



ROGERSTOWN ESTUARY, CO DUBLIN

By **Sean Pierce**

Site Guide – your one-day itinerary

TRADITIONALLY, Rogerstown Estuary has been known primarily as a good location to view estuarine ducks, geese and waders. Over the last ten years there have been some really positive developments through the co-operative efforts of BirdWatch Ireland and Fingal County Council, who have developed an Inner Estuary Biodiversity Plan on lands adjacent to the estuary.

The opening up of the Turvey Parklands to the public combined with the provision of bird hides, wader scrapes, freshwater ponds, hardwood forestry, new farming practices, planting of winter seed crops for birds and construction of new public pathways now allows the visitor a more diverse birdwatching experience year round. It is now possible to combine a day on the estuary with searching for winter finches, thrushes, woodland birds and raptor-watching.

The following is a suggested itinerary by car for visitors who would like to make a complete day-out. The route begins on the northern side of the estuary and should be timed ideally to follow a flooding tide into the estuary. Several stops are made in an anti-clockwise route around the estuary.

Note: to reach the Turvey bird hide you have to walk (or cycle) from the car park for a distance of approximately one kilometre. The Turvey Parklands area is large and if several hours are spent there it may not be possible to complete the full itinerary of Rogerstown in one day, especially in winter.



Pale-bellied Brent Geese

Michael Finn



Pintail

BirdWatch Ireland Reserve. The fields around here are market gardening-orientated and consequently tend to be good for winter finches. Follow the right-of-way south through the swing gate provided, to the end of the lane. Watch for Sparrowhawk in the trees and you may be lucky to find a recent prey item.

When you get to the end of the lane, cross the rough field leading towards an obvious stile over a small stream. Snipe and Short-eared Owl can sometimes be flushed en route and both Kingfisher and Green Sandpiper occur on the river.

The walk down to the raised hide (the North Hide) follows the obvious old pathway through a saltmarsh and then cuts behind our birch screening close to the eastern perimeter. The hide is always open and provides great views over the reserve. Try and get on site 1½ hours before local high water when the area comes alive with geese, ducks and waders as the tide rises and the birds are pushed progressively towards the hide area which overlooks all of the inner estuary roost sites.

Check the old watermill remains for Merlin and the surrounding lowlying fields and posts for Buzzard, Hen Harrier and Peregrine. Long lists of rare birds have been seen here. Check the log books in the hide to find out what has been seen most recently. Birds to look for (in season) include Greylag Goose, Pintail, Curlew Sandpiper, Little Egret and Ruff. Rarities have included Pectoral Sandpiper, Terek Sandpiper, Long-billed Dowitcher, American Wigeon, Green-winged Teal, Pink-footed Goose, Barnacle Goose and Glossy Ibis.

1 Rogerstown Lane

This is a pleasant drive down a narrow country lane that is an adventure in itself. The hedges on both sides restrict viewing until one nears the farmhouse near the end of the road: then the wide panorama unfolds over the lowlying fields and entire outer part of Rogerstown Estuary. This is a good viewing point for watching all of the estuarine species. The surrounding farmland should be worked for Skylarks, pipits, thrushes, finches, raptors and Tree Sparrows.

The walk eastwards along the foreshore to **Rogerstown Pier** is very pleasant and brings the visitor close to the estuary mouth where the incoming tide flows hard through the narrows.

Birds to look for (in season) include Red-breasted Merganser, Goldeneye, Knot, Ringed Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit and Little, Sandwich, Common and Arctic Terns. Rarities have included Water Pipit, Red Kite, Crane, Spoonbill.

2 BirdWatch Ireland Reserve, Baleally Lane, Newhaggard

Access is from Baleally Lane, which is the first right turn off the Lusk road (R127) after you leave the NI. There is limited parking at the entrance lane to the

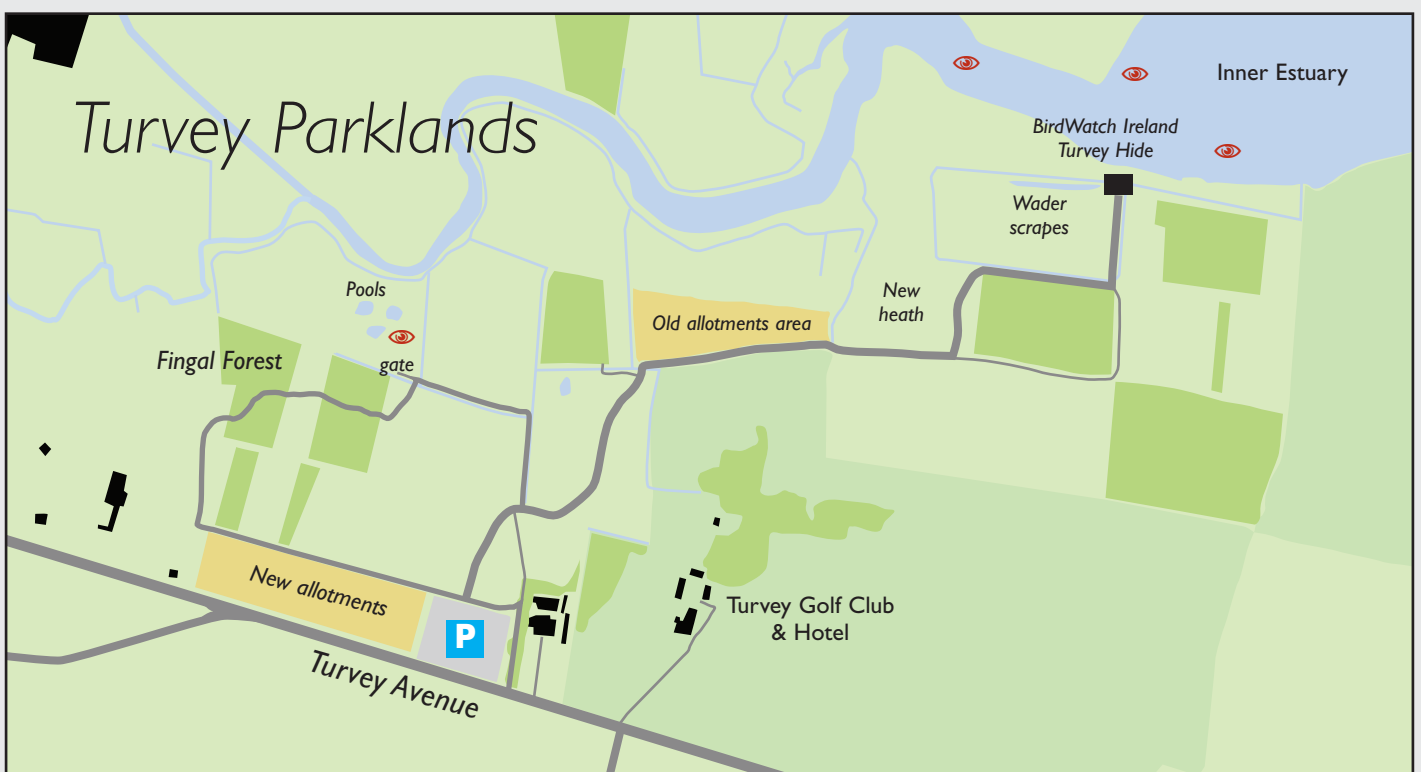
3 Turvey Parklands

Access is from Turvey Avenue: turn into the newly signposted car park. There are several possible routes to follow through the parklands. However, the following suggested route will maximise the visitor's chances of experiencing all that the area has to offer.

At the northern side of the car park turn left and follow the obvious path westwards. This skirts the allotments on one's left and a mixture of open fields and woodland plots to one's right. The area is good for winter thrushes and finches and the views north over the inner estuary can be scanned for Buzzard.

The pathway turns north and drops into the new Fingal Forest, all planted by local volunteer groups and schoolchildren. Several diversions can be made around the stands of woodland and field margins. All the usual woodland birds can be found here and the Silver Birch stands can hold good numbers of Woodcock in winter, with Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler and Blackcap in summer.

If one stays on the main track it eventually emerges close to the upper reaches of the Inner Rogerstown Estuary. Here, a new grazing regime with Kerry Cattle has





Short-eared Owl

opened up the rank vegetation of the fields that border the river. This has allowed Skylark, Meadow Pipit, Reed Bunting, Yellowhammer and Lapwing to breed here in recent years. The gateway on your left opens onto an area of interest where there are new freshwater pools (the old pools are still present, a little further to the west). It is certainly worth a look for Common and Green Sandpipers, in particular.

Once back on the path, follow it as it loops its way generally eastwards past more rough fields and some brackish pools and past several more stands of hardwoods. The pathway crosses a small stream and a sign for the BirdWatch Ireland Turvey Hide indicates the way. On one's left a distinctive group of old Oak trees are a good way-mark and indeed it is worth keeping an eye out here for views of Peregrines, which often perch on them.

The old disused allotment plots on one's left should be checked for Reed Bunting, Brambling, Redpoll, Yellowhammer, Goldfinch and Tree Sparrows. Pass the old allotments and the big fields on one's right are often grazed by Brent Geese as well as being good for winter thrushes including Fieldfare and Redwing.

At the next path junction, go left to follow the side of more mature Silver Birch woodland. Follow the path and enjoy again more views of the Inner Estuary. At the obvious gap look north across the field for a view of the newly-created wader scrapes until at the next path junction turn left again to find the BirdWatch Ireland Turvey Hide. Again check the log books to see what has been seen recently.

If one has timed one's visit well you should be able to see the roosting wildfowl and waders beginning to feed again as the tide drops in the narrows directly in front of the hide. The mudflats of the Inner Estuary gradually become exposed on one's right and can hold thousands of birds. It is a great place to be on a foggy mid-winter's day to hear the evocative calls of Teal, Wigeon, Brent Geese, Golden Plover, Lapwing, Redshank and Curlew. Check the gull flocks for rarities such as Glaucous, Iceland and Yellow-legged Gulls. Other rarities have included Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Lesser Yellowlegs, Spotted Sandpiper and Booted Eagle.

The route taken back to the car park can follow any number of diversions around the more mature copses of Silver Birch, Alder and Larch at the eastern end of the Turvey Parklands. These areas are good for Long-tailed Tit, Bullfinch, Redpoll, Siskin, Sparrowhawk, Long-eared Owl and Woodcock.

All pathways here link up to bring one back westwards towards the car park, again passing the old allotment area.



Snipe
(Colum Clarke)

4 Raheen Point

Access to Raheen Point is via Donabate village: the road eventually peters out to give views northwards across the Outer Estuary and towards the starting point at Rogerstown Lane.

The birds have by now filtered out of the Inner Estuary to feed on the extensive exposed mudflats. This is the time to watch for any missed species. Check both right and left of the point and the open water areas for diving ducks.

The newly planted woodland just south of the point is worth checking for any woodland bird species missed in Turvey. The open fields on one's right often have Greylag Geese or raptors quartering. The gull flocks that utilise the tiphead can be focused on again here.

5 Burrow Point, Portrane

This is a good place to finish the day as the tide should now be rushing through the narrows again, allowing the piping Oystercatchers to work the emerging mussel beds. There is a nice walk around to the seaward side that gives good views towards Lambay Island and Ireland's Eye. Scan the sea for seabird species and divers and the drying sand-banks for Knot, Bar-tailed Godwit, Grey Plover, Sanderling, Ringed Plover or terns in summer. Check also for Wheatear, Stonechat, Skylark and Whitethroat in the sand dunes complex. Cuckoo and Short-eared Owl may be seen here occasionally.

Tower Bay is an alternative place to finish the day. It is reached via Portrane village: bear right along the bay as it opens out before you. There are several pull-in spots where one can stop to scan the sea or sand-flats, depending on the tide. Look for divers and grebes in winter; Knot, Bar-tailed Godwit, Sanderling and Grey Plover also utilise the area. In summer, it is a good feeding site for terns.

At high water, there is an important roost site just north of the Martello Tower that is worth checking. Purple Sandpiper can occur here. Check for Common Scoter offshore, and for Fulmar on the cliffs. You may be lucky enough to see an evening "flighting" of Greylag, Brent Geese or waders heading to roost on Lambay Island on winter evenings.

Turvey Nature Reserve opening times:

January, February: 8am-5pm

March, April, May: 8am-7pm

June, July, August, September: 8am-9pm

October: 8am-7pm

November, December: 8am-5pm

BirdWatch Ireland Turvey Hide opening times:

The hide is manned by volunteers on Saturdays and Sundays, September to March inclusive, from 10am to 4pm.



Kestrel