

Where to watch ... in Offaly

Leabeg, Boora, Co Offaly. - Tom Egan (Bord na Móna)

4 Lough Boora

Target species: Grey Partridge, Marsh Harrier, Short-eared Owl

Access: This area of the Lough Boora Parklands is located between Boora village (south of the R357 Blueball-Cloghan Road) and north of Kilcormac (which lies on the N52 Tullamore-Birr Road). A number of car parks and way-marked trails exist on the site, and it is worth collecting site information leaflets from a local tourist office for a detailed map of the site (or see www.loughbooraparklands.com).

Much of the land is privately farmed and, due to the presence of vulnerable ground-nesting birds in the area (especially Grey Partridge and waders such as Lapwing and Ringed Plover), it is essential that visitors stick to the ample network of paths, trails and tracks in the area. Also, dogs should not be taken into the core partridge conservation areas.

Habitats: Boora comprises several small, freshwater lakes interspersed with areas of private farmland and forestry plantations. The wetlands and amenity areas are principally managed by Bord na Móna, through a collaborative community partnership (The Lough Boora Parklands Group). The National Grey Partridge Conservation Project (a joint venture between the National Association of Regional Game Councils and the Irish Grey Partridge Conservation Trust) is funded by the National Parks and Wildlife Service and managed by The National Grey Partridge Conservation Project Ltd (www.greypartridge.ie).

Birds: Boora is the location of the only remaining population of Irish Grey Partridge. The small areas of tillage (provided especially for the Grey Partridge to rear and feed chicks in) between Tumduff Beag and Finnermores, especially the Marl Square area, are the best spots to look or listen for these and other birds that take advantage of the habitat, such as Merlin and breeding Lapwings.

Spring and early summer is a good time to visit, with breeding Lapwing, Little Grebe and a colony of Black-headed Gulls at Tumduff Beag. Tumduff Mór and the Marl Square have had summering Marsh Harrier, Short-eared Owl and Quail in recent years.

Across the road from Tumduff Beag is Boora Lake, which can be good for passage waders in spring (Red-necked Phalaropes were recorded here in both 2007 and 2008) and autumn (typically Ringed Plover and Common Sandpiper, interspersed with the occasional Ruff or Greenshank).

During winter there are regularly over 100 Whooper Swans around the site, with huge flocks of 1,000+ Lapwing and Golden Plover and smaller flocks (50+) of Curlew also present.

The Grey Partridge tillage plots are also worth checking for wintering seed-eating flocks, dominated by Linnet, Lesser Redpoll, Chaffinch, Greenfinch and Goldfinch, but with the occasional Stock Dove or Brambling. Hen Harrier are seen regularly during the winter.



Grey Partridge (male)

Alex Copland

5 Slieve Bloom

Target species: Hen Harrier, Red Grouse, Dipper, Woodcock

Access: Situated on the Laois/Offaly border, access is easiest from the Laois side via Mountrath, or via Kinnity on the Offaly side, taking either the R440 Mountrath-Kinnity Road over the Wolftrap or going through the Glendine Gap. Check out www.slievebloom.ie for more information on access in the area.

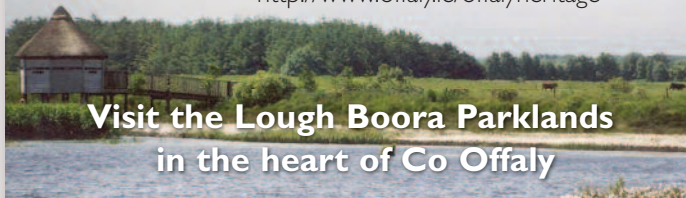
Habitats: A mixture of open heather moorland on the hilltops with conifer plantations on the slopes and some mixed woodlands in sheltered valleys and on lower ground.

Birds: Worth a visit at any time of year for the excellent, self-guided trails and wonderful scenery over the low-lying Midlands. Bird interest is at its highest in summer when there is a chance of seeing Hen Harriers or hearing Red Grouse (both of which breed in the area). At dusk, a wander along some of the roads within mature forestry plantings can yield roding Woodcock. Many of the self-guided trails follow streams and rivers, such as the Silver River at Cadamstown or the Camcor near Kinnity. Jays can be seen in some of the mixed woodland in these sheltered valleys, Crossbills in the forestry and Dippers are regular on the fast-flowing watercourses.



Offaly County Council is pleased to work with BirdWatch Ireland and appreciates their contribution towards the biodiversity of Co Offaly.

For details on heritage in Offaly and on the Offaly Naturalists' Field Club, see <http://www.offaly.ie/offalyheritage>



Visit the Lough Boora Parklands
in the heart of Co Offaly

Short-eared Owl



Alex Copland