

# DONEGAL: IRELAND

DATES: 13<sup>TH</sup> TO 16<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2019

## Introduction

The Rosses area of Donegal is somewhere that I have known for a long time having visited since I was a child and in more recent time was home for my parents. I have enjoyed exploring the area spending a great deal of time birdwatching, fishing, climbing and walking across this spectacular region. This year, after fifty-five years of visiting I meet another birder! This shows how quiet the area is.

## Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup>

**Annagry Estuary:** Geo Tag: 55.02309, -8.3268

*At low tide Annagry Estuary provides a great expanse of sandy bed that can be walked across with little risk. It is a good location for waders, plovers, curlew and a good range of gull. The causeway that runs parallel to the airport runway often holds large numbers of Golden Plover.*



*Figure 1 Looking across Annagry Estuary from the airport. The standing stones are a recent addition!*

Parked by the airport (Donegal International: voted the worlds most scenic airport) and walked back down to the estuary. As the tide was out was able to walk across the sand towards the mussel beds. Good numbers of **Hooded Crow** and **Jackdaws** feeding on the grass areas. Gulls were represented by **Common, Herring, Great and Lesser Black-backed**.

**Sanderling** were feeding along the water's edge and there was a good number of **Ring Plover** (33) in two distinct groups. **Curlew** and **Oystercatcher** were feeding amongst the mussel beds and five **Turnstone** were resting on the cages.

A large flock of **Golden Plover** (c150) seemed to be constantly moving from one area of the estuary to another. A single **Great Northern Diver** was feeding on the outgoing tide.

**Carrackfinn Headland:** Geo Tag: 55.06509, -8.33148

*The beaches and headland in this area are great for exploring. The little bays often hold a variety of divers and Black Guillemot. Rock pipits are very common and in spring and summer the meadows are rich in flowers and Corncrake and snipe can be located.*

Moved down to the little bay at Carrackfinn. The long freshwater lake by the road contained the usual **Mute Swan, Little Grebe** and **Grey Heron**.

Standing on the pier at the boat strand spotted another **Great Northern Diver** feeding in the little bay. Yet it was a large, juvenile gull standing on the rocks offshore that attracted my attention. Its light, mottled plumage and large bill was distinct and said **Glaucous Gull**, a new tick on my life list! Sadly, as I was getting my camera out it strolled over the top of the rocks and disappeared down the other side not to reappear.

At the same location a **Merlin** appeared. While watching it was 'buzzed' by a Peregrine making a nice 2 for 1 observation.

**Mullaghderg:** Geo Tag: 55.03697, -8.36926

*The bay here is excellent after a period of rough weather. Large flocks of Long-tailed Ducks have often been observed and several species of divers can be seen. A telescope is a must for this location.*

After a few days of strong wind and heavy swell the bay was much quieter. I was surprised to find only two **Long-tailed Duck** usually more are present after such weather. The bay also held two **Great Northern** and three **Red-throated Diver**. There were several other divers, but the range was too great for a positive identification.

On the rocks by the boardwalk and group of five **Turnstone** were feeding along with **Oystercatcher** and **Curlew**.



*Figure 2: Turnstone*

#### **Thursday 14<sup>th</sup>**

**Annagry Estuary:** Geo Tag: 55.02309, -8.3268

A return visit to Annagry Estuary added **Black-headed Gull** to the list for this trip. There was a fly over of eighteen **Whooper Swan** which are always a welcomed addition to this location. A **Little Egret** was also present, and this was the first time I've recorded on here in Donegal.

**Mullaghderg:** Geo Tag: 55.03697, -8.36926

A brief visit as the wind had again increased and it made observations difficult. However, a **Chough** was feeding at the back of the large sand dune near the car park, but the biggest surprise was a flock of eleven **Long-tailed Tit** which flew across the road leading to the car park. It is not a location or environment that I would normally expect to see them in being open with no trees. I can only speculate that they on the move towards the lake and bushes that surround it.

**Burtonport Area:** Geo Tag: 54.98469, -8.44336

*This area is just a few miles south of my usual birding area. There is a dock with fish works around it so it attracts, when the boats are in, an interesting range of gulls. Several circular walks start from this point and will lead you through a range of habitat.*

Starting from the dock car park a walk through the fish works produced **Grey** and **Pied Wagtail**. Several **Wren** were active, and a single **Stonechat** showed well. A small group of **Long-tailed Tit** were in the bushes by the old railway crossing house.

Two groups of **Whooper** Swan passed over heading NE. One group of seventeen and another of twenty-two.

### **Friday 15<sup>th</sup>**

**Ballymanus Beach Area:** Geo Tag: 55.04235, -8.34714

*This is my favourite walk whether birdwatching or just having a good stroll. Having parked beyond the airport the walk takes you along the Blue flag beach of Ballymanus, through a number of bays to Carrackfinn. At this point you can continue on to walk round the headland, which is a must in spring and summer as the flowers, especially orchids, are stunning. If you don't wish to do this take the road from the pier to a long, freshwater lake. Walking along the shore of this lake it's worth checking the fields with cattle in for Chough as in the past I've had flocks of up to 11 here. The fields at the end of the lake near to the airport perimeter are very good for Corncrake in the summer. Following the fence brings you to Annagry Eastuary. If the tide is out, then it is safe to walk on the sand. If the tide is incoming it is worth turning left and positioning yourself along the shore to watch for bird on the incoming tide.*

*Reward yourself by popping into the airport for a coffee and café! If you have timed it right watch a landing of a plane into the most spectacular of airports. The whole walk is about five miles.*

Little along the beach other than **Herring** and **Common Gull**. Offshore there were several divers but too far for positive identifications. **Oystercatcher** were feeding amongst the seaweed that had been blown in.

A **Great Northern Diver** was again in the little bay and I watched it make a number of dives coming up with a small dab, a crab and what looked like a small lobster that proved challenging!





*Figure 3: Great Northern Diver*

A **Red-throated Diver** was swimming against the outward tide in Annagry Estuary. The estuary held good numbers of **Sanderling** (43), **Ringed Plover** (c60), **Turnstone** (21), **Curlew** (13), and **Golden Plover** (93).



Figure 4: Ringed Plover and Sanderling

Five **Brent Goose** flew down the far side of the estuary.

**Maghery:** Geo Tag: 54.93165, -8.44278

*Magery is on the other side of Dungloe and first started to explore this area when we took a holiday home there in 2017. Dungloe Estuary holds internationally important numbers of Harbour Seal and a boat trip from Burtonport is worth doing. The Maghery area included a small harbour, a large lake and just beyond yet another spectacular beach.*

Two female **Eider** were just of the beach and thirty-three **Oystercatcher** were feeding amongst the drift material. A flock of **Linnet** were moving around the beach and two **Grey** and seven **Pied Wagtail** were feeding around the freshwater inlet.

On the lake twenty-seven **Wigeon** were present as was the **Otter**, which I've seen on each visit I've made to this lake. Two **Stonechat** were near the cemetery and offshore from the was a group of eleven **Red-breasted Merganser**, and a Great Northern and Red-throated Diver.

### **Saturday 16<sup>th</sup>**

**Mullaghderg:** Geo Tag: 55.03697, -8.36926

A group of eleven **Long-tailed Duck** were diving towards the shore. There were three types of divers' present: **Red-throated (2)**, **Black-throated (2)** and **Great Northern Diver (6)**. However, there was at least another fifteen divers but too far, without a telescope, for a confident identification.



There was six **Shag** either feeding or loafing on the rocks. This was the most I've seen here for a long time.



*Figure 5: Shag*

The pebble beach held fifteen **Sanderling**, five **Turnstone**, one **Ringed Plover** and two **Curlew**. A **Merlin** crossed the bay and a **Kestrel** was hunting across the dunes.

Additional photos taken over the years can be found at:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/fenlandbirder/albums/72157691609063090>

Andy Hannaford

**Species checklist: 51 seen**

**Blackbird**  
**Black-headed Gull**  
**Black-throated Diver**  
**Blue Tit**  
**Brent Goose**  
**Chough**  
**Common Gull**  
**Cormorant**  
**Curlew**  
**Dunlin**  
**Dunnock**  
**Eider**  
**Glaucous Gull**  
**Golden Plover**  
**Great Black-backed Gull**  
**Great Northern Diver**  
**Grey Heron**  
**Grey Wagtail**  
**Herring Gull**  
**Hooded Crow**  
**Jackdaw**  
**Kestrel**  
**Lesser Black-backed Gull**  
**Linnet**  
**Little Egret**  
**Little Grebe**  
**Long-tailed Duck**  
**Long-tailed Tit**  
**Magpie**  
**Mallard**  
**Meadow Pipit**  
**Merlin**  
**Mistle Thrush**  
**Mute Swan**  
**Oystercatcher**  
**Peregrine**  
**Pied Wagtail**  
**Red-breasted Merganser**  
**Red-throated Diver**  
**Ringed Plover**  
**Robin**  
**Rock Pipit**  
**Sanderling**  
**Shag**  
**Song Thrush**

*Turdus merula*  
*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*  
*Gavia arctica*  
*Cyanistes caeruleus*  
*Branta bernicla*  
*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*  
*Larus canus*  
*Phalacrocorax carbo*  
*Numenius arquata*  
*Calidris alpina*  
*Prunella modularis*  
*Somateria mollissima*  
*Larus hyperboreus*  
*Pluvialis apricaria*  
*Larus marinus*  
*Gavia immer*  
*Ardea cinerea*  
*Motacilla cinerea*  
*Larus argentatus*  
*Corvus cornix*  
*Corvus monedula*  
*Falco tinnunculus*  
*Larus fuscus*  
*Carduelis cannabina*  
*Egretta garzetta*  
*Tachybaptus ruficollis*  
*Clangula hyemalis*  
*Aegithalos caudatus*  
*Pica pica*  
*Anas platyrhynchos*  
*Anthus pratensis*  
*Falco columbarius*  
*Turdus viscivorus*  
*Cygnus olor*  
*Haematopus ostralegus*  
*Falco peregrinus*  
*Motacilla alba*  
*Mergus serrator*  
*Gavia stellata*  
*Charadrius hiaticula*  
*Erithacus rubecula*  
*Anthus petrosus*  
*Calidris alba*  
*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*  
*Turdus philomelos*



**Starling**  
**Stonechat**  
**Turnstone**  
**Whooper Swan**  
**Wigeon**  
**Wren**

*Sturnus vulgaris*  
*Saxicola rubicola*  
*Arenaria interpres*  
*Cygnus cygnus*  
*Anas penelope*  
*Troglodytes troglodytes*