

# COASTAL AND MACHAIR BIRDS

**Common Guillemot** occur inshore/ land during the breeding season, March/April to August/September. They are the commonest species of Auk in Ireland, a highly marine species which are only found on land in the breeding season. A dark brown and white seabird, brown above and white below, with a distinct breeding plumage. In the breeding season head and neck completely dark brown, in the winter white on front of the neck and face. At a distance can be confused with Razorbill. Guillemot has a longer body, browner upperparts with less white on the side of the body and a lighter bill. Shows a darker 'armpit' than Razorbill. Seen flying in lines close to the sea with Razorbills. He feeds mainly on small fish, some invertebrates, caught by surface diving.



Amber-listed in Ireland due to majority of Guillemots breeding at less than ten sites. The European population has been evaluated as Secure.



**Dipper** is a widespread resident along rocky streams and rivers. Slightly smaller than a Blackbird, in all plumages appears very compact and dumpy. Habitually bobs up and down when perched. Flies low over the water. Adults are reddish-brown with a large "bib" of white on the throat and breast. Also has a broad rusty brown patch where the white bib ends on the breast. Juvenile Dippers have the brown plumage tones replaced with grey and the white bib reduced to a small area on the throat. The underparts are barred grey, while at close range, a small white eyering can be seen. Feeds on aquatic invertebrates, such as the larvae of caddis and mayflies.

Green-listed in Ireland. The European population has been evaluated as Secure.

**Fulmar** is a resident along all Irish coasts. A gull-like bird with white underparts and pale grey upperparts. Also occurs in darker morphs ('Blue Fulmars'), which are commoner in the north of its range but not in Ireland. Has a thick neck and large head. Shows a pale primary patch on the upper wing. Does not show gull-like black tips to the primary feathers. He feeds a great variety of food including fish, discards from trawlers, crustaceans and whale flesh. Winters at sea, but can be seen in Irish waters throughout the year. Green-listed in Ireland. The European population has been evaluated as Secure.



**Grey Heron** is a common resident at wetlands, estuaries and along rivers throughout Ireland. The grey plumage and stature of Grey Herons make them unmistakable. It is a very familiar species being widely distributed and a year-round resident in Ireland. Single birds are often flushed when posed motionlessly at the edge of water bodies, coiled ready to strike out at unsuspecting prey with its formidable spear-like bill. He feeds fish, amphibians, small mammals, insects and reptiles. Green-listed in Ireland. The European population is considered to be Secure.



**Grey Wagtail** is a widespread resident along fast flowing streams and rivers throughout Ireland. Slightly larger than Pied Wagtail. A very striking bird, with the dark grey head and back offset by extensive yellow on the breast, belly and vent. The rump is also bright yellow. Grey Wagtails also have a black throat, as well as a white stripe through the eye. The beak and legs are dark grey, the latter with a variable pinkish tinge. The yellow wash on the lower body is less intense on female birds, while juveniles lack the black throat patch and have the yellow restricted to the vent and rump. Juvenile Grey Wagtails also have pink legs and bill in contrast to the adults. Grey Wagtails feed mainly on insects caught on the ground or in flight. Green-listed in Ireland. The European population has been evaluated as Secure.

**Kingfisher** is a resident on Irish streams, rivers and canals. Very distinctive when seen well with its brightly coloured plumage. The underparts are a bright orange-red, while the wings and back of the head are dark blue. The back, rump and tail are a bright, almost "electric" blue and usually draw attention to a flying bird. Despite these bright colours, can be easily overlooked perched motionless on a branch beside a stream or river on the look-out for fish. During the breeding season, females have a small red patch at the base of the bill, which is not shown by adult males. He feeds various species of small fish (Stickleback, Minnow, and Chub) and larger aquatic insects caught by plunge-diving from a perch or while hovering. Amber-listed in Ireland. BirdLife International has evaluated the European population as depleted, due to a moderate historical decline.



**Kestrel** is a widespread resident throughout Ireland. A species of falcon. A small bird of prey with long relatively narrow wings and tail. Has a short, hooked bill for eating meat. Usually, hovers, with a fanned tail, when hunting for its prey, when it manages to keep its head stationary despite its rapid wing beats. Male and female birds have different plumages but both sexes are recognised by their brown back and inner upper wings, which contrast with their dark upper outer wings. Feeds mainly on small mammals, but will also take insects and invertebrates and sometimes birds. Can see small mammal 'runs', which it scans for signs of movement. Amber-listed due to concerns over the European population, which has undergoing a moderate continuing decline.

**Long-eared Owl** : Widespread resident throughout Ireland. The owl species most likely to be seen in Ireland. Infrequently seen during the day, only active late at night. Most frequently seen flying across road in car head-lights. Appears a largely white, with a dark comma marking on the underwing. If seen during the day, has intricate pattern of brown and black streaks all-over. Has two obvious tufts on the head (do not serve as ears!) and orange eyes. Juveniles are beige, with an obvious black face mask. Hunts small mammals, frogs and birds. Has been observed taking migrant birds disorientated at lighthouses and other bright lights. Green-listed in Ireland. The European population is currently evaluated as Secure.





**Mistle Thrush** is a common resident. About the same size as a Blackbird. Has a very upright stance in comparison to either Song Thrush or Blackbird. The face is white with some black markings, while the eye has a distinct white eyering. The crown, nape and back of the Mistle Thrush are plain brown. The throat and upper part are white with some black streaks. This is bordered by a brownish smudge across the breast, with the rest of the underparts white with black spots. The rump is pale grey-brown, while the tail is brown - the outer tail feathers being white. The legs are pink in contrast to the dark colouring of the Fieldfare. Mistle Thrushes feed mainly on berries and will vigorously defend a favoured tree from all other birds. Also feeds on insects and earthworms. Green-listed in Ireland. The European population is considered to be Secure.

**Moorhen** is a resident, augmented by winter visitors from the Continent, particularly the Netherland and Denmark - September to April. Usually quite secretive, but can also be seen out in the open on water sides and even out in open fields. A dark pigeon sized bird with long sturdy legs. The adult has a red bill and fore crown, the bill is tipped yellow. Has a white line along the flanks and white sides to its under tail. The under tail is easy to see as it carries its tail high. The upperparts are brownish and the underparts are blue-grey. Juveniles lack any red in the bill and crown and have greyish-brown plumage. Moorhens are usually seen on the ground or in the water. If the bird is walking about look out for the long yellow/green legs with the very large toes; the legs project out from the tail in flight. Omnivorous, feed on both plants and animals. Feeds when swimming but also walks out on to floating plants, muddy ground and out into fields. Green-listed in Ireland. The European population is considered to be Secure.



**Pied Wagtail** is a common resident throughout Ireland. Is a small passerine bird in the wagtail family Motacillidae, which also includes the pipits and longclaws. This species breeds in much of Europe and Asia and parts of North Africa. It is resident in the mildest parts of its range, but otherwise migrates to Africa. It has a toehold in Alaska as a scarce breeder. In Ireland and Britain the darker sub-species the Pied Wagtail (*M. a. yarrellii*) predominates. The White Wagtail is an insectivorous bird of open country, often near habitation and water. It prefers bare areas for feeding, where it can see and pursue its prey. In urban areas it has adapted to foraging on paved areas such as car parks. It nests in crevices in stone walls and similar natural and man-made structures. The White Wagtail is

the national bird of Latvia. Pied Wagtails feed mainly on insects caught on the ground or in flight. Green-listed in Ireland. The European population is considered to be Secure.

**Peregrine** is a widespread resident in Ireland. A bird of prey (raptor) with a short hooked bill. A species of falcon with a heavy powerfully built body, medium length tail and wings which are broad close to the body and pointed at the tip. Sexual size difference, the female is larger than the male. Male and female plumages are the same, unlike Merlins, the species most likely to be confused with Peregrine. Adults are bluey grey above, with a barred tail; the underparts are white and finely barred, the check, throat and upper breast are plain white and contrast with a black hood and thick moustachial stripe. Juvenile birds are similar to adults but have brownish upperparts and streaked, not barred, feathers on the body. Feeds mainly on birds, usually taken in the air and sometimes on the ground or on water. Employs spectacular hunting



technique where the bird 'stoops' from high above its intended prey, with its wings held close into the body, reaching great speeds. Green-listed in Ireland. No longer a species of European conservation concern after severe historic declines, due to chemicals affecting reproductive success.

**Razorbill** is a resident, though occur inshore/ land during the breeding season, March/April to August/September. A species of Auk, highly marine and only found on land in the breeding season. A black and white seabird, black above and white below, with a distinct breeding plumage. Head and neck all black in the breeding season with white on the front of the neck and face in the winter. Bill heavy, except in first winter birds. At a distance can be confused with Guillemot. Razorbill slightly smaller with blackish rather than brownish upperparts, more white on the side of the body and the bill distinctly heavier and blunter on adult birds. White 'armpit' compared to the darker 'armpit' of the Guillemot. Seen flying in lines close to the sea with Guillemots. Feeds mainly on small fish, some invertebrates, caught by surface diving. Amber-listed in Ireland as the majority of the population breed at less than ten sites. The European population is considered to be Secure.



**Reed Bunting** is a widespread resident of wetlands throughout Ireland. Typical bunting in size and shape, with chunky bill and long tail. Adult summer males have a black neck and throat, with a prominent white collar on the neck and a small white stripe from the bill to the neck. The underparts are off-white with some faint black streaking on the flanks. The back and wings are rather cryptically streaked black and brown. In adult winter males much of the white collar and black throat is moulted to a pale brown. The head is dark brown with a small white eyering. Feeds on various seeds and grains, as well as insects during the breeding season. Green-listed in Ireland. The European population has been evaluated as Secure.

**European Shag** is a resident along all Irish coasts. Medium sized, mainly all dark seabird. Long body and neck, long narrow hooked bill. Dark webbed feet. Rather short rounded wings. Swims low in the water with bill raised. Very rarely inland unlike the similar looking Cormorant. Adult breeding bird is black with a green and purple gloss to its plumage, yellow gape and a crest on its fore crown. While the Cormorant lacks a crest, instead having a sloping forehead and crown peaked at rear, the Shag has peaked fore crown at all seasons and in all plumages. The adult birds lack the crest outside of the breeding season. Juvenile and first year birds are brownish with darker upperpart. Feeds on a wide range of small fish taken from just below the surface. Amber-listed in Ireland due to its localised breeding population. The European population has been evaluated as Secure.





**Siskin** is a common Resident. Additional birds arrive from Continent in winter. A small finch, with a fine, pointed bill and deeply forked tail, which is easily visible in flight. Male is mostly bright yellow (especially around the head and breast) with a whitish belly and yellow-green back. The female is a more muted version of the male and is more streaked. Male also shows a black crown and tiny bib. Both sexes have black and yellow markings on the wings and tail and a yellow rump. Mostly found in coniferous woods and in winter frequents alder woods. Readily comes to garden feeders in mid-winter. Feeds mostly pine cone seeds and alder cone seeds. Also uses peanut feeders. Green-listed in Ireland. The European population is regarded as Secure by BirdLife International.

**Sparrowhawk** is a common resident, with occasional winter visitors from Continental Europe. A small bird of prey (raptor) with broad wings with blunt wing tips and a long tail. Small hooked bill suitable for eating meat. Tail is banded in all plumages with four or five bands. The sexes are different in size, the female is larger than the male. Sparrowhawks have barred underparts in all plumages, with the barring extending across the underwings, breast, belly and flanks. Usually he feeds small birds which are taken when perched or in flight, sometimes after a long chase. Attacks with one or both feet, will pursue prey on foot. Sparrowhawks often utilize hedge rows or other cover, flying low on one side and then crossing over to other side to surprise its prey. Is a master of flying in woodland where it can fly through small gaps in branches pursuit of its prey, displaying great agility. Will use woodland edges, rides as well as any cover, especially cover that adjoins woodland. Will even pursue prey birds on foot over the ground. Green-listed in Ireland. The European population has been evaluated as Secure.



**Lapwing** is a summer visitor from the Continent (France & Iberia) and winter visitor (from western & central Europe). Some overlap between all three groups. Greatest numbers occur in Ireland between September & April. Distinct black-and-white, pigeon-sized wader, with wide rounded wings and floppy beats in flight. Wispy crest extending upwards from back of head and green/purple iridescence seen at close range. Pinkish legs. He feeds on a variety of soil and surface-living invertebrates, particularly small arthropods and earthworms. Also feed at night, possibly to avoid kleptoparasitic attacks by Black-headed Gulls, but also, some of the larger earthworm species are present near the soil surface at night, and thus are more easily accessible. They use traditional feeding areas, are opportunistic, and will readily exploit temporary food sources, such as ploughed fields and on the edge of floodwaters. Red-listed (National, BoCCI), SPEC 2 vulnerable (Europe).

**Chough** is a resident along rocky coasts in Munster, as well as parts of Connaght and Ulster. Marginally larger than the familiar Jackdaw, at 40 cm in length, in many respects the Chough looks like a typical all-black crow. At close range, however, its unique long, down-curved red bill and bright red legs make identification easy; the Irish name of this species translates as "red-legged Jackdaw". Choughs also have more prominently "fingered" flight-feathers than our other crows, giving them a distinctive silhouette in the air. Feeds mostly on insects and their larvae, worms and other subterranean invertebrates, using their curved bills to dig them out of the soil. They will also eat berries, grain, small mammals and birds and, in true crow fashion, pretty much anything else they can find. Amber-listed in Ireland. The European population has been evaluated as declining by BirdLife International, due to an ongoing moderate decline.





**Meadow pipit** is one of the commonest bird species in Ireland, favouring rough pastures and uplands. A very non-descript bird when seen in the field. Meadow Pipits are brown above with black streaking on a white breast and belly. The beak and legs are pinkish. It looks very similar to a Skylark, but that species is slightly larger than a Meadow Pipit and has a broad white stripe above the eye. Rock Pipit is dark grey on the back and has much denser dark streaking on the breast. Feeds on Invertebrates such as crane flies, mayflies and spiders and to a lesser extent on seeds. Green-listed in Ireland. The European population is considered to be Secure.

**Skylark** is a common resident throughout Ireland in uplands and areas of farmland, especially cereal. A rather non-descript species, with much brown and black streaking. Adult Skylarks have a prominent white supercilium and frequently raise their crown feathers to form a little crest. Juveniles have much of the black streaking replaced by spotting and lack the crest. When flushed from the ground, keeps close to the ground unlike the similar Meadow Pipit which typically rises straight up. Skylarks feed on a variety of insects, seeds and plant leaves. Amber-listed in Ireland. Evaluated as depleted in Europe, due to a large historical decline by BirdLife International.



**Common Gull** Similar to Herring Gull, with in adult plumage, light grey upperparts and white underparts. Common gull is much smaller than Herring Gull, with a slighter bill (yellow in adults), and adults have yellow-green legs and often show larger mirrors at the wing tips. Common Gull is also a more delicate gull with a more rounded head and quicker movements. Like adult Herring Gulls the head is pure white in the summer and streaked in the winter. The species has three age groups and attains adult plumage after two years when they moult into adult winter plumage. Juveniles have dark, strongly marked upperparts, tail band and dark pink legs. First year birds retain the dark heavily marked upperwings and tail band, but have a grey mantle as adults birds do. Second year birds more closely resemble adult birds but show more black markings in the outer wing feathers and only a small mirror.



Amber-listed in Ireland due to a decline in the localised breeding population. The European population is regarded as Depleted, due to a moderate historical decline.

**Herring Gull** A large gull, which in adult plumage has light grey upperwings, showing black tips with white 'mirrors' (white at the very tips surrounded by black); the rest of the plumage is white. Similar to Common Gull in colouration, but separated by size, Common Gull is much smaller and shows larger, more conspicuous white 'mirrors' at the wing tip as an adult. Adult birds have heavy yellow bills with a orange spot on the lower bill, the head is pure white in the summer and streaked in the winter. The legs are pink at all ages. Herring Gulls have four age groups and attain adult plumage after three years when they moult into adult winter plumage. Juveniles are brown with finely patterned feathers which fade in the first year, especially the wing and tail feathers which are retained through the first summer. Juvenile and first year birds, do not have any plain grey adult like feathers in the upperparts and can be difficult to tell apart from immature Lesser and Greater Black-back Gulls. Grey in the upperparts develops from the second winter onwards, initially mostly in the mantle and back and becomes more extensive over the wings as the bird moves towards maturity. Younger immature birds have a dark terminal tail band which becomes less prominent as they get older, adult birds lack this band completely. Red-listed in Ireland due to a large decline in the breeding population. The European population has been assessed as Secure.

