

CORK HARBOUR I-WEBS COUNTS: SUMMARY REPORT FOR THE WINTER OF 2014/15

INTRODUCTION

This document presents a summary of the Cork Harbour I-WeBS counts carried out between September 2014 and March 2015. Please note that the species totals in this document are provisional and do not represent official I-WeBS data.

COVERAGE

Coordinated counts were completed in five months: September, October, December, January and February. Complete coverage of the main subsites¹ was achieved in the September, October, December and February counts. There is data missing for one subsite in the January count (Table 1). Conditions were good on most counts, with only one subsite count recorded as having low overall accuracy.

For the purposes of count coordination, the subsites have been divided into groups, where there is likely to be significant daily movement between subsites within the same group, but little movement over the short-term between the groups (see Figure 1). The large North group has been further divided into subgroups. Efforts were made to have all counts within groups completed on the same day, but shortage of counters prevented this being achieved on every count (Table 1).

Table 1. Coverage and coordination of Cork Harbour I-WeBS counts, 2014/15

Group	Subgroup	Subsites	Sep	Oct	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
West	-	Owenboy	13/09	18/10	14/12	17/01	15/02	-
		Lough Beg-Monkstown	13/09	18/10	13/12	17/01	15/02	-
Inner	-	Douglas	13/09	18/10	14/12	17/01	14/02	14/03
		Dunkettle	13/09	18/10	14/12	-	14/02	-
North	Belvelly-Glounthaune	Glounthaune	14/09	19/10	14/12	17/01	14/02	-
		Belvelly	14/09	19/10	14/12	17/01	15/02	-
	North Channel	North Channel (south)	14/09	19/10	14/12	16/01	14/02	-
		North Channel (north)	14/09	19/10	14/12	17/01	14/02	15/03
	Midleton	Rathcoursey-Ballynacorra	13/09	19/10	14/12	17/01	14/02	-
East	-	Saleen-Whitegate	14/09	18/10	13/12	18/01	15/02	-
-	-	Cuskinny	14/09	19/10	-	17/01	14/02	-

Owenboy = Owenboy Estuary (OL454) subsite; Lough Beg-Monkstown = Lough Beg (OL453), Spike Island (code not assigned) and Monkstown Creek (OL496) subsites; Douglas = Douglas Estuary (OL488) subsite; Dunkettle = Dunkettle (OL486); Glounthaune = Glounthane Estuary/ Slatty Water (OL489) subsite; Belvelly = Carrigrenan Pools (OL 041), Belvelly Tower (OL424), Belvelly Bridge – Railway (OL425), Carrigrenan - Great Island & Railway (OL426) and East Lough Mahon (OL452) subsites; North Channel (south) = North Channel – Ballintubbrid (OL492); North Channel (north) = Weir Island (OL469), Ballintubbrid (OL482) and Brick Island (OL487) subsites; Rathcoursey-Ballynacorra = Rathcoursey & Ahanesk (OL415) and Ballynacorra (OL484) subsites; Saleen-Whitegate = Rostellan Lake (OL099), Aghada (OL490), Whitegate Bay (OL491) and Saleen (OL498) subsites; Cuskinny = Cuskinny (OL485).

WATERBIRD NUMBERS

Total monthly counts for all the species recorded are shown in Table 2 and 3. The monthly counts of selected species during 2011/12-2014/15 are compared in Table 4. In contrast to previous winters, gulls were counted on almost all counts, although the subsites will only cover a small proportion of their total Cork Harbour populations.

¹ Cuskinny is a small subsite, which is isolated from the other subsites, and which does not hold large numbers of birds. This subsite has not been covered as regularly as the other subsites in recent winters, due to lack of counters.

A notable feature of the 2014/15 season were the high counts of several species in September and October. For Oystercatcher, Black-tailed Godwit and Curlew this reflects the typical seasonal pattern, although the absolute numbers were very high. However, the high counts of Redshank in September and October are not typical of the usual seasonal pattern for this species in Cork Harbour (although there was a high count in October 2012). It should also be noted that comparisons with previous years may be affected by incomplete coverage in September 2012 and the lack of a count in October 2013.

The 2014/15 counts provide further evidence of large declines in the Shelduck populations since the mid-2000s, and continued decline in the Lapwing population, as previously indicated by the 2011/12-2013/14 counts, while the mid-winter Redshank numbers also continue the pattern of decline since the mid-2000s. Dunlin numbers in 2013/14 and 2014/15 have been much lower, compared to 2011/12 and 2012/13. This may indicate a resumption of the declining trend from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s, which the 2011/12 and 2012/13 counts had suggested had appeared to stabilise. However, accurate counts of this highly mobile species are difficult to achieve.

The autumn Little Egret counts indicate that numbers have finally recovered after the setback during the cold winters of 2009/10 and 2010/11. Greenshank also occurred in very high numbers, with counts in every month higher than the respective counts from the previous three winters, and the October and December counts are probably the first 100+ counts of this species in Cork Harbour (and possibly record counts for any site in Ireland). The Mediterranean Gull count in October 2014 is probably a record I-WeBS count for Cork Harbour. However, while there has undoubtedly been an increase in Mediterranean Gull numbers over a number of years, the high total of the October count, compared to other recent I-WeBS counts, probably just reflects a chance coincidence of the count with a large gathering of roosting gulls at Whitegate.

GREAT CRESTED GREBE ROOST COUNT

Great Crested Grebe gather together to form communal nocturnal roosts on open water in Irish coastal sites. A co-ordinated roost count was carried out of the Great Crested Grebe roosts in Cork Harbour on 07 February 2015. This roost count also covered the other diving species that form nocturnal roosts on open water in Cork Harbour: Great Northern Diver, Goldeneye and Red-breasted Merganser.

A total of 208 Great Crested Grebe were recorded on the count, compared to 94 and 74 in the January and February I-WeBS counts, respectively (Table 5)². The main roost occurred in the open water between Great Island and Aghada, with birds observed swimming from Aghada Pier and Whitegate to join this roost. The roost count in the open water south of Spike Island revealed much larger numbers than are normally recorded in I-WeBS counts on the western side of the harbour.

While the overall numbers are low, the Great Northern Diver total of 12 is also higher than the numbers recorded on the I-WeBS counts. However, the Red-breasted Merganser total of 89 was very similar to the February I-WeBS total of 86. As in the I-WeBS counts, only 2 Goldeneye were recorded (in Lough Mahon).

CORMORANT ROOST COUNT

A Cormorant roost count was carried out on 02-03 November 2014. The main count on the evening of 02 November 2014 covered roosts at: Monkstown Creek; Glanmire Wood, Glashaboy Estuary; Fota Island North; Fota Island South; Bagwell's Hill East, East Ferry Channel; Bagwell's

² In fact, the January count probably includes a double-count of birds between the adjacent Ballintubbrid (0L482) and North Channel – Ballintubbrid (0L492) subsites. These subsites were counted on different days: 21 were counted in 0L492 during the day (14:10-15:30) on 16 Jan, while 37 were counted in 0L482 in the evening (16:00-16:50) on 17 Jan. From knowledge of the roosting behaviour, it seems clear that the birds in the 0L482 count were assembling to roost after feeding in 0L492 during the day. Therefore, excluding double-counting, the adjusted total for the January count should be 73.

Hill North, North Channel; and Siddon's Tower, Saleen Creek. Cormorants commuting into the harbour from the roost at Finure, west of Trabolgan, were counted at dawn on 03 November 2014. The Drake's Pool, Owenboy Estuary and Rostellan Lake roosts were counted on the evening of 03 November 2014.

A total of 544 Cormorant were recorded on the count, compared to 330 in the October I-WeBS count (Table 6). The total was higher than the roost count carried out in December 2013, but the latter count did not cover the Bagwell's Hill North roost or the birds commuting into the harbour from the roost at Finure.

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Table 2. Monthly totals of regularly occurring species in the Cork Harbour I-WeBS counts, 2014/15

Species	Monthly counts 2014/15					Annual maxima			
	Sep	Oct	Dec	Jan	Feb	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Mute Swan	29	39	44	41	43	45	40	40	44
Canada Goose	7	6	6	7	5	14	14	10	7
Light-bellied Brent Goose	0	0	58	27	20	58	60	28	58
Shelduck	36	41	524	876	1073	1140	1281	1241	1073
Wigeon	18	422	1177	1557	1558	1468	1056	1503	1558
Teal	215	586	889	1180	1221	929	1251	1240	1221
Mallard	376	321	378	339	322	416	319	323	378
Pintail	0	1	4	21	1	31	8	15	21
Shoveler	0	0	17	23	17	33	19	24	23
Tufted Duck	0	0	1	1	13	26	51	22	13
Goldeneye	0	0	2	2	2	20	23	8	2
Red-breasted Merganser	0	4	49	48	86	71	50	55	86
Great Northern Diver	0	0	1	3	2	3	6	5	3
Little Grebe	40	56	90	70	47	88	62	71	90
Great Crested Grebe	12	46	65	94	74	165	117	82	94
Cormorant	312	330	305	170	157	317	363	263	330
Shag	0	6	4	7	2	6	5	7	7
Little Egret	131	84	58	49	24	67	64	83	131
Grey Heron	99	81	88	58	29	70	49	78	99
Moorhen	14	17	11	20	25	21	15	15	25
Coot	1	1	0	0	0	9	11	4	1
Oystercatcher	2334	1276	592	736	657	1939	1294	1452	2334
Ringed Plover	40	37	10	0	0	29	29	15	40
Golden Plover	0	2202	3650	2394	591	5211	6900	2602	3650
Grey Plover	0	1	47	26	2	35	36	19	47
Lapwing	20	367	1942	1202	1570	2217	1934	1750	1942
Knot	0	0	44	35	136	178	230	125	136
Dunlin	54	117	1980	3697	3801	5068	6789	3117	3801
Snipe	0	8	27	23	56	34	55	32	56
Black-tailed Godwit	3299	2968	1430	666	1600	2955	2770	2681	3299
Bar-tailed Godwit	227	162	213	290	74	312	351	300	290
Whimbrel	1	4	0	0	0	2	67	8	4
Curlew	1987	1307	662	797	851	1662	1266	1163	1987
Redshank	1886	1906	1381	1454	1271	1354	1739	1436	1906
Greenshank	95	124	120	88	80	88	82	85	124
Turnstone	19	54	89	87	35	207	177	104	89
Black-headed Gull	4289	1639	2022	2344	3365	3417	2067	3276	4289
Common Gull	65	116	69	85	295	131	200	444	295
Mediterranean Gull	32	146	8	49	43	8	43	44	146
Herring Gull	187	52	33	4	105	74	70	60	187
Lesser Black-backed Gull	142	78	57	8	47	72	167	120	142
Great Black-backed Gull	246	134	56	11	26	150	116	128	246

Table 3. Monthly totals of scarce species in the Cork Harbour I-WeBS counts, 2014/15

Species	Monthly counts 2014/15					Annual maxima			
	Sep	Oct	Dec	Jan	Feb	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Barnacle Goose						0	0	1	0
Ruddy Shelduck				1		2	2	2	1
American Wigeon			1			0	0	0	1
Gadwall		2	36	21	17	22	12	15	36
Pochard						1	1	0	0
Eider						1	1	1	0
Long-tailed Duck						0	0	1	0
Gannet						0	0	1	0
Sparrowhawk	2	2				0	0	1	2
Buzzard	1	2	2	2	1	2	6	1	2
Water Rail	2				4	0	1	2	4
Spotted Redshank		2	2	1	3	7	4	2	3
Common Sandpiper	1					0	0	1	1
Ring-billed Gull					1	0	0	1	1
Yellow-legged Gull					1	0	2	1	1
Sandwich Tern	378	5				104	85	228	378
Common Tern	26					0	1	1	26
Black Guillemot		6	1	2	4	19	5	15	6
Guillemot						0	0	1	0
Razorbill						0	0	1	0
Kingfisher			1	2	2	3	1	2	2

Table 4. Comparison of monthly counts for selected species between 2011/12-2013/14

Species	Season	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Shelduck	2011/12	8	43	465	681	1140	948	439
	2012/13	0	202	465	-	1281	1109	-
	2013/14	38	-	274	811	911	1241	533
	2014/15	36	41	-	524	876	1073	-
Wigeon	2011/12	15	475	820	1137	1407	1468	237
	2012/13	2	348	914	-	1056	844	-
	2013/14	18	-	762	1173	1180	1503	750
	2014/15	18	422	-	1177	1557	1558	-
Teal	2011/12	174	534	612	632	713	929	488
	2012/13	115	374	602	-	1251	1034	-
	2013/14	87	-	609	968	1240	1201	773
	2014/15	215	586	-	889	1180	1221	-
Oystercatcher	2011/12	1939	1281	1028	803	1220	930	400
	2012/13	1207	1294	899	-	836	764	-
	2013/14	1452	-	853	1328	882	768	508
	2014/15	2334	1276	-	592	736	657	-
Lapwing	2011/12	18	371	2217	1709	1792	378	4
	2012/13	10	354	1169	-	1934	294	-
	2013/14	15	-	414	1581	1683	1750	15
	2014/15	20	367	-	1942	1202	1570	-
Dunlin	2011/12	39	600	2419	5068	4338	2771	72
	2012/13	10	697	1390	-	4261	6789	-
	2013/14	16	-	481	2021	2512	3117	1660
	2014/15	54	117	-	1980	3697	3801	-
Black-tailed Godwit	2011/12	2955	2154	1155	700	2209	2015	1896
	2012/13	1663	1404	1037	-	767	1826	-
	2013/14	2681	-	2091	2207	1453	867	2267
	2014/15	3299	2968	-	1430	666	1600	-

Species	Season	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Curlew	2011/12	1662	978	887	623	1357	1197	324
	2012/13	1234	1139	506	-	628	1266	-
	2013/14	1163	-	747	846	883	855	527
	2014/15	1987	1307	-	662	797	851	-
Redshank	2011/12	1062	1297	1352	1209	1219	1354	552
	2012/13	697	1739	1259	-	1284	978	-
	2013/14	1383	-	1303	1115	1386	1436	1207
	2014/15	1886	1906	-	1381	1454	1271	-
Greenshank	2011/12	88	78	71	66	55	40	60
	2012/13	61	82	57	-	44	40	-
	2013/14	73	-	85	79	67	43	67
	2014/15	95	124	-	120	88	80	-

Table 5. Great Crested Grebe roost count

Roost	Great Northern Diver	Great Crested Grebe	Red-breasted Merganser
open water south of Spike Island	2	39	7
Lough Mahon	0	20	42
North Channel at Ballintubbrid	0	35	24
open water between Saleen and Aghada	0	12	0
open water between Great Island and Aghada	10	102	16
Whitegate Bay	0	0	0
Total	12	208	89

Table 6. Cormorant roost counts

Roost	07-08/12/2013	02-03/11/2014
Drake's Pool, Owenboy Estuary	19	18
Monkstown Creek	151	169
Glanmire Wood, Glashaboy Estuary	109	86
Fota Island North	34	70
Fota Island South	42	41
Bagwell's Hill North, North Channel	-	33
Bagwell's Hill East, East Ferry Channel	49	60
Siddon's Tower, Saleen Creek	51	40
Rostellan Lake	6	0
Roches Point	-	27
Total	461	544

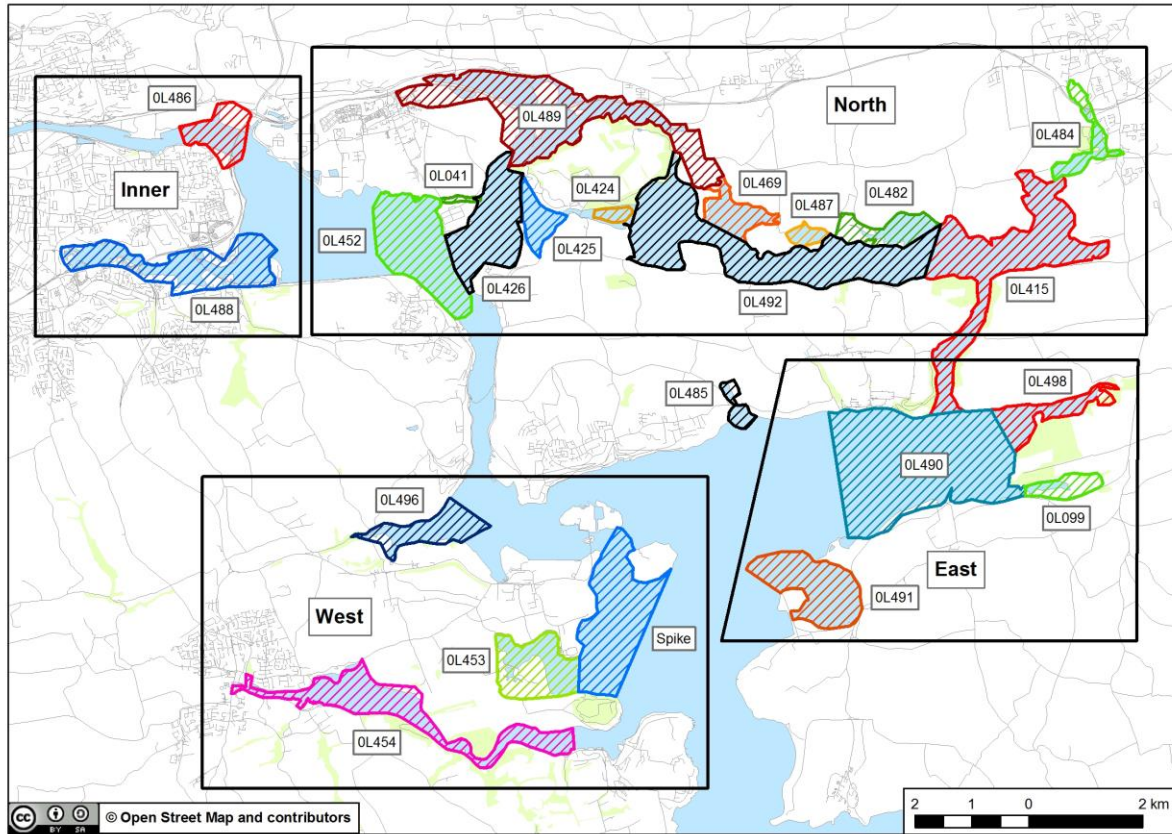


Figure 1. Cork Harbour I-WeBS subsites