

Birding trip to Ireland, August 25-31, 2004

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Introduction

JR and IS made a plan already early June to spend a week in Ireland to catch certain target WP species: Roseate Tern, Storm Petrel, Leach Petrel, Sooty Shearwater, Great Shearwater, possible American waders, gulls and ducks, etc. KH joined the duo few days later and flights were immediately reserved from Ryanair, Tampere – Stansted – Kerry return tickets only 160 euros per person. It was much cheaper than any other flight choices. Kerry is located also in ideal place, just an hour drive from Bridges of Ross and Brandon Point, which are few of the best seawatching points on the southwestern coast of Ireland.

Prior to the trip each one had studied possible species seen in previous years at the planned locations around the same time. Expectations were high and IS was expected to pass his 600th WP species target and join to a group of only 4 Finnish birdwatchers who have passed the magical limit of 600 WP species.

Several trip reports were studied to find out ideal plan to execute the strategy. We decided to adopt the same strategy, which a group of Swedish birdwatchers recommended in their report (Anders Blomdahl, Jan Hägg: Fågelhavsskådning på Irland 11-20.8.1999) to decide each evening where to head according to the winds. However, our plan was also to visit Wexford area on the southeastern coast to pick up Roseate Tern and possible American waders at Tacumshin Lake and Lady's Island Lake.

Trip plan

Few days prior to the trip daily Irish bird report web pages were followed-up very carefully to know well all possible interesting species and locations. Last minute news about female Canvasback, Long-billed Dowitcher, White-rumped Sandpiper, American Herring Gull, and excelled seabird influx due to ideal wind conditions from Northwest and West tied our plan. Thus, our program was fixed to visit first 3-4 days on the western coast: Smerwick, Brandon Point and Blennerville in Dingle Peninsula, then head to Bridges of Ross and visit at some point Galway as well. Then we needed to cross the country from Shannon to Wexford for two days and spend last day somewhere on the southern coast, possible Galley Head or Mizen Head prior to return Kerry airport.

Itinerary

- Aug 24 Drive Espoo – Tampere, flight Tampere – Stansted, night near Stansted
- Aug 25 Flight Stansted – Kerry, drive to Smerwick, Blennerville and Brandon Point
- Aug 26 Brandon Point – Smerwick – Blennerville – Galley - Kilkeehe (near Bridges of Ross)
- Aug 27 Bridges of Ross
- Aug 28 Bridges of Ross, long drive to Wexford, visit Lady's Island Lake, Camsore Point and Tacumsin Lake

- Aug 29 Lady's Island Lake, Tacumsin Lake, drive via Ballycotton to close to Mizen Head
- Aug 30 Mizen Head, long drive near to Kerry
- Aug 31 Flight Kerry – Stansted – Tampere, drive to Espoo or train to Kouvola

Daily agenda and highlights

Aug 24:

Arrival Stansted at 10pm and over an hour wait of luggages until we finally were close to midnight asking at the information desk possible cheap place to stay one night. We got very decent offer, 25GBP/person a night with return transportation included. We had to wait around an hour until the driver arrived to pick up us and few other travelers. A house with several rooms was 15 minutes drive east from the airport. Finally 2am to the bed for a few hours sleep.

Aug 25:

Wake up already 4.45am and the driver came to pick up us 5am as agreed. We were very early at Stansted Airport to wait Ryanair flight to leave to Kerry 7.30am. We arrived Kerry 9.10am and soon we realized that we could not find the car renting company, which JR had reserved via web. So, we had to check whether any known renting companies had any cars available. Budget offered C-class car 405€/ 6 days all included. It was much more than the reservation JR had made, but we did not have any other choices. Other renting offices did not have any free cars available.

10.20am we finally were heading west towards Smerwick, where we expected to find female *Canvasback* found just few days earlier. At Ballingrannig Marsh were two birders from Galway and together we tried two hours to find the bird without luck. We accepted that the bird had left. British bird alarm system brought a message that Fea's Petrel had passed Bridges of Ross. Expectations were getting higher though first target species was missed. However, some debate was going on about Canvasback's identification and few people who had seen the bird or its pictures were supporting Pochard identification.

Then we drove to Blennerville, where a longstanding *Long-billed Dowitcher* has been among hundreds of other waders. KH found the bird in 20 minutes among Redshanks and one target species was found though KH had seen it already in England summer 2001. Waders were numerous: 100 Oystercatchers, 50 Lapwings, 3 Knots, 500 Dunlins, 150 Black-tailed Godwits, 100 Curlews, 300 Redshanks along the river and at the river mouth.

Then we headed again west to Brandon Point to watch seamigration last two hours, 5.15-7.30pm. We could not find any of our target species though wind was strong and from the correct direction, NW. However, a Great Skua, 300 Manx Shearwaters, 2 Arctic Skuas, 3 Common Guillemots, 70 Razorbills, >4 Choughs and a female plumaged Stonechat were best to mention. We drove nearby village, Cloghan, for the night (30€/per person B&B), as the aim was to be again at Brandon Point early in the morning before breakfast.

Aug 26:

Early morning at Brandon Point showed that migration was weaker than previous evening. A local Peregrine and 4 Great Skuas were highlights. East of Brandon point, at least 5 km away, on Brandon Bay was a large group of Common Scoters swimming. We did not go closer to look them better. After the trip we read that among the group were two Surf Scoters. Small dip though not a missing WP species as we all had seen in May a male Surf Scoter in Finland.

We returned B&B for a breakfast and then decided to return Smerwik. Two hours search was again confirming that the duck had gone. Then we drove to Blennerville to search any new wader species without success.

The birder from Galway yesterday told us that at Nimmo's Pier in Galway it is a longstanding *American Herring Gull*. He even showed his excellent digital pictures to show details of the bird. So, we drove there close to three hours and arrived 5.45pm. Just when we arrived Pier, strong rain shower poured and made the search of our target gull less pleasant as number of Herring Gulls was over 200. After 15 minutes KH found the bird, which had exactly such details as the Galway birder had shown in his digital pictures. As the bird was 2nd calendar year, its identification was based on some 1st winter details and rather uniform brownish underpart. Few tail feathers and tertials were already moulted but otherwise 1st winter feather characters were well seen. One good twitch made our group to smile though heavy rain did not encourage us to search anymore *Ring-billed Gull* or *Glaucous Gull*, which was supposed to stay there as well.

The rain was continuing all the time when we returned south and arrived close to 10pm Kikeehe, where we took a B&B (30€pp). We were hungry and needed well deserved meal with few beers. And then to the bed as we were very tired and very early wake up was ahead.

Aug 27:

We ate a breakfast 5am and we left B&B to be very early at Bridges of Ross. There we arrived 7am to notice that around 20 cars had filled the parking area. We felt that we were late!

When we arrived watchpoint area, we noticed that there was two groups of people around 150 meters from each other. We first went to the group staying left. Soon we learned that the group was from England and most had arrived for several days as the weather report showed excellent winds from west and northwest, and promising seamigration with excellent species. Birds passed so close that we felt that the place was ideal to watch migration.

Four and a half hours (7.15-11.45) we watched decent migration to southwest and it included mainly few hundred Gannets, Manx Shearwaters and Kittiwakes, 10 Arctic Skuas, 5 Great Skuas, 6 *Sooty Shearwaters*, 2 *Storm Petrels*, ad Little Gull, 30 Sandwich Terns, a Silver and a Common Tern, 30 Guillemots and few Razorbills. Two *Red-billed Choughs*, which landed nearby, created some interest among Brits.

Ilkka got his 600th WP species (Sooty Shearwater) and immediately for the sake he picked up three small Bailey's from his backpack to celebrate the moment. Feelings were very high with smiling faces and Bailey's – tasty. Few minutes later Ilkka picked up Storm Petrel as well, so the 600th species limit left behind.

After 10am small groups of Brits left gradually for a breakfast to their B&Bs or hotels. When most of the Brits returned from their late breakfast, we felt hungry and satisfied to Ilkka's morning highlights. So, we left for a lunch and to search a B&B, as the migration was not so intense anymore. On a way we made a short stop at the lighthouse just 10km west at Look Head. At least 10 Rock Pipits were flying around between the lighthouse and the seafront on the meadows.

Good lunch and a beer relieved our hungry stomach and we headed to Carrigaholt. After several queries we found outside of the village very nice new B&B (24€/per night and person, Glencarrig B&B). Then we returned Bridges of Ross.

We now parked to the right side group who were – Irish. The migration was very good and we watched there 15.30-20.10. Manx Shearwater movement was strong and it became very intense between 5-6pm. However, rather soon after our arrival one Irish shouted, that either Leach's or Wilson's Storm Petrel is approaching. It was not easy to find the bird near the surface and between waves. Almost half of the group found it only when the bird had already passed the group, and Ilkka was among them. It was *Leach's Storm Petrel* and it brought a new cross to all of us. Later few other Leach's Storm Petrels passed our watching point.

When we discussed, Killian Mullarney, who was sitting lower just in front of us, turned and commented: "You are Finnish." I supposed first that he recognized us as we had Finnsticks but he replied that he recognized our language to be Finnish. Killian has done so many birdguiding trips to Finland that he well recognizes Finnish-speaking people. A bit later he shouted: "Isokihu". It was perfect pronunciation about a passing Great Skua.

Around 7.30pm one Irish found a larger Shearwater flying far away and it was very difficult to find. The birdfinder gave us last moment to catch it into the scope when it passed a large ship, as there were no other good and easy marks to try to search the bird. KH and JR just managed to find it when the bird passed the ship and followed then its flight further away southwest. Irish group confirmed that it was a *Great Shearwater* based on its jizz, as its jizz did not fit to Cory's Shearwater. Ilkka dipped it, unfortunately.

When Killian was leaving for his work duties in Wexford, we changed mobile numbers as we told him that next day we'll plan to drive near to Wexford to visit Lady's Island Lake and Tacumshin. *Short-billed Dowitcher* has been several weeks in Lady's Island Lake but not seen anymore in five days. Also *Roseate Terns* are still expected to find there.

Killian was also curious to know whether we had been visited Smerwick, and we nodded. Then he commented that by seeing the pictures he immediately noticed that the bird was a female Pochard. So, we did not feel anymore disappointed, when we dipped it.

Evening migration was really good, as most of the target species had been seen already. We saw also few Storm Petrels, 6 Sooty Shearwaters, 2 Great Skuas, 3 Arctic Skuas, 4 Long-tailed Skuas, over 10000 Manx Shearwaters and few hundred Kittiwakes. We missed many passing skuas and storm petrels, so the total amount of Skuas and Petrels was in tens. Satisfied in the darkening evening we returned our B&B and went to the village to enjoy a great dinner for the good birding day. The best pub/restaurant was very crowded and we had to wait over 30 minutes to get a table. The place offered really good food.

It was exactly what we had expected to see and Mother Nature showed us pretty good migration and several of our target species. Sabine Gull, Wilson's Storm Petrel or Fea's Petrel would have been much more rare to see but still possible. Also timing would be suitable for Grey Phalaropes.

Aug 28:

Again drive to Bridges of Ross to watch morning migration (6.40-9.40). The wind was weaker and also bird selection. Gannet and Guillemot migration was good. So did also Skua migration. We could now focus to separate juvenile Arctic and Long-tailed Skuas, as both were quite numerous.

We returned our B&B to eat breakfast, then packed our goods and headed to the road, as 5 hours drive crossing the Ireland took major time of the day.

We arrived near Wexford 4.30pm and went straight to Lady's Island Lake. Its NW corner had tens of terns but not Roseate Terns. Killian send a short message that he could have few hours time to watch birds and give some guiding by asking where we were. When we answered that we had just arrived Lady's Island Lake, he drove in 20 minutes there to meet us. He asked us to follow him to east of Lady's Island Lake to the seaside, where usually at this time of year Roseate Terns can be found (place 2km North of Camsore Point). And really, there was a large group of terns and gulls. He immediate picked up *Roseate Tern* call, which was very distinctive. Soon he also pointed two birds flying 50m from us. Among Black-headed Gulls was one 1-cy *Mediterranean Gull*. A bit further by the seaside was 5ad and 3juv Roseate Terns sitting on the rocks. We had good possibility to study differences of Common Tern and Roseate Tern.

We returned Lady's Island Lake and Killian showed us where the Short-billed usually had been earlier among Knots. However, it was not there anymore, though it has been away several days and then refound. Then we drove to Tacumsin Lake, which is famous of thousands of waders, and where usually are some Americas waders. Few days earlier had been a White-rumped Sandpiper, a Buff-breasted Sandpiper and something like. We mainly just familiarized to the place to know where and what to look for next morning. Sun set off and we drove to find B&B (Roselawn in Killinick had free rooms, 30€pp). And then together we went to eat nearby restaurant.

Killian was very anxiously following weather report from TV, which showed that a big gale was approaching Irish west coast. He decided to drive through the night with another bird friend to Bridges of Ross after sleeping few hours. We just needed good sleep.

Aug 29:

Wake up 6am and straight to the Lady's Island Lake to try to find Short-billed. No sign. Ca. 30 *Little Egrets* and a Waterrail were best to mention. Then we returned our B&B to enjoy the breakfast and leave the B&B. We drove to Tacumsin Lake. Long walk through eastern and southern shore within three and a half hours was aimed to look thousands of waders, which mainly were Dunlins (5000) and Ringed Plovers (2000). We tried to search possible Buff-breasted Sandpiper, White-rumped Sandpiper or Semipalmated Sandpiper but no luck. JR saw twice shortly a small wader but its identification left open, either a Little or Semipalmated Sandpiper. Adult Peregrine chased waders major part of which were hiding

among short vegetation and thus, their follow-up was not easy. Smaller group of waders were on the shoreline and easy to look one by one. However, we could not find anything else than 2 juv Sanderlings, 2 ad Curlew Sandpipers, 50 Knots on top of 3 Grey Plovers, 30 Black-tailed Godwits and 10 Green Sandpipers.

The whole morning and the day extremely strong wind was from northwest. We could expect that people at Bridges of Ross have seabirding fiesta. Later during the day Killian sent just a short text message that migration is good though nothing exceptional, yet.

We left Tacumsin 1.15pm towards Ballycotton. High tide and crowds of people made our stop just waste of time, so we continued near Mizen Head where we already in dark evening managed to find a B&B only 5km from Mizen Head. Prior to arriving B&B we enjoyed good dinner in a rather expensive French type restaurant in Goleen.

Irish birdwatchers had seen just day before an American Golden Plover in Ballycotton and the place is wellknown about its high number of rare species, mainly waders, when the time is suitable and tide as well.

Aug 30:

We drove to Mizen Head to see the morning migration, this time 200m above the sea level. Behind the entry gate we watched 7.00-9.35am and then returned B&B for our breakfast. Among 1500 Manx Shearwaters we found 10 Sooty Shearwaters. Also Gannet movement was good. Stonechat family was outside of the entry gate.

When we left B&B 11am, KH decided to walk around Lissagriffin Marsh, whereas JR and IS went to Mizen Head. Marsh or Mizen Head did not produce anything special though a Redpoll was a new for the trip and we expected to find it in that area. Meeting was agreed 1pm to prepare return trip to Kerry. We drove over the mountains, through Guagane Forest Park and Killarney National Park. Sceneries were more like in Varanger Peninsula in the most Northeastern Norway. Very harsh mountain nature without any trees was typical landscape in mountainous Killarney Nat Park.

We made a short walking stop 10km before Killarney town by the lake. Some new garden birds were practically last species of the trip. Dingle Bay did not have any shoreline due to high tide and very high water level. We drove to Blennerville but the same thing. All waders were far away and hiding on the flooding meadows.

We were already hungry and thus, now jus wanted to find B&B for the last night near Kerry airport. So, we drove to Castleisland, enjoyed good Chinese meal, few beers and spent the night in a hotel where a family with kids finally stopped the noise when hotel personnel came to warn them close to midnight after our request. We had to wake up already 5am to make last move to the airport.

Aug 31:

In a rather cold but sunny morning we drove Kerry airport, returned our rented car and had some breakfast at the airport café. Good Ireland birding trip ended with 113 species altogether and 1170 miles (ca. 1800km) in our car. Jukka and Ilkka got 6 new WP species, Kari only 3.

Flight from Kerry to Stansted and there almost 5 hours wait until our flight from Stansted to Tampere was leaving. Hours were spent to plan new trips, new species to hunt for, learning from the trip and so on. Bridges of Ross is really the place to watch seamigration expecting that the wind is blowing from the right direction, Northwest or West.

Around midnight we were at home in Espoo and Kouvola.

Some final words

Major part of smaller roads are really narrow and thus, be prepared to save time for driving, if you want to explore widely country interesting bird places. Bridges of Ross is the place to watch seamigration as you practically are on the same level as birds. They are much easier to find and follow compared to high cliffs of Brandon Point and Mizen Head. And for waders, Ireland is offering plenty of good places though Lady's Island Lake, Tacumshin and Ballycotton are probably the best known ones. Many other places may provide interesting American waders as well.

B&Bs are easy to find everywhere and their quality is very good, as lots of new buildings have been constructed in past 10 years. People were very friendly and Ireland, first in Europe, has adopted a law of non-smoking pubs and restaurants. Common currency, euro, made also our travel convenient without any money exchanges.

During our visit and best migration days few Sabine Gulls, Wilson's and Fea's Petrels, Great and Little Shearwaters were seen on the western coast of Ireland. Hence, active seawatching can provide interesting highlights, new species, and pleasant stay with Irish and other seawatching fanatics.

		25.8.	26.8.	27.8.	28.8.	29.8.	30.8.	Total
Mute Swan	Cygnus olor		50		50	40	3	143
Greylag Geese	Anser anser				40	50		90
Shelduck	Tadorna tadorna				10	6		16
Wigeon	Anas penelope					20		20
Common Teal	Anas crecca				10	25	1	36
Mallard	Anas platyrhynchos	2	10		200	50	15	277
Shoveler	Anas clypeata				30	20		50
Common Scoter	Melanitta nigra	200	200		3			403
Common Pheasant	Phasianus colchicus					2		2
Little Crebe	Tachybaptus ruficollis				20		40	60
Red-necked Crebe	Podiceps grisegena	1						1
Fulmar	Fulmarus glacialis	40	40	200	50		100	430
Great Shearwater	Puffinus gravis			1				1
Sooty Shearwater	Puffinus griseus	1		10			9	20
Little Shearwater	Puffinus puffinus	300	40	1000	1000		1000	12340
Storm Petrel	Hydrobates pelagicus		1	4	3			8
Leach's Petrel	Oceanodroma leucorhoa			2				2
Sula	Morus bassanus	80	200	400	500		800	1980
Cormorant	Phalacrocorax carbo		2	5	2	2	2	13

Shag	Phalacrocorax aristoteles	1	30	20	5		30	86
Little Egret	Egretta garzetta				15	30		45
Grey Egret	Ardea cinerea	5	5		10	10	2	32
Marsh Harrier	Circus aeruginosus	1						1
Sparrow Hawk	Accipiter nisus	2	1		1	3	1	8
Kestrel	Falco tinnunculus	1	1	1	2	1		6
Peregrine	Falco peregrinus		1			1		2
Water Rail	Rallus aquaticus					1		1
Moorhen	Gallinula chloropus	1	3		15	20	1	40
Coot	Fulica atra				50	50		100
Oystercatcher	Haematopus ostralegus	150	100	70	50	100	70	540
Ringed Plover	Charadrius hiaticula	50	25	1	1000	2000	1	3077
Golden Plover	Pluvialis apricaria			1		1		2
Grey Plover	Pluvialis squatorola				2	3		5
Lapwing	Vanellus vanellus	60	40		100	200	40	440
Knot	Calidris canutus	3	40		100	80	3	226
Sanderling	Calidris alba	15	1		1	2		19
Little/Semipalmated Stint	Calidris minuta/pusillus					1		1
Curlew Sandpiper	Calidris ferruginea	1			5	2		8
Dunlin	Calidris alpina	500	850	100	3000	5000	200	9650
Ruff	Philomachus pugnax	2			4	8	1	15
Common Snipe	Gallinago gallinago					7		7
Long-billed Dowitcher	Limnodromus scolopaceus	1	1					2
Black-tailed Godwit	Limosa limosa	70	50		20	60	70	270
Bar-tailed Godwit	Limosa lapponica		90			3		93
Little Whimbrel	Numenius phaeopus	1	30		1	38		70
Curlew	Numenius arquata	100	150	5	50	300	100	705
Redshank	Tringa totanus	200	250		80	50	250	830
Greenshank	Tringa nebularia	2	6		4	15	6	33
Sommon Sanpiper	Actitis hypoleucos	1					1	2
Turnstone	Arenaria interpres		2	1	20	20	1	44
Arctic Skua	Stercorarius parasiticus	4		15	4			23
Long-tailed Skua	Stercorarius longicaudus			5	8			13
Great Skua	Catharacta skua	3	4	8	3		1	19
Mediterranean Gull	Larus melanocephalus				1			1
Little Gull	Larus minutus			1				1
Black-headed Gull	Larus ridibundus	250	150	10	250		200	860
Common Gull	Larus canus	20	20				1	41
Lesser Black-backed Gull	Larus fuscus	2			50	35	50	137
Herring Gull	Larus argentatus	150	150	5	1	20	30	356
American Herring Gull	Larus smithsonians		1					1
Yellow-legged Gull	Larus michahellis				1			1
Greater Black-backed Gull	Larus marinus	5	3	15	10	15	10	58
Kittiwake	Rissa tridactula		4	1000	100		50	1154
Sandwich Tern	Sterna sandvicensis			20	2	10	9	41
Roseate Tern	Sterna dougallii				10			10
Common Tern	Sterna hirundo			5	500	2	2	509
Silver Tern	Sterna paradisaea			1	2			3

Guillemot	Uria aalge	3	8	100	50		10	171
Razorbill	Alca torda	80	50	7			1	138
Puffin	Fratercula arctica		2	10	5		1	18
Rock Dove	Columba livia							++
Stock Dove	Columba oenas				1			1
Wood Pigeon	Columba palumbus		10	1	30	30	10	81
Collard Pigeon	Streptopelia decaocto		10	2	20	5	1	38
Swift	Apus apus		1					1
Skylark	Alauda arvensis	20						20
Sand Martin	Riparia riparia	1	8		30	5		44
House Swallow	Hirundo rustica							++
House Martin	Delichon urbicum							++
Tree Pipit	Anthus trivialis	1	2					3
Meadow Pipit	Anthus pratensis	10	10		1	5	10	36
Rock Pipit	Anthus petrosus	2	3	15	5		10	35
Yellow Wagtail	Motacilla flava					1	1	2
Pied Wagtail	Motacilla alba	30	25	10	50	100	40	255
Wren	Troglodytes troglodytes	1	3	5	5	8	10	32
Dunnock	Prunella modularis	1						1
Robin	Erithacus rubecula		4	1	5	5	10	25
Stonechat	Saxicola torquatus	1	2	3	1	1	4	12
Wheatear	Oenanthe oenanthe			1	5	3	1	10
Blackbird	Turdus merula	1	5	1	5	5	3	20
Fieldfare	Turdus pilaris		15					15
Song Thrush	Turdus philomelos				1			1
Blackcap	Sylvia atricapilla						1	1
Willow Warbler	Phylloscopus trochilus		1		1	1	1	4
Goldcrest	Regulus regulus			2			1	3
Coal Tit	Parus ater						1	1
Blue Tit	Parus caeruleus		1				1	2
Great Tit	Parus major			1		3	3	7
Treecreeper	Certhia familiaris				2			2
Magpie	Pica pica	2	10	5	10	5	10	42
Red-billed Cough	Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax	10	2	2			15	29
Jackdaw	Corvus monedula							++
Rook	Corvus frugilegus							+++
Hooded Crow	Corvus corone cornix							+
Raven	Corvus corax	3	2		1		2	8
Starling	Sturnus vulgaris	50	250	300	1000	50	100	1750
Common Sparrow	Passer domesticus		40	10	50	100	20	220
Chaffinch	Fringilla coelebs		5			1	2	8
Greenfinch	Carduelis chloris	1						1
Goldfinch	Carduelis carduelis					1		1
Linnet	Carduelis cannabina	10	5	3	5	10	30	63
Redpoll	Carduelis flammea						1	1
Reedbunting	Emberiza schoeniclus			1				1

