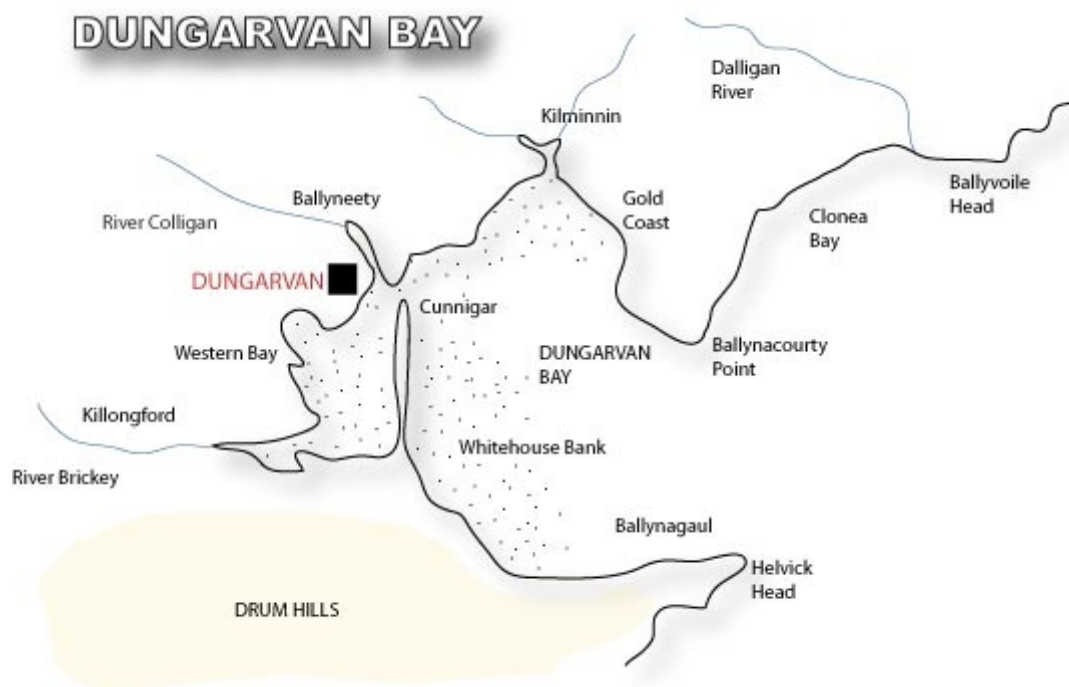


Major estuaries



Dungarvan including Ballynagaul, the Cunnigar, Killongford, Ballyneety, town & quays, Barnawee (Kilminnin), the Gold Coast & Ballynacourty pier

See also: **Helvick Head** and **Clonea & Ballynacourty Point**.

Grid reference: X28/X29

Ordnance Survey Discovery map: # 82

Habitat: Estuary, open bay, sand-dunes.

Main interest: Wintering wildfowl (especially Brent Geese & Shelduck); wintering and passage waders (including Black-tailed Godwit); wintering grebes, divers & gulls.

Regular/near-annual: Slavonian Grebe, Little Egret, Goosander, Long-tailed Duck, Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Ruff, Spotted Redshank, Green Sandpiper, Arctic Skua, Mediterranean Gull, Black Guillemot, White Wagtail, Black Redstart.

Scarcer species & rarities: Black-necked Grebe, Cory's Shearwater, *Great White Egret, 'Black Brant', 'dark-bellied' Brent Goose, Garganey, Eider, Velvet Scoter, *Red Kite, Osprey, *Hobby, *Little Ringed Plover, *American Golden Plover, *Long-billed Dowitcher, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Baird's Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Ring-billed Gull, Yellow-legged Gull, Sabine's Gull, Little Auk, Hoopoe, Waxwing, Golden Oriole, Twite, Snow Bunting.

Highlights: *Bonaparte's Gull (April 2004), Forster's Tern (1985, 1987/88 & 1995/96), Squacco Heron (May 1994 & Sept 1896), Whiskered Tern (Apr 1994), Lesser Grey Shrike (Sept 1991), Ivory Gull (1988).

Further details:

Undoubtedly, Dungarvan is the most ornithologically important area in County Waterford, both in terms of the numbers of waders and wildfowl that use the mudflats for feeding and roosting (over 20,000 birds on occasion) and the ease with which the birds can be observed so close to a major town. The site is particularly important in autumn, winter and early spring, and details below mainly refer to those seasons. For diversity and sheer numbers of wetland birds, and the chance of finding rarer species, Dungarvan also ranks highly among estuarine sites in Ireland as a whole.

Dungarvan Harbour is a large circular basin, almost closed in one corner by a long sand-spit called the Cunnigar, and is fed by several small rivers or streams, the largest being the Colligan, rising deep in the Comeraghs. West of the Cunnigar, the coastline is fringed by an extensive intertidal mudflat with large saltmarsh areas. The sub-surface of the sand-bank on the seaward side of the Cunnigar (the Whitehouse Bank) is composed largely of broken shells, which, in providing a solid substratum, prevents the sand from shifting and thus allows *Zostera* or eel grass to grow. Nowadays, much of this area is used for commercial oyster farming, but numbers of birds may not be too affected. There is a less extensive tract of *Zostera* in the shallower and more protected waters inside the Cunnigar but growth here is more prolific than on the east side. These *Zostera* beds are of significance because of their importance to wildfowl, particularly grazing Wigeon and Brent Geese. *Spartina* also occurs at Dungarvan but is less widespread than at Tramore Backstrand, further east.

Ornithologically, Dungarvan is of international importance for the numbers of Brent Geese and Black-tailed Godwits wintering on the wetlands. The area is of national or local importance for many other wintering species, and also provides a migration stop-over point for many of the wader species. For example, Oystercatcher numbers are highest in the autumn and ringing recoveries suggest that many of these are from Scottish populations.

As at Tramore, the distribution of waders and wildfowl in Dungarvan Bay is quite complex with waders foraging most efficiently on the exposed intertidal flats at low tide, the least suitable time to observe or count them. In general, the highest concentrations of feeding waders at Dungarvan occur on the main mudflats in the inner Bay area (especially Dunlin and Black-tailed Godwits) and along the Gold Coast at the east side (especially Bar-tailed Godwits). The sandflats east of the Cunnigar, although relatively impoverished in terms of invertebrate prey, are favoured by Grey Plover, Bar-tailed Godwits and Sanderling and are of importance for Brent Geese feeding on the *Zostera* beds, particularly early in the winter.

For close views, or detailed counts, the optimum time is at or near high tide – especially higher, ‘spring’ tides that force birds closer to shore. A range of traditional roost-sites are scattered around the Bay, notably at Kilminnin (Barnawee Bridge); the upper part of the Colligan estuary (Ballyneety); the north shore just west of Dungarvan town; and along the Cunnigar. Visits to these sites at, or shortly before, high tide can provide spectacular views of the birds, but disturbance should be avoided. Wetland counts at Dungarvan are usually made over several hours by observers strategically placed to cover all the known roosts. But even casual visits can be productive, and numbers and variety of species can change from week to week, thus the area is always worth checking for new arrivals (perhaps especially after severe winter conditions further north).

The Gold Coast and Kilminnin (Barnawee)

Access: From Dungarvan, Kilminnin is reached by taking the coast road at Abbeyside. If approaching from the east, on the main Waterford-Dungarvan road, head coastwards at the signpost for Clonea (before the turn-off for Cappoquin/Killarney) and the Gold Coast is just over 3 km further on, on the seaward side of Kilminnin Bridge. If coming from the east on the narrower coast road, Kilminnin Bridge is 5 km west of Ballyvoyle.

The coastline from Barnawee Bridge out to Ballynacourty pier can be viewed from the narrow road along its length, but the safest viewing points are at Kilminnin and the pier. The walk along the Gold Coast is reasonably short and many of the birds can be seen at close range for a few hours before or after high water, when some of the mudflat is uncovered and Brent Geese and waders are still feeding. At any time of tide, the waters offshore should be scanned as good numbers of feeding Red-breasted Mergansers and Great Crested Grebes are usually present. These are best viewed from Ballynacourty pier. Grebes may be scattered across the bay but a careful scan (ideally with a telescope) is worthwhile, as Slavonian Grebes were regular until very recently, and other rare grebes can occur. Great Northern and Red-throated Divers can also be seen off the pier throughout the winter, and Black Guillemots occur in small numbers. Other seabirds can include skuas, large feeding flocks of Gannets and Sandwich tern on occasion, and scarcer gull species like Glaucous or Mediterranean.

Closer to high tide, waders concentrate in tighter flocks at Kilminnin (Barnawee) itself and can readily be viewed at close range from a car window – both north of the main road, and between the road-bridge and the old railway-bridge. Roosting flocks here typically include many Redshank, Bar-tailed Godwits and Turnstone, with large flocks of Knot on occasion. Black-tailed Godwits regularly feed in the shallows north of the road, at low tide. Whimbrels are regular in

spring and Common Sandpipers throughout much of the year (wintering occasionally). There is also potential for rare waders, and Long-billed Dowitcher has been reported here. Little Egrets are nowadays frequent here, and keep an eye out too for Kingfisher, often seen near the channel. Brent Geese can be viewed at close range between the two bridges, and Goosander has occurred here in several winters. Forster's Tern has also occurred here.

Ballyneety

From the path along the Colligan river to Ballyneety Bridge, just outside Dungarvan town to the north-west of the bypass road, many wader and wildfowl species can be seen at close range. As elsewhere in Dungarvan, the ideal time is an hour or so on either side of high water, when many of the birds roost or feed close to the roadside wall.

September is the best month for Curlew Sandpipers and flocks of 90 or more have been seen here in company with impressive numbers of Black-tailed Godwits, which occur right through the winter. Redshank also favour the area, both for feeding and roosting, with Greenshank in smaller numbers. This is the most regular Co Waterford site for Ruffs, especially in autumn. Good numbers of Shelduck can be seen, particularly in early spring. There are usually a few Little Grebes, Red-breasted Mergansers and Goldeneye in the channel, and up to 3 Goosanders nowadays winter here regularly. Dungarvan dump, just above Ballyneety Bridge, was formerly a good area for gulls, with many of these using the mudflats below the bridge for roosting; the dump is now closed, and numbers of gulls are smaller, with Glaucous and Iceland Gulls much scarcer than in the past. But the Ballyneety area is still productive for Mediterranean Gulls, and has also had Ring-billed Gulls and single Bonaparte's and Yellow-legged Gulls.

Dungarvan town&quays

Dungarvan town offers good opportunities for birdwatching and the walk from the Sports Centre past the old swimming baths and right around the quays can be extremely rewarding. The area near Abbeyside church also offers a good vantage point. Many of the diving species that winter in Dungarvan Bay will be present in small numbers in the channel offshore, and at very close range at times. Great Crested Grebes, Red-breasted Mergansers and Goldeney are the most regular, but occasional Slavonian or Red-necked Grebes are seen. Great Northern Divers, usually single birds, may also be present. Brent Geese will almost always be present, feeding around the seaweed near the swimming baths or on the playing fields by the Sports Centre (where tight flocks of 600-800 geese can occur). Watch out for colour-ringed and for 'Black Brant' & 'dark-bellied' Brent here. Mediterranean or Little Gulls can occur among the gull flocks inside the tip of the Cunnigar, and Sabine's Gull and Little Auk have been seen.

"The Youghal Road"

On the main Cork road, just outside Dungarvan at the Industrial Estate, the mudflats are good for feeding Black-tailed Godwits and Knot, viewable from a car or by walking along the road. The optimum time for this area is either half-tide or neap tides, when less mudflat is covered and feeding flocks of over 500 Knot and 1000 Black-tailed Godwits have been seen. At high tide, the water laps close to the road and large numbers of Shelduck on the water is usually the highlight, particularly in winter, though good numbers of Wigeon and other duck may be seen at greater range. Moderate numbers of duck (sometimes including Pintail or Shoveler) and roosting waders occur all along the coastline west from here as far as Killongford, although coverage may require a long walk along the shoreline. Small flocks of Brent Geese often feed along the tideline here.

Killongford

Killongford Bridge is west of Dungarvan town on the main Cork road, just before the turn-off for Ring and Helvick Head. The river Brickey flows into Dungarvan Bay here and the channel above and below the bridge is worth checking for scarcer species like Common Sandpiper or Spotted Redshank. Two Squacco Herons were found here in May 1994. Further up the Brickey (take a right turn just west of the bridge), Green Sandpipers can be found in most months (much of the riverbank can be walked), and Night Heron has occurred.

The mudflats further out towards Western Bay area are also used by waders and wildfowl for feeding and roosting. The area is best viewed from vantage points at farm gateways along the road out towards Ring. This is a particularly good area for Black-tailed Godwits, Lapwing and Golden Plover, with huge flocks often present. The mudflats are often thronged with feeding Dunlin, immediately before and after high tide, this being one of the last areas to be covered by the tide; large numbers of Curlew Sandpipers have also occurred in autumn. This is also a good area for Shelduck, Wigeon and Teal, occasionally Shoveler or Pintail.

The Cunnigar

Access: Take the main Cork road outside Dungarvan and turn off left for Helvick Head where signposted. After the hairpin bend, take the road left half-way up the hill and continue on this narrow winding road for about 2 km. Then take a sharp left at a farmhouse down to the base of the Cunnigar where there is ample car-parking.

The Cunnigar may be the best winter birdwatching location in Dungarvan Bay, indeed in Waterford, and is certainly worth a visit. The Cunnigar can be walked in safety along its length (a distance of about 3 km) and in winter is impressive, spectacular and alive with birds. This is also the top site in Waterford for rarer waders in autumn, with species recorded including Little Ringed and American Golden Plover, and Baird's, Buff-breasted, Pectoral and Semipalmated Sandpipers.

The Cunnigar is one of the main high-tide roosts in Dungarvan, so, ideally, time your visit to coincide with high tide or within an hour of it and expect large numbers of birds anytime between late August and March/April. September is a particularly good month as many of the birds may still be in summer plumage and of course, with luck, weather may be favourable with relatively long daylight hours and good light. The early autumn is also the best time for roosting Oystercatcher, with up to 2000 birds recorded. It takes 2 to 3 hours to walk the Cunnigar and back and in excess of 30 species of birds should be encountered. In autumn, pipits, Pied and White Wagtails and Wheatears are frequent. Sandwich Terns often roost on the railway sleepers used to protect the fragile sand-spit from coastal erosion, and Roseate Tern is occasional. Migrant butterflies like Painted Lady, Red Admiral or even the rarer Clouded Yellow are regularly recorded from April to October.

In harsh winter weather, the Cunnigar is impressive, particularly on crisp, bright days in December or January. The sand nearest the carpark may well be alive with Dunlin, Ringed Plover and Sanderling; these smaller waders are especially flighty, so with large numbers present, spectacular views may be obtained. In the autumn, the wader flocks are well worth checking for Little Stint and Curlew Sandpiper, or rarer species. Further along the Cunnigar on the east or seaward side, Knot, Grey Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit and Curlew may be roosting with perhaps more Dunlin, Turnstone and several hundred Oystercatcher out near Cunnigar Point. Large numbers of Oystercatchers also roost on the west side. Grey Herons usually roost on the west side of Cunnigar Point, sometimes over 30 birds, with similar numbers of Cormorants. The marshy area here can be good for Teal and Snipe. At or near high tide, the shallow waters on the landward side are attractive for feeding wildfowl. If conditions are suitable, high numbers of Brent Geese, Shelduck and Wigeon, sometimes with small numbers of Pintail or Shoveler. It is also possible to walk west along the saltmarsh towards Killongford and, though very awkward in places, there are usually good numbers of roosting Curlew and Redshank, with Shelduck offshore. Large numbers of Little Egrets (30 or more on occasion) often roost in trees along the shoreline between Killongford and the Cunnigar

One of the attractions of the Cunnigar for wetland birds is that it is relatively undisturbed, apart from casual walkers, occasional birdwatchers and the odd shooting party. Inconsiderate birdwatching can, however, result in excessive disturbance of roosting birds in winter at any wetland site, but particularly on the accessible Cunnigar. With care, good views can be had without causing disturbance.

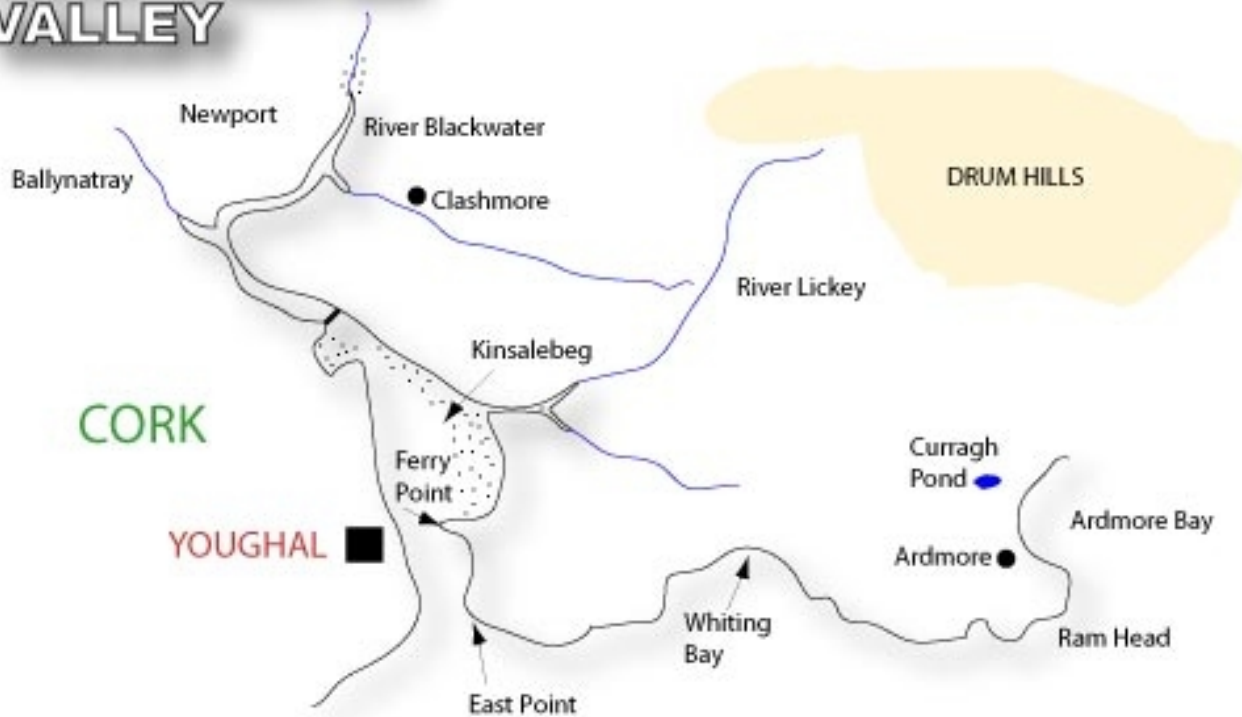
Ballynagaul

Access: On leaving the Cunnigar, turn east (left), continue on past the Irish College and turn left again to take the main road to Helvick Head. Once past the public house (beyond a sharp turn in the road) watch out for signposts to Ballynagaul on the left and follow one of the narrow roads down to the pier, where there is some car-parking.

Small numbers of waders can be seen here, sometimes at very close range, and, being far out in Dungarvan Bay, there are sure to be seabirds offshore. Greenshank, Oystercatcher, Turnstone and Redshank are the more usual species in winter but you may also find small numbers of Brent Geese, mostly on the shoreline left (or west) of Ballynagaul quay. The pier here is one of the best location from which to check Dungarvan Bay for Slavonian and Great Crested Grebes and for divers (including Black-throated Diver on occasion). Black Redstart can also occur in late autumn and winter, here and elsewhere around Dungarvan.

Just north of Ballynagaul, another access road leads down to the shore at Knockanpower Lower (signposted Meitheal Tra na Rinne). Good views can be had of Brent Geese and waders here. In winter 2004/2005, up to 10 wintering Chiffchaffs were present in the scrub along the beach, at the mouth of the stream below the oyster-processing factory here.

BLACKWATER VALLEY



Kinsalebeg & the Blackwater estuary

Grid reference:

Ordnance Survey Discovery map: # 81

Habitat: Estuary; adjacent woodland.

Main interest: Wintering and passage waders & wildfowl.

Typical species: Little Egret, Wigeon, Black-tailed Godwit, other waders.

Scarcer species & rarities: Leach's Petrel, Spoonbill, Green-winged Teal, Gadwall, Scaup, Avocet*, Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Baird's Sandpiper, Spotted Redshank, Ring-billed Gull, Pied Flycatcher.

Best bird: Spotted Sandpiper (Nov 1982).

Access: [Kinsalebeg](#) lies just a short distance south-east of Youghal Bridge. From Dungarvan take the main Cork road west through the Drum Hills and on through Grange. Almost 6 km west of Grange village, take a left turn at the cross roads signposted for Clashmore and Cappoquin. At the next cross roads take a right turn which leads down to Ferry Point pier. The stony shoreline on the north side of the road near Ferry Point can be walked without difficulty and the mudflats/roosts further north can be examined. Many of the birds roost or feed in the narrow inlet off the main mudflat, although access to this area is difficult. To reach [Ballynatray](#), turn right just beyond Youghal Bridge on the Cork side; this road skirts the west side of the Blackwater to Ballynatray. From Ballynatray, the road north leads through heavily wooded areas to Cappoquin, all totally under-watched and well worth exploring. There are, however, many small roads and it is quite easy to get lost.

General details - the Blackwater valley and callows:

The Blackwater river is typical of many Munster rivers in that for most of its length it runs along a west-east axis through a Carboniferous limestone valley, draining much of Kerry, Cork and Waterford, before turning abruptly southwards and discharging to the sea through an Old Red Sandstone fold on the Cork-Waterford border. The soluble

nature of the limestone till, east of Fermoy and in particular between Ballyduff and Lismore, has resulted in a low-lying river plain, the **Blackwater Callows**, which, when flooded in winter attracts internationally numbers of Black-tailed Godwits and many dabbling duck. There are well-developed birch and oak woodlands in the tributary valleys of the Blackwater around Lismore and south of Cappoquin, on both sides of the estuary, with their associated plant and animal communities. Near the mouth of the estuary, the mudflats at Ballynatray and Kinsalebeg support locally important concentrations of wintering shorebirds. The Blackwater Valley from Ferry Point to Ballyduff is one of the most ecologically important areas in Waterford and is, without doubt, part of the hidden Ireland, with a multitude of birding opportunities.

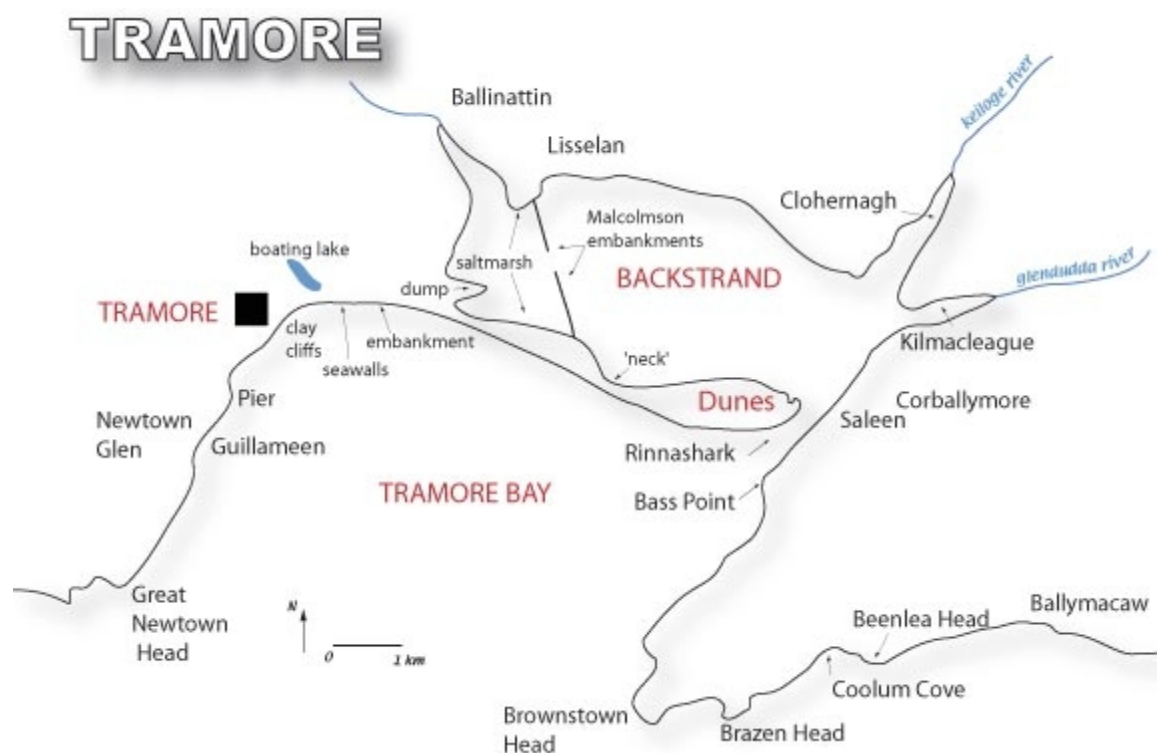
Further details:

The Blackwater estuary includes coastline in counties Waterford and Cork, and good views of waders and other species can be had on the Cork side from the coastline north of Youghal town. Waterford sections of the estuary are covered here.

Kinsalebeg is a an area of mudflats, including a small muddy inlet, on the east side of Youghal Bay which is used as a high-tide roost and feeding area by many of the birds that winter in and around the bay. Most of the species present at Kinsalebeg can be seen with little effort and at reasonable viewing distances, either from the main road on the Waterford side of Youghal Bridge or, preferably, from Ferry Point. In addition to the main species, there may be small wintering numbers of Gadwall, Pintail, Shoveler, Scaup, Goldeneye, Knot and Sanderling. Scarcer waders seen at Kinsalebeg including Little Stint, Ruff and Curlew Sandpiper in the autumn, with odd records of Spotted Redshank and Green Sandpiper even in winter, and a Baird's Sandpiper, a first for the county, was seen here in September 1982. A Ring-billed Gull in January 1985 was also a first county record. Kinsalebeg receives relatively little coverage and it is likely that other rarities go unrecorded.

By contrast to Kinsalebeg, the mudflats and the numbers of birds using them at **Ballynatray** are very small but the surroundings are idyllic, set in extensive woodlands with the tidal Blackwater nearby, and very close views of the birds can be had from the road. There is also the ruin of St. Molana Abbey, dating from the 6th century, formerly on an island but now surrounded on one side by a marsh (good for Water Rails) and on the other side by the estuary with exposed mudflats at low tide. Redshank are widely distributed over the mudflats, but other birds are less numerous. In winter, Herons, Curlew, Shelduck, Oystercatcher, Turnstone and Black-tailed Godwit are usually present with the odd Greenshank and, at times, Common and Green Sandpiper. A Spotted Sandpiper, Waterford's first, was recorded here in November 1982.

Newport, north-west of Ballynatray, is also worth a visit, offering extensive views of the Blackwater with many wading species from late summer on and the possibility of Fallow Deer at the water's edge in the late evening at any time of year. Further north beyond the **Bride** bridge, the road passes close to the river allowing good views of the estuary, north and south, and the woods at **Dromana**. Large numbers of Teal may be present, Red-breasted Merganser are likely, and Green-winged Teal has occurred on these upper stretches of the estuary. Also keep an eye out for Otter here.



Tramore Bay & Backstrand

Grid reference: S60/S50 (Backstrand), X59/X69/S50/S60 (outer Bay)

Ordnance Survey Discovery map: # 76

Habitat: Estuary, saltmarsh, sand-dunes and open bay.

Main interest: Wildfowl, waders and other waterfowl.

Regular: Red-throated & Great Northern Diver, Little Egret, Brent Goose, Long-tailed Duck, Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint, Arctic & Great Skuas, Ring-billed Gull (until recently), Glaucous & Iceland Gulls (now scarce), Kingfisher, Black Redstart. Nesting Fulmars in Bay.

Scarcer species & rarities: Black-throated Diver, Cory's Shearwater, White-fronted, Barnacle & Snow Goose, Black Brant, dark-bellied Brent Goose, Goosander, Velvet Scoter, Eider, Buzzard, Avocet, Ruff, Green & Wood Sandpiper, Grey Phalarope, Little, Mediterranean & Yellow-legged Gull, Black Tern, Little Auk, Short-eared Owl (formerly regular), Hoopoe, Redstart, Whinchat, Pied Flycatcher, Brambling, Snow Bunting. Surprisingly, no North American waders have yet been recorded at Tramore Backstrand.

Best birds: Baillon's Crake (1858), Black-winged Stilt (2, May 1994).

Further reading: A Guide to Tramore Bay, Dunes and Backstrand (Declan McGrath, 2001).

Access: The most direct route to Tramore is via the main Tramore road from Waterford. Depending on your choice of walk, either continue on into Tramore town or veer off left at Pickardstown, just before the petrol station on the west side of the road, and continue east towards Brownstown Head/Saleen. In Tramore make your way down to the carparks near the dump. If approaching Tramore from the west along the coast road from Dungarvan, continue into Tramore and make your choice from there. The outer bay can be viewed from various vantage points along the cliffs at the west side of the bay (e.g. from Newtown Cove, the pier and the Guillamene walk) or from Brownstown Head at the east side. Access to or views of the Backstrand are also possible from a range of points - from the dump area behind the beach (access to Sandhills also); from various points along the coast road east from Tramore town towards Dunmore East; and from the carpark at Saleen at the east side of the Backstrand. Details are also given under subsites below.

Further details:

Ecologically, the wetland area of Tramore contains a diverse range of habitats with associated plant and animal communities and is a nationally important Area of Scientific Interest and internationally important Special Protection Area and Special Area of Conservation. There are extensive mudflats in the inner bay, known as the Backstrand, formed behind a well-developed dune system. There is daily tidal flushing of the inner bay, via Rinnashark Harbour on the east side, and the Backstrand supports a rich invertebrate fauna on which many of the birds feed. Large areas of *Spartina* or cord grass are found on the west side, near Tramore dump, and an extensive area of *Zostera* or eel-grass, mainly on the north side, provides good feeding for wildfowl in the autumn.

Ornithologically, Tramore is internationally important for the numbers of pale-bellied Brent Geese that winter annually in the Backstrand area. Nationally important numbers of Golden Plover, Grey Plover, Lapwing, Dunlin & Black-tailed Godwit also winter, and Red-throated Diver numbers in the Outer Bay can be high. The area is also of significant local importance in that large numbers of waders and wildfowl can be seen so close to Tramore and Waterford City, particularly from August to April.

The distribution of shorebirds at Tramore Backstrand and their abundance varies with tidal conditions, weather and time of year. For example, Brent Geese in the autumn largely concentrate on the north side, feeding for a few weeks on the *Zostera* there. They later shift to the area near the tip of the sandhills and by the new year and early spring they are well scattered over the wetland, becoming difficult to locate and count at these times. Extreme winter weather conditions elsewhere, primarily prolonged periods of snow and ice, often result in considerable influxes of migrant birds from Britain, Europe and other parts of Ireland. Of course, the tidal cycle determines the spatial distribution of birds on the Backstrand, regardless of weather. At low tide when the mudflats are exposed, the birds are widely scattered and difficult to see. As the tide rises, the birds tend to concentrate, so that by high tide flocks have congregated at a small number of roosts which tend to be traditional in use from year to year.

Wetland counts here are made at, or approaching, high tide and the birds at roosts are counted. These coordinated counts are conducted by a team of people, strategically placed around the Backstrand to ensure as complete a count as possible. By and large, the casual birdwatcher will not be too interested in counting all the birds in the area. Nevertheless, there are some good walks which will provide views of a wide variety of wetland species.

The Sandhills area

The walk around the Sandhills is undoubtedly the most popular walk in Tramore, favoured by many thousands of people annually. That is not to say that the dune area is crowded, even in high summer. However, for the birdwatcher the ornithological delights of Tramore are more obvious in winter.

The carpark at the east end of the promenade (or 'Prom' as it is known locally) in Tramore, almost at the dump, is a good starting point. The dump itself, and adjacent mudflats, can be a useful place to search first as there are usually good concentrations of the commoner gull species and occasionally rarer species. Up to fairly recently, Glaucous or Iceland Gull were likely in winter, although these are nowadays much scarcer in Co Waterford.

There are two embankments crossing the mudflats just east of the dump, separated by a channel even at low tide. A walk out along the southern one is recommended. The embankments and adjacent saltmarshes provide high-tide roosts for Dunlin, Oystercatcher, Grey Plover, Redshank, Greenshank, the two godwit species, and, with careful stalking, or preferably by waiting in position as the tide rises, good views can be obtained. At low tide, these embankments are good for Turnstone and Redshank and the channel of water running between them often has Red-breasted Mergansers present. This is also one of the best places in Waterford for Long-tailed Duck in winter, and small flocks of Little Egrets are often present near the northern embankment. Depending on the time of year, Brent Geese may be feeding either near the dump or along the tideline, inside the embankment and along the saltmarshes.

The walk proper is down to the tip of the Sandhills and back, down one side and back the other. There are usually Sanderling feeding along the shoreline on the strand side of the Sandhills. Offshore Gannets are often actively feeding, and Sandwich Terns are ever-present in autumn. An odd Little Gull has been seen flying over the breakers among the usual Black-headed Gulls. If the swell is not too strong, Red-throated and Great Northern Divers may also be glimpsed offshore. Knockaunariark is the most conspicuous point in the dune system and affords excellent views of Tramore Bay and Backstrand. A search of the debris deposited by the tide at the highwater mark will often reveal the presence of seabird corpses, including occasional ringed birds. Several species of dolphins have also been found washed up here. As you near the tip of the Sandhills you will see a large channel of tidal water, known as **Rinnashark Harbour** (*Rinn na Searc* - "Headland of the Sharks"), which drains and covers the Backstrand mudflats on the tidal cycle. Shag and Cormorant feed in the fast and dangerous currents and in winter this channel can hold several Great Northern Divers,

sometimes at close range. In spring, small flocks of Brent Geese forage along the tideline. A few pairs of Ringed Plover breed along the shingle by the channel and on Tramore beach.

The walk back along the northside of the Sandhills meanders around the eroded contours of the dune system. From mid-winter on, Brent Geese should be present on the far side of the channel at low tide. Brent Geese at Tramore can be very wary, due mainly to the shooting activities on the mudflats, so a careful approach may be necessary. The very rare 'Black Brant', the Pacific subspecies, is possible among them, as there are a number of records from Tramore. Red-breasted Mergansers may also be about at any time of tide and there are sure to be small numbers of Curlew, godwits, Oystercatchers, other waders and flocks of gulls, particularly at low tide. The muddy area inside the western 'corner' of the Sandhills is also a good location for Ringed Plover and Sanderling, especially on a falling tide.

The Sandhills themselves are also worth a visit. Botanically the dunes are of national scientific interest, with some lichen species typical of sand-dune systems, notably *Collema tenax* var. *ceranoides*, not found elsewhere in Waterford. The shrubs Privet *Ligustrum vulgare* and Dewberry *Rubus caesius* can be found in the dune system and the rare Sea Knotgrass *Polygonum maritimum* also occurs nearby. Stonechat, Meadow Pipit and Skylark breed and Rock Dove, Chough and Kestrel are regular visitors. There are occasional records of Short-eared Owl (more frequent in the 1970s), and Snow Bunting has been seen in winter.

Boating lake

Outside of the main holiday season, the boating lake regularly holds good numbers of feeding Black-tailed Godwits and smaller numbers of other waders (occasionally Ruff or Common Sandpiper). Several dozen Mute Swans are often present, and Brent Geese have increasingly been recorded here (highest numbers in 2004/05 winter). A few diving ducks occur in most winters. The main attraction here up to recently was Ring-billed Gull, with two or more birds on occasion, including an adult bird first seen here in autumn 1991 which returned each winter up to 2001/02. Mediterranean Gull has also occurred, and other rare gulls are a possibility.

Ballinattin

The northern side of the Backstrand can be viewed from the road that overlooks the Backstrand at Ballinattin - large numbers of Little Egrets can often be seen roosting in the fields and marshes here. However, a walk down along the seawall can be very rewarding and is recommended, though it is more awkward than the Sandhills walk. Access and parking facilities are also restricted and there is the added disadvantage that the area all along the seawall is usually littered with rubbish removed by high tides from Tramore dump.

Access: Turn off for Dunmore East at Pickardstown from the main Tramore-Waterford road. About 1 km further on, a small by-road on the left offers limited car-parking, and access to the Backstrand is by the lane directly opposite. Do not cross the gate at the end of the lane but rather veer off right just before it. Alternatively, view the reclaimed fields from the roadside further north-east.

A walk out along the embankment, particularly near high tide, can offer good views of roosting Grey Plover, Greenshank, Redshank, Oystercatcher, Dunlin, Bar-tailed and Black-tailed Godwit. The mudflats on the west side of the embankment usually hold large concentrations of the various gull species, and good numbers of Brent Geese.

It is possible to walk along the seaward side of the seawall at all stages of the tide. Redshank, Shelduck and Dunlin will be present with an odd Heron stalking the channel at low tide, generally outnumbered by Little Egrets. Red-breasted Mergansers are regular on the water and, as you near the end of the seawall, Wigeon may well be feeding on the eel-grass. In the autumn, the entire flock of Brent Geese favours the area beyond the eastern end of the seawall; with care they can be viewed from behind ditches in the fields nearby. On a rising tide, the mudflat area beyond the seawall can be difficult to cross and even dangerous.

The channel of water on the landward side of the seawall often holds Redshank, Curlew, Teal or Shelduck, with Common Sandpiper frequent early in the autumn, and Goosander and Black-winged Stilt have been recorded here. Brent Geese often graze on the reclaimed land behind the seawall, especially in spring when other food resources on the Backstrand are depleted. Whooper Swans have also been recorded here, as have Bewick's Swans and (especially in autumn) White-fronted Geese. Large numbers of waders also feed in the reclaimed pasture, especially plover, Curlew and Black-tailed Godwits, and hunting Merlin can occur in winter. Cereal and stubble fields immediately north of the Backstrand hold good numbers of Yellowhammers throughout the year.

Clohernagh

Most of the Golden Plover and Lapwing and many of the Curlew that over-winter at Tramore do so in the fields behind the raised ditches just west of Clohernagh inlet. Access to the area is down through the fields from the main road (this is private land and entry may be restricted) or, with care, along the shoreline from Murphy's bar (see below). The gyrating flocks of plover are spectacular here in winter. Small numbers of Mute Swans, Mallard, Redshank, Greenshank and Shelduck are often present in the shallow channel just inside the sea-ditch. Grey Phalarope has occurred here, Green and Common Sandpiper are more likely, but there must be potential for American species also. Flocks of Brent Geese are not uncommon, feeding on the grass in spring. Just outside the sea-ditch there is an elevated sand-bar, which, although completely covered on spring tides, is usually packed with birds near high-water. Dunlin, Oystercatcher, Brent Geese, Grey Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit, Black-tailed Godwit and Curlew are usually present, actively feeding, and are best observed from behind the sea-ditch. Be aware though, that in the mornings, strong sunlight may hinder clear views. Large numbers of wintering gulls are often present here towards dusk. Further west is also a good area for waders roosting on the saltmarsh at high tide.

Access: Clohernagh inlet can be viewed from the roadside by Murphy's Bar, north of Corbally Church, while the mouth of the inlet can be reached by the small road running south-west just before the Church at Kilmacleague. More distant views can be had from the carpark at Saleen (see below).

The mudflat area at the mouth of Clohernagh inlet can often hold good numbers of Ringed Plover and Dunlin, with Whimbrel regular in the autumn and Curlew Sandpiper occasional. Much of the inlet can also be viewed from the roadside opposite Murphy's pub, and Little Egrets are regular here, often at close range. Kingfisher breed in in the vicinity, Whimbrel are regular in spring, and species such as Green Sandpiper, Spotted Redshank and Curlew Sandpiper occur at times. The small Keiloge River enters the Backstrand near the pub.

Saleen

Saleen lies on the south-east side of Tramore Backstrand. The carpark there offers a good vantage point from which to either view the mudflats or ramble north-east or south-west along shoreline. The walk down Rinnashark towards Brownstown is perhaps the more popular and also likely to be best for birds. Brent Geese are probably the most conspicuous birds to be seen, often just off the carpark. In the autumn, large numbers of terns appear, mainly Sandwich but occasionally Little and Common/Arctic Terns are seen. The inner part of Rinnashark channel, and the area of water off the carpark, hold good numbers of Shag in autumn and winter; this is also the best area to search for Red-breasted Mergansers, occasional Great Crested Grebes and Great Northern Divers. Otherwise, small numbers of Redshank, Oystercatcher and Greenshank will feed on the shoreline.

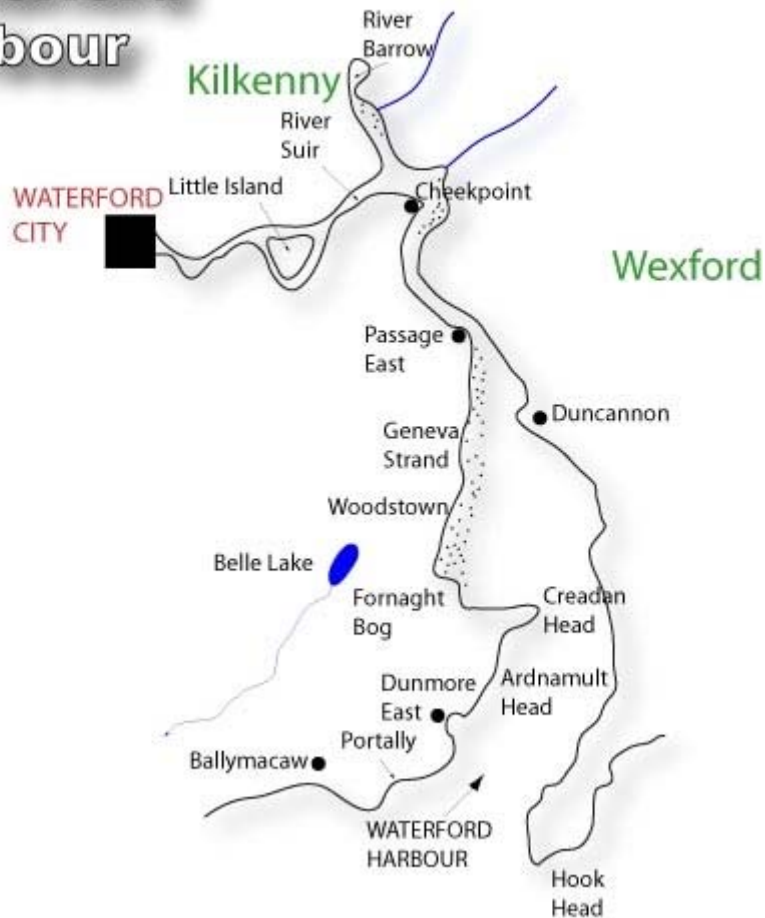
As you near the end of Rinnashark, Tramore Bay should be carefully scanned, particularly in autumn or winter after storms and onshore winds. Red-throated and Great Northern Divers, Gannets, Common Scoters, Arctic Skuas and, on occasions, large numbers of Kittiwakes are possible. The sandbanks here also demonstrate the power of coastal erosion with the forces of nature continually shaping and reshaping the shifting sands, as the regular walker will know.

The walk northwards from the carpark is less interesting, with rather fewer birds, but Little Egrets are frequent along the shoreline here. At low tide, waders will be scattered across the mudflats, while tighter flocks can be viewed (rather distantly) on a rising or falling tide, along the sandbank west from Clohernagh (see above). Whimbrel are regular at migration periods and Kilmacleague inlet, at the north end of Saleen strand, is worth checking for Common Sandpipers. Gull flocks are worth checking from Saleen (especially with a telescope) - mainly Lesser Black-backed Gulls nowadays, but rarer species have included Yellow-legged, Ring-billed, Mediterranean and Glaucous Gulls. The trees and bushes along the access road to Saleen can also be good for warblers, newly arrived on the coast in the spring; Hoopoe has also occurred here.

Outer Bay

The cliff-tops and slopes along the west side of **Brownstown Head** (see separate site account), at the eastern margins of Tramore Bay, provide good vantage points from which to scan the outer bay. Alternatively, the eastern coastline of the bay, from the pier out to Newtown Cove, provides suitable vantage points. Although wind-blown seabirds may of interest, calm conditions are best when viewing or attempting to count divers and Common Scoter spread across the bay. The wooded glen above the pier has produced Pied Flycatcher in autumn, and Black Redstarts probably winter regularly near the pier. Great Newtown Head (site of the Metal Man), at the extreme SW corner of the bay, can be a good seawatch point, and is accessible from Newtown Cove. Breeding seabirds there include Fulmar, Black Guillemot and Cormorant, and Choughs are frequent.

Waterford Harbour



Waterford Harbour including Cheekpoint, Passage East, Geneva Strand, Woodstown, Fornaght & Creadan

Grid reference: S60/S70 - Cheekpoint (S6813), Passage East (S7011), Geneva Strand (S7007), Woodstown (S6905), Fornaght Strand & Bog (S7003), Creadan Head (S7103). *See also:* **Dunmore East**.

Ordnance Survey Discovery map: # 76

Habitat: Estuarine mudflats (Cheekpoint south to Creadan Head); sea-cliffs (south from Creadan Head to Dunmore East); open sea (harbour mouth off Dunmore East).

Main interest: Wintering and passage waders & waterfowl; Sand Martin colony at Woodstown; breeding seabirds

Scarcer species & rarities: Balearic Shearwater (Harbour mouth off Dunmore East), 'dark-bellied' Brent Goose, Scaup, Eider, Pintail, Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Ruff, Pomarine Skua (Hbr mouth), Sabine's Gull (Hbr mouth), Mediterranean, Little, Iceland & Glaucous Gull, Black Tern, Turtle Dove, Hoopoe, Redstart, Reed Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Garden Warbler, Golden Oriole.

Best bird: Honey Buzzard, October 2001 (a bird satellite-tracked from Scotland).

Access: **Passage East** can be reached by taking the Dunmore road from Waterford City and then turning left (instead of continuing on towards Dunmore East) at the petrol station about 3 km beyond Ardkeen Regional Hospital; then continue another 6 km. Alternatively, after turning left at the petrol station, the village of **Cheekpoint** can be reached by veering right (and under the bridge) after just over 1 km. Panoramic views can be had of the confluence of the two rivers, Suir and Barrow and the estuary to the south (on the Wexford shore) from the road above Cheekpoint. From Cheekpoint, Passage East can be reached by turning left at Faithlegg and following the winding road (and signposts)

from there. However, the Waterford coastline between Cheekpoint and Passage is practically inaccessible, being very vegetated and sloping. Follow the main road which gives a spectacular view of Waterford Harbour along the approach to the scenic village of Passage East. There is a ferry between Passage and Ballyhack, linking Waterford and Wexford, which operates continuously in daylight hours all year round, seven days a week. This ferry is the gateway to Hook Head and other birdwatching sites in Wexford. **Geneva Strand** is a short distance (just over 3 km) south of Passage East on the Woodstown road but is easily missed - there is a narrow track leading down to it, not accessible by car. **Woodstown** is about 2 km south of Geneva Strand and can be reached either by road or by a walk along the shore at low tide. From the Waterford-Dunmore East road, take the second left turn just beyond Callaghane Bridge. **Creadan** (or **Fornaght Strand**, south of Woodstown, can be walked to only at low tide. By road, this small sandy area can be hard to locate; from Woodstown take the Passage-Dunmore road, then take the first turn left, left again at the junction further on and then continue down the hill on to the strand. Car-parking is limited here.

Further details:

Waterford Harbour is a long estuary, rather deep on its east side, with most of the available sand and mud on the shallower west side, or on the Wexford shore in the northernmost part of the estuary. Any of the access points, Cheekpoint, Passage East, Geneva Strand, Woodstown or Creadan Strand, can be used to view the birds that winter on the west side of Waterford Harbour.

At the north end of the estuary, waders on the Wexford shore can be viewed, rather distantly, from **Cheekpoint** and the roadside immediately to the south. Most Wigeon occur along the Wexford shore, and nowadays up to several hundred Black-tailed Godwits in winter. Fewer birds occur on the Waterford shore here, although good views can be had of Black-tailed Godwits at Cheekpoint itself. Good concentrations of Grey Herons can occur at Great Island generating station, immediately opposite Cheekpoint.

Better views of larger numbers of wintering birds can be had along the Waterford shoreline from Passage East south to Creadan Head. From **Passage East**, the walk south along the stony shoreline is awkward, but can be interesting, with perhaps more birds about at low tide. There is a mussel bed just off Passage East, which, when exposed, attracts many Oystercatcher, Redshank and gulls. Large numbers of Cormorants are often present offshore, and to the north of Passage East.

Geneva Strand, further south, is probably the most important area ornithologically, as many of the wintering birds roost and feed here. Regular species include Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Lapwing, Bar-tailed Godwit and Turnstone. Geneva Strand is also an important night-roost for Common and Black-headed Gulls. Small flocks of Brent Geese feed here, especially in late winter and spring. In general, the best time to visit Geneva Strand is at high tide when the birds will roost close inshore or just before dusk for the gulls. Otherwise, the birds will be widely dispersed over the extensive sandflats and rocky shore. At any stage of the tide, however, small numbers of Red-breasted Mergansers and Great Crested Grebes can be seen offshore.

There is a long sandy beach at **Woodstown** and at low tide a massive area of mudflat is exposed, used for feeding by wintering shorebirds which usually roost elsewhere. Oystercatcher can be numerous, and there are often good numbers of Bar-tailed Godwits and smaller numbers of Sanderling and Knot present. Good numbers of Great Crested Grebes can occur immediately offshore. Woodstown also holds a large night-time gull roost, with up to 4000 Black-headed Gulls and 3000 Common Gulls recorded. Species such as Mediterranean or Iceland Gull also occur on occasion. There is a colony of nesting Sand Martins along the north end of the beach. Further south, **Woodstown Bog** holds breeding Grey Herons, Water Rails and Sedge Warblers (and Reed Warbler has been heard singing), and can be a good spot for wintering Chiffchaffs;

At **Creadan** (or **Fornaght Strand**), Oystercatcher are again the most numerous species present on the flats exposed at low tide but small numbers of other waders, including Ringed Plover, will also be present in winter, plus often a few Brent Geese. There is also potential for migrant waders like Little Stint or Ruff, although recent records of such species (here or at Woodstown) are few, partly reflecting poor coverage. **Fornaght Bog**, inside Creadan strand between Creadan Head and Knockaveelish, can be a good site for migrant landbirds, although has suffered from drainage and is less productive than in the past.

From **Creadan Head** south to **Dunmore East** (see separate site-account) including **Ardnamult** and **Foilakippeen**, small numbers of seabirds nest (mainly Fulmar, Herring Gull, Kittiwake and Razorbill). Colonies can be viewed from a distance from Dunmore East pier, or accessed on foot along the cliff-tops. Large numbers of Cormorants also roost on the cliffs at the south side of Creadan Head. Dunmore East provides the best views of the harbour-mouth, when looking for feeding or passage seabirds, divers or seaduck.