

Birds at Creggan Country Park

In summer 2007 Tyrone Nelson, a surveyor for the RSPB, conducted Creggan Country Park's first ever bird survey in broad leaved and coniferous woodland, species rich grassland, areas of scrub and of course along the three reservoirs. This leaflet will outline what species were found at Creggan Country Park.

In November 2007 we were surprised and excited to discover some unexpected visitors to the Creggan Country Park. Whooper swans are winter visitors from Iceland and can usually be seen from October – March in Lough Foyle. Our close proximity to Lough Foyle offers an explanation as to why they appeared on our site. They can also be seen in the fields near to Lough Foyle feeding on grass, grain and aquatic plants. We were delighted to see them visit our park, even if it was only for a few hours!

Whooper Swan



Birds commonly found in the park:

Cormorant

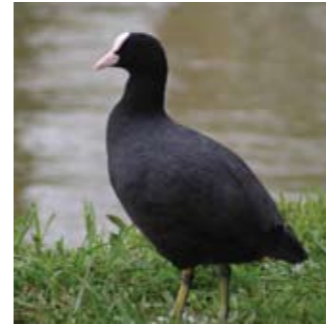
The Cormorant is a large brown/black bird and is a regular visitor to Creggan Country Park's fishery area where it hunts for its favourite prey – fish! The cormorant is often persecuted by fishermen as they can cause serious damage to fisheries due to their huge appetite! It is currently estimated that there are 663 breeding pairs of cormorant in the north.



Comorant

Coot

A coot is a black water bird with a white bill that can be spotted in Creggan Country Park's fishery area. The coot is a Bird of Conservation Concern in Ireland (BoCCI) as its numbers have declined over the years, giving it Amber status. The coot thrives in large open bodies of water; it also requires vegetation for shelter and as material to build its floating nest. This makes the fishery lake at Creggan Country Park the perfect habitat for these beautiful birds.



Coot

Curlew

We are delighted that Curlews have been recorded on our site as they are featured on Derry's Local Biodiversity Action Plan and are a Bird of Conservation Concern in Ireland (BoCCI) having been given Red status. The curlew is a large wading bird and is easily identified because of its long curved bill, streaky brown plumage and long legs. They can also be found on Lough Foyle, which is clearly visible from Creggan Country Park.



Curlew

Bird watching

You can take part in bird watching events at the Creggan Country Park, with tours being led by our Environmental Officer and guest tour guides from the RSPB. Keep an eye on our website for more information www.creggancountrypark.com.

You don't need expensive equipment to enjoy birds - just your eyes and ears. To make it easier you could use binoculars, and if you are really determined to see lots of wildlife you could set up camp with a mat and a camouflaged hide. If you decide to visit Creggan Country Park you will be pleasantly surprised to find three willow dome bird hides, where you can take shelter and appreciate our wildlife and natural heritage.

Some tips for bird watching:

- Avoid disturbing birds and their habitats
- Bring binoculars; they will help you spot birds in flight or in the distance.
- Try and explore an area rather than just sit in the one spot, walk around and take in the surroundings
- Report any injured birds, new sightings to our Environmental Officer.



Grey Heron

The Grey Heron is easily identified with its long yellow bill, long neck and legs and grey and white body. It often stands motionless on the edge of lakes and rivers waiting to stab a fish, evidence of which can be seen in the photograph above. The Heron (or Crane as some people call it) is so still and quiet its presence is often difficult to detect, making them fantastic predators!



Right: A Heron footprint discovered in the park. Above: A wild Grey Heron.



Goldcrest

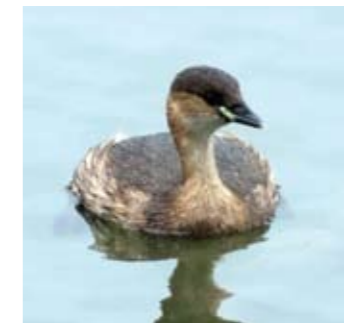
The Goldcrest is Ireland's smallest bird as it weighs only 5grams! It is easily recognised with its bright yellow crown. They can be found in broad-leaved and coniferous woods which makes Creggan Country Park the perfect habitat for these cute little birds.



Goldcrest

Little Grebe

This shy little water bird can be found in the fishery area at Creggan Country Park as the fishery provides plenty of food (mainly sticklebacks and other small fish) and shelter in its reed beds. Its plumage changes according to the season; during summer the adult has dark brown upper parts with chestnut cheeks and throat, whereas in winter it becomes paler and its chestnut cheeks become white.



Little Grebe

Swallow

The swallow is a common summer visitor to Ireland and is instantly recognisable with its blue upperparts, red throat and of course its long wings and forked tail. They are fantastic fliers and often catch insects in mid air. They arrive in Ireland in late April and leave for



Swallow

Africa in October to avoid the harsh Irish winter months. Their falling numbers means they have been listed as a Bird of Conservation Concern in Ireland (BoCCI), with amber status. Here at Creggan Country Park, swallows can be found nesting on the balcony overlooking the middle reservoir. This is the perfect habitat for these little birds, as it is out of sight from predators and harsh weather and the birds have access to water and plenty of insects. They can be seen flying around the activity centre throughout the day and you will often hear their distinctive 'twittering' sound even if they are not visible.

Black Headed Gull

The Black headed gull is smaller than the common gull and varies in colour according to the season. In summer it has a chocolate brown head, whilst in winter its head is white with just a dark patch behind the eye. Large colonies can be found near inland lakes, on marshes and bogs and along the coast. Black headed gulls eat a variety of insects in rural habitats and tend to scavenge for scraps of food in urban areas. The Black Headed Gull is listed as an Amber species and so is a Bird of Conservation Concern in Ireland (BoCCI).



Black Headed Gull

Raven

The Raven can be easily distinguished from other crows because of its large size, wedged shaped tail, glossy black plumage and large bill.



Raven

Ravens pair for life, and can be found nesting on coastal cliffs, old quarries and here at Creggan Country Park on top of the tall Scots Pine trees. Breeding usually begins in February; during courtship the Raven puts on an impressive mid air display which includes flying upside down!

Swift

Like the Swallow, the Swift is a summer visitor to Ireland, including the Creggan Country Park. Swifts can be easily identified with their brown plumage, rounded wings, short forked tails and screaming sounds as it flies by. It is very similar to the swallow, in that they both arrive in Ireland in late April and leave again for Africa in October. They feed on insects in mid air and they can be seen dashing around the middle reservoir and around the activity centre during the summer months at Creggan Country Park.

Sparrow Hawk

The sparrow hawk is a bird of prey and an excellent hunter; as it belongs to the family of hawks, eagles and vultures. It feeds on small birds and mammals, and has a curved sharp bill and sharp talons, enabling it to catch prey quickly and effectively. The sparrow hawk has a large tail, which enables it to twist and turn effortlessly in and out of cover and to catch prey mid flight. It is generally silent during winter unless disturbed. Sparrow hawks nest in woodlands, hedgerows, gardens and in parks just like Creggan Country Park. They are also generally found in places where there is a good supply of small birds such as Collared Dove, Starling, Snipe and songbirds such as Great tits and finches. It has also been known to feed on mice and even beetles.

Buzzard

The Buzzard is also a Bird of Prey. At present Buzzard populations in Ireland are on the increase but this wasn't always the case. In the years where rabbits suffered from the deadly disease Myxomatosis, buzzard populations were in such decline that



Swift



Sparrow Hawk



Buzzard

extinction was feared. The buzzard is easily distinguished from other species of hawk by its size alone. Its wingspan may vary between 48 inches to 60 inches, with a body length of some 20 inches. Its plumage is a rich brown, with lighter markings beneath. In flight the buzzard glides at a tremendous height, soaring high above trees and above the middle reservoir at Creggan Country Park. A slow flier; it has little chance of catching its prey on the move. Instead, the buzzard will perch motionless on the branch of a large tree. It will then swoop down on to its unsuspecting prey, usually rabbits, small birds and mice.

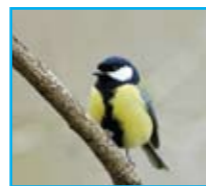
Other birds to look out for at Creggan Country Park:

- ✓ Black cap
- ✓ House Sparrow
- ✓ Willow warbler
- ✓ Robin
- ✓ Wren
- ✓ Pied Wagtail
- ✓ Starling
- ✓ Song Thrush
- ✓ Blackbird
- ✓ Greenfinch
- ✓ Blue tit
- ✓ Coal tit
- ✓ Great Tit
- ✓ Dunnock
- ✓ Chaffinch
- ✓ Blue tit
- ✓ Chiff chaff
- ✓ Hooded crow
- ✓ Jackdaw
- ✓ Song Thrush
- ✓ Magpie
- ✓ Mallard
- ✓ Rook
- ✓ Sedge warbler
- ✓ Wood pigeon
- ✓ Collared dove
- ✓ Chaffinch
- ✓ Common gull
- ✓ Goldfinch

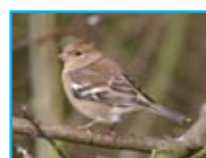
Song Thrush



Great Tit



Chaffinch



What YOU can do to help birds:

- Take part in Nature's Classroom and learn more about birds at Creggan Country Park and species such as the Barn Owl that are currently under serious threat.
- Report any injured or trapped birds immediately to the Environmental Officer; do not attempt to remove the bird yourself
- Why not build a nest box for birds in your garden or take part in the Nest Box Challenge at Creggan Country Park in March each year and help give a Barn owl a home
- Hang bird feeders in your garden or in your school grounds
- Make a bird table and leave it in your garden or in your school



Barney the Barn Owl in Creggan Country Park's conference room!

More local places to explore Wildlife

Prehen Wood – Why not visit this ancient woodland and see the red squirrel in its natural habitat.

Lough Foyle – Our very own Ramsar site! Take some time out and visit this spectacular site which is host to an incredible number of wintering birds including Whooper swans which come all the way from Iceland! (Magilligan/Benone Strand can also be included in these trips).

Brooke Park – This 100 year old parkland is host to an amazing variety of ancient trees and birds.

Banagher Glen – Located just outside Dungiven this site is very similar to Creggan Country Park as it is now used to supply water to the City. Look out for a range of birds including Buzzards and Sparrow hawks. Creggan Country Park now offers educational trips to Banagher Glen to explore its History and Natural Heritage.

Useful Contacts

Biodiversity Officer, Derry City Council
028 71365 151

Northern Ireland Environment Agency
028 9056 9605

RSPB (Birds and Wildlife advice)
01767 693 690

Northern Ireland Bat Group (to report injured bats)
028 90292138

For more information about Creggan Country Park's environmental education programme 'Nature's Classroom' contact Karen Healy, the Environmental Officer at the Creggan Country Park.

For information about the historical tours available at the Creggan Country Park and associated sites contact Mickey Cooper, Heritage Co-ordinator at the Creggan Country Park. All the tours are organised in association with our partner organisation derrybluebadgguide (www.derrybluebadgguide.com) which specialises in walking and coach tours of Derry and beyond. For further details on all of the above contact (028) 71363133 or info@creggancountrypark.com.

Creggan Country Park Birds in the Park

By Karen Healy, Environmental Officer, Creggan Country Park

