

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

BEATHA AN CHLADAIGH
COASTAL WILDLIFE

Nótaí le dul leis an stiallscannán den ainm céanna.
Notes to accompany the filmstrip of the same title.

[Notes by Dr. Christopher Moriarty]

Stiallscannán agus Nótaí ar na gcur amach ag

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Nótaí le)
Notes by)

CHRISTOPHER MORIARTY PH.D.

COASTAL WILDLIFE

1. TITLE FRAME

2. CREDIT FRAME

FRAME 3. THE HERRING GULL

The herring gull is the commonest of our seagulls. When four years old or more the colours are silvery grey on the back and snowy white beneath. The legs are pink, the bill yellow with a red spot and the wingtips are black with white patches. Herring gulls are scavengers and hunt the seashore for shellfish and crabs which have been cast up by the tide. In stormy weather they swim just beyond the surf, dipping their heads into the water to snatch creatures which have been churned up from the bottom.

FRAME 4. YOUNG HERRING GULLS

Young herring gulls have speckled colourings which becomes paler as they get older until the adult colours appear in the fourth year. Although nearly all herring gulls nest on cliffs and islands on the coast they travel far inland to feed.

FRAME 5. THE BLACK-HEADED GULL

A black-headed gull may be easily recognised in summer. Most of our black-headed gulls breed inland on lakes or in swamps but they come to the shore in great numbers, especially in winter. They hunt for food in a different way to the herring gulls. Black-headed gulls fly just above the surface or above the ground and drop down for their food, while the herring gulls usually walk or swim.

FRAME 6. BLACK-HEADED GULL

Black-headed gulls are not so easily recognised in winter. They lose their black hoods except for a dark spot just behind the eye. The red legs and red beak are the most noticeable distinguishing features.

FRAME 7. THE GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL

The great black-backed gull is the biggest of our gulls. It may measure six feet from wing tip to wing tip - truly a magnificent bird. The back is very dark and the legs are pink - these points distinguish it from the lesser black-backed gull which has greyish wings and yellow legs. Great black-backed gulls are predators and eat young or disabled birds and rabbits besides hunting for carrion and scraps. They are far less numerous than the herring gulls and are rarely seen in flocks.

FRAME 8. BEACHES IN WINTER

Great flocks of birds come to our shores in Winter to feed on the small animals which live in the mud or hide beneath the seaweed.

FRAME 9. THE SANDERLING

The little sanderling with its silvery-grey back comes to hunt for sandhoppers, flies and other small creatures on the sandy shores. They nest in the far north of Europe and are rarely seen here in summer. Some sanderlings spend the whole winter here, while others pay us short visits during Autumn and Spring as they pass on their way to and from Southern Africa.

FRAME 10. THE OYSTERCATCHER

The oystercatcher with its red beak and black and white colouring is one of the most noticeable shore birds. They gather in muddy places, and thousands of them may be seen at Dublin and Dundalk Bays in winter. They may be seen in smaller numbers all around the coast and sometimes inland as well. They feed along the edge of the sea - prising open shellfish such as cockles, mussels and periwinkles with their strong beaks. Most of our oystercatchers fly to northern countries to nest, but a small number breed here in summer.

FRAME 11. THE TURNSTONE

Turnstones, like the sanderling, breed in the far north, near the Arctic Circle. Some of the non-breeders stay here all year round but the majority are winter visitors. Their lovely rich brown, mottled colours and orange legs distinguish them. They feed in places at the very edge of the tide. They turn over fronds of seaweed to catch the tiny, shrimp-like creatures which hide beneath them.

FRAME 12. THE DUNLIN

The dunlin is another small shore bird about the same size as the sanderling but coloured brown rather than silvery. Both of these birds and the turnstone belong to the Wader family. The dunlin in this picture shows the thin long legs and slender beak which are typical of this family. Waders spend the winter mainly by the shores of sea and lake hunting for shellfish and small worms. Some of them, including the dunlin, may often be seen in enormous flocks. Most of our dunlins are winter visitors but a few remain here to breed. The white feathers on the breast are replaced by black ones in the breeding season.

FRAME 13. THE RINGED PLOVER

The ringed plover is quite closely related to the waders but plovers usually have rather short beaks and some black and white colouring. The ringed plover can be distinguished by the orange legs and by the white throat contrasting with its black collar. They are usually seen in rather small groups, sometimes on sandy shores, sometimes on mud where they hunt for snails, worms and creatures such as sandhoppers which are not buried in the ground.

FRAME 14. THE RINGED PLOVER - NEST

Many ringed plover nest in Ireland, close to lakes and to the seashore. The nest is little more than a hollow scraped in the shingle or coarse sand. The eggs are so perfectly camouflaged that they are almost impossible to see and the black and white colours of the bird's head help to keep it hidden while sitting. The down-covered young (one can be seen to the left of the yellow trefoil-flower in the centre of the picture) leave the nest as soon as they have hatched and hide by keeping very still until danger has passed.

FRAME 15. THE COMMON TERN

The common tern is one of five species which come to Ireland in summer and nest here. Terns hunt by flying ten feet or so above the water and by diving down to catch little fish. Shoals of small fish are abundant in summer but they grow larger and move into deeper water in winter so the terns, like swallows, fly south to places where food is still plentiful. Common

terns nest close to the seashore and also on the islands of our larger lakes.

FRAME 16. THE ARCTIC TERN

The arctic tern is another of our five terns and looks very much like the common tern. This frame shows the typical tern features of forked, swallow-like tail (they are often called "sea swallows"), white and grey plumage and black cap. The bill of the common tern has a black tip while that of the arctic is completely red. Arctic terns nest on the coast. Some of them breed within the Arctic Circle and fly to the Antarctic for the winter, probably the longest migratory journey of all birds.

FRAME 17. COASTAL CLIFFS

Steep sea cliffs have two advantages for breeding birds. It is impossible for land-based predators such as foxes to approach without being noticed and quite difficult even for predatory birds such as the larger gulls to attack the nests. Secondly, the height above the ground means that the birds can take to the air with a downward flight. Many seabirds find it very difficult to rise up off the ground.

FRAME 18. LARGE COLONIES OF BIRDS

On very steep cliffs with narrow ledges many thousands of sea and ocean birds come together to nest. They are birds which find all their food at sea - either by diving and chasing fish under water or by flying just above the

surface and dipping down. In July or August they desert the nesting cliffs and do not return until the following spring.

FRAME 19. THE KITTIWAKE

The kittiwake is a small, graceful gull, distinguished from our other gulls by the wingtips which are black with no white markings. Kittiwakes build cup-shaped nests of seaweed and lay two or three eggs. The young must stay in their nests until they can fly away since there is no room for them on the tiny ledges to wander about.

FRAME 20. THE FULMAR

The fulmar is coloured rather like a gull but has no black on its wingtips. It is not a gull but a member of the Petrel Order. Petrels live on the ocean and have wonderful powers of gliding, using the air currents created by wind and wave action to keep them in flight. They feed on small animals such as fish and plankton which swim near the surface. The curious tubular nostrils are found in all petrels. Fulmars were extremely rare in Ireland until early in the present century. They have since colonised the whole coast and nest in places where they find suitable cliffs.

FRAME 21. GUILLEMOTS

Guillemots, shown in this frame, have chocolate brown backs and narrow bills. Razorbills have similar habits. Both species swim under water to capture small fish. They build no nests but the female lays her single egg on bare ledges. The eggs are pear-shaped so that they roll around in circles when disturbed and do not fall off the ledge. Usually one parent sits on the egg or broods the chick while the other goes off to sea to hunt.

FRAME 22. CORMORANTS

Cormorants are powerful underwater swimmers and capture great quantities of fish. A very unusual feature is that cormorants do not put out a waterproofing oil for their feathers. Thus they must leave the water frequently and dry themselves by spreading their wings. The feathers of most water-birds have great water repellent powers so that they can stay in the water for much longer periods.

The white faces easily distinguish the cormorants in summer. In winter the area of white is greatly reduced and they look much more like the shag. Cormorants often feed and sometimes nest by inland waters while shags keep strictly to the sea.

FRAME 23. SHAGS

Shags sometimes called "green cormorants", are smaller than the cormorant and have a tuft of feathers on the head. Shags and cormorants nest in similar, rocky places along the coast, building big untidy nests of sticks and seaweed. The parent birds partly swallow fish for their families and the

young thrust their bills down the parent's throat to retrieve it. Cormorants may sometimes harm human fishing interests by eating young salmon but shags are completely harmless.

FRAME 24. THE GANNET

The gannet is the most magnificent of our seabirds and one of the biggest breeding colonies of gannets in the world is the Little Skellig Island off the coast of Kerry. They nest also on The Bull Rock off Cork and on the Great Saltee Island off Wexford. They are enormous birds, six or seven feet across the wings and with sparkling white plumage. Gannets spy for fish by flying as high as seventy feet above the water. When they spot a victim they partly close their wings and plummet down to catch it below the surface. Many thousands of them nest close together on their island colonies.

FRAME 25. THE GANNET - IN FLIGHT

This picture shows the adult gannet in flight with black wing tips, yellowish head and strong pointed beak. Adult gannets stay near home but the young, which are mottled brown, travel further, going as far south as the African coast.

FRAME 26. THE ROCK PIPIT

The rock pipit lives on rocky coasts or harbours where they nest in crevices between the stones. They feed on insects which they capture on or near the ground. Amongst other sources of food on the shoreline are heaps of rotting weed in which the insects breed.

FRAME 27. THE RAZORBILL

The razorbill, seen here with its chick, is coloured white and jet black and its bill is deep and shaped like a knife-blade in contrast to the guillemot's (frame 21). The single egg takes about a month to hatch. The chick is fed on the nesting ledge for a fortnight and then flutters or falls down to the sea where the parents continue to feed it for some time. Razorbills are expert divers and fine underwater swimmers.

FRAME 28. HERONS

Hérons (usually and wrongly referred to as "cranes") are quite common on the sea shore. They stand still by a pool until some fish or shrimp moves by. Then the heron stretches out its long neck and grabs the victim. Herons build large and untidy nests in the tops of tall trees, and sometimes many of them nest close together. As well as fish, they feed on frogs, beetles and rats.

FRAME 29. PUFFINS

Puffins nest in colonies on small islands where there are grassy slopes in which they can dig burrows. Each pair raises a single chick per season and in autumn the puffins leave their islands and go away to the sea. They are sociable birds and like to sit at the mouths of their burrows rather than hide inside them.

FRAME 30. PUFFINS - IN SUMMER

This picture shows the distinguishing points of puffins in summer: black backs, white fronts and orange legs. Puffins unfortunately are

decreasing in numbers although there are still some very large colonies on our coasts: several in Kerry, one in Mayo as well as some more in other countries.

FRAME 31. PUFFIN - SHOWING REMARKABLE BILL

In summer the puffin's face is very remarkable. It is white with large eyes and has an enormous many coloured bill. In winter the bill loses its bright colours and grows smaller.

FRAME 32. THE GREY SEAL

Seals are mammals, not fish. They must come to the surface to breathe and they come ashore to give birth to their pups. Two species are common around our coasts and these often come close inshore to look at people or swim up beside boats. The grey seal, shown in this frame, breeds in small colonies on islands and has a breeding and mating season which continues for several weeks in October and November. The common seal gives birth on an exposed sandbank at low tide and has no special breeding place.