

Where to watch

By Paul Walsh & Declan McGrath



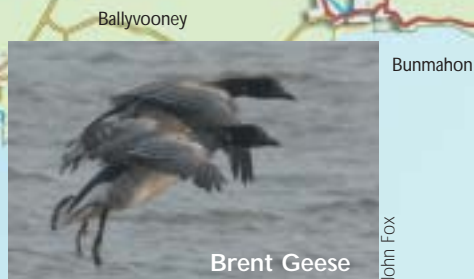
Yellow-browed Warbler

Paul Walsh

Black Redstart
Ronnie Martin

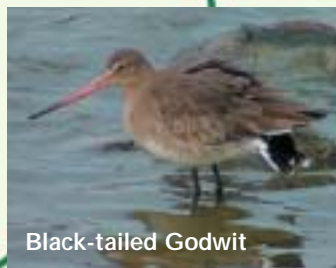


0 Distance (kilometres) 7.5



Brent Geese

John Fox



Black-tailed Godwit

Top 5 sites:

1 Waterford Harbour & Dunmore East

Access: Follow the coast road (via R683) southeast from Waterford city or north from Dunmore East, along the western side of the harbour. Good access points for viewing the mudflats, from north to south, are at Cheekpoint, Passage East, Geneva Strand, Woodstown and Fornaght (Creadan) Strand. From Co Wexford, take the Ballyhack-Passage ferry.

Habitats: Estuary, sea-cliffs and fishing port.

Birds: The estuary supports fewer wintering waterfowl than Tramore Backstrand or Dungarvan, but numbers of Oystercatcher are the highest in the county. Small numbers of Brent Geese winter, and good views of Sanderling and Bar-tailed Godwit can be had along Woodstown beach. Woodstown also has a Sand Martin colony in summer, and a small reedbed (Water Rail, etc). The sea-cliffs from Creadan Head to Dunmore East hold breeding seabirds including Razorbills and Kittiwakes.

The Kittiwake colonies at Dunmore East are probably the most easily viewable in Ireland, and birds are present almost all year round. Other interest around the fishing harbour is provided by occasional Iceland and Glaucous Gulls in winter, and Purple Sandpipers winter outside the seawall. Storm-blown seabirds like skuas and Storm Petrel also occur, and improved coverage for landbird migrants could be productive.



Kittiwake

2 Brownstown Head & coast to east

Access: From Waterford city, take the Airport road (R708) south from the ring road, turn left at the T-junction 2km south of the airport, then keep right, with Murphy's Bar and Corbally Church on left, out as far as the Head. Or follow the coast roads east from Tramore or west from Dunmore East. The coast road to/from Dunmore East also provides access to Ballymacaw, Rathmoylean and Portally coves.

Habitats: Coastal scrub/hedgerows, wooded valleys, gardens, cliffs.

Birds: Brownstown Head is best known as a site for migrant and vagrant landbirds. These are best searched for around the gardens at the south end of the access road, and in hedgerows and scrub anywhere on the headland, though the area nearest the tip has been most productive. Expect a wide range of common migrants from late March to May and August to early November, with a good chance of scarcer species or real rarities mixed in with the more usual Chiffchaffs, Blackcaps and Goldcrests. Spring vagrants have included Little Bittern, Golden Oriole and Subalpine Warbler. Autumn has been even more productive, with four species of American landbird (including Yellow Warbler and Northern Parula) and Old World vagrants like Western Bonelli's and Pallas's Warblers. Species like Yellow-browed Warbler and Firecrest are probably annual.

Brownstown is a good seawatch point during onshore winds, with Pomarine Skuas in May and Sooty Shearwaters in August-September among the highlights. The Head is also a good vantage point from which to scan for divers and Common Scoter in Tramore Bay (Site 3). Breeding species include Chough, Tree Sparrow and good numbers of Stonechat and Whitethroat.

Further east, rare migrants have been found in the scrubby or wooded glens leading down to Ballymacaw and Rathmoylean coves. Improved coverage of those sites, and Portally cove further east, would produce more.

3 Tramore Bay & Backstrand

Access: Take the main Tramore road (R675) south from Waterford city, or the coast road west from Dunmore East. There are car parks around Tramore town (boating lake and access to SW corner of the Backstrand), at Saleen/Corballymore overlooking the eastern part of the Backstrand, and at Newtown Cove (west side of the outer Bay). Parking is limited elsewhere, and care is needed if viewing the Backstrand from the narrow road along its NW boundary.

Habitats: Estuary (the Backstrand), sand dunes and open bay.

Birds: The Backstrand is of particular importance as a wintering site for hundreds of Brent Geese. Numbers of other wildfowl tend to be low, but wintering waders include good numbers of Black-tailed Godwits and Oystercatchers. Close-range views of Black-tails and Brent can be had at the boating lake, also a likely spot for Ring-billed Gull (one adult returned annually for a decade). Dozens of Little Egrets winter (and breed) and post-breeding concentrations of 50-70 birds occur in autumn.

Rarities have been relatively few (no American waders yet!) but have included Glossy Ibis, Black-winged Stilt and others in spring, with Osprey and Spoonbill among the more frequent rarities. Large numbers of Red-throated Diver can occur in the outer Bay, and Common Scoter are fairly regular in winter. Tramore beach supports dozens of Sanderling in winter and spring, and Short-eared Owl can occur in the sandhills. Breeding birds in the area include Shelduck and many Skylarks in and around the dunes.



Merlin

John Carey



Whimbrel
John Fox

Where to watch

... on the **Waterford coast**

Brownstown Head
(Paul Walsh)

Top 10 birds:

4 Dungarvan Harbour & Clonea Strand

Access: The main Cork-Waterford road skirts part of the bay, and (from west to east) there is a choice of other routes – out to Ring (with left turns for the Cunnigar and Ballynagaul pier), waterfront access in the town itself near the Sports Centre and in the Abbeyside area, or out the Gold Coast road, from Barnawee bridge towards Ballynacourty Pier. From there, check access points along Clonea Strand, especially the car park at Ballinclamper.

Habitats: Estuary, open bay, sand spit, sandy and rocky shore, coastal scrub and gardens.

Birds: Brent Goose is the dominant wildfowl species in winter, with 1,000+ birds possible, including regular Dark-bellied Brent and a Black Brant (the 'Pacific' subspecies). Large numbers of Shelducks and Wigeon also occur, with a few Shovelers interspersed. Wader flocks can be spectacular, especially roosting flocks of the 'grey' species at the Cunnigar (Knot, Sanderling, Grey Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit). The sheltered SW corner of the harbour, at Killongford, holds large numbers of Black-tailed Godwits and Golden Plovers. Dozens of Great Crested Grebes winter around the harbour, and Black-necked Grebes are occasional. Many vagrants have occurred, including Squacco Heron, Forster's Tern, Ivory Gull and (at the Cunnigar) Booted Warbler and a range of North American waders.

Clonea Strand supports many of the same species, in smaller numbers, but is a particularly good area for Red-throated and Great Northern Divers, Purple Sandpipers and feeding Choughs, and is the best spot in the county for Whimbrels (in spring) and migrant terns. Vagrants such as Red-backed Shrike and American waders have occurred, and the whole stretch from Ballynacourty Point (Ballinard) north to Ballyvoyle cove is worth checking.

5 Helvick Head and coast to west



John Fox

Iceland Gull

Access: From Dungarvan, take the main Cork road west, then the left turn for Ring, and watch for the signpost (c2.5km out) for Helvick. From the Cork direction, take the right turn, c4km east of Youghal bridge, for Ardmore. For sites in between, follow the coast road (OS map 82 essential!).

Habitats: Sea-cliffs, fishing harbour, coastal scrub, gardens and wooded valleys.

Birds: Helvick Head gets a similar mix of landbird migrants to Brownstown Head, with Blackcap and Black Redstart typical species in late autumn. Highlights have included Radde's Warbler in autumn and Red-footed Falcon in spring. Suitable habitat is well-scattered, though coverage is easiest around the gardens and hedgerows overlooking the pier. Helvick is the best seawatch point in Waterford, especially in autumn (though any month in onshore winds), with regular Storm Petrels, skuas and a good chance of Balearic or Cory's Shearwater. In winter, the pier often holds several Iceland Gulls. In summer the outer cliffs support the county's largest seabird colony, Guillemots and Kittiwakes mainly. These are difficult to view safely, but small numbers of Black Guillemots are often visible near the pier.

The headlands (e.g. Mine Head) and valleys (e.g. Ballymacart cove) west from Helvick to Ardmore can produce good landbird migrants (e.g. Red-eyed Vireos at Hacketstown and Ardmore Head). The cliffs along the coast are difficult to access, except those west of Ardmore, where a path skirts the Kittiwake colony at Ram Head (the top whale-watching site in Waterford, highlights including Fin and Humpback Whales). Nearby Ardmore and Whiting Bays are worth checking for Mediterranean Gulls (regular) or rarer species.

1 Light-bellied Brent Goose

Large numbers winter at Dungarvan and Tramore mainly, smaller numbers more widely.

2 Merlin

Scarce but widespread migrant and winterer along the coast.

3 Black-tailed Godwit

Hundreds winter at Dungarvan and Tramore, with best views obtained at Tramore boating lake.

4 Whimbrel

Common migrant, especially in late April and early May, when hundreds may arrive from the south, especially at Clonea Strand. A few also winter, in Dungarvan area mainly.

5 Pomarine Skua

Regular migrant during onshore winds, in May especially.

6 Iceland Gull

Scarce but regular winterer, especially at Helvick Pier.

7 Kittiwake

Good colonies at Dunmore East and Helvick Head.

8 Black Redstart

Scarce migrant in late autumn and early spring, also winters in small numbers along the coast.

9 Yellow-browed Warbler

Rare but annual migrant in late autumn, especially at Brownstown and Helvick Heads.

10 Tree Sparrow

A scarce migrant and winterer, it currently breeds in Brownstown Head and Ardmore/Whiting Bay areas.



Pomarine Skua

Dick Coombes



Tree Sparrow

John Carey