

# MIGRATORING BIRDS DURING THE SUMMER



**Arctic Tern** is a summer visitor from March to September on the Irish coast. Spends its winters off South Africa and south to Antarctica. Usually seen over the sea. Slender seabird with narrow, pointed wings, long forked tail and long, pointed bill. Grey above and white below, dark cap to head. Flight light and buoyant, can hover briefly over the sea before diving in. Very similar to Common Tern (with which it breeds) and told apart by plumage and structure. Arctic Tern is smaller, with a smaller head, neck and bill and slightly narrower wings, which look forwardly placed on the body and he has very short legs. He feeds on Marine fish, crustaceans and insects. Considered to have the longest migration of all birds, utilizing the summer of both hemispheres. Amber-listed in Ireland due to its localised breeding population. The European population is regarded as Secure. **Visible on this site.**



**Barnacle Goose** is a local winter visitor from Greenland, occurring in Ireland between October & April. She is a small compact goose, with small rounded head and short black bill. It has a black neck and breast and mostly-white head, barred grey upperparts and pale underparts. Identified in flight by a strong contrast between the black breast and the whitish belly. Primarily grazers, feeding on grasses and sedges on the tundra during the breeding season, and on coastal pastures during the winter. Spends winters in western Scotland and Ireland. Mostly on remote islands in the northwest Ireland and western Scotland where it is relatively free from disturbance. Highly gregarious. Amber-listed in Ireland as the majority winter at less than ten sites. The European population is considered to be Secure.



**Common Sandpiper** is a summer visitor from west Africa, south of the Sahara - breeding birds present March to September. Unlike most other waders visiting Ireland, the Common Sandpiper is a summer migrant. The first arrivals in spring betray their presence by their far-carrying whistle and rather unusual flicking wing action as they fly low over the water. Small to medium-sized, sandy brown upperparts and white underside and a distinctive white "shoulder patch" contrasting with a band of streaking across the breast. Bill longish and pointed, legs dirty yellow. Typically stands on stone beside water, bobbing tail up and down constantly. He feeds mainly flies and aquatic insects. Small numbers winter in Ireland, mainly along the southern coast. The majority of the Irish and European population winters around the Mediterranean and western Africa. Amber-listed in Ireland, due to concerns over the European population which has undergone a moderate recent decline.



**Cuckoo** is a widespread summer visitor to Ireland from April to August. Despite its obvious song, relatively infrequently seen. In flight, can be mistaken for a bird of prey such as Sparrowhawk, but has rapid wingbeats below the horizontal plane - ie. the wings are not raised above the body. Adult male Cuckoos are a uniform grey on the head, neck, back, wings and tail. The underparts are white with black barring. Adult females can appear in one of two forms. He feeds mainly caterpillars and other insects. Cuckoos winter in central and southern Africa. Green-listed in Ireland. The European population is currently evaluated as secure.





**Golden Plover** is a summer visitor from France & Iberia (though possibly some remain year-round in Ireland). Smaller than Grey Plover, with narrower, more pointed wings. Golden brown upperparts, which look grey at close range. Males in summer have more black below than females - extends from throat, towards each eye, and ventrally under neck, chest and belly. In winter, males and females similar in appearance, with no black underparts. He feeds on a variety of soil and surface-living invertebrates, principally beetles and earthworms, but also on plant material such as berries, seeds and grasses.

Red-listed in Ireland due to a large decline in the breeding population. The European population is considered to be Secure.

**House Martin** is a common summer visitor throughout Ireland from mid-March to late-September. Between Sand Martin and Swallow in size. In all plumages has a large white rump, a feature not shown by either Sand Martin or Swallow. The flight is also different, gliding frequently on extended, almost triangular wings. Has a shallow tail fork like Sand Martin. Adult House Martins have a glossy black head, back, wings and tail, contrasting markedly with the pure white underparts. In juveniles, the upperparts lack the glossy sheen, while the underparts are washed grey-brown. Like Swallows and Sand Martins, House Martins feed on insects such as aphids and mayflies caught in flight. Winters in tropical Africa. Has been Amber-listed in Ireland due to a large historical decline in the European breeding population. Several key populations in Europe are still declining.



**Manx Shearwater** is a summer visitor to all coasts from March to August. A black and white seabird, black above and white below. Long narrow wings, which are used for gliding low over waves, with hardly a wing beat employed to aid flight. Characteristic switchback flight action with bird banking over waves, which it employs for lift, showing black and then white, then black and so on. Taken from the sea by diving. Small fish, plankton, molluscs and crustaceans. Winters at sea in the South Atlantic off South America. Amber-listed in Ireland due to its localized breeding

population with more than 90% breeding at less than ten sites. The European population has been assessed as localized for the same reason.

**Merlin** is a local summer visitor to uplands throughout Ireland, Small birds, such as Meadow Pipits and Skylarks. A bird of prey (raptor) with a short hooked bill. A smallest species of falcon, similar to Peregrine in shape, with relatively narrow wings and a medium length tail. Nimble in flight, will pursue its prey for extended periods. Fleeing prey, for example Meadow Pipits, will occasionally associate with humans to avoid Merlin's which are in close pursuit. Males and females have different plumages. Adult males have blue-grey upperparts with a wide dark band on the end of the tail and dark outer wing feathers, the underparts are finely barred; the chest is orangey yellow.



Females are brown-grey above with a number of dark thick bands on its tail, the underparts are finely barred. Both sexes show a faint moustachial strip. Juvenile birds are very similar to females. Prey is caught by surprise attack from a low gliding flight close to the ground, by persistence pursuit or from a vertical dive. Much more widely distributed in the winter, than in the breeding season. Merlins move away from high ground at this time of the year and can often be seen on the coast, where concentrations of other birds are attractive as prey species.





**Puffin** is a summer visitor from March to September to sea stacks and cliffs, mainly along the west coast of Ireland. The smallest species of Auk in Ireland, a highly marine species which is only found on land in the breeding season. A black and white seabird, with black above and white below. In the breeding season the parrot like multi-coloured bill and large white patch on the face make adults distinctive and easily recognizable at close quarters. The bill is smaller on the adult in winter and much smaller on the juvenile. At a distance can be told from Guillemot by its small size, thicker body, larger, heavier head and darker

underwing. He feeds marine fish and crustaceans. Winters far out to sea and not often seen outside of the breeding season. Amber-listed due to its localized breeding population. The European population has been evaluated as depleted, due to a large historical decline.

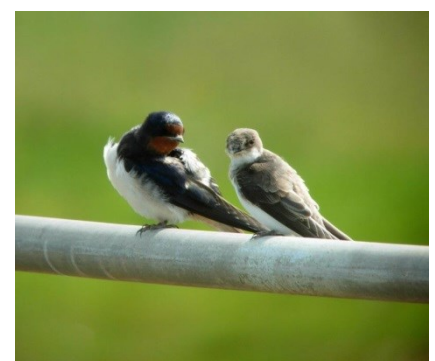
**Redshank** is a resident, winter visitor from Iceland and passage migrant (birds on passage from Scandinavia/the Baltic breeding areas to west African wintering areas). Highest numbers occur during the early autumn, when there is overlap of the populations. As the name suggests, its most distinctive feature is the leg colour - bright red. A common wader of wetlands throughout the country, though mainly coastal estuaries in winter. A generally mouse brown bird with dark streaking. Bill medium length and straight, reddish at the base. Legs relatively long. Can occur in quite large numbers at the larger estuaries. Detect prey visually and feed mostly during the day along the upper shore of estuaries and along muddy river channels. Feed singly or in small groups, and their prey consists mostly of *Hydrobia* sp., *Corophium* sp. and nereid worms, Winters all around the coasts of Ireland, Britain and many European countries. Favours mudflats, large estuaries and inlets. Smaller numbers at inland lakes and large rivers.



**Ruff** is a scarce spring & autumn passage migrant - occurs while moving from Siberia/Central Europe south to winter in Africa. Though a distinctive wader, with a large body, smallish head, long neck and pointed, slightly decurved bill, individual Ruffs vary enormously in size and colour. Firstly males are approximately one third bigger than females (which are known as Reeves) - males being slightly larger than Redshank, while females are close to Dunlin-sized. Leg colour can be yellow, dull greenish yellow, orange or red. Bill can be all dark or show varying amounts of red or orange - often there is a white area of feathering around the base of the bill. Though

males in full summer plumage are rarely seen in Ireland, this too is highly variable - the flamboyant ruff collar of chestnut red or black or even white is purely for display at the breeding ground. He Feeds on Invertebrates found in mudflats. Small numbers winter on estuaries along the southern coast of Ireland. The majority of the European population winters around the Mediterranean and western Africa. Green-listed in Ireland. The European population has been evaluated as Declining, due to a moderate recent decline.

**Sand Martin** is a widespread summer visitor throughout Ireland from mid-March to September, Our smallest breeding Hirundine species, being about a third smaller than both House Martin and Swallow. Adult Sand Martins have a brown head, back, rump and wings. The throat is white, as are the belly and vent except for a broad brown breast band. Juveniles have a pale yellow wash to head throat and face, as well as breast. The breast band is also noticeably narrower. In all plumages, has only a small fork in the tail, never has the long tail streamers of the Swallow. Almost exclusively feeds on insects caught in flight. This species winters in sub-Saharan Africa, crossing the Sahara Desert in autumn and spring. Amber-listed in Ireland due to concerns over the European breeding population, which is regarded as Depleted. Sand Martins had undergone a large historical decline, though the population is currently stable.





**Sedge Warbler** is a widespread summer visitor to wetlands from April to September throughout Ireland. A typical small warbler, about the same size as a Robin. Ages and sexes are similar in appearance. A buffy-brown colour all over, paler on the underparts. The crown is black, with a broad beige supercilium extending to the nape. Has some faint dark streaking on the back. Juvenile birds may have some dark spotting on the breast, but do not differ otherwise from adults. He feeds almost exclusively on insects and other invertebrates. Sedge Warblers winter in western and southern Africa. Green-listed in Ireland. The European population is considered to be secure.

**Swift** is a common summer visitor throughout Ireland from May to early September. About the same size as a Swallow, but all dark. Spends virtually all of its life airborne and never seen resting on wires, as Swallows and Martins frequently do. The weak and small feet of a Swift only allow it to cling to vertical surfaces or shuffle awkwardly on the ground (at the nest). In flight, has a distinctive shape with scythe shaped wings held straight out from the body. One of the fastest flying birds in Ireland. Feeds exclusively on various invertebrates (midges, flies, spiders) caught in flight. Winters in tropical Africa. Migrants arrive from the end of April onwards and most will have departed by mid-August. A few individuals can usually be seen up until the start of September. Amber-listed in Ireland due to a decline in the breeding population. The European population is currently evaluated as Secure.



**Wheatear** is a widespread summer visitor to uplands and scrubland throughout Ireland, from mid-March to early-October. Common passage migrant to all coasts in spring and autumn. Between Robin and Song Thrush in size. In all plumages, has a very obvious tail pattern of a broad lack stripe at the tip with another extending towards the white rump. The whole effect is of a black "T". Feeds insects and other invertebrates. Winters in southern Africa. Has one of the longest migration routes of any songbird. Birds breeding in north-eastern Canada fly almost non-stop across the northern Atlantic to Iberia and North Africa. Amber-listed in Ireland due to a decline in the breeding population. The European population is currently

assessed as Declining, due to a moderate ongoing decline in the population.

**Common Whitethroat** is a widespread summer visitor from April to September. Slightly larger than a Robin, and of the largest warbler species breeding in Ireland. Adult males have a pale grey head, with a large white eyering. The throat is white, with the rest of the underparts being a pinkish-brown. The back, rump and tail are a rather non-descript grey-brown. The wings are mainly black, with obvious brown centres to the feathers. Females and juveniles are nearly identical, lacking the males grey head and white eyering, but have a faint pale supercilium. The head is a grey-brown colour, as for the back and rump. Feeds almost exclusively on insects and other invertebrates. Common Whitethroats winter in central and southern Africa. Green-listed in Ireland. The European population has been evaluated as Secure.





**Common tern** is a summer visitor from March to October to all Irish coasts. Usually seen over the sea or over large inland lakes. Slender seabird with narrow, pointed wings, long forked tail and long, pointed bill. Grey above and white below, dark cap to head. Flight light and buoyant, can hover briefly over the sea before diving in. Very similar to Arctic Tern (with which it breeds) and told apart by plumage and structure. Common Tern has a longer head and bill and slightly broader wings, which look central on the body. Adults have a orangy red bill, usually with a small dark tip. Underparts are whiter than Arctic Tern and there is no contrast with cheek. The wing pattern is useful in separation, Common tern shows a dark wedge in the primaries which develops over the summer and a diffuse bar to the trailing edge of the primaries. Common terns have shorter tail streamers, not extending beyond the wing tips. Adult winter plumage, like all terns is different from breeding plumage and can develop in the summer months. Has a white forehead, all dark bill and dark carpal bar. Also has distinctive juvenile plumage with gingery mantle, a dark secondary bar and dark carpal bar. Feed chiefly fish. Winters in west and south Africa. Amber-listed in Ireland due to its localised breeding population. The European population has been evaluated as Secure. **Visible on this site.**



Adult winter plumage, like all terns is different from breeding plumage and can develop in the summer months. Has a white forehead, all dark bill and dark carpal bar. Also has distinctive juvenile plumage with gingery mantle, a dark secondary bar and dark carpal bar. Feed chiefly fish. Winters in west and south Africa. Amber-listed in Ireland due to its localised breeding population. The European population has been evaluated as Secure. **Visible on this site.**

**Sandwich tern** is a Summer visitor to all Irish coasts from March to September. Winters in small numbers in Galway Bay and Strangford Lough. Usually seen over the sea. Relatively slender seabird with narrow, pointed wings, long, forked tail and long, pointed bill. Grey above and white below, dark cap to head. Flight light and buoyant, will hover briefly over the sea before diving in. The largest of the terns in Ireland, similar in size to Black-headed Gull. Told from other terns by its size and longer bill. Has a small yellow tip to its dark bill, which at closer quarters confirms identification. Distinct dark wedge to wing tip. Winter plumage, like all terns is different from breeding plumage, a white forehead develops in June/July. Juvenile plumage different from adult plumage with barred upperparts and darker wings. Feed mainly surface dwelling fish, taken from shallow dive. Winters in southern Europe and Africa. Irish breeders have been recorded as far away as the Indian Ocean. About 10 to 15 birds winter in Galway Bay and Strangford Lough. Amber-listed in Ireland due to its localised breeding population. The European population has been assessed as Depleted, due to a moderate historical decline. **Visible on this site.**



**Little tern** is a Rare summer visitor from April to late August to shingle or sandy beaches, mainly on the east and west coasts. The smallest of the terns breeding in Ireland. Small slender seabird with narrow, pointed wings, long forked tail and long, pointed bill. Grey above and white below, dark cap to head, white forehead in all plumages. Flight is light and buoyant, hovers rapidly while foraging over the sea before repeatedly diving in. Has a dark leading edge to the primaries of its long narrow wings. Adult summer bird has long yellow bill with black tip. In winter plumage the white of the forehead extends up over the fore crown, the legs darken and the bill is all black. Juvenile plumage is distinct from the adult with dark bill, barred mantle and dark upper forewing. Feed chiefly marine fish. Winters in coastal areas in western Africa. Amber-listed due to a decline in the localized breeding population. The European population has been evaluated as Declining, due to a moderate continuing decline. **Visible on this site.**



Flight is light and buoyant, hovers rapidly while foraging over the sea before repeatedly diving in. Has a dark leading edge to the primaries of its long narrow wings. Adult summer bird has long yellow bill with black tip. In winter plumage the white of the forehead extends up over the fore crown, the legs darken and the bill is all black. Juvenile plumage is distinct from the adult with dark bill, barred mantle and dark upper forewing. Feed chiefly marine fish. Winters in coastal areas in western Africa. Amber-listed due to a decline in the localized breeding population. The European population has been evaluated as Declining, due to a moderate continuing decline. **Visible on this site.**

**Swallow** is a Common summer visitor throughout Ireland from mid-March to late-September. A common and easy to see species. Adults are instantly recognizable by their glossy black wings and back, long tail streamers and contrasting white undersides. At close range, the red face-patch can be seen, as well as a narrow black breast band. In juveniles, the face-patch is a pale orange, while the tail streamers are appreciably shorter than on adults. Swallows feed almost exclusively on insects (midges, flies) caught in flight. Swallows spend the winter in southern Africa, migrating across the Mediterranean Sea and the Sahara Desert in spring and autumn. Amber-listed in Ireland due to concerns over the entire European population. This has undergone large historical decline and has been evaluated as Depleted and is still declining in several countries.



**Visible on this site.**