

# The Birds of Binevenagh

*A guide to the wild birds of  
Binevenagh Area of Outstanding  
Natural Beauty*





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*River Roe & Binevenagh*

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# The Binevenagh AONB

**The Binevenagh Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) received its protected area status in 2006. In fact, this was a re-designation & extension of the old North Derry AONB that had been in existence since 1966 and joins the province's 8 other AONBs contributing to a total of 49 AONB designations within the United Kingdom. Via this status the landscape is acknowledged to be of significant, national importance and deemed worthy of measures of conservation to protect its distinctive character. This character is represented in a rich balance of natural, built and cultural heritage.**

The dark basaltic cliffs of Binevenagh which form the most westerly outcrop of the Antrim Plateau, tower above the surrounding lowlands and lead to a summit height of 385m on Binevenagh Mountain. On a fine day, there are spectacular panoramic views in a clockwise direction of the Sperrins, Inishowen & the Donegal Mountains across the waters of Lough Foyle, Magilligan and beyond to the Isles of Islay and Jura in Scotland.

In complete contrast, the lowlands stretching out below Binevenagh to the promontory spit of land which forms Magilligan Point and along the banks of Lough Foyle are a product of post-glacial raised beaches, salt marshes, and low lying flood plains, barely a few metres above current sea-level. Along the extent of the northern land boundary of the AONB are some of the most extensive dune systems and finest stretches of beach in Ireland. Beyond the beaches, the coastal waters around Binevenagh AONB hold a wide variety of



*Beach at Magilligan Point*

marine habitats teeming with a rich sea life, a primary food source to many popular sea faring birds.

This dramatic landscape of contrast and diversity provides a haven of different habitats within the Binevenagh AONB for an abundant wild bird population. The area is sparsely populated with people and is on the outer fringes of the province, making it a stopping off point for long-distance migrating birds and it is this fortunate coincidence that means it is favoured by some of the most abundant and at times rare displays of birdlife in the country.

This guide is a non-exhaustive list of the birds that may appear throughout the Binevenagh AONB. It is not an attempt to name every possible sighting, but a representative sample from the wide variety of species you may commonly come across along with some special rare but equally, important species that may hold particular significance to the regional heritage or the habitat in which they are found.

The birds are listed per habitat, but it is useful to bear in mind that they are mobile and will often be found passing through various habitats or even occupying more than one of the habitats listed. There may also be variations in the male and female of the species and often the young will have dissimilarities usually in the colour of their down before they grow a fully fledged feather coat, like the adult bird. However, for ease of use, the most common representation of the bird species has been presented in each case.

***Happy bird spotting!***

# Yearly Obser

## Spring

The return of birds from their southern, winter destinations is an annual spectacle, such as the sightings of the first swallows from Africa or the first sea birds of the coastal headlands. Adversely, the winter visitors such as swans and geese are leaving these shores to return to their northern haunts - estuaries become quiet. The uplands may have interesting sightings at this time, as species return from winter retreats in low-lying and/or coastal locations.

## Winter

A prosperous time for bird watching around estuaries, they are alive with wintering wildfowl such as whooper swans and waders benefiting from the invertebrate rich mudflats. Geese and ducks also enjoy the relatively mild winter climates found in the northwest of Ireland. Buntings and winter thrushes are a common sight in open country. In uplands bird sightings can be fewer as species move to lower or coastal ranges.

## The nature of wild birds

**The study of birds is called 'Ornithology'. Ornithology deserves a particular sub-division from the field of zoology (the study of all living animals) as it is the delight in the high visibility and aesthetic appeal of birds.**

Nowhere is the high visibility of birds more pronounced than along the north coast of Ireland. The province's prominent position on the northwestern fringes of Europe makes it an ideal stopping off point for many migratory bird species and

breeding colonies alike. This means that throughout the year, there are different birds associated with the various seasons. Sometimes there may even be varieties that we don't always expect, the golden eagle, once absent from the skies in

# vation Times

Breeding species are most active at this time. Farmland familiarities such as blackbirds, tits and song thrushes are busy attending young. Raptors (buzzards, peregrines etc.) that are year round residents can find good hunting opportunities when some of the less aware young fledglings emerge. The cliffs along the coastline can be noisy and active places in summer as nesting fulmars and kittiwakes cram the craggy ledges.

**Summer**

Birds on passage – At coastal outlooks, rare varieties of sea birds may be spotted, terns and auks include some of the possibilities. Wildfowl species and wintering (species who arrive for winter only) waders are returning to Northern Ireland from their northern breeding grounds where they have spent the summer months. Summer visitors to Northern Ireland (e.g. swallows) are also on the move to their southern, winter destinations.

**Autumn**

Northern Ireland has made a reappearance in the region from a small population, which conservation charity 'The Golden Eagle Trust' is attempting to re-establish in neighbouring County Donegal, these efforts are hoped to increase numbers further by encouraging breeding in the wild.

Occasionally birds which are attempting to travel southwards

down the American sea-board from the Canadian Arctic to central or southern America can get caught up in Atlantic storms and get lost or blown as far off track as Irish shores. Waders such as the pectoral sandpiper or the American golden plover fall amongst this category. Some of the more general bird movements throughout the seasons are shown above...



*Castlerock sand dunes*

## The importance of birds in the landscape

- As natural indicators – Thinking of the canary being taken down the coalmine... when the little bird perishes it is a pre-warning of unfavourable and even deadly conditions for humans... likewise, when birds disappear from a natural environment it is a severe warning signal, which would be unwise to ignore! A common gauge of the health of the wider environment is the biodiversity of wildlife, particularly birds as they are such a useful visual indicator. The deterioration of an entire ecosystem can be alerted by the desertion of its complimentary bird life.
- A natural predator – Birds can be an effective natural and '*cheep*' way of keeping pests at bay for the gardener and within farmland alike.
- Seed dispersal – Birds are an important link in the life cycle of certain plants. For example, jays are important for the dispersal of acorns as they bury them in the autumn as a food supply for the harsher winters and some that may remain in the soil can spring forth to form a new oak tree, the thrush family is also an important agent of dispersal for the rowan tree.
- Aural & visual contribution to the countryside and gardens. Birds are part of what many of us come to associate as synonymous with a walk in the countryside, likewise the robin or wagtails brighten up winter gardens. Their varieties of song and aesthetic qualities add to the delight of young and old alike.





## Priority species & endangered birds

Most people may be aware that many birds have suffered declines in population over past decades. From common garden species such as sparrows and starlings through to the symbolic call of the corncrake now absent from our farmland. These changes have occurred for a number of reasons outlined in the 'Opportunities & threats' section (page 40) but throughout the guide those that have made the Northern Ireland Priority Species List (NIEA) have been marked with an asterisk (\*). The RSPB has also identified a priority species list (more details in the 'Opportunities & Threats' section).



*Magilligan Point from Gortmore*



## Birds of the coastline

**The stretch of coastline from Magilligan Point, along the strands of Benone, Downhill and Portstewart forms the northern land boundary of the Binevenagh AONB. The coastline is dominated by its wide, sandy beaches and extensive dune networks which provide a natural backdrop to the coastal setting.**

Sand is the key agent responsible for this landscape and can be witnessed everywhere from the wind blown accumulations, which over thousands of years have extended the land across the mouth of Lough Foyle to form the spit of Magilligan Point to the beach networks which run in an almost uninterrupted strip from Magilligan to Portstewart. The dune systems at Magilligan and Portstewart are some of the finest and most complete dune networks in the whole of Ireland and provide a valuable habitat for wild bird species. Below the waves is a marine world rich in sea life, which for many of the sea birds in this section is a vital food source as species such as skuas, auks and kittiwake may spend months at a time at sea. Other species such as the red-throated diver and great-northern diver, can occasionally be witnessed offshore usually in the winter months and the manx shearwater is a summer visitor around the coastline, which rarely visits land. This is a windswept environment and the boundary zone where land meets the North Atlantic, it is a good place for long strolls with a display of sea birds taking the spotlight overhead.

### **Northern fulmar**

*(Fulmarus glacialis)*

Strictly a sea faring bird, it spends most of its life above the waves on its strong, powerful wings. Fulmars feed in flock on fish and other dead animals floating as they can't dive. During the breeding season they come in to find a suitable perch along the steep cliffs. They are gull-like in appearance with grey tones and white underparts visible in flight.

### **Eider**

*(Somateria mollissima)*

Common to the region, it is the UK's heaviest duck but also the fastest in flight. The male has identifiable black and white markings and the female has a similar profile but is greyish-brown. The down of this bird, which is the soft fluffy feathers under the tougher exterior layer, is the prized stuffing of 'eider down' pillows. This was traditionally



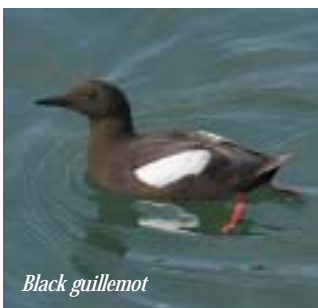
*Eider*

collected from the bird's nests as the female used it to make a warm lining for her eggs and ducklings, but harvested when the ducklings had abandoned the nest makes this traditional method sustainable.

## **Black guillemot**

*(Cepphus grylle)*

The black guillemot, unlike most sea birds, is found mainly singly or in pairs. It is a member of the auk family of sea birds who are distinctive due to their barrel shaped bodies and short stumpy legs. This means auks stand clumsily on land, where they rarely visit apart from during nesting season (March-July) but despite their poor manoeuvrability are very fast flyers, admirable divers and can use their wings to 'swim' under water. The black guillemots have a



*Black guillemot*

striking black plumage in summer and bright red legs.



*Shag*

## **Shag**

*(Phalacrocorax aristotelis)*

The shag has an all black plumage with a glossy green sheen and is perhaps most distinctive for its forehead crest, an unmistakable 'upcurved' tuft of feathers. The shag is maritime in nature, more so than its relative the cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) which can also be seen along the coastline here. Cormorants are stockier, thicker necked birds and have white patches on their face which the shags lack.



*Gannet*



*Arctic tern*



*Great skua*



*Black-legged kittiwake*

## Gannet

*(Morus bassanus)*

A sea bird commonly spotted off shore. It is one of our largest sea birds with a wingspan of up to two metres. It is a spectacle to see gannets diving for fish, as they shoot into the water wings folded tightly back like an arrow and can plunge from heights of thirty metres above the water surface. The adults have long narrow wings with black tips, a spear like bill and pointed tails.

## Great skua

*(Catharacta skua)*

The great skua, alongside the Arctic skua (*Stercorarius parasiticus*), may be found off Ireland's coast. Great skuas are regular autumn passage migrants, which means they can be seen from coastal lookouts, such as the northern fringes of Binevenagh AONB when travelling south from breeding grounds in Iceland or northern Scotland. They are known as the 'pirates of the seas'

as they commonly pursue other sea birds, chasing and attacking until the victim is forced to give up its food.

## Arctic tern

*(Sterna paradisaea)*

The greatest long distance migrant species known is the arctic tern; they astonishingly can cover the distance from pole to pole twice yearly to witness more hours of daylight than any other bird. Some do not make it all the way north in summer and stop off on our shores. There are two other varieties of tern that in flight may look similar in appearance to the arctic tern and can be found commonly off the coast of Binevenagh AONB, they are all summer visitors. These are the common tern (*Sterna hirundo*) and sandwich tern (*Sterna sandvicensis*). Terns tend to be smaller than gulls and are white with pale grey apart from a blackcap. They also have forked, tail streamers and have therefore earned the nickname of 'sea-swallows'.



Herring gull

## Black-legged kittiwake

(*Rissa tridactyla*)

Departed from our shores in winter to spend these months out at sea, the kittiwake is best spotted in spring and summer. They are the most numerous gull species in the world and are distinguishable from the common gull that is similarly grey and white in colour by, as the name suggests, their black legs and wings tipped with a triangular patch of black, looking as if they have been dipped with ink. The kittiwakes breed along this coastline making use of the cliffs adjacent to the coast.

## Gulls

(*Larus*)

These are very common and easy to spot birds that can be seen along the coastline and also in coastal inlets such as the estuaries. Gulls can vary in size from the smaller black-headed gull (*Larus ridibundus*), which is pale grey and white with black tipped wings and a black hood to the very large great black-backed gull (*Larus marinus*) which has an all black back and wings and pink legs. A smaller version of the great black-backed is the lesser black-backed gull (*Larus fuscus*) with similar colourings on its back and wings although perhaps a greyer shade of black and yellow



Rock pipit

legs, it is still quite a large gull but more similar in size to that of the herring gull (*Larus argentatus*)\*. The herring gull has black only on the tips of its wings and a good way to distinguish this bird is its bill, which is yellow with a spot of red. Often herring gulls are mistaken for the common gull (*Larus canus*), these medium sized gulls have a yellow-green bill with a black tip. Overall the gulls have their dissimilarities but to the untrained eye especially from afar they may be hard to differentiate conclusively. Overall the gulls can be spotted with their dominating shades of white, black and grey, their long wings and strong flight and may be seen floating in the water as they have great buoyancy and will even roost on the water at night if needed.

## Rock pipit

(*Anthus petrosus*)

The rock pipit is slightly larger and drabber in colour than its inland counterpart the meadow pipit (see pg 29). The rock pipit hugs the coastline searching for insects, worms, sand hoppers and molluscs. It also makes use of cliffs and rock crevices for its nest, as a resident breeding species.

## Birds of the estuaries & wetlands

One of the most rewarding places to catch a glimpse of some interesting bird species is by the Bann and Roe estuaries and around the waters of Lough Foyle where extensive mudflats rich in invertebrate provide feeding grounds for many birds. The RAMSAR designated site supports a diverse assemblage of birdlife, which includes some nationally and internationally significant species of wintering wildfowl and many nationally important species of wader.

Lough Foyle is a wide and shallow coastal inlet and along with Strangford Lough in County Down, is one of just two similar water bird magnets in the country. The eastern edge is rimmed with mudflats, saltmarsh and polder enhanced by shell and shingle ridges and mussel beds. Also within Binevenagh AONB, the Bann Estuary has a less extensive area of mudflats inland from its artificially aligned entrance to the North Atlantic at the Barmouth between the strands of Castlerock and Portstewart. Most rewarding times for bird watching in these areas occur during low tides, especially coincided with migration and in winter, as many are wintering species visiting the area only in the winter months migrating from colder countries such as Greenland and Scandinavia.



Whooper swan

### Whooper swan

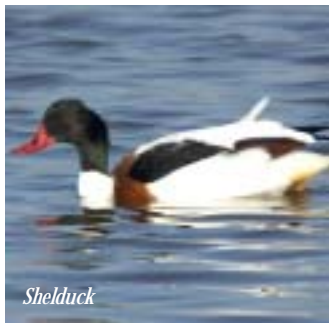
(*Cygnus cygnus*)

Lough Foyle supports internationally important numbers of whooper swan. It has been recorded that over 5% of the of the total international

population is supported here on the shores of the Lough, showing just how important this site is for these majestic birds (source: NIEA). The whooper swan has a long, thin neck usually held in a straight, upright position and a yellow bill. Peak counts for the whooper are recorded in spring and autumn although they also reside at Lough Foyle during the winter period. There are also significant numbers of mute swan (*Cygnus olor*), which is distinguishable from the whooper by its more curvy 'S' shaped neck and orange bill.



*Pale-bellied brent goose*



*Shelduck*



*Greylag goose*



*Mallard*

## **Pale-bellied brent goose \***

*(Branta bernicla hrota)*

Peak counts in autumn when these birds arrive via Greenland and Iceland from spending the summer in breeding grounds in Arctic Canada. They can be found in noisy flocks and are a small, short-necked goose with a black head, neck and a white lower breast and belly.

## **Greylag goose**

*(Anser anser)*

A parent of the farmyard goose, this bird's honking call and aggressive hiss may sound familiar. It is a large, heavy goose of greyish-brown colour, an orange bill and pinkish legs. It winters here in concentrated populations.

## **Shelduck**

*(Tadorna tadorna)*

The shelduck is an attractive and boldly coloured duck with shades of greenish-black on the head, a bright red bill and chestnut, white and black upperparts. It is a common resident breeding species which uses the estuaries and mudflats for feeding and may also utilise the sand dunes systems during nesting time.

## **Mallard**

*(Anas platyrhynchos)*

This is a widespread and extremely common duck species that can be seen in many locations from estuaries to lakes and ponds. In winter populations are highest with the arrival of birds from northern Europe. This duck gives the familiar quack that many of us will come to expect from ducks, however, it is only the females that give this call and the males give a softer, less strong kairp call amongst other noises.



*Wigeon*

## Wigeon

*(Anas penelope)*

The male wigeon has a distinctive call, a penetrating whistle which makes a whee-oo call. It is a compact, short-necked duck and arrives from Iceland, Scandinavia and as far east as Siberia in autumn. Wigeon have a distinguishable blue-grey bill with a black tip.



*Goldeneye*

## Goldeneye

*(Bucephala clangula)*

A quieter species, almost silent apart from a whistling call associated with courtship displays. Both male and female have the distinctive yellow eye, although in males it is set in a dark-green head and with female in a reddish-brown head, the female also has less white than the male and a greyer coat.



*Red-breasted merganser*

## Red-breasted merganser

*(Mergus serrator)*

This duck has a long wispy head crest and a slender profile. Its neck is longer than most of the other ducks present in the local estuaries and it has a long serrated bill that is used for diving for fish although they also consume some invertebrates. This is a resident breeding species, using large river systems and inland lakes but is most commonly seen around estuaries and at coastal locations in winter.



*Great crested grebe*

## Great crested grebe

*(Podiceps cristatus)*

This is a large, handsome bird with a long neck and a black crown that during breeding season is most striking as it extends back to form a double black crest on either side of its head. This bird suffered massive declines in number throughout the UK when its beautiful plumes were sought after to decorate ladies hats. When they received protection from law, numbers increased. They frequent the estuaries in winter and in summer breed inland making large floating nests amongst reeds of inland waterways.





*Grey heron*

## Grey heron

*(Ardea cinerea)*

Grey herons are common birds throughout Northern Ireland and are familiar for their association with wetland habitats especially shallow water, which they can stand in like statues until an unsuspecting fish swims past and is promptly grabbed out of the water by the birds long, dagger-shaped bill. It is an effective fisher.



*Redshank*

although small populations are said to remain and breed inland on lakes such as Lough Neagh and Lough Erne. The redshank is smaller than its relative the greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*) which may also be spotted in this area although not as commonly. Redshanks have orange-red legs and the greenshank has pale green legs with a slightly upturned bill, noisy waders, they conspicuously will draw attention to themselves with their loud 'teuk-teuk-teuk' call.



*Knot*

## Knot

*(Calidris canutus)*

A medium-sized wader, the knot has a somewhat stocky build and their straight, black bill is distinctive. They feed in flocks and similarly remain in tight flocks when in flight, moving as one.

## Redshank \*

*(Tringa totanus)*

The redshank is, like many estuary birds, a wintering species leaving for northern breeding grounds in spring

## Dunlin

*(Calidris alpina)*

A small bird, it may be seen on the estuary at low tide in winter dotted amongst the other waders. Its feathers at this time are brownish-grey and it eats a variety of small estuary creatures from molluscs and shrimps to other invertebrates.



*Dunlin*



*Bar-tailed godwit*

## **Bar-tailed godwit**

*(Limosa lapponica)*

The bar-tailed godwit has a long bill, which is pink at the base changing to a dark greyish-black near the tip. It has long legs and is a large wader wintering around the lough margins from breeding grounds in northern Europe. Not dissimilar in appearance to the curlew, but lacking the curlew's downward curving bill.



*Sanderling*

## **Sanderling**

*(Calidris alba)*

Around the sand flats and sandy shores is where the sanderling is most commonly found. It darts around the tide line and can be distinguished by its pale, grey plumage. Sanderlings also have a short, black bill and black legs which if witnessed up close are lacking a hind claw. They are hyperactive little, wading birds.



*Oystercatcher*

## **Oystercatcher**

*(Haematopus ostralegus)*

A common wader of coastal estuaries and mudflats, it is a large black and white bird that has a striking long, orange bill, ruby eyes and pink legs. The oystercatcher feeds on shellfish, which it may prise open with its powerful bill or hammer open, it also probes for worms on tidal mudflats. The oystercatcher is one of the noisiest birds in the estuary environment, and can often be heard giving a shrill 'kleep, klee-ep' call.



*Curlew*

## **Curlew \***

*(Numenius arquata)*

This bird has a variety of habitats, it may breed in upland bogs, but during winter months it retreats to the coastal estuaries. They are ideal for this large wader to use its very long, downwards curving bill to probe the mudflats for molluscs, crabs, worms and invertebrates.

# Birds of the farmland

Farming remains an important component of this area's economy and culture, the uplands are of less value due to the poorer agriculture land status but the lowlands of Magilligan have some of the most productive agricultural ground in Northern Ireland. The farmland is dissected by an artificial drainage network, which results in dry, sandy soils perfect for crops such as carrots and potatoes.

The farmland is generally composed of large field systems with little shelter and open expanses of flat countryside that stretch from near the foot of the Binevenagh Mountain to the coast. For the wildlife of the Magilligan farmland the expanses of improved land means that there is generally a small variety of different species, but it nevertheless supports some priority species (NIEA) such as the skylark, song-thrush and linnet amongst others.

## **Skylark \***

*(Alauda arvensis)*

A bird noticed to be in decline - the skylark is a small, brown farmland bird with a distinctive crest on the top of its head, which can be raised when the bird is excited or alarmed. It is a species renowned for its



*Skylark*

displays in flight, soaring vertically upwards and hovering while still in song. The skylark is resident in Northern Ireland all year round and within the Binevenagh AONB it has extended its habitat into the adjacent dune systems, this is where it may also be common to catch a sighting (or hear the musical, high-pitched chorus) of this bird.



*Reed bunting*

## **Reed bunting \*** (*Emberiza schoeniclus*)

The reed bunting is particularly fond of wet areas and therefore can be found occupying damper habitats, for example around the lowland ditch networks that drain the surrounding farmland. These ditches are the veins of the lowlands directing water to outlets in Lough Foyle as the area is artificially drained due to the fact that a lot of it is land reclaimed from the sea. Reed buntings have a sturdy build and the males have a black head and throat, separated by a white collar.



*Snow bunting*

## **Snow bunting** (*Plectrophenax nivalis*)

A spectacular little winter visitor, this bird has a striking 'snowy' plumage that is of a dazzling brightness and when in flight they are said to look like a bunch of drifting snow flakes especially against a grey winters sky. The snow bunting is a winter visitor from Greenland and Scandinavia and normally strays little from coastal

reaches. It arrives in late September and stays until February or March feeding on seeds and insects. It can be spotted most abundantly on the coastal peripheries of the farmland



*Swallow*

adjacent to and amongst the dune networks and in stubble fields.

## **Swallow** (*Hirundo rustica*)

A summer bird, finding nests high in the rafters of farm buildings, the swallow is especially fond of quiet or disused barns and is a faithful nesting bird often returning to the same spot year after year. It has distinctive long, tail streamers, which can often be its distinguishing feature and identifies it from the similar house martin (*Delichon urbica*) which has shorter, forked tails and lacks the red markings on the face that is present on the swallow. It is often spotted perched on overhead power cables, especially when flocks gather prior to their famous annual migrations to as far afield as Africa.

## **Magpie** (*Pica pica*)

An extremely common sight, the magpie has interesting blue, purple and green, glossy tones when witnessed up close, although from a distance they appear black and white. A resident bird that is probably most notorious for its 'bad reputation', the magpie can steal other birds' eggs



*Magpie*

but also feeds on insects, worms and seeds. It has a distinctive, loud 'chacka-chacka-chack' call, which can be heard from trees as they chase each other around the branches.



*Blackbird*

## **Blackbird**

*(Turdus merula)*

It is normally the male that is well known and easily identifiable in farmland, woodlands and gardens as it has a striking all black plumage with a bright orange bill. The female is dull brown in colour with a mottled breast, especially the younger bird, making her sometimes confused for a song thrush. The blackbird is also musical and has even been thought to copy human music although they are very territorial birds and when alarmed can give an excited 'chack-ing' noise.

## **Song thrush** \*

*(Turdus philomelos)*

The song thrush is a small, shy bird, smaller also than its close relative the mistle thrush (*Turdus viscivorus*) \* which can also be seen in the open



*Song thrush*

farmland in flocks in late summer or at other times bouncing around the ground searching for worms, slugs, insects and berries. The song thrush is a shy bird and has brown tones on the upper body, a yellowish face and a heavily mottled underbelly. To distinguish the mistle thrush it is more greyish-brown with a black mottled underbelly. Both thrushes are species of conservation importance.



*Robin*

## **Robin**

*(Erithacus rubecula)*

This bird barely needs an introduction, its bright orange-red chest plumage and olive brown back and wings are a sure give away. It once was a bird of the woodland but has since become accustomed to humans and is now a regular and bold visitor to most people's garden. Although people may associate the robin with a winter Christmas card scene, it is in fact a resident species in Northern Ireland.



*Linnet*

## **Linnet \***

*(Carduelis cannabina)*

A small, brown finch with black and white streaking and a pale underbelly, the linnet is widespread throughout a variety of Northern Irish habitats from farmland to saltmarsh and is resident all year round. It eats seeds and insects and nests close to the ground or in brambles. In the breeding season the cock has a crimson forehead and breast.



*Twite*

## **Twite \***

*(Carduelis flavirostris)*

Similar in appearance to the linnet but appearing rounder with a slightly longer tail and darker streaked markings, this little bird (around 14cm long) is a rare member of the finch family. It enjoys marginal, coastal habitats often with a heathland component and the reclaimed land of Magilligan is one of the best spots in Northern Ireland to witness wintering flocks. It may be seen amongst flocks of other finches feeding around saltmarshes and in stubble fields.



*Greenfinch*

## **Greenfinch**

*(Carduelis chloris)*

A very common finch species with bright markings, it has patches of yellow seen most clearly in flight as they run along the bird's wingspan and tail sides. They may be seen in flocks on farmland and in farmyards in the winter when they are searching for food, they eat mainly a diet of seeds.



*Goldfinch*

## **Goldfinch**

*(Carduelis carduelis)*

This resident finch is commonly found where there are thistles covering the ground, they enjoy quite open landscapes from gardens to woodland edges. Adults have a bright red forehead and chin, brown back and black wings with the famous gold streak that runs along the wingspan making them vivid in flight.

## **Lapwing \***

*(Vanellus vanellus)*

A very handsome bird, the long crest on its forehead makes it an easy one to identify, it also has a black crescent



*Lapwing*



*Chiffchaff*



*Sedge warbler*



*Blackcap*

on its upper breast, white underparts and a greenish sheen to its black upper plumage. The lapwing has gained a few names that it is known by, green plover being one and simply the peewit after its distinctive high pitched call.

## **Chiffchaff**

*(Phylloscopus collybita)*

A summer visitor, this small but active warbler enjoys lowland woodland with tall trees where it can find shelter. It receives its name from the song that this bird makes, an unmistakable 'chiff-chaff' repeated time after time.

## **Sedge warbler**

*(Acrocephalus schoenobaenus)*

This bird enjoys coastal meadows and can be seen in the farmland of Magilligan, it does however enjoy damp locations especially for nesting and therefore may be most commonly sighted around the ditches where there are reeds, bushes and sedges. The sedge warbler is pale

brown with cream underparts and head markings, it spends its summer in the region and departs again in the autumn for Africa where it winters.

## **Blackcap**

*(Sylvia atricapilla)*

This little warbler is a striking bird and can be found usually near the perimeters of farmland or in other locations such as Downhill Demesne where its melodic tunes fill the air. It has recently increased in numbers due to the milder climate and with more numbers staying through the winter months when it would usually retreat to southern Europe or Africa. Its obvious blackcap is the most identifiable feature in males and is a chestnut cap in females.



## Birds of the Binevenagh cliffs

**This dramatic frontier of sheer cliff faces, between the sweeping lowlands and upland plateau is a remote haven for bird life. Well out of humans reach, it makes an ideal nesting site for birds and raptors like the peregrine falcon which can on occasion, be seen soaring around the rocky crags hunting for unsuspecting victims.**

A good outlook for bird spotting is situated along the scenic Bishops Road at Gortmore View Point where panoramic views across the peninsula of Magilligan are also striking. Along from Binevenagh Mountain and its adjoining escarpment there are important cliff line habitats running parallel with the coastline at Benone Strand, where waterfalls cascade over the edge, fed by streams draining the upland plateau above. Below the famous landmark of Mussenden Temple also lie important cliff habitats for nesting sea birds such as the fulmar and kittiwake that arrive from their usual maritime habitat to

find a suitable nesting site in breeding season.

### **What's in the name?**

Place names have long been known to hold significance in their meaning and often give insight into the history of a place or feature they are describing. Along the Bishops Road, there is a high point with the name 'Eagles hill'. What is known is that eagles were present in the region approximately 100 years ago. Efforts by bird conservation groups are underway so that perhaps once again the golden eagle will return to take its place as the largest raptor of these skies.





*Peregrine falcon*

## **Peregrine falcon**

*(Falco peregrinus)*

A powerful bird and adept hunter, when positioned for attack, the peregrine can hurtle towards its prey at speeds of up to 180kph! At such phenomenal speeds the peregrine's attacks are mainly airborne to prevent injury to the bird, but it has also been known to pluck prey from perches or from the ground at reduced speeds. The peregrine is resident to the Binevenagh AONB, therefore it may be spotted all year round.

## **Buzzard**

*(Buteo buteo)*

The most common of the UK's large birds of prey, the buzzard has a short undefined neck, broad wings and a broad, rounded tail. It can be easily spotted within the Binevenagh AONB and is found in a range of habitats but the cliffs are a good place to catch a glimpse of a hovering buzzard. Although good in flight they can be seen on posts, in trees or on a rocky perch giving the



*Buzzard*

distinctive 'pee-oo' call. Populations of buzzards are said to be highest here in the northeast of the province, therefore this is a key area for this large raptor.

## **Northern wheatear**

*(Oenanthe oenanthe)*

The northern wheatear is often present at coastal lookouts during migration from the start of March. Some may be passing through en route to Greenland, and northwest localities of the British Isles such as



*Northern Fulmar*

here are said to be the best spots to see them on their northern passage. In breeding season, those that stop off also inhabit upland areas where they can be seen hopping and flitting around the ground. In flight the wheatear may be distinguished by its white rump and black 'T' markings on the tail. The males are the most highly distinctive with bright, black markings, a grey back and white underparts. The females are less brightly patterned and lack the black cheek markings of the male.

## Jackdaw

*(Corvus monedula)*

The crow family includes some of the easiest spotted birds including the rook (*Corvus frugilegus*), hooded crow (*Corvus corone*) and the jackdaw which are all predominantly black in appearance, but have definable differences. The rook has a subtle purple sheen to its coat and a grey bill. The hooded crow has a black head and a distinctive amount of greyish-white plumage. The jackdaw is significantly smaller and a more compact crow with a glossy black

sheen and pale grey nape, they use the cliff ledges for nesting. Often birds from this family tend to be less favorably thought of by people, as they are renowned for their cheeky attitude and bold nature.



*Jackdaw*

## Northern fulma

*(Fulmarus glacialis)* (see pg 10)

## Black-legged kittiwake

*(Rissa tridactyla)* (see pg 10)

## Raven

*(Corvus corax)* (see pg 29)



## Birds of the uplands

The uplands of Binevenagh AONB are cloaked in blanket bogs and upland heath which is sustained by the high rainfall, high humidity and cool summers, typical of the Northern Irish climate. Blanket bogs are defined as a layer of peat deeper than 0.5m and its associated plant life, such as heather, bog cotton and sphagnum moss.

This is found within the AONB at Altikeeragh which has been designated an ASSI (Area of Special Scientific Interest) due to the importance of this habitat in Ireland, the dense vegetation provides an ideal habitat for some of the last populations of red grouse in Northern Ireland. Heathlands are similar to bogs but the layer of peat is thinner (less than 0.5m) and they tend to occupy the western fringes of the AONB around Springwell and Cam Forest and associated bird species such as the stonechat find this habitat most suitable. The area also includes large swathes of planted, coniferous forest. These are typically lower in bird diversity than their natural deciduous woodland counterpart which is the natural vegetative state of the north of Ireland if all human influence was absent, (as was the case before the first settlers 9000 years ago). However, the coniferous forests teamed with the adjacent upland, blanket bogs and heathland has its own distinctive bird life. These birds may be some of the hardest to spot because of the nature of the dense cover, care must be taken not to disturb the fragile habitat, keep strictly to the footpaths and rights of way.

### Red grouse \*

(*Lagopus lagopus*)

The red grouse is commonly associated with the plant species *Calluna vulgaris* commonly called heather. The bird relies on heather rich habitats such as upland heathland, blanket bogs and raised bogs for its habitat, as a food source



Red grouse



Jay

and to conceal their nests in breeding season. Therefore a threat to these habitats, such as draining, fragmentation and excessive cutting of peat is a threat to the ongoing existence of the red grouse in Northern Ireland. It is currently a high priority species, with an alarming decline of 60% in the last 30 years. (source: NIEA 08)

## Jay

*(Garrulus glandarius)*

The jay can be found in the coniferous plantations sheltering amongst the cover of the trees since it is a shy woodland bird. But if you keep a beady eye on walks through woodland you may be lucky to see it, with its characteristic white rump flitting between trees from cover to cover. Jays are often heard before they are seen by their screaming call. When found in deciduous woodlands like the small patches that do exist within the Binevenagh AONB they are the famous acorn buriers, supplying the bird with food during the harsher winter months and helping in the life cycle of the oak tree.

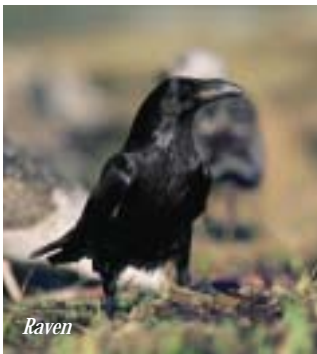


Crossbill

## Crossbill

*(Loxia curvirostra)*

Adult males are a vivid bright red colour and its unique, crossed over bill used for extracting seeds from cones makes it a distinctive bird to spot. It is a bird of plump build and may be encountered within noisy groups of family members or wider groupings. They are adapted to the coniferous woodland with their diet of conifer seeds and can be spotted high up by the tree tops, commonly occupying the roof of the forest.



*Raven*

## **Raven**

*(Corvus corax)*

The largest of the crow family, however, the raven is not normally associated as closely with its other relatives as the other crow species may be. It has a different habitat niche being most commonly seen in uplands reaches and coastal cliffs. Ravens are a powerful bird, they have large bills and shaggy neck feathers and not surprisingly are therefore very strong in flight and, whilst usually feeding on carrion, are able to kill small mammals or birds.



*Meadow pipit*

## **Meadow pipit**

*(Anthus pratensis)*

A common songbird of the upland areas, it has a distinctive high-pitched piping call. In appearance it is a small bird with a streaky, brown plumage. The meadow pipit is a adaptable bird as it accommodates itself in a variety of habitats, from farmland to the dune network and indeed to the upland peatlands. The meadow pipit forages for a variety of insects such as moths, spiders, beetles and flies.



*Sparrowhawk*

## **Sparrowhawk**

*(Accipiter nisus)*

A popular bird, found all over the UK. In flight they have a barred pattern aligned across their white chest, which is grey streaked on females and brown on males. This bird is found in the forests, but may also use open farmland and even gardens.



*Skylark*

## **Skylark\***

*(Alauda arvensis)*

This priority species also finds refuge in the uplands especially the peatlands. It can be heard more often than spotted making a trill 'chirrup' call in flight along with a variety of song.

## Irish Races

Some species are resident in a region or country throughout the year, never mixing or joining with populations from other regions - over time this may result in them evolving differences from outside populations as they are effectively cut off.

This has occurred in Ireland, where some unique species (known scientifically as endemic), have evolved over thousands of years of being separated from their British or European counterparts to form distinguishable differences (e.g. in shade of down) into a distinct 'Irish race'. Ireland has four such endemic species: coal tits, jay, dipper and red grouse.



*Coal tit*

### Coal tit

*(Parus ater)*

A very common tit found occupying mainly the coniferous woodlands within the uplands, they like to build their nests in holes close to the ground, such as in old tree stumps, walls and stony areas. The coal tit variety commonly seen in the area is the 'Irish race' (*hibernicus*) with a yellowish-white cheek strip and underparts, an olive-grey hue on the upper body and darker wings. The coal tit is slightly smaller than the familiar blue tit (*Cyanistes caeruleus*) seen in lowland locations.



*Siskin*

### Siskin

*(Carduelis spinus)*

The siskin is a member of the finch family but is especially adapted to woodland environments and a typical bird species of conifer plantations, of which the uplands are cloaked in large swaths at Binevenagh, Cam and Springwell forests. The siskin nests high up in conifer trees in summer months. It has a black crown and chin with black also on the wings and tail. Prominent tones of yellow and olive green are present in its plumage, which is most vibrant in males.



*Willow warbler*

## **Willow warbler**

*(Phylloscopus trochilus)*

This bird is a summer visitor, from early spring to September when its pleasant song has a lasting, liquid tone starting soft and growing louder before fading away again. It is a tiny bird, but a busy creature amongst woodland, hedgerows and scrub. The bird has pale tones of yellow, green and beige.



*Goldcrest*

## **Goldcrest**

*(Regulus regulus)*

This is Ireland's tiniest bird species, it is however a very active little bird which likes coniferous woodlands and thick cover, using this vegetation as shelter for its nesting site as it breeds in Ireland. It may be spotted in the AONB in other



*Stonechat*

forested areas along the coast at Downhill Demesne and Downhill Forest. It has a yellow crown on its head that is even more orange in the males from where it takes its name.

## **Stonechat**

*(Saxicola torquata)*

A bird with an orangey-red breast plumage, males have a black-brown mantle and females have duller shades of the same pattern. They are a plump bird found in heathlands and gorsy areas and can be seen perched on bushes or posts flickering their tail, they give a sharp, repeated 'tsack tsack' call which sounds similar to the noise made when stones are clicking together.

# Binevenagh AONB map and





# key bird spotting locations



*Binevenagh Lake*



## Bird spotting locations

### 1. Gortmore View Point

Great location to have a picnic and enjoy the view over Magilligan, Lough Foyle and the North Coast. There is a public car park signposted at Downhill.

**Location:** Take the Bishop's Road from the village of Downhill, following road signs for Gortmore View Point.

**What can we see?** Buzzard and peregrine all year round and cliff breeding fulmar over the summer period.

**Contact:** Limavady Tourist Information Centre  
Tel: 028 7776 0307  
[tourism@limavady.gov.uk](mailto:tourism@limavady.gov.uk)

### 2. Benone Strand

A Blue Flag beach, popular throughout the year for a variety of outdoor activities and events with great views along the North Coast, to Inishowen in Donegal and to

Scotland. Look out for seals, porpoises and sea birds.

**Location:** Benone Strand is located off the Seacoast Road (A2), 12 miles north of Limavady and 4 miles west of Castlerock. A regular bus route runs from Limavady to Coleraine.

**Species:** Gulls, black guillemot and eider ducks are common all year round over the sea; terns and kittiwake can be spotted throughout the summer.

**Contact:** Limavady Tourist Information Centre  
Tel: 028 7776 0307  
[tourism@limavady.gov.uk](mailto:tourism@limavady.gov.uk)

### 3. Roe Estuary

This is a National Nature Reserve. The car park is situated at the end of the public road. There are no formal paths and it is important to note that the soft mud on the shore can be dangerous and crossing either the railway line or bridge is not permitted.

**Location:** From Limavady, left off A2 before Bellarena level crossing.

**Species:** Thousands of migrating waders, ducks and geese in winter. The oystercatcher, lapwing and redshank can be seen all year round

**Contact:** Northern Ireland Environment Agency  
Warden: 028 7776 3982

#### 4. Magilligan Point

This is a National Nature Reserve. There is a car park at the end of the public road and Interpretation panels, but no formal paths or walk ways.

**Location:** At the end of the Point Road, off the A2 about 10 miles north of Limavady.

**Species:** Both wintering waders, ducks and geese and sea birds can be seen. Gannet and skuas can be spotted offshore over the summer period.

**Contact:** Northern Ireland Environment Agency  
Warden: 028 7776 3982

#### 5. The Bann Estuary and the Barmouth

The Barmouth is a local nature reserve and wildlife sanctuary, and attracts large numbers of migrant and wintering waterfowl and waders. A National Trust bird hide, accessible for wheelchair users, provides excellent views of the spectacle, although this is a fragile site and access is restricted.

**Location:** From Coleraine, Cranagh Road off the A2 Road.

**Species:** Over 4,000 waders, ducks and geese are present over the winter period. Each spring and autumn large numbers of birds on their way to and from countries further north pass through the

Lower Bann corridor linking to either Lough Neagh or wetlands and coastal areas further south in Ireland.

**Contact:** National Trust  
Keys for the bird hide can be obtained from Portstewart Strand (£10 deposit)  
**Tel:** 028 7083 6396  
portstewart@nationaltrust.org.uk

#### 6. Altikeeragh

This is a National Nature Reserve, renowned for its relatively intact area of peatland. No facilities are available on the site.

**Location:** On the Limavady to Catlerock Road, left at the top of the Ballyhacket Road.

**Species:** The bog provides habitat for upland birds such as red grouse, meadow pipit, skylark and raven.

**Contact:** Northern Ireland Environment Agency  
Warden: 028 7776 3982

#### 7. Springwell Forest

Walks and trails in 1,200 hectares of mixed coniferous and broad leaved award-winning conservation woodland. Picnic tables and car parking available, open from dawn to dusk every day of the year.

**Location:** Located on the main A37 Dunhill Road between Limavady and Coleraine.

**Species:** Woodland species present in this forest includes the jay, crossbill and sparrowhawk.

**Contact:** Forest Service Northern Ireland  
**Tel:** 028 2955 6000  
customer.forests@da.dni.gov.uk

# Bird spotting checklist

English name	Latin name	Irish name	Ulster Scots name	Date and location of sighting
Arctic skua	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>	Méirleach artach	Black-toed gull	
Arctic tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	Geabhróg artach		
Bar-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	Guilbneach stríocearrach	Norwegian whaup	
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	Lon Dubh	Merle	
Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	Caipín Dubh		
Black-headed gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	Sléibhín	Garrog	
Black guillemot	<i>Cephus grylle</i>	Foracha dhubh	Tystie	
Black-legged kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	Saidhbhéar	Chitty wink	
Blue tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	Meantán gorm	Tittymouse	
Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	Clamhán	Kite	
Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	Tiuf-teaf	Willow wren	
Common gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	Faoileán bán		
Common tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	Geabhróg	Spurr	
Coal tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	Meantán Dubh		
Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Broigheall	Scart	

Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	Crosghob	
Curlfew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	Crotach	Whap
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	Breacóg	Mud lark
Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	Eadar	
Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	Gainead	Gant / Solan
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	Cíorbhuí	
Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	Órshúileach	Whistler
Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	Lasair Choille	Corney of the cap
Great black-backed gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	Droimneach mór	King gull
Great crested grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	Foitheach mór	Molrooken
Great skua	<i>Catharacta skua</i>	Meirleach mór	Allan Hawk
Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	Laidhrín glas	
Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	Glasán Darach	Green linnet
Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Corr réisc	Cran
Greylag goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	Gé Ghlas	
Herring gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	Faoileán scadáin	Laughing gull
Hooded crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	Caróg	Scald crow
House martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	Gabhlán binne	
Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	Cág	Chough
Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	Screachóg	Daw / Kay

<b>English name</b>	<b>Latin name</b>	<b>Irish name</b>	<b>Ulster Scots name</b>	<b>Date and location of sighting</b>
Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>	Cnota	Stone row / Dunne	
Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	Pilibín	Wallapy	
Lesser black-backed gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	Droimneach beag	Horse gull	
Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	Gleoiseach	Whin grey / Lintie	
Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	Snag breac	Pienet / Pyot	
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Mallard	Wild duck	
Meadow pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	Riabhóg mhóna	Tattle / Tittling	
Mistle thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	Liatráisc	Cornageerie	
Mute swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	Eala bhalbh		
Northern fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>	Fulmaire	New gull	
Northern wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	Clochrán	Stone twister	
Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	Roilleach	Breedyeen / Garrabrack	
Pale-bellied brent goose	<i>Branta bernicla hrota</i>	Cadhan		
Peregrine falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	Fabhcún gorm	Goose hawk	
Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	Fiach Dubh		
Red-breasted merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	Siolta rua	Comber	
Red grouse	<i>Lagopus lagopus</i>	Cearc fhraoigh	Heath powt	
Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	Cosdeargán	Kitteryweary	
Reed bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	Gealóg Ghiolcaí	Chink / Ring rasher	

Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Spideog	Spiddiock
Rock pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>	Riabhóg Chladaigh	
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	Rúcach	Craa
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	Luathrán	
Sandwich tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>	Geabhróg scothhubh	
Sedge warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	Ceolaire Cíbe	Wee nightingale
Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	Seaga	Scart / Scarf
Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	Seil-lacha	Barduck
Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>	Siscín	
Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	Fuiseog	Leverock
Snow bunting	<i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i>	Gealóg Shneachta	
Song thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	Smólach Ceoil	
Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	Spioróg	Kack
Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	Caislín Cloch	
Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Fáimleog	
Twite	<i>Carduelis flavirostris</i>	Gleoiseach Sléibhe	Heatherling / Mossy grey
Whooper swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	Eala Ghlórach	Elk
Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>	Rualacha	
Willow warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	Ceolaire Saili	Sally wren

The Ulster Scots name column is non-exhaustive list of bird names used in Northern Ireland. For more information check the Concise Ulster Dictionary (Macafee, 1996).



## Opportunities & threats

**Agricultural schemes** – DARD (Department of Agriculture & Rural Development) encourages farmers to adopt environmentally sensitive farming methods through its Countryside Management Scheme (CMS). Measures relative to farmland bird life include planting of crops in autumn instead of spring to provide winter stubble in the fields for the benefit of skylarks, linnets and reed buntings that feed on the seeds in winter. There are also incentives to farmers with land used by swans and geese around Lough Foyle to leave the land uncultivated and free of stock between October and March when the birds use it for vital feeding after their long migrations.

**Pollution** – Pollution of coastal zones is particularly problematic for sea-faring bird species. Polluting items reaching the sea may be mistakenly ingested by birds resulting in fatalities, especially in gannets as shiny objects like metal can catch their eye and appear similar to a fish from their position high, above the water. Direct pollution into the sea of plastic bags, tin cans, discarded fishing lines & old fishing nets may similarly cause fatalities for sea diving bird species that get tangled up in the rubbish and drown. Oil spills although less frequent affect a lot of birds when they do occur.

**Rising sea levels** threaten the coastal lowlands where the most extensive bird populations in the Binevenagh AONB are found. The especially low lying land of the coastal rim around Lough Foyle, Magilligan and Bann Estuary would be at severe risk of inundation from any sea level rise which has been forecasted at between 85cm and 1 metre by 2100. (National Trust NI, 2007).

**Northern Ireland Priority Species** are those that have been chosen using scientific bases such as species decline, confined populations, being amongst a significant percentage of total international population or a species under threat that requires conservation action. The species list includes birds along with all other living species, which require extra conservation measures to ensure their survival and is undertaken through the publication and implementation of Species Action Plans. This helps to concentrate the efforts of biodiversity officers responsible for maintaining the overall biodiversity of boroughs and Northern Ireland as a whole. There is also a more extensive list for the UK although species under threat may differ between regions.



**Peat extraction and drainage of upland bog habitat** - Peat builds up slowly after many cycles of vegetation growth, die back and decay under water logged conditions. The peatland within the Binevenagh AONB is an important habitat for birds, teamed with adjacent heathland and coniferous forest it provides for a habitat range and species variety very different from the lowland area. This valuable habitat is restricted in its global distribution to areas (like the island of Ireland) that have sufficient levels of rainfall to maintain it and therefore should be carefully managed with future sustainability in mind so that peat is not extracted at a rate that may detriment the bogs ability to maintain itself. Drainage results in similar habitat destruction and usually occurs related to agriculture when channels and gullies are put in place in an attempt to dry out the land for agricultural profitability. However drainage removes the bogs lifeline (i.e. the water logged conditions) and peatlands are now being conserved due to their immeasurable ecological value. For instance it is believed that habitat loss is partly the reason that Irish red grouse have fallen so greatly in number and become a priority species.

**RSPB** – Probably the most recognised bird conservation organisation in the UK, including the reserve on Lough Foyle the RSPB has 5 nature reserves in Northern Ireland and 200 in the UK covering 130,000 hectares and home to 80% of the UK's rarest or most threatened bird species. The main themes of RSPB work include the conservation of wild birds but also they have an interest in related wildlife and the habitats in which the birds live. They have a categorised guide to bird conservation status (from UK and all-Ireland perspectives) with red being of the highest conservation priority, with species needing urgent action. Amber is the next most critical group, followed by green. More information can be obtained on the RSPB's website: [www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk).

**RAMSAR site** – This protected area tag is for wetlands deemed to be of international importance, designated under the Ramsar Convention; they therefore are specifically important in protecting the habitats of water birds within the U.K. The Lough Foyle Ramsar Site was designated in 1999 and covers an area of 2159.62ha, including the whole of the Lough Foyle Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI), the intertidal area of the Magilligan ASSI extending south of Magilligan Point and all of the Lough Foyle Special Protected Area (SPA). The Ramsar site at Lough Foyle includes the habitats of intertidal mudflats, sandflats and associated saline ditches. These habitats are vital to the numerous ducks, geese and waders that visit Lough Foyle every winter.

**SPA (Special Protected Area)** - All European Union member states are required to identify internationally important areas for breeding, over-wintering and migrating birds and designate them as Special Protected Areas. These sites are designated under the European Commission Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds (The Birds Directive). The Lough Foyle SPA designated in 1999 overlaps the Ramsar site (above).

The implementation of the EC Birds and Habitats Directives, and in particular the designation of sites, forms part of the "Natura 2000" network.



## Glossary

**biodiversity** - the total variety of all living things, from the smallest insect to the largest tree often used as a marker of the health of an environment.

**down** - Layer of fine feathers found under the tougher exterior feathers. Very young birds are clad only in down.

**ecosystem** – a biological community along with its corresponding physical environment.

**invertebrates** – a large group including any animal lacking a backbone such as insects, worms and starfish.

**habitat** – where a plant or animal lives, providing it with food, shelter and protection.

**mantle** – The whole back of a bird, combined with the top surface of the wings

**molluscs** – molluscs are typical food for many birds. Molluscs are classified as any animal lacking a backbone and with a soft body, such as clams, mussels, snails and slugs.

**NIEA** – The Northern Ireland Environment Agency is an agency within the Department of Environment.

**polder** – term used to describe a low-lying tract of land, enclosed by embankments known as dykes. It forms its own artificial closed water system as it is separated by its embankments from any natural interactions. Any interactions that do occur are human operated devices.

**raptor** – a bird of prey.

**spit** – area which projects out into the sea, formed from the accumulation of sand via the coastal process of long shore drift. Long shore drift occurs when waves hit the coastline at an angle and gradual transport sand along the beach, sometimes to project over the mouth of estuaries, like a long finger.

**waders** – a broad classification for birds which are associated with wetland or coastal environments and have adaptations to feed from mudflats and/or exposed soils. Often many varieties of waders can survive in these environments alongside as the different lengths of bill mean that they all feed from different levels of the mudflats.

**wildfowl** – includes ducks, geese and swans, these birds are adapted to life around water often with the ability to float swim or dive in aquatic environments.

# Acknowledgements, References & Useful Links.

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## Photographs

Paul Weston Bird Photographs: [www.birdimages.co.uk/images.aspx](http://www.birdimages.co.uk/images.aspx)

NIEA: [www.ni-environment.gov.uk](http://www.ni-environment.gov.uk)

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Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust, National Trust, Garry O'Neill.

For more information on the images used on this publication, contact the Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust.

## References

### **The complete guide to Ireland's birds**

Dempsey & O'Clery. 2002.

### **Coleraine Borough Biodiversity Action Plan**

McLaughlin, E. (2007). The Biodiversity of the Coleraine Borough: An Assessment of Priority Habitats and Species, Species of Conservation Concern and Locally Important Habitats and Species.

## Websites

### **The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds**

[www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk)

### **British Trust for Ornithology**

[www.bto.org](http://www.bto.org)

### **BirdWatch Ireland**

[www.birdwatchireland.ie](http://www.birdwatchireland.ie)

**Northern Ireland Priority Species** (follow link to 'species list' to find section on birds)

[www.habitas.org.uk/priority](http://www.habitas.org.uk/priority)

[www.ni-environment.gov.uk/ramsar/ramsar\\_foyle.shtml](http://www.ni-environment.gov.uk/ramsar/ramsar_foyle.shtml)

[www.ni-environment.gov.uk/landscape/designated-areas](http://www.ni-environment.gov.uk/landscape/designated-areas)

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[www.jncc.gov.uk](http://www.jncc.gov.uk)

[www.nbn.org.uk](http://www.nbn.org.uk)



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*cover pic: Northern fulmar*

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