

Site Guide

by Gerry O'Neill



Castletown River estuary seen from Dundalk docks. Photograph: Gerry O'Neill

Dundalk docks, Co Louth

The Dundalk docks area is accessible by public transport, bicycle or on foot, writes **Gerry O'Neill**

The Dundalk docks area has been my local birdwatching patch for nearly thirty years. It offers a great variety of bird species within easy reach of Dundalk town by **car, bicycle or walking**.

Dundalk Bay holds internationally important numbers of waders every winter. The docks area offers convenient access points for viewing many of these overwintering birds. With such good numbers of birds visiting regularly, it is not surprising that many rare species have been recorded here as well. These, most recently, have included

Ireland's fourth ever record of **Short-billed Dowitcher**, which spent most of its stay between the docks and the Navy Bank. It was found at Rockmarshall, on the north side of Dundalk Bay, on September 17th and was last seen (by the author) on November 11th in the docks area.

This guide will show you where best to view the waterbirds of the estuary, from the Castletown River end down to Soldiers' Point. The Shore Road is also well worth a visit as it is a regular haunt for wintering **Twites**.

The docks area

Access: From the M1 from Dublin, turn off at Junction 16 (for Dundalk South) and follow the N52 past the Crown Plaza Hotel on your left. Continue on through two roundabouts and two sets of traffic lights. Then look out for the sign for the **Spirit Store** and Dundalk docks on your right.

When you enter the docks area turn left and park beside the Spirit Store pub. From here, scan the tidal area to your left and straight out, looking north. The best time to view the birds

here would be two hours before or after high tide when most waders are concentrated on the remaining exposed mudflats.

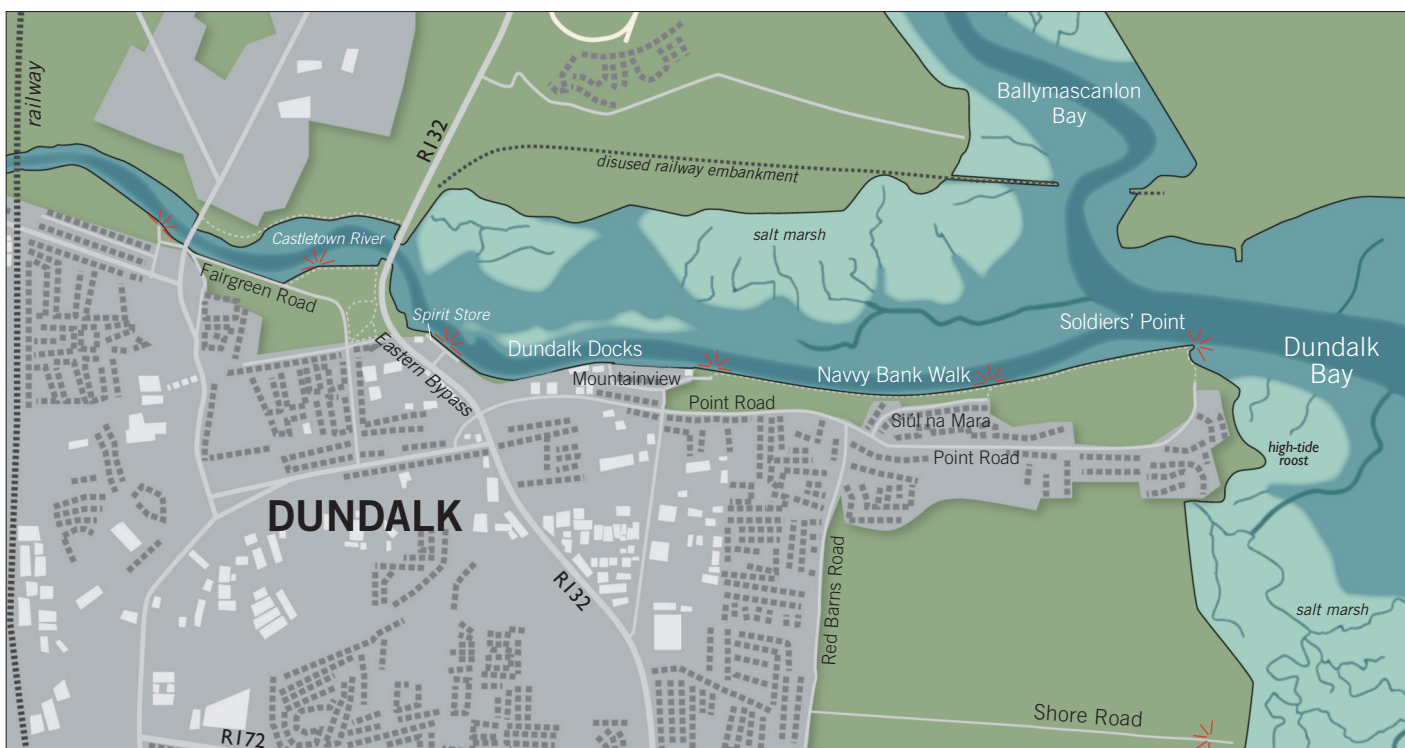
Birds to look out for here include **Teal, Black-tailed Godwit, Oystercatcher, Knot, Dunlin, Lapwing, Greenshank, Redshank, Common Sandpiper** and **Spotted Redshank**. The docks area is one of the most reliable spots for **Spotted Redshank** anywhere in Ireland.

Rare waders seen here have included **Short-billed Dowitcher (two), Long-billed**



Glossy Ibis, Dundalk docks

DON HODGERS



MAP by COLIN MACLOCHLAINN

Dowitcher, Wilson's Phalarope, Temminck's Stint, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Broad-billed Sandpiper and Pectoral Sandpiper. Black Tern, Black Redstart, Little Stint, Kingfisher and Glaucous, Iceland and Ring-billed Gulls are seen regularly (and Kumlien's Gull more rarely). Other interesting species have included Hobby, Marsh Harrier, Pallid Swift and Corn Bunting.

at least one Yellow-legged Gull.

Other scarce or rare birds have included Goosander, Spoonbill, Glossy Ibis, Lesser Yellowlegs, Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint, American Herring Gull, Little Gull and Little Auk.

Navy Bank Walk to Soldiers' Point

Access: From Dundalk docks, exit and turn left at the traffic lights and continue on to Point Road. Just before the football pitches turn left into Mountainview estate and park at the end of the road. From here you can walk along the Navy Bank to Soldiers' Point.

When you pass the football pitches you can also turn left into the the small housing estate Siúl Na Mara and park near the grassy area on the left. Walk onto the Navy Bank and view. Another option is to continue on to the end of Point Road to Soldiers' Point and to park near the houses just beyond the waterworks on your left.



Spotted Redshank, Dundalk docks. **Photograph:** Gerry O'Neill

Iceland, Yellow-legged and Little Gulls, and, on terra firma, Water Pipit, Yellow Wagtail and Twite.

Shore Road

Access: From Soldiers' Point drive back towards Dundalk for half a kilometre and turn left onto Red Barns Road. Continue through the roundabout and turn left onto Shore Road. Drive to the end of the road and park. Check the tall trees and hedges for Twites – this is one of the best sites in Ireland to find these birds in winter. Check the posts out on the saltmarsh for Merlin and Peregrine. Other rarities seen in Shore Road area have included Black Brant and Osprey, while Hen Harrier and White-tailed Eagle have been seen locally ■

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Forster's Tern, Soldiers' Point

Castletown River (upper docks area)

Access: Park at the docks and walk towards the Eastern Bypass bridge, then cross the road and enter the public park on the south side of the river. Follow the riverside path between the two bridges, following Fairgreen Road to the upper bridge.

When you reach the bridge (Dundalk Bridge), check the area upriver from it for interesting gulls. Both areas (above and below Dundalk Bridge) are best watched at low tide. You can return by crossing to the north side of the river (where Mealy Redpoll has been seen) and following the walkway back to the eastern bridge.

The birds found here regularly are much the same as the ones in the docks, though Ruff, Little Egret, Grey Heron and Teal are more common. There are also bigger numbers of Herring Gulls, Black-headed Gulls and Common Gulls. This area has regular wintering Ruffs and in summer holds

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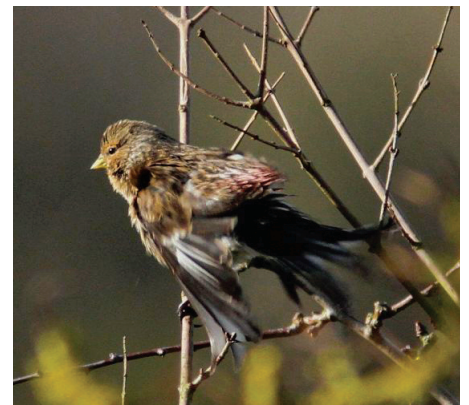
Yellow-legged Gull, Dundalk docks

These areas are all best viewed at low tide or on a rising tide, when large numbers of waders feed in the area during winter.

A Forster's Tern has been a regular visitor here from July to September for a number of years; it is most easily viewed at high tide when it roosts on the posts east of Soldiers' Point.

A great variety of species can be seen in this area, including Great Crested Grebe, Teal, Shelduck, Wigeon, Mallard, Goldeneye, Pintail, Red-breasted Merganser, Light-bellied Brent Goose, Knot, Golden Plover, Greenshank, Turnstone, Lapwing, Grey Plover, Ruff and Curlew, with Sandwich, Common and Arctic Terns in the summer months mainly. On terra firma, you will find Rock Pipit and Stonechat.

Scarce and rare birds seen along here have included the aforementioned Forster's Tern, Short-billed and Long-billed Dowitchers, Garganey, Blue-winged Teal, Great, Arctic, Pomarine and Long-tailed Skuas, European Storm-petrel, Glaucous,



Twite, Shore Road, Dundalk, March 7th, 2018

DICK COOMES

DON HODGERS



Lesser Yellowlegs, Dundalk docks



Short-billed Dowitcher, Dundalk docks, October 24th 2019, the 4th Irish record. **Photo:** Gerry O'Neill