

North Bull Island Bird Report 2013



Edited and compiled

by

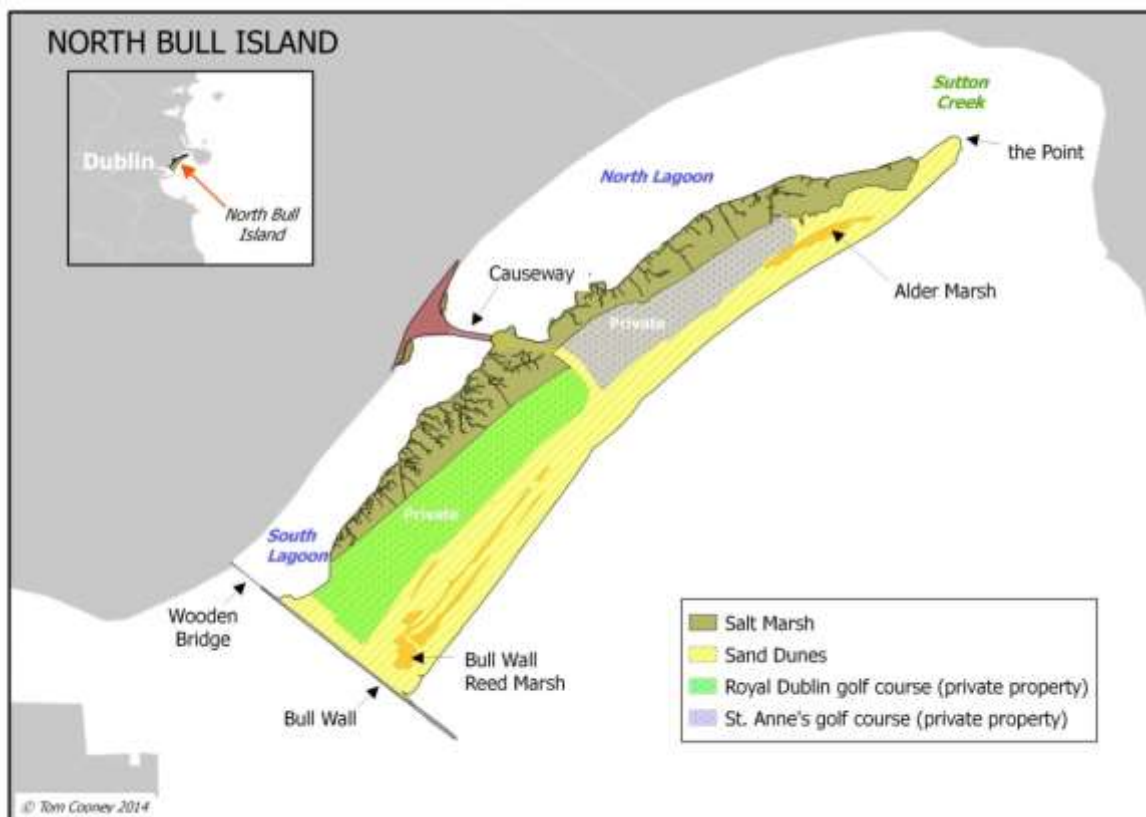
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2013

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

Editorial

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

A total of 134 species were reported between 1st January 2013 and 31st December 2013. Observations were reported to www.bullislandbirds.com on 251 days during 2013. This total does not include dates when data on the breeding and wintering birds were collected.

Added to the islands species list in 2013 were long-tailed tit and the *littoralis* race of rock pipit. Other island rarities included Sabine's gull, spoonbill, yellow wagtail, garganey, black brant, woodcock and water rail. The returning blue-winged teal also put in a very brief appearance.

Spring passage was particularly notable for the variety of warblers including record numbers of reed and grasshopper. Exceptionally large numbers of wheatears were also present for the second year in a row including birds showing characteristics of the Greenland/Iceland *leucorhoa* race. Spring passage of whimbrels was lower than in recent years. During an unusually 'late spring' record numbers of kittiwakes and gannets were observed feeding further inshore with some even venturing into the lagoons at high water.

The breeding birds were surveyed and mapped for the second year in succession. Regrettably neither little tern or ringed plovers attempted to nest despite suitable habitat being present. The absence of protection from disturbance at the traditional nesting site is the main reason for their abandonment of the island. Summer was relatively quiet for migrants with the only bird of note being a summer plumaged spotted redshank.

Regular autumn passage migration was average and no Nearctic waders were recorded. All regular wintering birds were present from August onwards.

The year ended with the welcome arrival snow buntings and long-tailed ducks.

Address for correspondence and contribution of sightings to Tom at: bullislandbirds@gmail.com

Acknowledgements

This bird report is for all birdwatchers and naturalists who enjoy bird watching on North Bull Island. It is independently produced and all birders are welcome to contribute sightings for inclusion in future issues.

This issue would not have been possible to produce without the support and cooperation of birdwatchers who contributed observations in 2013. I wish to thank all contributors many of whom supplied excellent photographs.

List of Contributors

Jim Bell	Vincent Hall	Paul McMahon
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John Fox	Tom Murtagh	Frank Turpin
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	Stephen McAvoy	Patrick Veale
Brian B Gormley	Philip McCaffrey	
Alex Gimenez	Colm McConnell	Aron White
Niall Griffin	Ronan McLaughlin	

Cover photo: Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*

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 with five cygnets hatched. Several birds were present throughout the year.

WHOOPER SWAN *Cygnus cygnus*

Very scarce winter visitor

Three on 17th March (Aidan G. Kelly). Nine flew south over the island on 5th (Tom Cooney, Tom Doyle) and two on 15th November (Matt Silk).

WHITE-FONTED GOOSE *Anser albifrons flavirostris*

Irregular and scarce winter in winter

Three on 13th November (Niall T Keogh, Matt Silk).

BRENT GOOSE *Branta bernicla hrota*

Common winter visitor

Summer: One from May was present on many dates up to 23rd July.

Autumn arrivals: Three on 9th September.

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

Rare winter visitor

One on 9th, 14th and 18th March (James Hayes, A.G. Kelly). Up to three from 4th to 6th May (P. Veale, A.G. Kelly, Tom Cooney, Tom Doyle). Five on 11th November (Matt Silk, James Hayes).

Black Brant *B.b. nigricans*

Very rare

One on 7th to 13th November (Matt Silk *et al.*).

This is the first record of this North American race since November 2001.



Grey-bellied Brent *Branta bernicla* ?

An adult male on 11th November (Matt Silk *et al.*) may have been the bird that was reported in February and March from various inland feeding sites during the winter 2012/2013 and last reported on 18th March. It is probably also the bird reported on 22nd and 25th February 2012 at nearby inland sites.



In addition to these reports, two metal ringed Atlantic Brant *B.b. hrota* were also present on 11th and 15th November (Matt Silk) and were probably return birds first seen feeding at inland sites in February and March 2013.

SHELDUCK *Tadorna tadorna*

Resident, common winter visitor

Successful breeding confirmed. Birds frequented the Bull Wall Reed Marsh in spring/early summer but nesting was not attempted due to constant harassment by dogs.

WIGEON *Anas penelope*

Common winter visitor

Late spring date:

A male on 8th May and remained until 13th at the Bull Wall Reed Marsh (Tom Cooney, Tom Doyle, Edd Kealy).

Early autumn arrivals:

Family party arrived on 27th June with one remaining on 28th. Normal arrivals started on 26th August.



GADWALL *Anas hyemalis*

Very scarce autumn migrant and winter visitor

Female on 9th September (Hugh Delaney). Male and female on 15th November (Ger Franck) joined by another male from 19th into 2014 (Edd Kealy, Tom Cooney, Ciaran Dunne).



TEAL *Anas crecca*

Common winter visitor

Late dates: In April three at Bull Wall Reed Marsh on 19th and a female in the drainage channel in the Royal Dublin golf course on 30th April.

Autumn arrivals: A female on 30th July was very early and the main arrival started with 20 on 25th August.

MALLARD *Anas platyrhynchos*

Resident

Several pairs bred



GARGANEY *Anas querquedula*

Rare

Male on 22nd May (Tom Cooney).



BLUE-WINGED TEAL *Anas discors*

Rare

A female, assumed to be the returning bird, on 14th and 17th February (Ger Franck, Jim Duffy, Mark Carmody).

TUFTED DUCK *Aythya fuligula*

Resident

Up to seven birds in early 2013 with up to ten daily in autumn and winter 2013/2014.



EIDER *Somateria mollissima*

Rare

First winter male from 13th to 17th November off the Bull Wall (Tom Cooney, James Hayes, Tom Doyle, Niall T Keogh *et al.*).

Now that eider ducks are breeding on the coast of County Dublin it is likely that more will occur off the North Bull in future years.



LONG-TAILED DUCK *Clangula hyemalis*

Irregular and scarce winter visitor

Two from 2012 were present regularly in Sutton Creek until 19th April (many observers). In November one on 21st, two on 25th and three from 27th into December increased to six on 11th and 16th (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy, James Hayes).



COMMON SCOTER *Melanitta nigra*

Regular winter visitor in small numbers

Two birds from 2012 were present regularly in Sutton Creek up to 19th April. Sixteen on the bay side of the point on 21st November (Tom Cooney) and 17 on 25th (James Hayes).

GOLDENEYE *Bucephala clangula*

Uncommon winter visitor

Up to six birds present at Sutton Creek up to 9th February (Niall T Keogh, Noel Keogh, Brian Porter, Sean Kelly, Ger Franck). Two at the point and seventeen off the Wooden Bridge on 21st November (Tom Cooney). One or two remained around the island into 2014.

RED-BREASTED MERGANSER *Mergus serrator*

Regular visitor in small numbers

A peak of 47 in February with up to 25 birds at other times. No records for July and August.

RED-THROATED DIVER *Gavia stellata*

Uncommon winter visitor

Very scarce in the early part of 2013 with only five records of single birds between January and late March. Two on 9th May were late and in partial breeding plumage. The first bird of autumn was on 24th October and in November there were singles on 1st and 3rd with two on 5th, 6th, 21st and three on 25th.

GREAT NORTHERN DIVER *Gavia immer*

Scarce winter visitor.

One on 20th January at Bull Wall (Niall T. Keogh, Sean Kelly).

FULMAR *Fulmarus glacialis*

Rare

One on 9th May off the Bull Wall (Tom Cooney). One found dead on the dunes on 20th November (Tom Cooney, Vincent Hall).

MANX SHEARWATER *Puffinus puffinus*

Occasional spring to autumn

Two off the point on 25th April (Ciaran Dunne). Ten off Bull Wall on 9th May (Tom Cooney). One hundred off the beach on 1st July (Stewart Holohan) with 33 there on 4th July (Ciaran Dunne, Edd Kealy, Tom Cooney). One off Bull Wall on 23rd July (Ciaran Dunne).

A typical scattering of spring and summer records.



GANNET *Morus bassanus*

Occasional offshore in summer

One on 9th March (Ciaran Dunne) off the Bull Wall was the first of many to occur close inshore in 2013. Several were present in April and early May with a peak of 31 on 8th and 9th May. Many were on the port side of the Bull Wall as far inshore as the Wooden Bridge and off Clontarf Yacht Club. Birds were reported into June with a peak of eight on 10th. Up to

five could be seen off the beach and Bull Wall in September through to mid-November.



CORMORANT *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Regular visitor all year

Present in every month with 10 to 20 regularly in the waters around then island. Peaks of 32 on 20th June and 68 on 29th August.

LITTLE EGRET *Egretta garzetta*

Non-breeding resident

Up to 20 present regularly from winter 2012/2013 up to late June. In early July 25 to 31 daily included several juveniles. Up to 42 were present daily in August and a peak of 59 on 19th September. Twenty to thirty were present daily to the end of 2013.



GREY HERON *Ardea cinerea*

Present all year

Twenty to thirty present daily with peak numbers in late summer.

SPOONBILL *Platalea leucorodia*

Rare

Adult from 10th to 13th March (Paul McMahon *et al*).



LITTLE GREBE *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Scarce winter visitor

Birds were present regularly in the south lagoon at high water with most reports coming from the Wooden Bridge area. Others were reported from the saltmarsh channels, causeway and golf courses. Peak of nine on 19th September.

GREAT CRESTED GREBE *Podiceps cristatus*

Winter visitor, occasional at other times

Birds were reported regularly in the early part of the year up until 23rd May. Peaks were 23 on 13th February and 27 on 5th April (Ciaran Dunne *et al*). The first bird of autumn was one on 20th September off the Bull Wall. Up to ten were present on several in the latter part of the year with peak counts of 19 on 1st and 21 on 6th November (Ciaran Dunne). A minimum of 107 was counted between the point and Bull Wall on 25th November (Tom Cooney).

SPARROWHAWK *Accipiter nisus*

Regular visitor

Single birds reported in every month in every month throughout the island.



COMMON BUZZARD *Buteo buteo*

Rare but becoming more frequent

One flew over the causeway on 4th May (Tom Doyle). One on 19th November on the south saltmarsh (Frank Turpin) and possibly the same bird on the 23rd (Ger Franck).

WATER RAIL *Rallus aquaticus*

Rare

One flushed from the same location on the north saltmarsh on 5th and 21st November and 16th December (Tom Cooney). One in the Royal Dublin Golf Course on 8th December (Matt Silk).

The sightings on the northern salt marsh presumably refer to a wintering bird.

COOT *Fulica atra*

Resident

Birds were present at Bull Wall Reed Marsh up to late June and were attempting to nest but were forced to abandon the site due to constant harassment by dogs.



OYSTERCATCHER *Haematopus ostralegus*

Common winter visitor and passage migrant

A small number were present in summer. The leucistic individual seen in previous years was present again during autumn passage.



GOLDEN PLOVER

Regular passage migrant and winter visitor

Spring: 157 were present on 13th March but his increased to 850 by the 23rd.

Up to 650 remained until mid-April and the last report was of 250 on 13th April.

Autumn: The first bird of autumn was one on 23rd July. Birds were present more regularly from 5th August onwards with 20 on 7th increasing to 150 by 27th. Up to 200 were present to the end of the year.

GREY PLOVER *Pluvialis squatarola*

Common winter visitor and passage migrant

The last of the winter/spring passage birds were reported on 7th May. First returning birds were reported on 24th July but the main passage commenced from 6th August onwards.

LAPWING *Pluvialis pluvialis*

Common in autumn, uncommon in winter

Post breeding birds returned on 9th June with four present for several days. Numbers increased solely into July with 26 on 17th. Up to 50 present in autumn and early winter.

RINGED PLOVER *Charadrius hiaticula*

Former breeder, common passage migrant and winter visitor

No breeding pairs.

This is the third year in succession ringed plovers have been absent during the breeding season. Constant disturbance by walkers, joggers and various amenity activities at the traditional nesting location is preventing these birds from nesting.

WHIMBREL *Numenius phaeopus*

Regular passage migrant.

Earliest spring date: One on 16th March (Ger Franck).

Latest autumn date: Two on 19th September (Tom Cooney).

Winter record: One on 3rd January (Tom Doyle).

Peaks of 160 on 22nd April, 81 on 7th May and 25 on 28th August.



CURLEW *Numenius arquata*

Common passage migrant and winter visitor

Outside the breeding season up to 50 were present throughout June rising abruptly to 180 on 3rd July as autumn passage got under way.

BLACK-TAILED GODWIT *Limosa limosa*

Common passage migrant and winter visitor

Spring: 600-680 were present in April up to 22nd with only two present on 29th.

Autumn: One on 7th June was the earliest reported increasing to seven by the first week of July. Numbers increased to 50 on 16th July and 350 by 25th August.



BAR-TAILED GODWIT *Limosa lapponica*

Common winter visitor and passage migrant

Up to 600 or more were present in the early part of the year. A small number summered on the island with 40 present in June. Autumn passage began in early July with 102 on 5th increasing to 650 by 25th. Up to 1000 on 2nd October.

KNOT *Calidris canutus*

Common winter visitor and passage migrant

Up to 20 remained until 7th May. The earliest autumn passage birds arrived on 5th July but most occurred from 24th July onwards into early August.

RUFF *Philomachus pugnax*

Scarce autumn passage migrant, rare in spring

One on 9th September (Tom Cooney, Frank Turpin, Ger Franck, Ciaran Dunne).

CURLEW SANDPIPER *Calidris ferruginea*

Autumn passage migrant, rare in winter and spring

Spring: none recorded.

Autumn: One on 30th July (Mark Stewart). Three on 25th August may have been the birds seen regularly into early September (M. Nolan, A.G. Kelly *et al*). Eight on 7th and six on the 10th September with up to two or three remaining to mid-month and singles on 17th, 25th, 27th September and 2nd October (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy, Diarmuid Ó Sé, Stewart Holohan). One adult and five juveniles on 4th October (Tom Cooney) with two on 5th and 7th (Niall Griffin, Tom Cooney, Frank Turpin). One on 3rd (Diarmuid Ó Sé) and 9th November (Frank Turpin) probably refer to the same bird.



SANDERLING *Calidris alba*

Common passage migrant and winter visitor

Up to 170 birds were present in the early part of the year with several counts of 300 from October to early December. 160 on 31st December.

A number of Icelandic ringed birds were present in both winters.

DUNLIN *Calidris alpina*

Very common passage migrant and winter visitor

Spring passage: 2,000 on 20th May (Stewart Holohan) was the highest count.

Autumn arrivals: 19 on 16th July (Edd Kealy) were the first birds reported but numbers increased slowly until 600 on 5th August and 1,000 on 7th (James Hayes, Brian Carruthers).

Winter: 2,100 at the point on 30th December during a high tide (Tom Cooney).

PURPLE SANDPIPER *Calidris maritima*

Scarce and irregular winter visitor

Two on 9th May at Bull Wall (Tom Cooney).

LITTLE STINT

Regular but scarce passage migrant

Reported on six dates between 28th August and 14th September.

August: one on 28th (Edd Kealy) and 30th (Tom Cooney, James Hayes). September: two on 2nd (Tom Cooney, Ciaran Dunne), one of 3rd (Frank Turpin, Ger Franck), three on 7th (Tom Cooney) and one on 14th (Edd Kealy).



GREY PHALAROPE *Phalaropus fulicarius*

Rare

First winter on 2nd November near the coastguard cottages (John Fields, Cian Merne) and another first winter bird in Sutton Creek after stormy weather on 27th December (Edd Kealy).



COMMON SANDPIPER *Actitis hypoleucos*

Scarce and irregular migrant

Single birds on 30th July, 4th, 6th, 7th and 19th August with two on 9th (Tom Cooney, Ger Franck, James Hayes, Edd Kealy).

SPOTTED REDSHANK *Tringa erythropus*

Scarce passage migrant, very scarce in winter

Adult in breeding plumage on 28th June (Tom Cooney).



GREENSHANK *Tringa nebularia*

Uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor

Recorded on all months except May.

Autumn passage started on 24th June increasing daily to 26 by 16th. Peak in August of 55 on 6th and 57 on 27th. Less than 30 remained from September until the end of the year.

REDSHANK *Tringa totanus*

Common passage migrant and winter visitor

Passage and wintering populations were as normal. The first of the autumn migrants was reported on 24th June with 23 present on the 25th.

JACK SNIPE *Lymnecryptes minimus*

Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor, probably under-recorded

In January single birds on 2nd January at Bull Wall Reed Marsh (Tom Cooney) and on 3rd on the northern end (Tom Doyle). Three on the north saltmarsh on 1st February (Tom Cooney) with a single bird there on 17th March (Hugh Delaney, Peter J Doyle) and in the Alder Marsh on 23rd March (James Hayes). In April singles were reported from the Alder Marsh on 9th (Edd Kealy) and at the causeway on 14th (Mir Harris).

Several reports of one on the north salt marsh from 18th October to 16th December (Tom Cooney). Singles at Bull Wall Reed Marsh on 4th November (Tom Doyle), south saltmarsh on 7th and 12th November, and one flew in off the sea on 26th November (Tom Cooney). One at Bull Wall Reed Marsh on 24th and on the north saltmarsh on 29th December (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy).

WOODCOCK *Scolopax rusticola*

Rare

One on 8th November was flushed from the sand dunes near the Alder Marsh (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy).

COMMON SNIPE *Gallinago gallinago*

Regular passage migrant and winter visitor

One or two on many dates with a maximum of only three reported on 12th April. Unusually birds were seen in late May and June. The first migrants of autumn were two on 15th September with a peak count of eleven on 22nd October.

ARCTIC SKUA *Stercorarius parasiticus*

Very scarce migrant

One on 9th May off the Bull Wall (Tom Cooney).

BLACK GUILLEMOT *Cephus grille*

Occasional visitor

Singles at the Bull Wall / Wooden Bridge area on 20th January, 12th March, 23rd, 27th and 30th March, 9th April and 22nd October. Two on 26th March and eight on 9th May. One at the Wooden Bridge on 22nd October. One in winter plumage in Sutton Creek on 21st November.

RAZORBILL *Alca torda*

Occasional visitor

Three on 25th April, six on 8th May and 11 on 9th May (Ciaran Dunne, Tom Cooney).

GUILLEMOT *Uria aalge*

Occasional

One on 20th April and four on 25th April (Ciaran Dunne). Nine on 8th and 14 on 9th May (Tom Cooney). Two on 17th October (Tom Cooney, Ciaran Dunne). Tideline corpse on 5th November.

LITTLE TERN *Sternula albifrons*

Formerly nationally important breeding site, now very scarce summer visitor

Three on 8th May (Tom Cooney).

Lack of protection and disturbance by walkers, joggers, dogs and sand-kite surfers *etc* are preventing this rare summer visitor from using this traditional breeding site.

SANDWICH TERN *Sterna sandvicensis*

Common passage migrant, occasional in summer

Earliest date: One on 24th March (Mark Carmody)

Latest date: Five on 7th October (Tom Cooney).

Spring arrivals on 5th April with birds reported in every month up to 7th October. Peaks were 23 on 25th April (Tom Cooney, James Hayes), 28 on 7th August (James Hayes) and 37 on 9th September (Ger Franck, Frank Turpin, Tom Cooney). Five on 4th October.



COMMON TERN *Sterna hirundo*

Common in summer

Earliest date: One on 18th Aril (Paul McMahon).

Latest date: 230 on 30th August (Tom Cooney).

Up to 80 daily from May to August in the lagoons, beach and the Bull Wall. Unusually many birds frequented the area just south of the causeway where courtship and copulation was observed regularly.



ARCTIC TERN *Sterna paradisaea*

Uncommon summer visitor

Five on 24th May (Edd Kealy) were the earliest reported however birds may have been present earlier but unrecorded. Up to five were reported in June, July and August.



SABINE'S GULL *Xema sabini*

Vagrant

A winter plumaged adult off the causeway on 9th September roosted with gulls on the north salt-marsh (Tom Cooney, Hugh Delaney, Ger Franck, Frank Turpin).



KITTIWAKE *Rissa tridactyla*

Formerly a rare visitor

Reported from 24th March to 21st June with peaks of 230 on 9th May (Mark Carmody, Tom Cooney, Ciaran Dunne, Tom Doyle, Edd Kealy, Niall Griffin).

Kittiwakes are rarely seen inshore in such large numbers.

MEDITERRANEAN GULL *Larus melanocephalus*

Scarce

Many reports from early February to 13th November. Single birds present in February and early March with an increase to eight on 15th June and peaks of 12 to 18 into mid-July. By late July up to seven were still present. One or two were present occasionally up to 13th November (many observers). Adult on 20th December (Patrick Veale).

RING-BILLED GULL *Larus delawarensis*

Scarce, mostly usually recorded in spring.

Two on 12th March and one on 13th (Niall T Keogh, Mark Stewart, Andrew Power, Peter Cutler). Adult from 18th to 20th October (Geoff Morgan, Edd Kealy). Adult on 13th

November (Niall T. Keogh, Matt Silk).

STOCK DOVE *Columba oenas*

Very scarce

One on 4th May (Niall Griffin) and two on 25th July (Ger Franck).

COLLARED DOVE *Streptopelia decaocto*

Rare

Two on 26th April and one on 28th August (Tom Cooney).

CUCKOO *Cuculus canorus*

Very scarce summer visitor

Single birds from 1st to 6th May in the Alder Marsh, one at Bull Wall Reed Marsh on 20th June and one at the causeway on 25th August.



SHORT-EARED OWL *Asio flammeus*

Scarce and irregular winter visitor

Single birds on 23rd March (Brian Carruthers, P. Yates, R. Moore, L. Hughes), 23rd April, 2nd May (Tom Cooney) and 15th May (Stephen Doyle, Christian Onyedikam). One on 21st and 22nd October (Tom Cooney). One flew in from the sea on 18th November (Sean Geraty *et al.*).

SWIFT *Apus apus*

Frequent in spring and autumn, scarce in summer

Earliest date: Five on 26th April (Tom Cooney, James Hayes, Colm McConnell).

Latest date: Last birds were three on 26th July (Edd Kealy).

Highest count: One hundred over saltmarshes on 28th June (Tom Doyle).

KINGFISHER *Alcedo atthis*

Scarce but regular winter visitor

One on 23rd March (Brian Carruthers, P. Yates, R. Moore, L. Hughes).

KESTREL *Falco tinnunculus*

Resident

One or two present daily.



MERLIN *Falco columbarius*

Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor

Single birds reported on nine dates from 3rd January to 7th April (many observers).

A female/immature on 23rd September was the first of the autumn and several sightings of another female/immature from October to December may refer to the same individual.



PEREGRINE *Falco peregrinus*

Regular visitor

One or two reported regularly in each month. In autumn two adults and an immature were present on different dates indicating that at least three birds frequented the island.

CARRION CROW *Corvus corone*

Scarce resident

One on 12th March at the Bull Wall (Ciaran Dunne).

HOODED CROW *Corvus corone cornix*

Resident

Small groups of 10 to 20 birds were present regularly throughout the year. No large flocks reported although the actual number of birds present on the island was the same as in previous years.

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

Very scarce

A least one throughout the year mostly at the River Santry outflow.

RAVEN *Corvus corax*

Scarce but regular visitor

Three on 1st and two on 28th February (Tom Cooney, Niall T. Keogh). One on 4th and 7th May (Tom Doyle). Two on 14th August (James Hayes). Singles in November on 4th, 8th, 11th, 13th, 15th and 20th (Edd Kealy, Tom Doyle, Tom Cooney, Ger Franck, Vincent Hall).

GOLDCREST *Regulus regulus*

Very scarce passage migrant, mainly in autumn

Spring passage: recorded on five dates between 13th March and 20th April with a peak of three on 13th April (Ger Franck *et al.*).

Autumn passage: Two on 27th September. Singles on 1st, 7th, 17th and 22nd October with three on 21st (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy). In November five of 1st and one on 4th (Tom Cooney).

SAND MARTIN *Riparia riparia*

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

Earliest date: One on 19th April (Ger Franck).

Latest date: A minimum of ten on 4th October.

Birds were present most of the summer with peaks of up to 30 in July.

BARN SWALLOW *Hirundo rustica*

Summer visitor and passage migrant

Earliest Date: one on 13th April (Brian Gormley).

Latest Date: one on 12th November (Steven McAvoy).

Breeding: breeding confirmed

Spring passage: up to 60 daily at Bull Wall Reed Marsh in late April.

Autumn passage: up to 30 daily in September but significant passage of 1,000 birds in two hours on the morning of 4th October.



HOUSE MARTIN *Delichon urbicum*

Summer visitor and passage migrant

Earliest date: one on 13th April (Brian Gormley).

Latest date: minimum of 50 flew south across the bay on 4th October.

Small mixed flocks of barn swallows and house martins were recorded migrating across the island in spring and autumn but no large movements were reported.

LONG TAILED-TIT *Aegithalos caudatus*

Vagrant

Two on 23rd March in the Alder Marsh (James Hayes).

This is the first record for the island.



CHIFFCHAFF *Phylloscopus collybita*

Scarce but regular passage migrant

Spring passage: 8th April to 5th May with peaks of 15 on 13th April (Ger Franck) and ten on 20th (Edd Kealy).

Autumn passage: 29th August to 24th October with peaks of five on 11th in the Alder Marsh and 27th September near the Bull Wall (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy).



WILLOW WARBLER *Phylloscopus trochilus*

Uncommon but regular passage migrant

Spring passage: recorded regularly from 12th April to 9th May with peaks of 12 on 19th April (Ger Franck), 29 on 30th April (Tom Cooney).

Autumn passage: recorded from 4th August to 27th September with peaks of four on 4th August (Ger Franck) and five on 15th August (Edd Kealy).



BLACKCAP *Sylvia atricapilla*

Scarce migrant and winter visitor

Spring passage: Recorded from 25th April to 31st May. Peak of eight on 30th April.

Autumn passage: September: five on 11th, two on 26th and one on 27th. One on 3rd October. Two on 4th November.

WHITETHROAT *Sylvia communis*

Scarce passage migrant

Spring passage: Up to three were reported from 25th April to 26th May (many observers).

Autumn passage: One on 5th, two on 15th August (James Hayes, Brian Carruthers, Edd Kealy, Ger Franck), one on 11th and two on 27th September (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy).



GRASSHOPPER WARBLER *Locustella naevia*

Very scarce but possibly regular passage migrant

Spring: Recorded from 19th April to 13th May at a variety of locations but mostly in the southern dunes near the Bull Wall. Singles on 19th and 24th April were followed by a minimum of 21 on 25th (Tom Cooney *et al.*). Smaller numbers of up to seven were present to late May (Tom Cooney, Tom Doyle, Niall Griffin, James Hayes, Edd Kealy, Colm McConnell).

Autumn: One on 28th August at Bull Wall Reed Marsh (Tom Cooney).



An overnight 'fall' of grasshopper warblers involving a minimum of twenty-one migrant birds is exceptional for any location in Ireland. Only a few hectares of dunes near the Bull Wall were checked in detail. This normally very secretive bird was very conspicuous during the fall. One small isolated willow bush in the sand dunes held five 'reeling' birds whilst others sang or were flushed from the Marram grass. One sang for at least 5 minutes from the top of old electricity cables. The figure of twenty-one birds is clearly an underestimate as in subsequent days many birds were found at various locations throughout the island.

SEDGE WARBLER *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

Scarce but regular passage migrant

Spring: Singles at Bull Wall Reed Marsh on eight dates from 22nd April to 10th May (Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy, P. McMahon, Gerry Power, Tom Doyle).

Autumn: Two from 25th to 30th August at Bull Wall Reed Marsh (Edd Kealy, Tom Cooney, James Hayes). One at the Alder Marsh on 30th August (Tom Cooney).

REED WARBLER *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

Rare

Spring: One near the Interpretative Center on 1st May. Three in St. Anne's Golf Course on 6th May. One at Bull Wall Reed Marsh on 8th May. Two on 10th May in scrub near Royal Dublin Golf Course (Tom Cooney, Tom Doyle, Edd Kealy).

During early May care was taken to avoid duplication in sightings. Considering that the first island record was in 2012 a minimum of five and possibly even seven reed warblers in 2013 was exceptional. This species has increased significantly as a breeding species in Ireland in recent decades.

WREN *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Resident

The small breeding population continues to recover after a recent population decline. Outside the breeding season birds were reported from all areas on the island.

FIELDFARE *Turdus pilaris*

Passage migrant and winter visitor, occasionally in large numbers

One on 4th and 12th November (Tom Doyle, Tom Cooney).

SONG THRUSH *Turdus philomelos*

Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor

Up to four present daily to mid-February. In the latter part of the year birds were reported from 7th October with peaks of eight on 7th and five on 8th November.

REDWING *Turdus iliacus*

Passage migrant and winter visitor.

Two at Bull Wall Reed March and four at the point on 20th January were the only birds reported in the early part of the year (Niall T. Keogh, Sean Kelly). One on 5th November (Tom Cooney) was the first of winter 2013/2014.

MISTLE THRUSH *Turdus viscivorus*

Uncommon visitor

Several birds recorded in summer.

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER *Muscicapa striata*

Very scarce passage migrant

One on 15th September at the Alder Marsh (Edd Kealy, Tom Cooney).

ROBIN *Erithacus rubecula*

Resident

Outside the breeding season single birds reported from various locations in the early and latter parts of the year.

WHINCHAT *Saxicola rubetra*

Scarce passage migrant

One on 29th and 30th April at Bull Wall Reed Marsh (Tom Cooney, David MacPherson, Tom Doyle). One on 28th August in the dunes near Bull Wall (Edd Kealy, Tom Cooney).



STONECHAT *Saxicola torquata*

Uncommon resident

Breeding resumed in 2013 and family parties present in late summer/early autumn. Although still quite scarce birds were reported from many areas on the island in the autumn early winter 2013/2014.

WHEATEAR *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Common passage migrant, former breeder

Earliest date: One on 23rd March (James Hayes).

Latest date: One on north saltmarsh on 6th November (Tom Cooney)

Spring: Birds were recorded from 23rd March to 23rd May with peaks of 220 on 22nd April and 107 on 30th (Tom Cooney).

Autumn: Autumn peak of 35 on 8th September (Edd Kealy).



HOUSE SPARROW *Passer domesticus*

Rare

Two on 6th May, four on 24th and 28th June, one on 16th July (Tom Cooney, Ger Franck).

YELLOW WAGTAIL *Motacilla flava*

Rare

One at the Bull Wall Reed Marsh on 8th May (Tom Cooney, Tom Doyle).



GREY WAGTAIL *Motacilla cinerea*

Occasional along mainland

Singles on 20th and 26th January outflow (Niall T. Keogh, Sean Kelly, Ger Franck).

PIED WAGTAIL *Motacilla alba yarrellii*

Resident and passage migrant

Small numbers present daily and breeding was confirmed.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba alba*

Scarce passage migrant

Spring: singles on 26th April (Tom Cooney, James Hayes), 30th April and 8th May (Tom Cooney, Tom Doyle).

Autumn: singles on 26th August (Tom Cooney) and 8th September (Edd Kealy). Three on 9th September at the point (Tom Cooney, Hugh Delaney) with two at the causeway and Bull Wall on 10th, 11th and 18th September (Tom Cooney, Ger Franck, Ciaran Dunne).



ROCK PIPIT *Anthus petrosus*

Uncommon winter visitor

Two on 17th February (Mark Carmody). Singles on 12th March (Niall T. Keogh) and 23rd July (Ciaran Dunne).

Scandinavian Rock Pipit *Anthus petrosus littoralis*

Vagrant

One on 20th March (James Hayes) was present up to 28th (Paul McMahon).

This is the first island record.



GREENFINCH *Carduelis chloris*

Common winter visitor

Small numbers present throughout the year.

LINNET *Carduelis cannabina*

Resident and very common winter visitor

Linnets had a very successful breeding season in 2013.

The largest flock reported was 400 on 3rd October but flocks of 40 to 120 were regular throughout the island outside the breeding season.

REDPOLL *Carduelis flammea cabaret*

Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor

Two birds in late April and early May (Tom Cooney, Paul McMahon, Edd Kealy). Two with goldfinches in the Alder Marsh on 17th October (Tom Cooney).

GOLDFINCH *Carduelis carduelis*

Common passage migrant and winter visitor, occasional breeder

Small numbers present periodically but mostly from June onwards as family parties were present in various parts of the island. Largest autumn/winter flocks included 25 on 17th July (Edd Kealy) and up to 60 in the Alder Marsh from September to November.

SNOW BUNTING *Plectrophenax nivalis*

Irregular winter visitors

Three males at the Bull Wall on 11th November increased steadily to eight by 18th with most remaining until at least the 21st (Anna Valentin *et al.*). In December four on 6th, two on 8th increased to six from 20th to 31st (Stephen McAvoy, Brian Gormley, Patrick Veale, Cillian Nolan, Ciaran Nolan, Michael Nolan, Tom Cooney, Edd Kealy, Ciaran Dunne, Peter J Doyle, Hugh Delaney).





REED BUNTING *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Common resident

Twenty on 9th January in the southern dunes (Ger Franck). Fifty-two were counted at two locations in mid-September (Tom Cooney). Sixty in the vicinity of the Bull Wall Reed Marsh on 4th November (Tom Doyle).

BRENT or BRANT ?

Tom Cooney

Identification of Brent and Brant geese still causes confusion with inexperienced birdwatchers and now there is a grey-bellied form that is confounding the 'experts'. The following is a series of photographs which might assist in separating the different forms.

In autumn and early winter 2013-2014 North Bull Island was home to Black Brant, Light-bellied Brent and dark-bellied Brent and the putative Grey-bellied Brant. In addition there were two ringed birds known to be Atlantic Brant (*B.b. hrota*). It is likely to be only location in the world where all these forms could be seen in one day.



1 Light-bellied Brent (*Branta bernicla hrota*)

2 Dark-bellied Brent (*Branta bernicla bernicla*)



3 Grey-bellied Brant (*Branta bernicla* ?)

4 Black Brant (*Branta bernicla nigricans*)

The taxonomy of Grey-bellied Brant has not been established to date however it is hoped that the results of genetic studies will be published soon.

Photos: 1, 2 Tom Cooney, 3 Niall T Keogh, 4 Edd Kealy

Issues of Conservation Concern 2013

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 are continuing to have a negative impact on the islands habitats and wildlife.

The following is a summary of over 100 incidents reported to www.bullislandbirds.com in 2013. A number of these were reported to the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and Dublin City Council (DCC) who share responsibility for the protection of the islands habitats and wildlife. 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 2013 included:

Mudflats (low tide): golfing, motor biking, mountain biking, film crews, dogs (numerous), bait digging, shellfish collecting, crabbing, jogging and groups out walking.

Lagoons (high tide): canoeing (individuals and organised groups), speed boats and fishing.

Saltmarshes: dogs (numerous), jogging and one incident of a sling shot.

Dunes and beach: dogs (numerous), falconry, sand-kite surfers, cars and quad bikes (both vehicles at the traditional nesting site for plovers and terns).

Proposed development

Dublin City Council (DCC) is involved in a feasibility study to be carried out on the island for the development of a new Interpretative and Visitor Experience Center. Details of this new building complex are not available yet (31/12/2013).

Naturalists/conservationists who are familiar with the islands troubled history will be aware that DCC (formerly Dublin Corporation) and Bord Failte (formerly Irish Tourist Board) were two of the main proposers of previous developments on the island. Previous proposals attempted to turn it into an 'amenity' and had no regard for the islands natural history.

Now that the island is acknowledged as a major nature reserve deserving of the most sensitive management possible, it is hoped that DCC and others involved in this latest proposal will take this opportunity to remove the present Interpretative Center from the island completely. The mainland side of the causeway would appear to be an ideal location for this new center.

As details of this latest development proposal become available they will be posted on the <http://www.bullislandbirds.com/> and <http://www.northbullisland.com/>.

Sea Buckthorn *Hippophae rhamnoides*. All areas with sea buckthorn were mapped in detail during 2013. The results were analysed and compared with mapping carried out in 2012. This shrub continues to spread.

Although both golf courses made substantial efforts to control buckthorn in the winter 2012/2013 very little was cleared from the public areas by Dublin City Council. During fieldwork in 2013 this shrub was noted to have regenerated in areas where DCC had previously made attempts to clear it. In addition, many new plants have appeared in the sand

dunes alongside the beach and far away from existing clumps. Sea Buckthorn is now spreading rapidly on the island.

Despite the need to eradicate this shrub as a matter of urgency a ‘Berry Picking Day’ was held on the island as an amenity activity.

The spread of sea buckthorn and efforts to eradicate it will continue to be monitored.

Dogs: off leashes chased and disturbed roosting and feeding birds on the inter-tidal flats, nesting birds and mammals, especially seals. The hare population remains at a critically low level and they have no chance of surviving on the island unless dogs and others disturbance issues are resolved permanently.



Bait digging, shellfish collecting and crabbing: damage to EU Annex I inter-tidal habitats and the removal of organisms from the National Nature Reserve continued throughout 2013.



Map: areas where EU Annex I habitat was dug up and damaged in the SAC during 2013.

Water sports: speed boats, canoes and a variety of surfing activities by individuals and groups (including organised events) continued in 2013. As in previous years motor boats and canoes were observed disturbing birds on the salt-mashes on the incoming tides and at high water.



Unprotected nesting habitat: all areas within the National Nature reserve are subject to disturbance however the most sensitive area, the sand spit on the northern end has suffered most. Constant disturbance caused by walkers/joggers/dogs/quad-bikes/sand-kite surfers/cars *etc.* through the nesting site during the breeding season has resulted in the extirpation of Ringed Plovers since 2010 at the latest.



Photos: sand kite tracks (left) and car tracks (right) at the traditional nesting area for ringed plovers, little terns and the recently established seal haul-out site.

Other activities

Among the most bizarre reports received was of a film crew on the southern mudflats for several hours in November. It is not known how often filming took place on the mudflats but it was evident from this particular incident (photograph below) that considerable disturbance was caused to thousands of waders on the mudflats. It would appear that the laws protecting the islands wildlife from disturbance do not apply to film crews. On other occasions in 2013 filming involved driving cars along the northern end of the beach in the car fee area.

