

Ireland - Wildlife of Wexford in Spring

Naturetrek Tour Report

26th – 30th June 2026



Chough



Common Tern



Roseate Tern



Gannets on Great Saltee Island

Tour report by Andy Smith
Photos by Andy Smith and Mike Walker



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Tour participants: Andy Smith (leader) with six Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Friday 26th June

Overcast with occasional sunny breaks and a moderate south-westerly breeze. Drizzly in the late evening.

The group met at Pembroke Dock ferry terminal at lunchtime, in preparation for the afternoon crossing to Rosslare. The weather was fine, and most of us spent the larger part of the crossing up on deck. Having left Milford Haven, we rounded St Ann's Head and a dramatic vista of islands opened up: Skomer, Skokholm and, more distantly, Ramsey and its outlying skerries.

The islands collectively hold significant seabird colonies, and unsurprisingly the sea around us was full of birds. As we progressed, we enjoyed excellent views of lots of Puffins, Common Guillemots, Razorbills, Kittiwakes and Manx Shearwaters. This last species provided great excitement, cruising around inches above the wave tops with consummate ease and skill. There were many Gannets too, and half an hour or so out we passed Grassholm, with its huge Gannet colony. From a distance the island looked like some strange kind of iced cake; through the binoculars you could see it was "furry with Gannets". It was a magnificent sight!

Approaching Rosslare a couple of hours later, we saw more auks, shearwaters and Kittiwakes, plus our first Common and Sandwich Terns and, in Rosslare Harbour itself, a pair of smart Black Guillemots. Docking and disembarkation were quick and efficient, and formalities were brief, and we soon found ourselves sitting down to a delicious dinner in a pub restaurant just out of Rosslare. We completed our journey to Arthurstown, and settled into our very comfortable accommodation.

Day 2

Saturday 27th June

Overcast and mild with a fresh southerly wind.

After a sumptuous breakfast at the guesthouse, we set off towards Lady's Island Lake. The route took us through the attractive mixed-farming landscape of south-east Wexford, with small fields and tree-filled hedgerows. Along the way, we noted a first few birds, including a couple of Buzzards, a lovely male Yellowhammer and some of Ireland's ubiquitous Rooks. At Lady's Island, we first walked around the headland at the village itself, following the famous pilgrimage trail. This took us close to the two small low-lying islands, which hold the large mixed tern colony for which the lake is noted. There were terns everywhere, so we set to with an ID workshop, first familiarizing ourselves with Common and Sandwich, and then the more delicate and subtle Arctics. The Roseates were nesting on the far side of the further island and were too far away for us to really appreciate: we'd have to wait until later to see those properly.

As well as the terns, we saw a satisfying collection of other birds including Ringed Plovers, Redshanks, Lapwings and Oystercatchers, some Shelduck with chicks, lots of Greylag Geese, both Sedge and Reed Warblers, and several smart Mediterranean Gulls. An unseasonable pair of Curlew Sandpipers were an unexpected and exciting find, especially as one was still in good breeding colours.

Pleased with this start, we proceeded down to the dunes at the seaward end of the lake, a lovely stretch of wild countryside. Having found a relatively sheltered spot to eat our picnic lunch, we realised that we were sat under the main tern flight path between the nesting islands and the sea. Terns were passing overhead almost constantly, and although some were Arctic, very much most were Roseates! We soon added their ID features to our skill set, and learned to recognise their diagnostic, croaking flight calls. Over the next hour or so, we enjoyed quite wonderful views of them: it was a rare treat.



Cottonweed



Pyramidal Orchids

In the nearby dunes, we admired an extensive stand of the endangered Cottonweed (*Achillea maritima*) and then took a short stroll along the beach, an impressive stretch of sand and shingle extending into the distance in both directions, and devoid of people other than us. Terns fished offshore, a few Turnstones flew past, some Linnets rose from the marram, and on a small gravel island back on the lake we enjoyed good views of several pairs of Little Terns with chicks.

The Little Terns made it a “Five Tern Day” and, satisfied with our success, we left Lady’s Island Lake and drove the short distance to Tacumshin, another large shallow dune barrier lake. Tacumshin is famed for its rich avian diversity and its uncanny ability to pull in rarities; indeed, we’d heard that a White-winged Tern had been seen on and off there over the preceding couple of days. We weren’t specifically looking for it, but fortuitously found it on a first scan, hawking into the wind and then drifting back again, and totally unmistakable in its smart black, white and grey breeding plumage. Although distant at first, we ended up with some stunning views of it as it came closer to us, and eventually it passed almost over our heads! Now it was a “Six Tern Day”!

Other notable sightings in a rich hour or so at Tacumshin included a sizeable flock of Black-tailed Godwits (some still in breeding livery), a few Curlews, a pair of Greenshanks, a dozen or so Teals, four Swifts and lots of Sand Martins. All too soon, it was time to call it a day and head back towards Arthurstown. and our dinner.

Day 3

Sunday 28th June

Sunny and warm. with some scattered cloud and a fresh south-westerly wind.

Our first stop today was at Saltmills. on the shore of Bannow Bay, a lovely, peaceful spot which produced sightings of Curlews and Little Egrets, a couple of Grey Herons, a Stock Dove, a number of smart Black-headed Gulls and, from the river bridge, a shoal of sizeable grey mullets. From here we proceeded to Kilmore Quay, in good time for our trip out to Great Saltee.

With the brisk wind, it proved to be an 'exciting' crossing, but soon enough we were safely ashore and able to enjoy the wonderful experience of being on an uninhabited offshore island, and immersed in the noise, bustle and smell of a busy seabird colony. During an excellent few hours in fine sunshine, we enjoyed fabulous views of Puffins, Razorbills, Common Guillemots, Fulmars and Kittiwakes at their nest sites. There were both Lesser and Great Black-backed Gulls too, the latter holding station on prominent knolls and rock outcrops. Some had very young chicks and were ultra-defensive, giving us a short warning bark if we strayed too close.



Gannets



Swallow-tailed Moth

Then there were the Gannets. Great Saltee holds some eight thousand pairs of these magnificent birds, and the main colony is only yards below the path, so we were able to watch them at very close quarters. Collectively, they presented a fantastic sight; we were able to appreciate all the intricacies of their markings, but also to watch the interactions between them, such as bonding rituals between pairs and irritation when their neighbours encroached on their territories. There were chicks of various ages to be seen too, from strangely reptilian hatchlings peering out from under their brooding parent's flanks, to well-grown fellows clad in gorgeous white down.

Beyond the seabirds on Saltee, there were lots of Sedge Warblers singing from the bracken beds, good numbers of Linnets, Meadow Pipits and Wrens, some Rock Pipits, a nice flock of Turnstones on the shore, and various other bits and pieces.

With the wind behind us, our crossing back to Kilmore Quay was easier than the trip out, and after a break for a cup of tea we headed back towards Arthurstown. It had been an exciting and rewarding day!

Day 4

Monday 29th June

Overcast with occasional sunny breaks and a gentle breeze. Some rain in the late afternoon.

Having set off shortly after breakfast, and noting a Sparrowhawk and a Jay en route, we drove down to Hook Head, the low-lying headland on the east side of the great inlet of Waterford Harbour. Choughs were a big target for us here and, amazingly, no sooner were we out of the minibus than we heard their distinctive 'twanging' call: a family party winged down onto the small beach just below us. Initially there were two adults and a juvenile, but they were later joined by another three adults and a further juvenile. Over the next half hour or so we had the most wonderful views of them, the adults foraging among the rotting seaweed and the orange-billed youngsters constantly begging to be fed.

We walked along the shore on bouncy carpets of Thrift and past a series of dramatic blow-holes, before reaching the famous lighthouse and the headland itself. It was all very pleasant, and beyond the Choughs we saw a good range of other species too, including Oystercatchers, Rock Pipits, Linnets and Starlings, and offshore, a few Manx Shearwaters, Gannets and Sandwich Terns.

From the Hook, we proceeded back inland to the rather lovely Tintern Abbey, where we explored the ruined abbey itself, ate a picnic lunch, and took a walk through the woods and along the river. The best of the birds here were a Kingfisher, a couple of Grey Herons, a Buzzard, a Great Spotted Woodpecker and a party of Long-tailed Tits. Also notable were a couple of Hummingbird Hawk-moths around the flowerbeds in the walled garden.

Next was Ballyteige Burrow, an extensive dune system a little west of Kilmore Quay. We'd hoped for sunshine here, to bring out the insects, but in the event it was overcast and rather cool. Nevertheless, it was a lovely spot, and we enjoyed the rich flora, which included lots of Pyramidal Orchids, and some lovely stands of Sea-lavender. Birds included a couple of Kestrels and some Stonechats and, on a freshly cut meadow along the entrance track, a lovely gathering of over 120 Curlews, sixty Back-tailed Godwits and a couple of hundred Rooks. These all stayed put when we stopped, allowing us a lovely view of them. Many of the godwits were still showing their glorious orange breeding colours, and in among the Curlews we discovered a Whimbrel, which was a good find.

Day 5

Tuesday 30th June

Overcast and wet at first, becoming sunny with scattered cloud and occasional showers. Breezy and mild.

We had an early start from Arthurstown in order to catch our breakfast-time ferry out of Rosslare. Everything went smoothly, and soon we were up on deck watching the coast of Wexford receding into the distance behind us. The crossing was productive for seabirds once again, with a nice flock of Arctic Terns shortly out of Rosslare,

and almost constant Manx Shearwater action, with some truly fantastic close views. Around the Welsh islands, things hotted up, with hundreds of auks on the water, some Fulmars and Kittiwakes, lots more shearwaters, and even a couple of Storm Petrels.

Soon enough, we arrived at Pembroke Dock, where we said our goodbyes. It had been a splendid little trip!

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Species lists

Birds (H=heard only)

Common name	Scientific name	June 2026				
		26	27	28	29	30
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		100+			
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		200		2	
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>		30			
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>		25			
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		50		3	
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		10			
Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>			2	1	
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>		4		1	
Feral Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	10	5	6	10	
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		2	1		
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	1	20	10	20	2
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	5	10	2	3	
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		1			
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		100+			
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>		10			
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>		30	6	5	
European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>		1			
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>		6			
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		10			
Eurasian Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>				1	
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		H	10	120	4
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>		50	1	60	
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		6	1		
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>		2			
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		5	14		
Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>		2			
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		2			
Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>		12			
White-winged Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>		1			
Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>		100+			20
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	2	100+			
Roseate Tern	<i>Sterna dougallii</i>		100			
Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>	10	50+	2	1	2
Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	30		50+		10
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	10	100+	20	50	30
Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i>		10			
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	2				
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	50	30	50	30	10
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	5	6	20	5	
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	2		50+	5	2
Atlantic Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>	100+		100		50+
Black Guillemot	<i>Cephus grylle</i>	2				1
Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>	50+		✓	5	20+
Common Murre	<i>Uria aalge</i>	100+		✓	5	100+
European Storm Petrel	<i>Hydrobates pelagicus</i>					2
Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>		50+			3
Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>	✓		30+	20+	✓

Common name	Scientific name	June 2026				
		26	27	28	29	30
Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	✓	1	✓	3	✓
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		50	5		1
European Shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>	10		100	2	10
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	2	8	3	3	
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		5	4	5	
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	1			1	
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		2	2	4	
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>				1	
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>			1H	1	
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>				2	
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>				1	
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		2		3	1
Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>			1	7	
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>		15	1	30	2
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>		200+	100+	750+	10
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	1	1	3	10	
Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>				1H	
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		H		2	
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		5		2	
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		1		1	
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>		50		5	
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	10	50	30	30	
Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		15	10	10	2
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>				12	
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		1H	1H	3H	
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>		2+2H	1+12H	2H	
Common Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>		1+1H			
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		1H		1+2H	
Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>		4H		1+1H	
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		1H		2H	
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		5H	3H	4+3H	
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		100+	50+	100+	10
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		2	1	2	
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>				2	
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	2	5	4	5	
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		1	3	4	
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		1		4	
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		15	5	10	
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		1	1	1	
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>		8	4	12	
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		25	25	50	
European Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>			6	4	
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		5	2	10	
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>				1+1H	
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		1+3H			
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		10	8	5	
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		6	6		
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>		1+1H	1		
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>		1	1		

Mammals

Common name	Scientific name
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>
Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>

Fishes

Common name	Scientific name
a grey mullet	Mugilidae sp.

Butterflies

Common name	Scientific name
Green-veined White	<i>Pieris napi</i>
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>
Small Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>
Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>

Moths

Common name	Scientific name
Hummingbird Hawk-moth	<i>Macroglossum stellatarum</i>
Swallow-tailed Moth	<i>Ourapteryx sambucaria</i>