway is now being considered by Dublin City Council. It has been suggested that subject to planning approval this infilling could commence in late 2013. The notion that legally protected habitats within a nature reserve can be infilled for a non-essential infrastructure is a matter of great concern.









Bait digging in low water channel southern mudflats 29th May 2011:



One of several winkle pickers in north lagoon near Sutton Creek on 11th June 2012

