

Coastal headlands, coves & valleys

Annestown Bog

Grid reference: X59-S50 - X5099-S5000

Ordnance Survey Discovery map: # 82

Habitat: Reedbed and scrub, with freshwater pools.

Main interest: Breeding and passage warblers, Water Rail; breeding seabirds and Choughs on nearby cliffs.

Scarcer species & rarities: Gadwall, Hoopoe.

Access: The area can be viewed from the roadside which runs along the west side of the main river as it flows into the sea just east of Annestown village. A number of pathways provide limited access, but beware deep pools or marshy areas.

Further details: The reedbed and scrub along the river valley here provide abundant nesting habitat for Sedge & Willow Warblers, and other warbler species nest or pass through in smaller numbers. Potentially this could be a site for rarer migrants. Some of the marsh habitat and pools here have been constructed to help improve water quality along the valley. Water Rails, Little Egrets, Mallard and Mute Swans are regular throughout the year, and additional duck species can occur in winter. Choughs, Herring Gulls and Fulmars nest along the cliffs at Annestown beach, or immediately east and west of here. Hoopoes have occurred on a number of occasions, most recently a bird in March 2003.

Ardmore Head & Bay

Grid reference: X17-X27: X1977-X1979/X2077-X2079

Ordnance Survey Discovery map: # 82

Habitat: Gardens, scrub, mixed farmland, coastal bay and sea-cliffs.

Main interest: Landbird migrants, especially in autumn; breeding seabirds.

Typical birds: Nesting Fulmars & Kittiwakes at nearby Ram Head; divers and waders in bay; Whimbrel in spring; cliff-nesting House Martins; migrant warblers and Goldcrests; Tree Sparrows occasionally breed (one of few sites in Waterford).

Scarcer species & rarities: Black-throated Diver, Eider, Red-necked Phalarope, Black Tern, Turtle Dove, Hoopoe, Tawny Pipit, Black Redstart, Icterine Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Yellow-browed Warbler, Firecrest, Pied Flycatcher, Crossbill.

Best bird: Red-eyed Vireo (Sept/Oct 2000).

Access: The most direct route to Ardmore from Dungarvan is by taking the main Cork road and turning left at Power's pub at Kiely's Cross Roads 7 km to the south-west. The coast road, via Ring, is less direct but is preferable if the west Waterford coastline is to be investigated. From Cork, take the main Waterford road and a few km east of Youghal Bridge turn off right where indicated. Migrant habitat and the cliff walk at Ardmore Head are best accessed near the Cliff House Hotel at the SW corner of Ardmore Bay.

Further details:

Ardmore is an excellent base for birding coverage of west Waterford. Ardmore Bay and the cliffs to the west are good for seabirds, both breeding and offshore, and there is excellent habitat for migrant passerines at Ardmore Head and in the village itself. To the east, as far as Mine Head and beyond, a range of well-vegetated coastal valleys provide excellent migrant habitat. To the west, the estuary of the Blackwater, the Blackwater callows and their adjacent woodlands provide many birding opportunities.

The only defined cliff-walk on the Waterford coast is at Ardmore, going west to Saint Declan's well. It starts at the car-park at the Cliff House Hotel on the west side of Ardmore Bay and meanders across the cliff-top for a little over 1 km. House Martins breed in good numbers in the sea-cliffs, and there are often Choughs about. For close views of the seabirds, it is necessary to leave the safety of the walkway and venture down the slopes. Although not particularly dangerous, care is required. The main seabird cliffs are at Ram Head and west to just before St. Declan's Well; Kittiwakes outnumber other species, with smaller numbers of Fulmars, large gulls and, in some years, Shags, Guillemots and Razorbills. A cliff near Ram Head is known as *Leac na gCánóg* - "Flagstone of the Puffins", which suggests that Puffins (or possibly Manx Shearwaters, the literal translation of *Cánóg*) formerly bred on these cliffs. (In fact, Manx Shearwaters were heard close inshore at night on several occasions during July-August 1996-97, during Storm Petrel ringing sessions.)

The gardens and areas of scrub and Sycamores near the Cliff Hotel provide the best habitat for migrant passerines, and have produced a range of scarce or rare species in autumn (including Red-eyed Vireo). The whole area from the Round Tower out to Ardmore Head is worth checking in the right conditions (NE to SE winds in spring or autumn, and potentially any time in late September or October). More frequent or intensive coverage would be worthwhile, and if time allows can easily be combined with searches of other migrant sites in west Waterford (see under **Mine Head** and **Helvick Head**).

Of interest if approaching Ardmore from the east is the small Curragh pond. This is nowadays largely a reedbed, with little or no open water, but summer holds breeding Moorhens, Sedge Warblers and other reedbed species. The Bay outside can be good for terns, particularly Sandwich, in autumn and Whimbrel in spring. Other waders are regular, and Ringed Plover breed. In winter and spring, Ardmore Bay is worth watching for Red-throated and Great Northern Divers, and Black-throated Diver has occurred.

Ballymacaw

Grid reference: X69 - X6498/X6499

Ordnance Survey Discovery map: # 76

Habitat: Wooded coastal glens, and gardens, with sea-cliffs to east & west.

Main interest: Migrant passerines; some breeding seabirds.

Regular/annual: Common warbler species.

Scarcer species & rarities: Quail, Green Sandpiper, Mediterranean Gull, Turtle Dove, Black Redstart, Melodious, Garden & Yellow-browed Warblers, Firecrest, Pied Flycatcher, Brambling.

Access: The east Waterford coastline, the coves at Portally, Rathmoyle and Ballymacaw, Brownstown Head and Tramore Backstrand (Saleen) can be reached by following the winding road westwards from Dunmore (keep left before White's pub in Ballymacaw if going to Brownstown/Saleen).

Further details:

The two streams running down to Ballymacaw Cove each form steep-sided, well-wooded, scrubby glens, with breeding species including Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff and occasionally Blackcap. Small passerines find plenty of shelter and feeding here at migration times, but because there is so much dense, tall cover, they can be difficult to see. However, the easternmost glen can be viewed from the roadside above and flitting shapes in the branches can be gradually picked out. Most will be tits, Willow/Chiffs or Goldcrests, but Garden and Melodious Warblers, Yellow-browed Warbler, Firecrests and Pied Flycatchers have all occurred. Although Brownstown Head has been more productive in recent years, partly because of greater coverage, the glens at Ballymacaw are always worth a visit at migration seasons and merit improved coverage. Gardens in the village itself are also worth checking.

Common Sandpipers occasionally occur on rocks at the mouth of the cove in late summer. A walk westwards along the cliffs towards Benlea Head will produce a few breeding Fulmars and Herring Gulls, and Kittiwakes have bred in the past. Quail and other interesting species have occurred along the cliff-top.

Ballyvooney Cove

Grid reference: X382973

Ordnance Survey Discovery map: # 82

Habitat: Open sea, rocky beach, cliffs and nearby Gull Island; scrub.

Main interest: Divers and sea-duck in small numbers; nesting seabirds, especially large gulls & Cormorants on Gull Island and Black Guillemots on mainland cliffs west towards Stradbally; Choughs; cliff-nesting Sand Martins in some years.

Scarcer species & rarities: Surf Scoter, Black Redstart.

Access: From the west, take the Dungarvan-Tramore 'coast road', past Clonea, to Stradbally, and take a right turn when in Stradbally village itself. The road leads down the small cove and parking area. If scoter are not visible from the cove itself, better views may be had from the cliff top just to the east; with care, cliff top access is also possible to view breeding seabirds west as far as Stradbally. (There is no defined path, however, and these cliffs should thus be considered dangerous for casual walkers.) From the east, best approached by taking a left turn at Bunmahon and following the coast road then taking the last left turn before Stradbally.

Further details:

The near-regular occurrence of one or two Surf Scoters close inshore in recent years, especially in winter 2003/2004, has attracted the most attention from local and visiting birders. There are no major flocks of Common Scoters wintering along the Waterford coast, but the small numbers here may represent the most regular flock. Divers (especially Red-throated) can also be seen regularly in winter and spring. Black Guillemots can be seen further west, close to Stradbally Cove, especially in spring, although safer views can be had from the entrance to Stradbally itself. Good numbers of Cormorants and Great Black-backed Gulls nest on Gull Island, to the west (visible from the cove). Sand Martins sometimes nest in clay banks just below the cliff top to the west. With a small stream and adjacent scrub, the cove itself has potential for landbird migrants, and (like most similar inlets between Dungarvan and Tramore) warrants more frequent checks in spring and autumn.

Brownstown Head

Grid reference: X69 - X6197/X6198/X6199

Ordnance Survey Discovery map: # 76

Habitat: Sea-cliffs and mixed farmland (mainly pasture) with gardens and scrub, overlooking Tramore Bay.

Main interest: Landbird migrants (March-May, Aug-Nov); seabird passage (all year, especially Apr-Sept).

Typical birds: Manx Shearwater, Gannet, Kittiwake, auks (mainly spring & autumn); Chough, Stonechat, birds of prey (all year); passerine migrants, especially hirundines, Skylark, Meadow Pipit, Wheatear, common warblers, Goldcrest, finches (spring and autumn); divers and Common Scoter in adjacent Tramore Bay.

Regular/annual (subject to coverage): Sooty Shearwater, Merlin, Arctic, Pomarine & Great Skua, Black Redstart, Whinchat, Reed & Garden Warbler, Pied Flycatcher.

Scarcer species & rarities: Great & Balearic Shearwater, 'Blue' Fulmar, Leach's Petrel, Hen Harrier, Ruff, Green Sandpiper, Grey Phalarope, Little & Sabine's Gull, Black & Roseate Tern, Little Auk, Short-eared Owl, Turtle Dove, Hoopoe, Wryneck, Tree Pipit, Redstart, Ring Ouzel, Lesser Whitethroat, Icterine, Melodious, Barred, Yellow-browed & Wood Warbler, Firecrest, Woodchat & Red-backed Shrike, Golden Oriole, Brambling, Lapland Bunting.

Best birds: Pallas's Warbler* (Nov 2003), Northern Parula* (Oct 2003), Scops Owl (Apr 1998), Yellow Warbler (Oct 1995, 1st Irish record), Greenish Warbler (Oct 1995), Blackpoll Warbler (Oct 1993), Red-eyed Vireo (Oct 1985), Bonelli's Warbler (Sept 1981), Sociable Plover (Dec 1909), Stone Curlew (March 1840).

Access: Brownstown Head can be approached from Dunmore East by following the coast road carefully towards Ballymacaw; continue coastwards from there for almost 3 km and then take a left turn at the cross roads, just after the Sandhills and Tramore Backstrand come into view. From Tramore, Brownstown Head is 14 km away to the east. Turn off at Pickardstown on the main Waterford-Tramore road, follow the sometimes narrow and winding road that skirts Tramore Backstrand, veer off right just beyond Corbally church and proceed along that straight road to the Head. Access from Waterford is straightforward using this route, once you are on the Tramore Road. Alternatively, take the airport road from St. John's Park in Waterford City; beyond the airport, turn left (right for Tramore) and keep on straight, past Murphy's pub at Clohernagh and then beyond Corbally church veer right for the Head, almost 5 km away. It is possible to drive down the breen at Brownstown but turning can be awkward. Preferably, park the car near the ruined farmhouse buildings and access the Head by foot from there.

Further details:

As a site for observing good numbers of both seabird and landbird migrants on the Waterford coast, Brownstown is equalled or approached only by Helvick Head, further west. Situated at the south-east corner of Tramore Bay, Brownstown projects almost as far south as Hook Head, Co Wexford, to the east, and compares well in the range and numbers of migrants recorded over the last few decades. Most notably, the site has produced records of four North American passerine species.

Ideal conditions for seawatching at Brownstown are onshore winds, from between a south-easterly and a south-westerly direction, especially with reduced visibility in mist or rain. Some shelter from the elements is available inside or behind the World War II observation hut on the tip. From spring to autumn, Manx Shearwaters, Gannets, Kittiwakes, Guillemots and Razorbills are the most abundant species, with occasionally a thousand or more passing per hour. Even in mid-winter, large Kittiwake and auk passages are occasionally recorded. Other species including divers, Common Scoters, Sooty Shearwaters and skuas are fairly regular at the appropriate seasons. Common Porpoises too have often been seen offshore during seawatches and there have been records of Killer Whales and Risso's Dolphin.

On land, the most obvious migrants are usually Swallows, Skylarks and Meadow Pipits, which can be seen passing east or west overhead, especially in September and October, sometimes several hundred in a few hours. These are often accompanied by smaller numbers of Sand Martins, and occasionally by a Turtle Dove, Yellow Wagtail or Tree Pipit. Finch movements (Chaffinch, Redpoll, Siskin) also occur, in late autumn.

Nocturnal migrants are usually fewer in number and less obvious, and may require patient and careful searching of suitable cover, especially the gardens and hedgerows. Optimum conditions are after south-easterly winds from late March to early June and from late July to mid-November, when commoner migrants and the odd rarity pass through. An excellent place to start looking is the large garden at the south end of the access road to Brownstown, just before the dirt-track which leads down to the Head. The dense cover in the garden provides good shelter and feeding for species attracted to trees and willow scrub, and is the most productive patch for night-migrants on the headland. With patience, most birds can be seen from the adjacent roadside. Over the years, scarce or rare species recorded here in autumn, sometimes staying around for a week or more, include Redstart, Tree Pipit, Lesser Whitethroat, Reed, Icterine, Barred, Bonelli's, Pallas's and Yellow-browed Warbler, Firecrest, Pied Flycatcher and, from North America, Red-eyed Vireo, Yellow Warbler and Northern Parula.

Coverage along the main track towards the tip of the head, with occasional binocular scans along the hedges of adjacent fields, will usually reveal some common migrants in spring or autumn, including Whitethroat (which also breed in good numbers). Whinchats are most likely to be seen here. Rough tracks can be followed across several of the fields bordering the breen, and by keeping to the extreme margins of the fields it is possible to systematically search the hedgerows for birds. In this part of Brownstown, small migrants often flit ahead of the observer along the hedgerows (or bury themselves deep in cover!), but a careful or sit-and-wait approach can be rewarding. Black Redstart, Blackcap, and Garden Warbler are the most frequent 'scarcities' here, but Firecrest, Lesser Whitethroat, Reed, Icterine, Melodious, Barred and Yellow-browed Warbler have all occurred, with Blackpoll Warbler the highlight.

At the east margin of Brownstown Head, a stream down to Coolum Cove flows through an impressive, densely vegetated, steep-sided glen, which can be viewed from above in places. Towards its north end, the glen closes in and the stream is bordered by dense, but more accessible willow and thorn scrub. Access is by a rather long walk along the cliff-top west of Brazen Head, or, more easily, along a track running east from the 'main road' further back along the Head. Species recorded include Wryneck, Ring Ouzel, Lesser Whitethroat, Reed, Yellow-browed & Greenish Warbler, and Firecrest.

Field-margins and scrub back along the 'main road' from the head (Woodchat Shrike has occurred in spring) and gardens and scrub at the NW side of the head (overlooking the NE corner of Tramore Bay) are also worth checking if time allows.

Apart from migrant species, locally-breeding passerines present include Chough, Stonechat, Reed Bunting, and cliff-nesting House Martins. Good numbers of thrushes may occur in winter, along with waders in the fields. Birds of prey are regular, including fairly frequent sightings of Merlin in autumn and occasional Hen Harrier and Short-eared Owl.

In winter, the western cliffs of Brownstown provide a good vantage point, in calm conditions, from which to scan for divers and Common Scoters in **Tramore Bay**.

Clonea & Ballynacourty Point including Ballyvoyle Cove, Ballinclamper & Ballinard

Grid reference: X39

Ordnance Survey Discovery map: # 82

Habitat: Sandy and rocky beach with open sea; landbird habitat including scrub & gardens.

Main interest: Open-shore waders (winter & passage); divers & seaduck; passerine migrants; gulls, terns & skuas.

Regular/annual: Red-throated & Great Northern Divers, Brent Goose, Merlin, Whimbrel, Sanderling, Little Stint, Purple Sandpiper, Great & Arctic Skuas, terns, Chough, White Wagtail, Dipper, Wheatear, wintering Black Redstart. Nesting Ringed Plovers.

Scarcer species & rarities: Black-throated Diver, Red-necked Grebe, 'dark-bellied' Brent Goose, 'Black Brant', Eider, Lesser Yellowlegs, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Ruff, Curlew Sandpiper, Grey Phalarope, Black, White-winged Black* & Roseate Terns, Little Auk, Pied Flycatcher, Red-backed* & Woodchat Shrikes, Tree Sparrow.

Best birds: Ruddy Shelduck (Clonea, March 1871).

Access: Access to Clonea strand is possible via several routes from the main Dungarvan-Ballyvoyle coast road. To get to Ballinard (Ballynacourty Point), take the Gold Coast road south from Kilminnin Bridge along the east side of Dungarvan Bay, turn left just before Ballinacourty Golf Course and take the right turn at the next junction. As an alternative to this, take a left turn there, then the next right, to reach the car-park at Ballinclamper, probably the best location from which to view waders and terns. Ballinard can be accessed on foot from there, either along the beach or by following the path along the old railway track. Other points along Clonea Strand, north-east as far as Ballyvoyle Bridge, can be reached by following a number of other access roads, including that leading to the Clonea Strand Hotel.

Further details:

The sandy beach at Clonea runs for over 3 km south-westwards from Ballyvoyle Bridge to Ballinacourty Point (and lighthouse) at the north-east corner of Dungarvan Bay. Many of the birds to be seen along Clonea strand are present in higher numbers at Dungarvan but, at low tide, Clonea often provides better views of waders, because they feed over a narrower expanse of shoreline. Typical sandy-shore waders here are Ringed Plover, Grey Plover, Sanderling and Bar-tailed Godwit, but others are also regular. At the southern end of the strand, in the area known as Ballinard, on the east side of Ballinacourty Point, the shoreline becomes much rockier and Turnstone are common. A real specialty here is the Purple Sandpiper. Scarce migrant waders are also possible in spring and autumn, and flocks of up to several hundred Whimbrel are regular in late April/early May. Rarities have included Semipalmated Sandpiper and Lesser Yellowlegs.

Brent Geese regularly feed at Clonea or commute to and from Dungarvan. Other wildfowl include occasional Eider or Long-tailed Duck among the more frequent Red-breasted Mergansers or Common Scoter on the sea. Red-throated and Great Northern Divers are regular (the latter often in tight flocks), with smaller numbers of Great Crested Grebes and Black Guillemots. Rarer visitors include Black-throated Diver, Red-necked Grebe and Little Auk.

Good numbers of gulls are usually present, and Mediterranean Gulls are nowadays fairly regular. This is probably the best location for viewing terns in Waterford, with good numbers of Sandwich and Common Tern regular, especially in

autumn, both feeding and resting on the beach or inshore rocks. Roseate, Arctic and Black Terns occur in smaller numbers, and White-winged Black Tern has occurred; potentially, even rarer species may occur. Arctic Skuas regularly harass the terns along the beach and in the mouth of Dungarvan bay.

The whole area, but perhaps especially the southern end towards Ballynacourty Point, is also worth checking for passerines. There may be dozens of Rock Pipits feeding among the seaweed strewn on the shore, and good numbers of White Wagtails among them in September especially. A few Black Redstarts usually winter, especially at Ballinard, and large numbers of migrant Wheatears have been seen in early spring. The trees and bushes at Ballinard and behind Ballinclamper provide good cover for warblers and other night-migrants, and are worth checking, particularly after south-easterly winds; both Red-backed and Woodchat Shrike have occurred. Winter finch flocks here occasionally include a few Bramblings or Tree Sparrows among the more usual species. At the north end of Clonea, Ballyvoyle Glen and gardens and scrub around Ballyvoyle Bridge can also be good for migrant passerines, and must have potential for rarer species. The stream above the bridge is also worth checking for Dipper.

Dunmore East

Grid reference: S60/X69 - S6900/6800, X6999

Ordnance Survey Discovery map: #76

Habitat: Fishing port with sea-cliffs, rocky shore and open sea; gardens and other landbird-migrant habitat.

Main interest: Nesting Kittiwakes; winter gulls, other seabirds & rocky-shore waders.

Regular/near-annual species: Purple Sandpiper, Turnstone, commoner gulls & auks, Iceland & Glaucous Gull (though less frequent in recent years), Arctic & Great Skua, common night-migrants.

Scarcer species or rarities: Balearic Shearwater, Velvet Scoter, Quail, Pomarine Skua, Sabine's, Little & Mediterranean Gull, Black Tern, Turtle Dove, Hoopoe, Wryneck, Black Redstart, Golden Oriole, Carrion Crow, Lapland Bunting.

Best bird: Indian House Crow (1974-79) – a ship-assisted vagrant, the first recorded in Europe.

Access: The most direct route to Dunmore East is from Waterford City by taking the Dunmore road near the Tower Hotel and then following the signposts for 17 km. Access from Woodstown is also straightforward, by taking a left turn at the Fairybush Cross Roads. From Dunmore, the headlands to the east at Foilakippeen and Ardnamult can be reached, with some difficulty, by walking across fields above Councillor's strand, where car-parking is available. From Dunmore, Creadan Head and strand can also be reached by turning right at Killea church and continuing right from there. Other bird sites along the east Waterford coastline - the coves at Portally, Rathmoylan and Ballymacaw, Brownstown Head and Saleen (at Tramore Backstrand) - can be reached by following the winding road westwards from Dunmore (keep left at White's pub in Ballymacaw if going to Brownstown/Saleen).

Further details:

Dunmore East lies at the mouth of Waterford Harbour and is an important fishery port, especially in winter. In the birdwatching world, Dunmore is most famous for its Kittiwake colonies, and none more so than the Inner Harbour colony which can be viewed with ease from the roadside below, even from the comfort of a car. This colony is unique for its proximity to man and is quite an attraction, particularly in summer. There are three main Kittiwake colonies - Outer Harbour, Inner Harbour and Black Knob. The Outer Harbour colony is the largest and the birds can be viewed safely from a number of vantage points at Badger's Cove and Men's Cove. Black Knob is the most dangerous of the three and caution is required if Kittiwakes are viewed from above. There are also two smaller colonies, Foilakippeen and Ardnamult to the north-east, both within sight of Dunmore East. The birds are present on nests at the colonies from November to August and a visit during this time is recommended. The other prominent breeding species in Dunmore is the Herring Gull, nesting on rooftops of many buildings, including hotels, in the town. Fulmars breed in the cliffs on either side of Councillor's Strand and anyone carefully watching the Inner Harbour Kittiwakes will also find Blackbird, Dunnock, Wren and Pied Wagtail breeding in the dense vegetation there.

Gull numbers fluctuate according to fish-processing and trawling activities and Dunmore East in winter is ideal for both common and scarce gulls. Despite decline in recent decades, Herring Gulls are still usually the most abundant species, but good numbers of Black-headed, Common and Great Black-backed Gulls also occur. Glaucous and Iceland Gulls,

scarce 'northern' species, were formerly regular in winter but are less regular nowadays. Little Gulls are occasional from September to April, and Sabine's & Mediterranean Gulls have occurred.

The seas and the flat rocks outside the seawall are always worth checking. Turnstone and Purple Sandpipers are regular from autumn to spring – this is the best site for Purple Sandpipers in Co Waterford. Knot sometimes occur, and Common Sandpiper has wintered elsewhere in Dunmore. The waters offshore are worth scanning, particularly during onshore winds, either from the seawall or from the Shanooan carpark above Black Knob. Storm Petrels, Manx Shearwaters and skuas are possible, especially in the autumn, Gannets and auks are likely, and large feeding concentrations of Kittiwakes can occur in winter. Occasionally Great Northern Divers or Common Scoters can be seen, and Balearic Shearwater and Velvet Scoter have occurred.

Dunmore East, within close sight of Hook Head, is potentially a good site for landbird migrants and better coverage would almost certainly produce an increase in notable records. To date, the best landbirds have been a Wryneck near Dunmore East in 1877 (first Irish record), a Golden Oriole in 1994, and the Indian House Crow in the 1970s. The latter is a species from SE Asia that has reached many parts of the Old World by hitching lifts aboard ship; the Dunmore East bird, which arrived in 1974 and survived to at least 1979, was the first recorded in Europe.

Helvick Head

Grid reference: X38 - X3189, X3188

Ordnance Survey Discovery map: # 82

Habitat: Fishing port with pier, sea-cliffs, gardens, scrub.

Main interest: Passage & breeding seabirds; landbird migrants; wintering divers & gulls.

Regular/near-annual: Common seabirds (including breeding Black Guillemots) and landbird migrants; Sooty, Great & Balearic Shearwaters, Storm Petrel, Pomarine, Arctic & Great Skuas, Glaucous & Iceland Gulls, Black Redstart, Whinchat, Pied Flycatcher.

Scarcer species & rarities: Black-throated Diver, Cory's Shearwater, 'Blue' Fulmar, Leach's Petrel, Hobby, Quail, Grey Phalarope, Sabine's, Yellow-legged Gull & Little Gulls, Roseate & Black Terns, *Long-tailed Skua, Little Auk, Turtle Dove, Short-eared Owl, Hoopoe, Ring Ouzel, Redstart, Reed Warbler, *Melodious Warbler, Icterine Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Garden Warbler, Yellow-browed Warbler, Firecrest, Red-breasted Flycatcher, *Red-backed Shrike, Brambling, Snow Bunting.

Best birds: Pallas's Warbler (Oct 1999), Fea's or Zino's Petrel (Sept 1998), Red-footed Falcon (May 1994), Alpine Swift (Apr 1988), Radde's Warbler (Oct 1985).

Access: Helvick can be reached by taking the Dungarvan-Cork road and turning east, where signposted, 5 km south of Dungarvan. Veer left beyond the second hairpin bend and the road then to Helvick Head affords excellent views of Dungarvan Bay, the Waterford mountains and the Head itself in the distance. The car-park at Helvick pier is a good starting point when searching for landbird migrants (scrub, trees and gardens slightly uphill from the car-park), or when seawatching. Gardens further back along the road, of slightly 'inland', might also be productive but are under-watched. Heading back from Helvick pier, either the first or, preferably, the second left turn leads to a small car park west of Helvick Head, allowing access to the main seabird colony from the west, and providing panoramic views of the sea offshore at Muggort's Bay and Mine Head to the west.

Further details:

Helvick Head lies at the mouth of Dungarvan Bay, on the south-west side, and holds an important seabird colony, in addition to being a good site for seawatching and landbird migrants.

Helvick pier often has some of the rarer gulls present, especially in winter, with occasional records of Glaucous, Iceland and Mediterranean Gulls. Outside the pier and off Helvick Head itself, particularly in rough weather, good numbers of seabirds are often present, feeding, roosting or on passage. Some of the diver species may be about, and Cory's, Great, Sooty and Balearic Shearwaters have been seen here more often than elsewhere in Waterford, in addition to impressive sea-passages of Manx Shearwaters, mainly in autumn. Both Great and Arctic Skuas occur regularly, and there is the

possibility of Black Terns among the tern flocks (mainly Sandwich) that feed or pass offshore. Ideal seawatching conditions are during strong southerly or SSW winds, and (depending on visibility) good views can be had from the pier carpark (from the car-window if necessary!), or the nearby cove or (for the best views) from the clifftop further south.

For land-birds, coverage in spring and autumn has shown that the Head is an excellent site for those in search of scarce migrants. Ireland's second Radde's Warbler was seen here in October 1985, and there are records of Red-backed Shrike, Icterine Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Yellow-browed Warbler, Firecrest and other species, especially following south-easterly winds in autumn. Common migrants such as Goldcrests and Chiffchaffs are usually present in the gardens, hedgerows and tall conifers near the Head. Resident passerines include Stonechat, while other landbirds include the commoner raptors, and sometime Merlin or even rarer species.

Helvick Head is the most important seabird colony in Waterford and they breed mainly on the higher, south-facing cliffs. Be forewarned though, that these seabird cliffs are high, difficult to reach and dangerous. For those with suitable footwear and a head for heights and densely vegetated slopes, the seabird cliffs are a revelation and very spectacular. Kittiwakes (up to 1500 pairs in a good year) and Guillemots (c.1000 adults) are the most common species, but up to 9 seabird species breed. The colony is spread out over several cliffs, each more spectacular than the other, heavily indented and each with poetic Gaelic names in keeping with this Irish-speaking locality in the heart of the Ring Gaeltacht - names like *Faill a' Phíobaire* - "The Piper's Cliff" and *Poinnte an Phréacháin* - "The Crow's Point.

It is rare to visit the Helvick cliffs without seeing Choughs, as a few pairs breed in the vicinity and there are usually non-breeding birds about. Ravens regularly occupy one of the high cliffs west of the seabird colony and there are Rock Pipits, Stonechats and cliff-breeding House Martins. Apart from the birds, keep an eye out for Common Porpoises and Basking Sharks offshore; even Killer Whales have been recorded here. The headland itself can be good for migrant butterflies like Red Admirals and Painted Ladies.

The clifftop west of this carpark is heavily vegetated and walking can be difficult; there are no seabirds, the cliffs in Muggort's Bay being low and sloping, though there are usually Chough and Shelduck about in summer. Botanically, Muggort's Bay is of regional importance with Autumn Gorse *Ulex gallii*, Bell Heather *Erica cinerea* and Ling *Calluna vulgaris*, and the cliff-top here supports one of the finest stretches of coastal heath on the south coast of Ireland.

Mine Head area including Ballynamona, Hacketstown, Ballymacart, Crobally, Paulsworth

Grid reference: X28 (see under *Access*).

Ordnance Survey Discovery map: # 82

Habitat: Sea-cliffs and coastal scrub, including a number of well-vegetated valleys.

Main interest: Migrant passerines (under-watched but abundant, potentially productive habitat); nesting seabirds.

Typical birds: Common warblers & other night-migrants, Goldcrest; nesting Cormorants, Fulmars, Kittiwakes, Choughs.

Scarcer species & rarities: Marsh Harrier, Little Auk, Turtle Dove, Garden Warbler, Yellow-browed Warbler, Firecrest, Pied Flycatcher etc.

Best birds: Honey Buzzard* (Ballymacart, Sept 2004); Red-eyed Vireo (Hacketstown, Oct 1996); Hawfinch (Mine Head, Nov 1898).

Access: Access to this coastline is possible from many points along the main road between Youghal and Dungarvan, but it is easy to get lost and close attention to Discovery Map #82 is strongly recommended! For a full tour of the valleys and headlands, it is best to start either from Ring, on the Dungarvan-Helvick road, turning off (southwards) at grid reference X296883 near Ballynagaul, or from the west, from Lisakeelty Cross-roads (X204827) on the eastern access road to Ardmore. The cliffs at Ballynamona (grid reference X2883) and at Mine Head itself (X286823) are best accessed from the west via Mine Head, near the unmanned lighthouse. The farmer on the east side of the road leading down to Mine Head should be informed if the cliffs are to be visited. The well-vegetated valleys at Hacketstown and Ballymacart, south-west of Mine Head, can be viewed or accessed from the main coast-road at Hacketstown Bridge (X271828) and Ballymacart Bridge (X253822), respectively. For Ballymacart, there is also a second left-turn west of

the bridge, leading down to the seaward end of the valley (but beware hairpin bends). Further west again, before reaching Ardmore Bay, the wooded valley and small beach at Paulsworth or Ballyquin (X2180) can be reached from the east by turning left at an obvious cross-roads (X214814).

Further details:

There are few recent interesting records of migrants from **Mine Head** itself, perhaps reflecting its remote location and difficulty of access and also the lack of suitable cover for landbird migrants. Some lighthouses were notorious for causing mortality of migrant birds striking the unlit tower when they become confused by the strong light source in adverse weather conditions. Although manned up to 1987, there are no recent such occurrences recorded for Mine Head lighthouse, but in the 19th century occasional casualties were noted, including Waterford's first Hawfinch. Little Auk was also recorded by the lighthouse keepers. More recently, Quail has been recorded along the cliff-tops here. The stream-valley (X286840) at **Ballynamona** might be productive for landbird migrants, though is under-watched.

The most productive locations for migrant birds in recent years have been the valleys at **Hacketstown** (X2782) and **Ballymacart** (X2581), about 1 km and 4 km SW of Mine Head, respectively, although both sites are still severely under-watched. Good numbers of commoner passerine migrants occur on occasion, with species like Blackcap, Chiffchaff and Goldcrest regular in late autumn. Rarer species have included, most notably, Red-eyed Vireo at Hacketstown and Honey Buzzard at Ballymacart, while Firecrest, Yellow-browed Warbler and other scarce species have occurred. More frequent coverage would certainly be worthwhile, although Ballymacart, in particular, is difficult to cover well, given the large amount of woodland present. The scrubby valleys around **Crobally Lower** (X2280/X2380) hold breeding Whitethroats and Stonechats, and might also be productive for migrants. Further west again, the densely wooded glen at **Paulsworth** (or **Ballyquin**) undoubtedly attracts many small migrants in spring and autumn and deserves more frequent coverage. A small colony of Sand Martins nests in the sand-cliffs immediately west of the valley, Ringed Plovers may breed, and Whimbrel occur as spring-migrants.

Otherwise, breeding seabirds provide the main interest along this coastline. The cliffs between Mine Head and Ballynamona, further east, are quite vegetated but the coastline, being reasonably indented, can be viewed from the headlands. Usually a small number of Cormorants breed on the mainland cliff just east of Mine Head in the company of Fulmars and Herring Gulls. 'Blue' Fulmar has occurred on the cliffs here. A small offshore island nearer Ballynamona, *Carraig na nÉan* or "Rock of the Birds" (X290834), has a good-sized breeding colony of Cormorants in most years and a small Kittiwake colony on the seaward side. In some years, the mainland cliff opposite also has breeding Cormorants. The cliffs here are good for Choughs and large non-breeding flocks have been recorded. Stonechats too are common.

The cliffs west of Mine Head towards are less inspiring and hold few breeding seabirds, although Ravens breed almost annually. At **Ballynaharda** there is a high Red Sandstone cliff with many ledges used by breeding Fulmars (perhaps the densest colony in Waterford). Beyond that the birds are again scarce with just a few Herring Gulls, Hooded Crows and the odd Stonechat. Continuing west, the cliffs to Ballymacart are difficult in terms of access and cannot be recommended to anyone other than the dedicated seabird-surveyor. Cliffs between Ballymacart and Crobally are also difficult of access, and hold relatively few seabirds, but Cormorants sometimes breed west of Crobally Lower (X2380). Otherwise, regular species in summer include small numbers of Fulmar, Shelduck and Chough.

Portally Cove

Grid reference: X69 - X672992

Ordnance Survey Discovery map: # 76

Habitat: Gardens & scrub, small beach, sea-cliffs.

Main interest: Passerine migrants (good potential but under-watched); breeding Kittiwakes.

Scarcer species & rarities: Twite.

Access: Portally is 3 km west of Dunmore on the coast road and is signposted. Best approached along the coast road west from Dunmore East. The cove is signposted, but parking & turning is limited.

Further details:

There is a small breeding colony of Kittiwakes on the east side, out at the mouth of the cove. Fulmars, Shags and Herring Gulls also nest. Although the cliff walk between Dunmore East and Portally is short and relatively safe, birds are usually scarce with perhaps a handful of Herring Gulls, Choughs and breeding Fulmars at Red Head, nearest Dunmore.

The glen, and small broad-leaved plantation, leading down to the small beach can be productive for common passerine migrants, and there is potential for rarities. If time allows, visits to **Brownstown Head** in the right conditions (especially E to SE winds in late autumn) should be combined with coverage of Portally, **Rathmoylan** and **Ballymacaw**.

Rathmoylan

Grid reference: X69 - X6598/X6599

Ordnance Survey Discovery map: # 76

Habitat: Scrub, small beach, nearby sea-cliffs.

Main interest: Passerine migrants.

Regular/annual: Common warblers & other night-migrants; Raven; Yellowhammer.

Scarcer species & rarities: Sabine's Gull, Turtle Dove, Black Redstart, Melodious, Reed & Garden Warbler, Firecrest.

Access: Rathmoylan Cove is reached by following the coast road west from Dunmore East, about 2 km beyond the sign for Portally Cove. From the west, approach from Ballymacaw.

Further details:

Extensive low scrub along the stream running down to Rathmoylan cove, and on the adjacent hillside, provides excellent migrant habitat, although the site is under-watched. Nocturnal migrants are frequent in spring and autumn, usually Goldcrests, Willow Warblers and Chiffchaffs but occasionally rarer species like Melodious Warbler or Firecrest. Breeding species include Sedge Warbler and Yellowhammer.

Down at the cove, wagtails & Rock Pipits are frequent and Black Redstarts have been recorded in autumn. A slightly oiled Sabine's Gull spent several days here in September 1996. Small numbers of Herring Gulls and Fulmars breed along the Old Red Sandstone cliffs east and west of the Cove. Some care is needed in walking the cliffs from Rathmoylan to Portally, but in spring good views can be had of Ravens breeding at Old Ship's Cove.