Biologically speaking, Ireland is a single entity, with little difference between the impoverished avifauna of Northern Ireland and the impoverished avifauna of the Republic; both political regions possess fewer than 50% of the breeding species of Great Britain and both have a rather

Continued....
different winter bird population from that in the more eastern island. Political and cultural differences between the two sides of the border of Northern Ireland have, however, led to rather different approaches to the study of these birds. In Northern Ireland, political attention is directed eastwards, ensuring the development of political and organisational structures broadly paralleling the system found in Great Britain. Even the RSPB, for example, is precluded by its charter from operating outside the United Kingdom, so that it has become a significant force in Northern Ireland ornithology but has been confined to offering advice and encouragement to bird conservationists in the Republic of Ireland. Ornithologists in the Republic, on the other hand, operate in a rather different framework of social opinion, the latter heavily influenced by the British scene, but with a strong transatlantic component present. The result has been a distinctiveness of ornithological style in the Republic.

The position of Irish ornithology (referring now both to Northern Ireland and to the Republic) is probably best described as being 20 to 25 years behind that of Britain, but learning fast and effectively. Several features of the Irish scene are reminiscent of the past situation in Britain. First, at a general level, there is the relatively low public awareness of the threat to the Irish countryside which exists as the result of modern industrial and agricultural practice; it is not yet realised that birds and their habitats need positive action for their conservation. Secondly, among ornithologists there is a disproportionate interest in documenting the occurrence of rare species and a relatively low interest in ‘scientific’ ornithology. Thirdly, there are very few professionally qualified ecologists in Ireland and proportionately few of them are ornithologists. These features form a backdrop to the current work by ornithologists in Ireland.

Some history
The last decade has been one of particular development in the quality and quantity of ornithological research in Ireland. It is probably fair to say that the first 50 years of this century depended on the labours of a handful of ornithologists of the calibre of Major R. F. Ruttledge, G. R. Humphreys, the late C. F. Scroope, and the late Rev P. G. Kennedy. Their labours and their extended correspondence with countrymen and shooting people throughout the country resulted in a handful of standard reference books, notably The Birds of Ireland (Kennedy et al. 1954) and its update Ireland’s Birds (Ruttledge 1966). Another book of note was An Island Sanctuary (Kennedy 1953), describing the birdlife of the North Bull Island in Dublin Bay. These books—and the annual Irish Bird Reports, edited by Rutledge from 1953 to 1971—gave a measure of cohesion to the activities of ornithologists throughout the country, but it was an extremely loose cohesion. A personal reminiscence of this early era can be found in Humphreys (1979).

By the early 1960s, a variety of organisations had sprung into being to tackle various bird problems in Ireland. Some, like the Irish Society for the Protection of Birds and the Irish Ornithologists’ Club, were national bodies (though often with the bulk of their membership centred around the capital
Ornithology in Ireland

Others were more local, meeting in the convivial surroundings of a Dublin pub, for example, with the first item of the agenda the ordering of drinks by those present! Some, like those already mentioned, concerned themselves with all species of birds; others, such as the Irish Wildfowl Committee, had been set up to tackle problems associated with a particular group of birds. With overlapping interests and overlapping membership and a variety of outside bodies—particularly shooting organisations, game councils and governmental departments—to be dealt with, the scene was set for confusion. The year 1966, however, saw the event which was to become the real strength of the Irish ornithological movement: three major organisations—the ISPB, the IOC, and the IWC (which by then had become the Irish Wildfowl Conservancy rather than merely a committee)—agreed to dissolve themselves and merge into a single or new organisation, the Irish Wildbird Conservancy. Careful diplomacy having obtained the agreement of the various committee members of these organisations beforehand, a polite note informed members of the three organisations that their subscription orders entitled them to membership of the new body in lieu of their previous membership: those who did not like the new arrangement could have their subscriptions refunded. Thus were the memberships of the three organisations brought together to provide a unified voice and concerted action on Irish birds. The results have been spectacular: from a membership of some 800 in 1967 (when nearly one-third of its support came from overseas) the IWC has grown to 1,800 members, mainly within Ireland.

The IWC has remained the dominant organisation on the Irish scene in the Republic, but it liaises closely with other organisations, particularly with the RSPB in Northern Ireland and with the BTO in Britain. One of the earliest actions of the new society—and one that had given it its claim to national authority on birds within the Republic—was to join in starting an annual IWC/RSPB ‘All Ireland Conference on Bird Conservation’, held in alternate years in Northern Ireland and in the Republic. The event transformed Irish ornithology: from being the concern of relatively parochial groups, bird conservation became a serious matter worthy of national debate and capable of attracting speakers from both parts of Ireland and from the mainland of Britain. As the IWC grew, it developed a series of branches and links with established bird clubs and societies in centres of ornithological population: Dublin, Cork, Galway, North Munster, Sligo, Waterford and Wexford. This development has given the IWC features of both the BTO and of the RSPB Members’ Groups: an organisational infra-structure capable of achieving widespread coverage through the country for national projects, while at the same time providing foci for social and recreational aspects of birdwatching. These structures reflect more the organisation of the Audubon Society in the USA rather than any of the societies in Britain. In the same vein, the annual report of the combined societies became the Annual Report and Conservation Review, turning itself into a forum for promoting ecological and conservation ideas in their wider context, placing emphasis on habitats and environmental quality rather than purely on birds.
Although the Northern Ireland Ornithologists' Club has, for instance, carried out important survey work at Lough Neagh, the major influence on the development of ornithology in Northern Ireland has been the RSPB. It has pursued there its usual policy of acquisition of reserves, thereby creating foci for the birdwatching public and providing tangible evidence of the value of bird haunts in a manner accessible to the general public. With the resources of the RSPB behind a determined policy of expansion in Northern Ireland, the ornithological world there has been transformed. This development has undoubtedly been aided by the presence of two or three individuals in influential posts: both the Conservation Branch of the NI government and the Department of Extra Mural Studies of Queen's University, Belfast, have appointed ornithologists to staff positions from which they have brought some of the resources of their departments to the development of Northern Ireland ornithology; in this they have supplemented the long-standing support provided by the Ulster Museum.

Education
One of the striking features of the IWC's programme is the emphasis it has put on education and educational activities, both for schools and for the general public. School posters, competitions and quizzes for schoolchildren (individually and in school-based projects), annual courses in ornithology for school teachers, and the superb publicity films *A Hundred Thousand Wings* and *The Cry on the Mountain* have all contributed to this emphasis. This sustained educational campaign by the IWC has undoubtedly raised the level of environmental consciousness in Ireland: by 1977, birdwatching and ecology had become so respectable that the annual Aer Lingus 'Young Scientist of the Year' award went to a schoolboy, Michael O'Briain, for an ecological study of the important wader haunt of Rogerstown Estuary in northern Co. Dublin. Teachers needing ideas for similar projects can refer to an IWC booklet *Projects on Birds* for advice. Several hundred copies of this book have been sold to date and the recent IWC/RSPB booklet *Birds in Ireland* will doubtless help further.

Reserves
The Republic differs from Northern Ireland in the type of reserves run by its societies. Where the RSPB—with its large staff and extensive membership—can manage a large series of reserves as financial enterprises, the IWC has, with important exceptions such as the Wexford Slobs, been able to purchase only relatively cheap reserves not particularly threatened by pressure of people. But it has also entered into management agreements with the owners of particular pieces of land with a view to managing that land in the interests of birds alongside the interests of the owners. In this way, a series of important bird haunts has been brought under reserve status. In many cases, even part-time (voluntary) wardens have been appointed to look after the bird interests of these sites. In addition, Irish ornithologists have successfully fought several planning enquiry or court battles to prevent particularly important bird sites being 'developed', in some cases fighting their case alongside the shooting fraternity from the
same region. Such victories, the publicity accompanying them, and the publicity associated with the purchase of each reserve, however remote from the centres of population, all contributed to the establishment of the principle that birds matter politically in Ireland in the same way as they do in Britain.

The universities
The involvement of Irish universities in ornithological work has been sporadic, both in Northern Ireland and in the Republic. No university has established itself as an Irish centre for ornithology along the lines of Oxford, Aberdeen or Durham, and there are no career ornithologists on the permanent staff of any university. Past provision for the study of birds has treated the subject as a minor ecological topic, so that university activity in bird work has depended on the personal interest of a handful of individuals pursuing an ornithological doctorate as research students. Even granting a slight increase in the frequency of such students during the 1970s, it remains the case that the university contribution to Irish ornithology is barely significant when compared with the amateur and government scientist activities.

The role of government
The role of the Irish government in the recent flourishing of ornithology is extremely interesting. Shooting is a major rural pastime everywhere and there is a strong game-club and gun-club lobby. Consequently, such research as the relatively impoverished country of Ireland has been able to sustain has been directed towards wildfowl and game problems, notably through research on the Mallard, the Red Grouse and the White-fronted Goose; more recently, work on the Irish population of the Woodcock has been started. But one of the striking features of the last 15 or so years has been the willingness of government ministers to give a sympathetic hearing to the conservation arguments put forward by the IWC, particularly when the conservancy has itself previously consulted with the shooting interests (usually to obtain an agreed position with respect to government). The public support given to the IWC and the Irish conservation case by ministers or their senior civil servants is undoubtedly a factor contributing to the publicity received by the IWC within Ireland. More tangible support has been afforded to Irish ornithology in the form of grants for educational work and outdoor activities by young people, by financial support for the Irish work towards the BTO/IWC Atlas (Sharrock 1976) and, more recently, through financial support in publishing Ireland’s Wetlands and their Birds (Hutchinson 1979), the IWC report of the four years of the Wetlands Enquiry in Ireland. Despite these very real forms of support to Irish ornithology, it took ten years to get a promised Wildlife Act into the Dáil (the Irish parliament) and the results of this have yet to bear fruit. The IWC is represented on the statutory Wildlife Advisory Council set up under the Act, which itself contains many admirable features, some of them well in advance of Britain. Nevertheless, it is generally felt in Ireland that the
real test of the government's determination to develop a modern conservation policy (which in Ireland involves a large component of ornithological conservation) lies in its attitude towards reserves acquisition (O’Gorman & Wymes 1973). Only public ownership and enlightened management of the major wetlands for which Ireland is deservedly famous can guarantee the continued survival of these areas. The fate of sites such as the Little Brosna and Rahasane Turlough lies with the Irish government and not with the amateur ornithologists of the IWC.

In Northern Ireland, policy and practice in respect of State-owned reserves are similar to those in Britain, though, as the remit of the Nature Conservancy Council does not extend there, administration is via a Conservation Branch at Stormont. The more direct access to centres of power afforded conservationists by this arrangement is apparent in the network of reserves (of all types) distributed across Northern Ireland and in a high level of conservation management at ornithologically important sites.

Publications

It is perhaps on the publications side that the truly active state of Irish ornithology can be appreciated. The first 60 years of this century were appallingly devoid of publications: the major work of Ussher & Warren (1900) was virtually the sole authoritative work on Irish birds until its 1954 replacement. There was even one period when no journal of Irish ornithology was available: the Irish Naturalist, which carried many bird notes at the turn of the century, met its demise in 1923, leaving a gap which was not filled until 1925, when the Irish Naturalists' Journal commenced its publication. This latter journal carried occasional ornithological notes and infrequent papers on the birds of Ireland. In 1953, Major R. F. Rutledge began the Irish Bird Report. Effectively an annual classified list of rare birds and occurrences, the IBR remained the sole national outlet for ornithological observations for many years: no local avifaunas, no local reports, and no outlet for the Irish scientist beyond the erudite Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. The Irish Bird Report came to carry occasional articles on the birds of Ireland, but it was not until 1977 that the first purely ornithological journal—Irish Birds—made its appearance. Irish Birds has existed for only two years, but that it has filled a gap is already clear. Produced annually, issues to date have a coverage somewhere between that of British Birds and Bird Study, as well as incorporating the Irish Bird Report and an annual report on ringing in Ireland. It is undoubtedly one of the most important developments in Irish ornithological publication.

Several regional bird reports have also made their appearance in Ireland, with various degrees of permanence. The first and the only one still being published is the Cork Bird Report (1963-71 and 1977-79). The Dublin and Wicklow Bird Report has not appeared since 1975, while reports covering Co. Waterford, Co. Louth and Co. Wexford have also come and gone in recent years. Their publication reflects the dedication of individual birders, few places having the large population needed to sustain regular publication on a recurring basis. These publications have been supplemented by a proliferation of local bird books of varying quality; The Birds of Dublin and
Ornithology in Ireland

Wicklow (Hutchinson 1975) covers the best studied region, but several books covering the catchment areas of some of the bird observatories—the Saltee Islands (Roche & Merne 1977; Perry & Warburton 1976), Cape Clear Island (Sharrock 1973) and Malin Head (part of the Inishown Peninsula) (Perry 1975)—have all been produced. There have also been corporate volumes on the Wexford area (Merne 1975), Clare and Limerick (Stapleton 1975), Galway and Mayo (Whilde 1977) and Lough Beg in Northern Ireland (D'Arcy 1977). These books represent a far cry from the first 60 years of the century described above.

Record assessment is on similar lines to that in Britain. The Irish Records Panel parallels the British Birds Rarities Committee and acts in co-operation with the Northern Ireland Bird Records Committee.

Perhaps because the avifauna is more restricted than in Britain, Irish ornithologists have not produced many identification guides, nor works on the biology of particular birds, but there are signs that this pattern may be changing. The books now making their appearance from the pens of Irish authors are directed to a less sophisticated birdwatching public than in Britain. To date, guides have appeared for waterfowl and for seabirds and there are also local guides to identifying birds in particular areas: Northern Ireland (Deane 1975) and Wexford (Merne 1975). Several other books treat birds in a wider zoological context.

Apart from formal publications, several newsletters have been produced in recent years. The best-established of these is IWC News, the newsletter of the Irish Wildbird Conservancy, published four times a year. Initially produced on a duplicator, the newsletter has now achieved a more formal appearance and always includes photographs. An Irish Ringers' Bulletin has also made its appearance lately, though its regularity of publication remains to be tested. The newly founded Ulster Trust for Nature Conservation also produces a newsletter—the Irish Hare—and seems set to carry a certain amount of ornithological news. A number of other bulletins circulate, but their future cannot yet be said to be certain. Finally, Cape Clear Island off the Cork coast and Copeland Island off Co. Down continue as active observatories and produce annual reports.

The present and the future

History, however, is perhaps of little importance for present-day Irish ornithology. In some ways, the Irish are at a crossroads in their ornithological development. Birding interests in Ireland focus, so far as groups go, on seabirds and on wetland birds. Much effort went into Irish participation in the 1969-70 'Operation Seafarer' census and has established a moderately good understanding of seabird distribution in Ireland. On the other hand, skilled and committed manpower is not sufficiently plentiful in Ireland to allow systematic monitoring of changes in these colonies, despite their importance. The Wetlands Enquiry—organised by the IWC to parallel the Birds of Estuaries Enquiry in Britain—has now finished and the results have appeared as a book (Hutchinson 1979). Finally, the distribution of breeding birds throughout Ireland was thoroughly covered—admittedly by a disappointingly small proportion of the Irish ornithologists—in the
1968-72 atlas project, to provide a never-before-achieved wealth of detail on the pattern of Irish bird distribution. On the other hand, the Register of Ornithological Sites evoked little interest in Ireland: though there has been a cataloging of the seabird colonies, a listing of the important wetlands, and collection of some material on the important oakwoods. This further reflects the considerable ignorance, even among ornithologists, of the threats to the Irish countryside. By the same token, no attempts are being made to monitor systematically the levels of bird populations in Ireland. To some extent, this is understandable: Ireland has only a fraction of the breeding species of Great Britain, with consequently restricted scope for breeding studies, and the glamour of special study in any event lies with the wildfowl and waders, and with a handful of rarer species such as the Peregrine. Intriguingly, the apathy towards work other than on these groups is not present in Northern Ireland. There has been some talk of introducing the Christmas Bird Count system into the Republic. In some ways, this scheme, so popular and successful in the USA, has many of the characteristics—rarity-hunting, travel, and rivalry—which seem to appeal to Irish birdwatchers more than they do to English observers.

In conclusion, Irish ornithology has achieved nearly two decades of vigorous growth and expansion, largely consequential on the merging of individual activities into the IWC programme in the Republic and on the expansion of RSPB work in Northern Ireland. But these organisations have in many ways served merely as formal outlets for the energies of a very few really active ornithologists whose drive has carried others along. Irish ornithology remains vulnerable while it is so narrowly based.

Dr Raymond J. O'Connor, BTO, Beech Grove, Tring, Hertfordshire HP23 5NR, England

References to Ireland’s birds

The following books and papers have been mentioned in the preceding five papers.


References to Ireland's birds


Appendix 1. Alphabetical list of species mentioned in the texts of preceding five papers on Ireland’s birds

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*
Blackbird *Turdus merula*
Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*
Bunting, Corn *Miliaria calandra*
Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*
Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*
Coot *Fulica atra*
Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*
Cornrake *Crex crex*
Curlew *Numenius arquata*
Diver, Red-throated *Gavia stellata*
Dove, Rock *Columba livia*
Duck, Long-tailed *Clangula hyemalis*
Duck, Tufted *Aythya fuligula*
Dunlin *Calidris alpina*
Eider *Somateria mollissima*
Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*
Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*
Gadwall *Anas strepera*
Gannet *Sula bassana*
Godwit, Bar-tailed *Limosa lapponica*
Godwit, Black-tailed *L. limosa*
Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*
Goose, Barnacle *Branta leucopsis*
Goose, Brent *B. bernida*
Goose, Greylag *Anser anser*
Goose, Pink-footed *A. brachyrhynchus*
Goose, White-fronted *A. albirostris*
Grebe, Great Crested *Podiceps cristatus*
Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*
Grouse, Red *Lagopus lagopus*
Guillemot *Uria aalge*
Guillemot, Black *Cepphus grylle*
Gull, Black-headed *Larus ridibundus*
Appendix: list of species

Gull, Common *L. canus*
Gull, Great Black-backed *L. marinus*
Gull, Herring *L. argentatus*
Gull, Lesser Black-backed *L. fuscus*
Harrier, Hen *Circus cyaneus*
Heron, Grey *Ardea cinerea*
Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*
Knot *Calidris canutus*
Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*
Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*
Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*
Martin, Sand *Riparia riparia*
Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*
Peregrine *Falco peregrinus*
Petrel, Storm *Hydrobates pelagicus*
Phalarope, Red-necked *Phalaropus lobatus*
Pintail *Anas acuta*
Pipit, Meadow *Anthus pratensis*
Plover, Golden *Pluvialis apricaria*
Plover, Grey *P. squatarola*
Plover, Ringed *Pluvialis squatarola*
Pochard *Aythya ferina*
Puffin *Fratercula arctica*
Quail *Coturnix coturnix*
Razorbill *Alca torda*
Redpoll *Carduelis flammea*
Redshank *Tringa totanus*
Redshank, Spotted *Tringa erythropus*
Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*
Redwing *Turdus iliacus*
Ring Ouzel *T. torquatus*
Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*
Sanderling *Calidris alba*
Scaup *Aythya marila*
Scoter, Common *Melanitta nigra*
Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*
Shearwater, Cory's *Calonectris diomedea*
Shearwater, Great *Puffinus gravis*
Shearwater, Manx *P. puffinus*
Shearwater, Sooty *P. griseus*
Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*
Shoveler *Anas clypeata*
Skua, Arctic *Stercorarius parasiticus*
Skua, Great *S. skua*
Skua, Pomarine *S. pomarinus*
Skylark *Alauda arvensis*
Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*
Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*
Swallow *Hirundo rustica*
Swan, Bewick's *Cygnus columbianus*
Swan, Mute *C. olor*
Swan, Whooper *C. cygnus*
Teal *Anas crecca*
Tern, Arctic *Sterna paradisea*
Tern, Common *S. hirundo*
Tern, Little *S. albigors*
Tern, Roseate *S. dougallii*
Tern, Sandwich *S. sandvicensis*
Thrush, Song *Turdus philomelos*
Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*
Warbler, Grasshopper *Locustella naevia*
Warbler, Willow *Phylloscopus trochilus*
Warbler, Wood *P. sibilatrix*
Wigeon *Anas penelope*
Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*
Woodpecker, Great Spotted *Dendrocopos major*