

All in a Day's Work

Brian Caffery – Bird Atlas Co-ordinator

Brian Caffery works for BirdWatch Ireland, a voluntary organisation that helps to protect Ireland's wild birds and their habitats. He is also Co-ordinator of the Bird Atlas project 2007-2011.



Where do you work?

I work for BirdWatch Ireland in Banagher Co. Offaly.

What type of work do you do?

I work on a project called the Bird Atlas (*see page 3*). With the help of thousands of volunteers we do a huge survey across every part of Britain and Ireland to map the locations of every single species of bird. At the end of the survey we can use the maps to tell which bird species are doing well and those that are declining in number.

Have you always been interested in what you do?

For as long as I can remember I have been fascinated by wildlife and in particular birds. I remember getting a pair of 'proper' binoculars and a bird book for my 10th birthday, one of the best presents I ever got!

What training did you do to get where you are today?

I went to University in Wales, where I completed a diploma in Countryside Conservation before moving to The University of Gloucestershire in Cheltenham to do a degree in Environmental Management. I also did some voluntary work along the way, working as a nature warden for The National Trust on Lough Erne in Co. Fermanagh.

What is the best thing about your job?

The best part of working on the Bird Atlas is knowing that the bird survey work we are doing will provide us with the information needed to help protect Ireland's birds in the future. Many of our bird species like the Cuckoo, Barn Owl and Curlew are declining, so it is really important that we keep a check on their numbers so that we can help to protect them.

I also love getting out of the office every now and again to do some fieldwork; whether it is up in the hills looking for Hen Harriers, along the River Shannon counting wetland

birds or on the coast recording seabirds, it's great to be out counting birds.

What equipment do you use?

When I am out doing fieldwork I always carry my binoculars. Sometimes I also use a telescope to help count birds that are difficult to get close to, on lakes or out to sea. I always have a map to help find my way around and a GPS can also be handy for when I get lost.

Where does your work take you?

The Bird Atlas takes me all over Ireland. Over the last few years working on the project I have visited every county in Ireland meeting the local volunteers who carry out the survey work. It's fantastic to work in a job that takes you to such wonderful places and to meet such interesting people.

What advice would you give someone wanting to do your job?

The first thing to do is learn more about birds. If you don't already have a bird book – put it on your wish list. A pair of binoculars is also very useful. They will help you to get closer to the birds. Every time you see a new species, look it up in the book and identify it. Before you know it you will be an expert

birdwatcher, able to identify every bird that you see! It would also be good to get involved in some bird survey work. BirdWatch Ireland has some great surveys, such as Spring Alive www.springalive.net. Taking part in these surveys is great fun and will help you learn more about birds.



Photo courtesy of Steve Kneel rspb-images.com



Photo courtesy of Laurie Campbell rspb-images.com

Top right: The Puffin - many of Ireland's seabirds like the Puffin are declining.

Bottom right: Curlew chick - the Curlew is now one of Ireland's most endangered bird species.

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