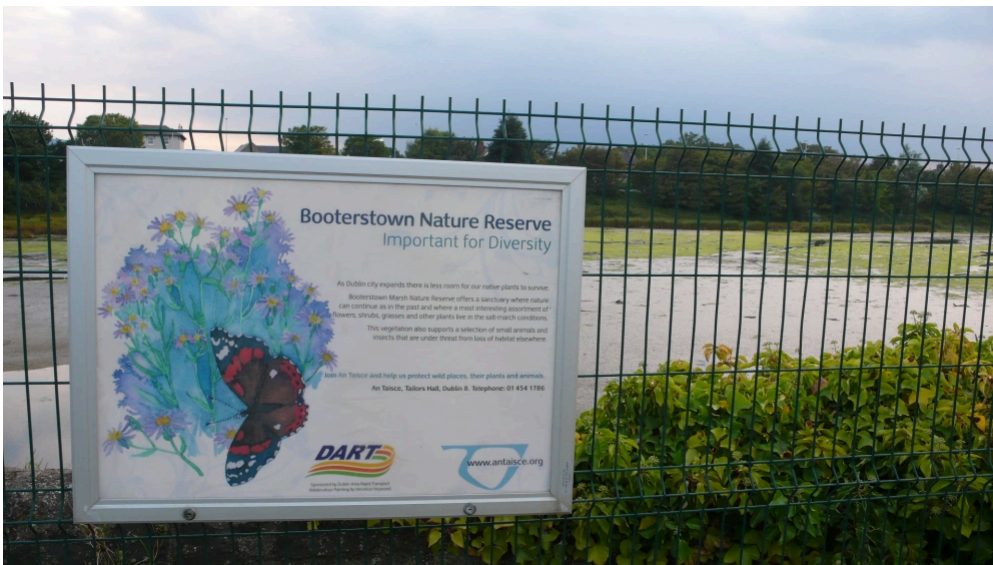


Prof. Jeff Ollerton – ecological scientist and author

Is Booterstown Marsh the best small urban nature reserve in Europe?



On a recent visit to Dublin, where I'm External Examiner for some courses at UCD, my host **Dr Jan-Robert Baars** took me on a short early evening excursion south of the city to **Booterstown Marsh**. What a great little nature reserve it is! It's tiny (only 4.3 ha) and is boxed in by urban development on all four sides. To the north there are buildings; to the east runs a busy main road and housing; on the southern side is a car park and the entrance to Booterstown train station, with the railway line completing the rectangle of infrastructure to the east. Beyond that is a beach and the open water of Dublin Bay.

The reserve is largely saltmarsh, fringed with trees, with a freshwater stream coming in from the north (visible in the bottom right corner below).



As the tide turns, seawater rapidly ebbs and flows from the reserve, bringing with it food particles and nutrients for the plants and invertebrates of the marsh. The next photograph was taken only a few minutes after the previous one.



If you click on these photographs above to maximise their size you can see something of what makes this reserve so special – the bird life that is supported by those plants and invertebrates. The very abundant dark birds are **Black-tailed godwits**, the white ones are **Black-headed gulls**. During our visit, which lasted less than an hour, we saw a total of 12 species including other wading birds such as Dunlin, Oystercatcher, Little egret, Grey heron, and Redshank. These are birds that one often sees from a distance, foraging on lake margins or mudflats. But here they are just a few metres from a busy railway line which funnels commuters to and from the city every day.



Whether by accident or design the open-ended station bridge makes a great viewing platform; here you can see Grey heron and Little egret.



At its eastern side the bridge looks over Dublin Bay and provides further birding opportunities.





If you have the opportunity to visit Booterstown Marsh (and I strongly recommend it) [there's a useful guide](#) produced by the Irish Wildlife Trust. This urban nature reserve is one of the most interesting I've ever visited, because it affords the opportunity to get very close to a diverse assemblage of birds that are not normally so confiding. Clearly these birds feel secure despite the rumbling traffic and the dashing trains. I almost envy the local commuters!

If you think you know of a more interesting small urban nature reserve I'd be interested to hear about it – feel free to comment below.



My thanks to Jan (pictured below on the bridge) for introducing me to this wonderful site. The final list of birds that we saw on the reserve was: Black-tailed godwit, Dunlin, Grey heron, Little egret, an unidentified duck, Black-headed gull, Redshank, Oystercatcher, Woodpigeon, Moorhen, Mute swan, Jackdaw. On the Dublin Bay side we also spotted Pied wagtail and (from a distance) a Curlew.



This entry was posted in Biodiversity, Birds, Urban biodiversity and tagged Birding, Ireland, Nature, Science, Urban ecology on September 8, 2014 [<https://jeffollerton.co.uk/2014/09/08/is-booterstown-marsh-the-best-small-urban-nature-reserve-in-europe/>].

4 thoughts on “Is Booterstown Marsh the best small urban nature reserve in Europe?”



collectireland

July 27, 2017 at 9:45 am

Booterstown Marsh is a dump today – mismanaged by An Taisce for decades and I can't believe your post.



jeffollerton

Post author

July 27, 2017 at 11:36 pm

Well I did write it almost 3 years ago....



collectireland

July 30, 2017 at 7:46 pm

I appreciate that, but it has been derelict for decades and certainly was at the time of your visit.



jeffollerton

Post author

July 31, 2017 at 1:35 am

I'm not sure what you mean by "derelict"; it's an area of salt marsh and mud flat, and functions as such: the tide comes in and goes out twice a day, and there must be plenty of food in the form of invertebrates to attract so many birds. No doubt it has some urban pollution problems (all urban nature reserves do) but I saw no evidence that it was derelict.
