

WINTER WILDFOWL CENSUS

Last updated April 2010

Chris & Lynda Huxley

Since 2000, we have been carrying out monthly counts of the wildfowl and waterbirds of Lough Carra each winter, between the months of September and March, as part of the Irish Wetland Bird Survey ("IWeBS" - coordinated by Birdwatch Ireland). The following reports summarise the counts and points of interest for each winter since 2000-2001.



LOUGH CARRA "IWEBS" BIRD CENSUS WINTER 2000 – 2001

The following table shows the numbers of waterbirds and raptors recorded on the monthly census through the winter of 2000 – 2001. These counts were conducted as part of the nationwide wetland bird survey (IWEBS = Irish Wetland Bird Survey) established by BirdWatch Ireland and Duchas. The purpose of the annual census is to monitor wetland bird numbers as indicators of the ecological health of our wetlands, and to determine where the important bird populations are and where conservation measure might be needed.

The counts on Lough Carra were conducted from several shore sites, and the co-operation of the landowners is gratefully acknowledged.

It is important to note that the numbers recorded are counts of those birds seen, so that some species (such as water rail and moorhen) that are difficult to see are "under-recorded". However, since the counts are made from the same sites each month, by the same people, in similar conditions (when possible), the numbers counted will indicate any significant changes.

The monthly count in October was missed because we had other commitments, and that in March was missed as a result of the foot and mouth disease restrictions.

The counts have shown the following points of interest:-

Little grebe – although numbers were quite high in autumn, there were fewer in winter, suggesting that most of them move on in the hard weather.

Great crested grebe – although these birds breed on the lough, the low numbers recorded indicate that most of the resident birds probably move elsewhere in winter.

Grey heron – only one was seen, on just one occasion.

Gadwall – this species has been increasing its range over recent years, and there seems to be a very healthy resident population on the lough. They were seen mostly at Moorehall and Kilkeeran. Since they tend to live in and near the reedbeds, the low number recorded in December was probably due to their being out of sight at the time of the count.

Teal – in the 1960s and 1970s, winter counts often recorded up to 500, especially in January. Our maximum count of 31 suggests that there has been a substantial drop in numbers of this species visiting the lough.

Mallard – a maximum count of 202 (in January), suggests that the population has suffered catastrophic declines over the last few decades. In the 1960s and 1970s, the wintering numbers regularly topped 1,500, and over 2,000 were sometimes recorded. While we know of no hard evidence of the cause of this decline, it seems possible that the effect of mink on the mallard breeding population is important.

Moorhen – it is amazing that the lough has so few moorhens. It seems very likely that this is due to the presence of mink. Elsewhere, moorhen populations have been observed to crash when mink appear.

IWEBS (Irish Wetland Bird Survey) - Lough Carra 2000/2001							
	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Little Grebe	17		13	6	3	5	
Great Crested Grebe					1	2	
Cormorant	5		12	14	7	3	
Grey Heron	1						
Mute Swan	7		5	4	7	5	
Wigeon				27	106	4	
Gadwall	33		44	11	34	78	
Teal	1				14	31	
Mallard	16		80	171	202	40	
Shoveler			4	2	10		
Pochard					190		
Tufted Duck	11		83	141	212	89	
Golden eye			18	45	96	79	
Red breasted Merganser	4		5	1	9	3	
Water Rail					1		
Moorhen	2		1	3	7	3	
Coot	4		1		5	12	
Golden Plover			524				
Lapwing	207		150	40			
Snipe			4		1	2	
Curlew	21		33	21	43	25	
Black-headed Gull	1						
Lesser Black-backed Gull	3						
Peregrine Falcon			1				
Kestrel			1				
Sparrowhawk			1		1		



LOUGH CARRA "IWEBS" BIRD CENSUS WINTER 2001 – 2002

The following table shows the numbers of waterbirds and raptors recorded on the monthly census through the winter of 2001 – 2002. These counts were conducted as part of the nationwide wetland bird survey (IWEBS = Irish Wetland Bird Survey) established by BirdWatch Ireland and Duchas. The purpose of the annual census is to monitor wetland bird numbers as indicators of the ecological health of our wetlands, and to determine where the important bird populations are and where conservation measures might be needed.

The counts on Lough Carra were conducted from several shore sites, and the co-operation of the landowners is gratefully acknowledged.

It is important to note that the numbers recorded are counts of those birds seen, so that some species (such as water rail and moorhen) that are difficult to see are "under-recorded". However, since the counts are made from the same sites each month, by the same people, in similar conditions (when possible), the numbers counted will indicate any significant changes.

The counts have shown the following points of interest:-

Little grebe – numbers were generally up on the previous winter, with a maximum of 30 in October.

Great crested grebe – generally much higher numbers than the previous winter, with a big influx of birds in March, although most of these birds were on passage rather than resident.

Mute Swan – higher numbers this winter, with a peak of 13 in October and four pairs in January, February and March.

Gadwall – more or less similar numbers this winter, suggesting that the population is stable and continues to be one of the largest and most important of this species in Ireland.

Teal – in the 1960s and 1970s, winter counts often recorded up to 500, especially in January. Our maximum count of 63 (and 31 last winter) suggests that there has been a substantial drop in numbers of this species visiting the lough.

Mallard – a maximum count of 92 (in December) suggests that the population has continued to decline. In the 1960s and 1970s, the wintering numbers regularly topped 1,500, and over 2,000 were sometimes recorded. The breeding population of the lake was around 150 pairs, so it is now clear that there is something drastically wrong. This is of great concern. It seems

most likely that drainage of breeding areas around the lake and the presence of mink are major causes of this catastrophic decline.

Moorhen – numbers continue to be desperately low and will probably remain so unless the mink population is controlled.

CONCLUSIONS

- *Several species have shown significant declines since the 1970s, suggesting that the ecology of the lake has been modified.*
- *The presence of a significant population of introduced mink is probably having an ongoing negative effect on the breeding waterfowl populations.*

IWEBS (Irish Wetland Bird Survey) – Lough Carra 2001/2002							
	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Little Grebe	26	30	15	14	12	2	8
Great Crested Grebe	14	12	8	1	6	2	34
Cormorant	4	11	12	7	8	3	4
Grey Heron	4	3			1		1
Mute Swan	10	13	9	11	8	8	8
Whooper Swan			2			12	
Wigeon				43		8	
Gadwall	13		54	61	67	63	27
Teal		7	5	25	11	20	63
Mallard	31	33	17	92	33	48	41
Shoveler				1	37		22
Pochard			1		10	15	17
Tufted Duck		27	328	191	154	98	200
Golden eye			55	59	94	58	149
Red breasted Merganser	1		6	3	5	12	
Water Rail		1		1			3
Moorhen	1	1	5	1		4	5
Coot	12				1	6	11
Golden Plover	8	10	35		57	70	120
Lapwing	70	30	1		60	9	5
Snipe		1		11	1	3	
Curlew	39	12	10	6	21	33	109
Redshank				1		1	
Kingfisher			1				
Black-headed Gull							33
Common Gull		8					17
Lesser Black-backed Gull	7	1					
Great Black-backed Gull					1		
Kestrel		1		1		1	
Sparrowhawk	1						



LOUGH CARRA "IWEBS" BIRD CENSUS WINTER 2002 – 2003

The following table shows the numbers of waterbirds and raptors recorded on the monthly census through the winter of 2002 – 2003. These counts were conducted as part of the nationwide wetland bird survey (IWEBS = Irish Wetland Bird Survey) established by BirdWatch Ireland and Duchas. The purpose of the annual census is to monitor wetland bird numbers as indicators of the ecological health of our wetlands, and to determine where the important bird populations are and where conservation measures might be needed.

The counts on Lough Carra were conducted from several shore sites, and the co-operation of the landowners is gratefully acknowledged.

It is important to note that the numbers recorded are counts of those birds seen, so that some species (such as water rail and moorhen) that are difficult to see are "under-recorded". However, since the counts are made from the same sites each month, by the same people, in similar conditions (when possible), the numbers counted will indicate any significant changes.

The counts have shown the following points of interest:-

Cormorant – numbers were greatly up on previous winters, with a maximum of 23 in January.

Mute Swan – higher numbers again this winter, with a peak of 20 in January.

Gadwall – slightly higher numbers this winter, with a peak of 82.

Tufted Duck – numbers of this species were down, with the peak of only 260 in December.

Mallard – numbers continue to be extraordinarily lower than thirty years ago, with a maximum count of 197.

Moorhen – numbers were a little higher (maximum 9), suggesting that perhaps the mink population has dropped.

Black-headed Gull and Common Gull numbers increased significantly in March. This was of interest as both species bred on the lake this year (2003).

CONCLUSION

- *Although some species have shown increases recently, the evidence of significant ecological decline is now mounting. The wildfowl population of the lake has clearly suffered drastic changes over the last thirty years, most of them negative.*

IWEBS (Irish Wetland Bird Survey) – Lough Carra 2002/2003							
	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Little Grebe	13		18	6	30	3	7
Great Crested Grebe	10		6	3	4	16	42
Cormorant	6		18	15	23	15	5
Grey Heron	4		3	1	3	1	1
Mute Swan	19		10	12	20	11	9
Whooper Swan				4			3
Wigeon				5	50	19	
Gadwall	30		20	65	35	82	44
Teal	1		4	63	84	58	49
Mallard	64		61	114	197	84	29
Shoveler				17	6	6	
Pochard				34	2		5
Tufted Duck	2		120	260	179	151	66
Golden eye			51	99	152	87	36
Red breasted Merganser			5	2	4	4	8
Water Rail				1	1		2
Moorhen	6		4	5	9	7	4
Coot	13				8	6	8
Golden Plover	4		62	80		8	
Lapwing	61		37	1	22	8	12
Snipe			6	2	6	1	1
Curlew	4		45	49	63	18	
Redshank						1	13
Kingfisher			1				
Black-headed Gull	1				1	4	330
Common Gull							36
Lesser Black-backed Gull	13					2	
Great Black-backed Gull							
Hen Harrier				1		1	
Kestrel				1			
Sparrowhawk							

Note: no count was undertaken in October due to inclement weather.



LOUGH CARRA "IWEBS" BIRD CENSUS WINTER 2003 – 2004

The following table shows the numbers of waterbirds and raptors recorded on the monthly census through the winter of 2003 – 2004. These counts were conducted as part of the nationwide wetland bird survey (IWEBS = Irish Wetland Bird Survey) established by BirdWatch Ireland and Duchas. The purpose of the annual census is to monitor wetland bird numbers as indicators of the ecological health of our wetlands, and to determine where the important bird populations are and where conservation measures might be needed.

The counts on Lough Carra were conducted from several shore sites, and the co-operation of the landowners is gratefully acknowledged.

It is important to note that the numbers recorded are counts of those birds seen, so that some species (such as water rail and moorhen) that are difficult to see are "under-recorded". However, since the counts are made from the same sites each month, by the same people, in similar conditions (when possible), the numbers counted will indicate any significant changes.

The counts have shown the following points of interest:-

Cormorant – numbers continue to increase, with a maximum of 29 in November.

Gadwall – the numbers of this species have averaged 74 over the last four winters, and seem to be fairly stable. Good news in view of the fact that the Carra population is nationally important.

Teal – although numbers peaked at 98, the highest for the last four winters, there is still no sign of a recovery to the hundreds recorded in the 1970s.

Mallard – the peak of 351 in January was the highest for some time, but still numbers continue to be extraordinarily lower than thirty years ago.

Shoveler – a maximum of 61 was the highest count for four winters, but still much lower than in the 1970s.

CONCLUSION

- *Although some species have shown increases recently, the evidence of significant ecological decline is now overwhelming. The wildfowl population of the lake has clearly suffered drastic changes over the last thirty years, most of them negative. However, at least the gadwall numbers have remained stable, and tufted duck seem to still winter on the lake in good numbers.*

IWEBS (Irish Wetland Bird Survey) – Lough Carra 2003/2004							
	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Little Grebe	19	28	17	2	10	11	13
Great Crested Grebe	7	3	4	4	1	7	24
Cormorant	12	14	29	15	13	6	8
Grey Heron	2	4		4	3		
Mute Swan	9	16	5	5	17	15	9
Whooper Swan			3				
Wigeon				36	131	313	33
Gadwall	48	42	10	68	46	48	49
Teal	1	8	98	30	74	32	49
Mallard	105	47	134	77	351	246	32
Shoveler			26	61	52	23	1
Pochard						22	
Tufted Duck	8	109	195	227	183	372	97
Golden eye			32	98	158	99	133
Red breasted Merganser		3	1	2	1	8	4
Water Rail	4	3		2	1		4
Moorhen	5	3	1	3	8	7	5
Coot	9		1		3	9	12
Golden Plover	8	355		80	30	60	706
Lapwing	64	393	159	135	54	310	35
Dunlin	12						
Snipe		1		1			1
Curlew	4		24	3	54	84	72
Redshank							5
Kingfisher		1					
Black-headed Gull	1	5					46
Common Gull							12
Lesser Black-backed Gull	2		1				
Great Black-backed Gull							
Hen Harrier							1
Kestrel							
Sparrowhawk		1	1		1	1	



LOUGH CARRA "IWEBS" BIRD CENSUS WINTER 2004 – 2005

The following table shows the numbers of waterbirds and raptors recorded on the monthly census through the winter of 2004 – 2005. These counts were conducted as part of the nationwide wetland bird survey (IWEBS = Irish Wetland Bird Survey) established by BirdWatch Ireland and Duchas. The purpose of the annual census is to monitor wetland bird numbers as indicators of the ecological health of our wetlands, and to determine where the important bird populations are and where conservation measures might be needed.

The counts on Lough Carra were conducted from several shore sites, and the co-operation of the landowners is gratefully acknowledged. It is important to note that the numbers recorded are counts of those birds seen, so that some species (such as water rail and moorhen) that are difficult to see are "under-recorded". However, since the counts are made from the same sites each month, by the same people, in similar conditions (when possible), the numbers counted will indicate any significant changes.

The counts have shown the following points of interest:-

Cormorant – numbers continue to increase, with a maximum of 36 in December. The maximum counts since 2000-2001 have been 14, 12, 23, 29 and 36. This suggests an ongoing rise in the cormorant population and an increasing pressure on the fish population of the lake in winter.

Mute swan – the maximum count in the winter of 2000-2001 was 7, so the three recent winters have all been much higher (20, 17 and 18), suggesting that the population has recovered to some extent.

Gadwall – the numbers of this species seem to be remaining stable at around 60 to 80. So, the Carra population remains nationally important. A few were also seen in mid-summer, so there is even the possibility that we might see a breeding attempt soon.

Teal – numbers peaked in the 90s again, but there is still no sign of a recovery to the hundreds recorded in the 1970s.

Mallard – the peak of 110 in September was followed by a decline to less than 100 throughout the winter. There is still no sign of any recovery of the population of this species.

Shoveler – a maximum of 4 was the lowest count for five winters. Lough Carra was previously listed as holding a nationally important wintering population of this species, but this is no longer the case with the average maximum count at around 25 in recent years.

CONCLUSION

- *The wildfowl population of the lake, particularly the dabbling ducks (mallard, teal, and shoveler) is clearly not recovering to levels recorded in the 1970s and 1980s. We do not yet know what the causes are for the decline, but they are likely to include ecological damage resulting from the ongoing eutrophication of the Lough, increased predation (from introduced mink and a rise in the crow population) and changing habitats around the lakeshore.*

IWEBS (Irish Wetland Bird Survey) – Lough Carra 2004/2005							
	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Little Grebe	19	34		4	1	4	6
Great Crested Grebe	8	9		34		18	25
Cormorant	28	18		36	17	8	7
Grey Heron	1	4		1	1	4	4
Mute Swan	8	9		10	18	14	14
Whooper Swan		3					
Greenland white-fronted goose							51
Wigeon				2	41	61	38
Gadwall	62	41		7	37	26	31
Teal	3	14		53	48	38	96
Mallard	110	64		52	23	65	82
Shoveler	2			4			4
Pochard				60			40
Tufted Duck	9	55		320	292	116	159
Golden eye		34		75	90	93	78
Red breasted Merganser		1			4	6	2
Water Rail	1					1	
Moorhen	5	5		2	3	9	19
Coot	1			1	2	15	12
Golden Plover	148	435		29	150	576	
Lapwing	43	200		14	17	10	13
Dunlin							
Snipe		3		2		3	
Curlew	34	41		66	27	21	59
Redshank				1		2	2
Kingfisher		1					
Black-headed Gull	1	5				14	
Common Gull						1	
Lesser Black-backed Gull	2	1		1			
Great Black-backed Gull							
Hen Harrier				1	1		
Kestrel				1			1
Sparrowhawk		2		1	1		



LOUGH CARRA "IWEBS" BIRD CENSUS WINTER 2005 – 2006

The following table shows the numbers of waterbirds and raptors recorded on the monthly census through the winter of 2005 – 2006. These counts were conducted as part of the nationwide wetland bird survey (IWEBS = Irish Wetland Bird Survey) established by BirdWatch Ireland and Duchas (now National parks and Wildlife Service). The purpose of the annual census is to monitor wetland bird numbers as indicators of the ecological health of our wetlands, and to determine where the important bird populations are and where conservation measures might be needed.

The counts on Lough Carra were conducted from several shore sites, and the co-operation of the landowners is gratefully acknowledged. It is important to note that the numbers recorded are counts of those birds seen, so that some species (such as water rail and moorhen) that are difficult to see are "under-recorded". However, since the counts are made from the same sites each month, by the same people, in similar conditions (when possible), the numbers counted will indicate any significant changes.

The counts have shown the following points of interest:-

Mute swan – the maximum count of 22 suggests that the population has recovered from the low in and is now more or less stable.

Gadwall – the numbers of this species were notably lower this winter, with perhaps only around 50% of numbers recorded in other, recent winters. However, the good news is that in the summer (of 2006) there was firm evidence of successful breeding. This is the first record of this species breeding on Lough Carra.

Teal – numbers were even lower than usual.

Mallard – There is still no sign of any recovery of the population of this species. Although there was a peak of 157 in January, numbers in the other months were extremely low.

During the last two years, Chris Meehan, a postgraduate research student at GMIT in Castlebar, has been conducting more intensive surveys of both the wintering wildfowl populations and the breeding populations of ducks, especially mallard. He is now in the process of writing up his results and we hope that they will be available early in 2007. We already know that his work on the breeding mallards confirms our observations that the population has crashed since the 1970s, but we hope that Chris's research will help identify the critical factors causing this decline.

CONCLUSION

- *The dabbling ducks (mallard, teal, and shoveler) are still not recovering to levels recorded in the 1970s and 1980s. We hope that Chris Meehan's work will help identify the reasons for this.*
- *The first record of Gadwall breeding on the lake provides a small note of optimism. We know that Red-breasted mergansers also bred successfully in 2006.*
- *There have been more frequent sightings of otters on and around the lake recently. It is believed that otters may drive mink away from their territories, so perhaps this is another good sign.*

IWEBS (Irish Wetland Bird Survey) – Lough Carra 2005/2006							
	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Little Grebe	30	22	22	19	9	30	7
Great Crested Grebe	8	4	4	1	1	16	12
Cormorant	18	10	30	18	21	14	15
Grey Heron	3	2	1	2			
Mute Swan	20	10	12	5	13	22	3
Whooper Swan							
Greenland white-fronted goose							
Wigeon			30	52	52	60	14
Gadwall	40	44		8	23	24	32
Teal	5	15		38	69	25	29
Mallard	33	40	46	32	157	34	27
Shoveler		3		10	32	16	2
Pochard						45	
Tufted Duck	4	40	250	181	133	172	73
Golden eye		1	43	73	81	92	48
Red breasted Merganser		4		2			
Water Rail		1			3	3	
Moorhen	4	3	3	3	6	11	
Coot	2			1	4	11	11
Golden Plover	92	81					6
Lapwing	53	8	75	25	20	2	
Dunlin							
Snipe			2	2	1	2	1
Curlew	4	17	10	23	67	63	2
Redshank	1					1	1
Kingfisher				1			
Black-headed Gull						8	102
Common Gull						5	80
Lesser Black-backed Gull	1						
Great Black-backed Gull							
Hen Harrier							
Kestrel		1	1	1			
Peregrine		1					
Sparrowhawk		1				1	



LOUGH CARRA "IWEBS" BIRD CENSUS WINTER 2006 – 2007

The following table shows the numbers of waterbirds and raptors recorded on the monthly census through the winter of 2006 – 2007. These counts were conducted as part of the nationwide wetland bird survey (IWEBS = Irish Wetland Bird Survey) established by BirdWatch Ireland and Dúchas (now National Parks and Wildlife Service). The purpose of the annual census is to monitor wetland bird numbers as indicators of the ecological health of our wetlands, and to determine where the important bird populations are and where conservation measures might be needed.

The counts on Lough Carra were conducted from several shore sites, and the co-operation of the landowners is gratefully acknowledged.

It is important to note that the numbers recorded are counts of those birds seen, so that some species (such as water rail and moorhen) that are difficult to see are likely to be "under-recorded". However, since the counts are made from the same sites each month, by the same people, in similar conditions (when possible), the numbers counted will indicate any significant changes.

The counts have shown the following points of interest:-

Little Grebe and Great-crested Grebe – for both these species, these were the lowest counts since the winter of 2000-2001.

Gadwall – the numbers of this species have declined over the last four winters, despite the fact that they now breed on the lake. This is very worrying since Lough Carra has been one of Ireland's most important sites for Gadwall. Maximum numbers are now less than half those recorded in the period 2000 to 2004. We do not yet have any evidence of the cause of this decrease, but hope that it is just a temporary drop in the population.

Mallard – Numbers continue to be desperately low in comparison with those recorded in the 1970s and 1980s.

Curlew – The numbers of this species recorded have dropped significantly. The maximum count of 20 compares with the previous average of 72 and is less than half the previous lowest count (43 in 2000-2001). We suspect that this is just part of a more general decline due, at least in part, to the decline in earthworms (their main food) which has resulted from slurry spreading activities.

Chris Meehan's research recently completed for a master's degree at GMIT suggests that the decline in waterfowl numbers on Lough Carra since the surveys of 1967 to 1980) is on a larger scale and included more species than previously thought. A total of seven species of duck (Teal, Mallard, Wigeon, Shoveler, Pochard, Tufted Duck and Red-breasted Merganser) have declined by between 58% and 91% since the counts conducted in the 1960s/1970s. The lake used to host over 100 pairs, one of the largest and most concentrated Mallard breeding populations in the country, but the population is no longer nationally important with a massive decline of nearly 90% occurring between the mid 1980s and the mid 1990s. Chris Meehan's breeding surveys conducted in 2005 and 2006 found that the breeding Mallard population on eight islands has declined by over 90% since the previous surveys. A change in island habitats and high levels of predation on nests and nesting females by American Mink and Hooded (Grey) Crows continues to suppress breeding numbers and prevent populations from making even a slight recovery. As well as Mallard, the American Mink have also preyed upon Teal, Tufted Duck, Coot, Moorhen and Common Gull.

Chris Meehan's detailed results in the form of his complete thesis are available elsewhere on this website.

CONCLUSIONS

- *The breeding ducks (mallard, teal, tufted duck and red-breasted merganser) are still not showing any signs of recovering to levels recorded in the 1970s. Chris Meehan's work has identified some of the reasons for this, of which predation by American Mink and Grey Crows is probably the most important.*
- *Chris Meehan's research also suggests that the ongoing nutrient enrichment of the lake is a negative factor in the continuing decline of the lake's waterfowl ecology.*
- *Unless action is taken by the responsible authorities to address the serious problems that have been identified, it is unlikely that any improvement will occur in the foreseeable future.*

IWEBS (Irish Wetland Bird Survey) – Lough Carra 2006/2007							
	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Little Grebe	21	25		4	13	16	6
Great Crested Grebe	9	11		1	5	15	3
Cormorant	18	19		30	12	17	4
Grey Heron	3	4		1	2	1	2
Mute Swan	4	7		18	5	8	9
Whooper Swan				4	5		
Greenland white-fronted goose							
Wigeon				70	27	30	24
Gadwall	20	17		34	24	16	22
Teal		2		66	61	21	93
Mallard	124	39		109	57	55	47
Shoveler				22	20		
Pochard				240			
Tufted Duck	14	28		155	217	128	131
Golden eye				59	89	114	64
Red breasted Merganser	17	7		1		5	2
Water Rail	2	3			2	4	
Moorhen	1	3		1	6	11	2
Coot	1				1	8	10
Golden Plover		3				60	
Lapwing				5	4	40	4
Dunlin							
Snipe		2		2		1	1
Curlew	1	4		4	2	20	6
Redshank							2
Kingfisher							
Black-headed Gull				80			4
Common Gull							22
Lesser Black-backed Gull							
Great Black-backed Gull							
Hen Harrier							
Kestrel		1				1	
Peregrine							
Sparrowhawk	2					1	



LOUGH CARRA "IWEBS" BIRD CENSUS WINTER 2007 – 2008

The following table shows the numbers of waterbirds and raptors recorded on the monthly census through the winter of 2007 – 2008. These counts were conducted as part of the nationwide wetland bird survey (IWEBS = Irish Wetland Bird Survey) established by BirdWatch Ireland and Duchas (now National Parks and Wildlife Service). The purpose of the annual census is to monitor wetland bird numbers as indicators of the ecological health of our wetlands, and to determine where the important bird populations are and where conservation measures might be needed.

The counts on Lough Carra were conducted from several shore sites, and the co-operation of the landowners is gratefully acknowledged. It is important to note that the numbers recorded are counts of those birds seen, so that some species (such as water rail and moorhen) that are difficult to see are likely to be "under-recorded". However, since the counts are made from the same sites each month, by the same people, in similar conditions (when possible), the numbers counted will indicate any significant changes.

The counts have shown the following points of interest:-

Little Grebe – numbers have recovered since the low of the previous winter.

Gadwall – the numbers of this species have remained low over the last five winters, despite the fact that they now breed on the lake.

Mallard – Numbers continue to be desperately low in comparison with those recorded in the 1970s and 1980s.

Shoveler – The count of 75 in December is just over double the previous highest count since 2000. Nonetheless, numbers remain extremely low in comparison with those recorded in the 1970s.

Pochard – This winter saw the lowest count (just 6) since 2000, and a big decrease on the 240 from the previous winter.

Tufted duck – The maximum of 185 was also the lowest since 2000.

Curlew – The numbers of this species recorded have dropped significantly. The maximum count of 31 compares with the previous average of 72.

CONCLUSIONS

- *The breeding ducks (mallard, teal, tufted duck and red-breasted merganser) are still not showing any signs of recovering to levels recorded in the 1970s.*
- *The noticeable drop in numbers of pochard and tufted duck may be due to the very mild winter weather.*

IWEBS (Irish Wetland Bird Survey) – Lough Carra 2007/2008							
	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Little Grebe	42	30	30	23	31	11	
Great Crested Grebe	10	2	1	1	2	20	
Cormorant	7	26	13	20	17	5	
Grey Heron	1	1	3	1	2		
Mute Swan	11	6	5	13	15	4	
Whooper Swan					3		
Greenland white-fronted goose							
Wigeon			34	48	9	73	
Gadwall	14	15	7	43	30	43	
Teal	3	29	32	63	32	71	
Mallard	24	41	90	145	107	79	
Shoveler		9	3	75	10	6	
Pochard						6	
Tufted Duck	17	42	122	185	181	170	
Golden eye			87	109	108	124	
Red breasted Merganser				6	6	4	
Water Rail				2			
Moorhen	2	3	5	6	5	10	
Coot		2			1	8	
Golden Plover		196				31	
Lapwing		6			60	25	
Dunlin							
Snipe					2	3	
Curlew	8			4	6	31	
Redshank							
Kingfisher			1				
Black-headed Gull		38					
Common Gull		2					
Lesser Black-backed Gull				1	1		
Great Black-backed Gull							
Hen Harrier							
Kestrel	1						
Peregrine	1		1				
Sparrowhawk							

Note: no count was undertaken in March due to inclement weather.



LOUGH CARRA "IWEBS" BIRD CENSUS WINTER 2008 – 2009

The following table shows the numbers of waterbirds and raptors recorded on the monthly census through the winter of 2008 – 2009. These counts were conducted as part of the nationwide wetland bird survey (IWeBS = Irish Wetland Bird Survey) established by BirdWatch Ireland and Duchas (now National Parks and Wildlife Service). The purpose of the annual census is to monitor wetland bird numbers as indicators of the ecological health of our wetlands, and to determine where the important bird populations are and where conservation measures might be needed.

The counts on Lough Carra were conducted from several shore sites, and the co-operation of the landowners is gratefully acknowledged.

It is important to note that the numbers recorded are counts of those birds seen, so that some species (such as water rail and moorhen) that are difficult to see are likely to be "under-recorded". However, since the counts are made from the same sites each month, by the same people, in similar conditions (when possible), the numbers counted will indicate any significant changes.

The counts have shown the following main points of interest:-

Gadwall – the maximum count of 31 is the lowest since we started IWeBS in 2000. For the last four winters, the numbers of this species have been around half those recorded in the previous five winters.

Mallard – Numbers have declined even further, with the maximum count of 55, compared to the previous lowest maximum of 92. This is clearly an indication of serious negative impacts on this species.

Goldeneye – this species seems to be fairly stable, with good numbers present through the main part of the winter.

CONCLUSIONS

- *The mallard population appears to have suffered an even greater decline in numbers and there can be little hope of recovery until the causes are recognised and addressed.*
- *The drop in gadwall numbers over the last four winters is of concern, particularly since Carra had a nationally important population until recently.*

IWeBS (Irish Wetland Bird Survey) – Lough Carra 2008/2009							
	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Little Grebe	30	17	13	15	17	15	13
Great Crested Grebe	4	1	1	2		17	18
Cormorant	11	28	24	18	27	13	18
Grey Heron	2	3	2	2	1	1	2
Mute Swan	4	3	2	14	7	10	15
Whooper Swan						4	4
Greenland white-fronted goose							
Wigeon		26	11	1	132	16	21
Gadwall	3	20	20		31	16	6
Teal		25	51	101	95	99	17
Mallard	40	42	30	55	45	38	37
Shoveler				1	15		
Pochard						38	
Tufted Duck		109	93	113	211	177	83
Golden eye		63	62	135	104	149	31
Red breasted Merganser	4			2	1		
Water Rail	2				1	1	
Moorhen	2	2	5	11	6	9	4
Coot		4	4		2	8	11
Golden Plover				3		44	180
Lapwing	19	20		1	14	13	1
Dunlin							
Snipe		1	1	4		2	
Curlew	34	38	28	16	44	1	2
Redshank				1			1
Kingfisher							
Black-headed Gull						1	104
Common Gull						2	29
Lesser Black-backed Gull					1	1	
Great Black-backed Gull							
Hen Harrier				1		1	
Kestrel		1					1
Peregrine				1			
Sparrowhawk							



LOUGH CARRA "IWEBS" BIRD CENSUS WINTER 2009 – 2010

The following table shows the numbers of waterbirds and raptors recorded on the monthly census through the winter of 2009 – 2010. These counts were conducted as part of the nationwide wetland bird survey (IWeBS = Irish Wetland Bird Survey) established by BirdWatch Ireland and Duchas (now National Parks and Wildlife Service). The purpose of the annual census is to monitor wetland bird numbers as indicators of the ecological health of our wetlands, and to determine where the important bird populations are and where conservation measures might be needed.

The counts on Lough Carra were conducted from several shore sites, and the co-operation of the landowners is gratefully acknowledged.

It is important to note that the numbers recorded are counts of those birds seen, so that some species (such as water rail and moorhen) that are difficult to see are likely to be "under-recorded". However, since the counts are made from the same sites each month, by the same people, in similar conditions (when possible), the numbers counted will indicate any significant changes.

Unfortunately, a combination of factors reduced our coverage this winter to just three counts (September, February and March). The weather conditions were mostly to blame for this, especially in January when the whole lake was frozen over.

Since so few counts were conducted, it is not possible to draw many firm conclusions. However, the following points are of interest:-

Little grebe – September saw the highest ever count (at 43), and with 40 still present in February it seems they survived the worst of the bad weather quite well.

Great-crested grebe – each spring sees numbers of this species passing through on migration and the March count of 53 was the highest ever.

Wigeon – the total of 6 was the lowest ever count, probably because of the bad weather.

Gadwall – the maximum count of 25 is even lower than the previous winter and is very worrying.

Mallard – Maximum numbers are still below 100.

CONCLUSIONS

- *The dabbling duck population (wigeon, gadwall, teal, mallard and shoveler) was the lowest ever with a maximum of 177 (the long-term average since 2000 is around 400). This is probably due mainly to the very bad winter weather.*
- *The continuing decline in gadwall numbers is of serious concern, particularly since Carra had a nationally important population until recently.*

IWeBS (Irish Wetland Bird Survey) – Lough Carra 2009/2010							
	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Little Grebe	43					40	27
Great Crested Grebe	4					7	53
Cormorant	17					15	13
Grey Heron							
Mute Swan	10					13	11
Whooper Swan						13	
Greenland white-fronted goose							
Wigeon						6	
Gadwall	1					25	8
Teal	1					67	56
Mallard	39					47	79
Shoveler							
Pochard							26
Tufted Duck	16					205	173
Golden eye						102	47
Red breasted Merganser							
Water Rail							1
Moorhen	2					6	7
Coot	3					14	24
Golden Plover							142
Lapwing						14	6
Dunlin							
Snipe						1	
Curlew						4	
Redshank							3
Kingfisher							
Black-headed Gull							7
Common Gull						1	24
Lesser Black-backed Gull							1
Great Black-backed Gull							
Hen Harrier						1	
Kestrel						1	
Peregrine							
Sparrowhawk						2	

n.b. no counts were possible in October, November, December and January.