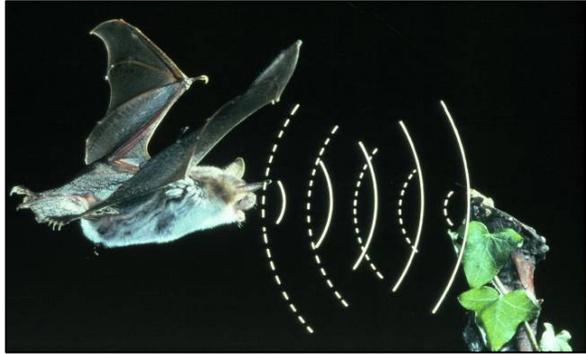


Bats: Bats are mammals (just like us) i.e. they are covered in fur (some of us still are), are warm blooded and give birth to and suckle their live young. We have ten species confirmed in Ireland.

All Irish bats are listed under Annex IV of the Habitats Directive as species requiring strict protection. They are also protected under the Irish Wildlife Act 1976 and Amendment 2000. Any action that is likely to have an impact on bats or their roost sites must be notified to NPWS. After a site inspection advice will be given as to if, how and when the proposed action is appropriate. It is an offence to intentionally kill, handle or disturb a bat or its roost site without a licence.



They are insectivorous (feed on insects) and use echo-location to find their prey. They send out short high-frequency pulses and the echoes that bounce off the obstacles in their path gives them an acoustic image of its environment. They can eat up to 3,000 midges a night.

They rely heavily on old and new buildings for roosting. If you are privileged and they share your home (some tolerance and goodwill is a must), lets clear up some old wives tales once and for all. They are not aggressive, nor are they blind, they do not fly into your hair and they cause no structural damage.

All of our species are small, fitting into the palm of your hand. One young is born in late June and reared by its mother. In the winter months, they hibernate in cooler places like caves, bridges, tree holes or crevices in stone outbuildings.

You can help conserve bats by informing your local ranger about bats in your area, placing bat boxes around to provide them with additional roost sites, maintain hedgerows, wetlands and woods (feeding sites) or re-establishing them.

If you plan to do any roofing repairs or alterations in a building that has a bat roost please contact NPWS. Usually it's just a case of timing the work so that breeding or winter roosts are not disturbed. Certain timber treatments are toxic to bats. Again a little thought into product type and timing of its use can make a huge difference.



Bat Conservation Ireland is a group set up to help conserve bats. They run training courses in the use of bat detectors, run evening bat walks and talks etc. They can be contacted at www.batconservationireland.org or by phoning 01-8011474.

A Daubenton Bat Survey is to take place this autumn in the National Park and contributions to the National Bat Atlas survey would be appreciated (if you know of any roost sites etc). Contact Conservation Ranger Nicola Carroll at the Lagduff office.



Comhshaol, Oidhreacht agus Rialtas Áitiúil
Environment, Heritage and Local Government

Ballycroy National Park

**National Parks &
Wildlife Service**

Lagduff Office: 098 49996

Newsletter June 2008 – Issue 3

National Park Visitor Centre update:

The Ballycroy National Park (BCNP) visitor centre construction is near completion. For those of you who don't pass by it often the picture below shows the stage it's at. We would like to thank everybody who sent in ideas, artefacts etc for inclusion in the centre and who attended the stakeholders' presentation with Wildfowl and Wetland Trust Consulting (WWTC) in the National Parks Office at Lagduff in February for their input.



What's happening in the National Park and Owenduff/Nepin SPA?

* The Red Grouse (*Lagopus lagopus hibernicus*) survey has finished for the year. In total eight x 1km squares were surveyed in the Owenduff/Nepin Special Protection Area (SPA). Of the eight squares, four had sightings/signs of Grouse. The Irish birds are paler than their Scottish relatives and this may be an adaptation to their mostly grass and sedge dominated heather habitats.

Nests are usually a shallow scrape on the ground. On average 6-9 eggs are laid and incubation is between 19-25 days. The chicks are mobile and feeding themselves within hours. A mixture of ages of heather ensures the best quality habitat for the Grouse family. Tall heather is needed for nesting and sheltering the chicks and younger shoots for feeding.

So keep an eye out for this elusive bird and its offspring when you are out and about on the hills. It's certainly an experience when they explode into flight at your feet.

* The Bird Atlas 2007-11 survey continues into the breeding season. The winter survey threw up some interesting sightings from a flock of snow-buntings to wrens living in some of the most isolated areas of the mountains. If you would like to take part you still can, by signing up with Birdwatch Ireland (BWI) on www.birdatlas.net or call BWI on 057-9151676. It's a great way to get out and about and visit some of those beautiful areas in the region.

* Conservation Ranger, Cameron Clotworthy is currently undertaking a part time PhD, funded by National Parks and Wildlife (NPWS), studying breeding Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*) in the Owenduff/Nephin SPA. These birds are commonly seen feeding in large flocks on the coast of Mayo in the winter having travelled from Iceland. They return in the spring to breed but some breed on the bog and upland areas here. 3-4 eggs are laid in a nest or scrape on the ground and are incubated for approx 28 days. The chicks become mobile within 24hrs and feed themselves on small insects while the parents look out for them.

They are listed as an Annex I species on the European Birds Directive. They are one of the qualifying interests for which the SPA has been designated. Part of the research this year is to look at the extent of habitat used by the chicks for feeding. Radio tracking is used (under licence). This will help us to understand how far the chicks move from their nest site and the habitats which are important to them for feeding on.

* There is a study going on into the *Carabus clatratus* beetle in the SPA. This large (22-28mm) metallic bronze/green ground insect can feed underwater and prefers water logged soils.



Its status is described as in decline in Western Europe (thought to be extinct in the UK). In Ireland it was formerly widespread on undisturbed blanket bogs but now it's very local. It is here in the SPA and this study will help establish its distribution range.

* The 13th International Peatlands Congress takes place this year in Co Offaly. It runs from the 8th-13th June. Many items are up for discussion including the use of peat as energy, its use in horticulture, forestry on peatlands and the after use of cutover and disturbed bog. Delegates from around the world are attending and they are taking a field trip to Ballycroy National Park and other bogs in Co Mayo during their conference.

* It is planned to improve the waymarking (trail signage) along the Bangor trail. This work will be done in partnership between Mayo County Council, the Rural Social Scheme and BCNP. The Trail has fallen into disrepair in recent years and is not insured in its present condition. Interim insurance will be put in place once the waymark work begins.

A reminder: The nesting/breeding season is in full swing at the moment. During this time, (1st March-31st August), it is advised not to cut, grub, burn or destroy hedgerows, scrub or margin vegetation.

Birds do a great public relations job for wildlife, everyone loves to hear and see them. A hedgerow provides an important habitat for wildlife of all kinds, so have a heart and think before you go "tidying" around the garden/farm.

Flora: Throughout the bog food availability is in short supply. This is because the acidity discourages the microscopic bacteria and fungi that would normally make nutrients for plants to use. But the bog plants have evolved a number of strategies for coping with this.



The insectivore sundews (*Drosera sp*) are plants well suited to life on the nutrient poor bog (picture on the left). On its leaves are long glands each with a blob of sticky mucilage. Insects get caught on the leaves, the hairs curl inwards trapping the insect and it is dissolved by digestive juices from the glands. The plant then uses the nitrogen compounds for growth.

In ancient times sundews were used by Celtic tribes to dye their hair. The leaves were boiled with ass's milk as a cure for whooping cough and asthma.

of obtaining nutrients is used by the lousewort (*Pedicularis sylvatica*). It is a parasite. In order to set seed its roots onto the host, usually heathers and nutrients. The flowers were used in Scotland to cosmetics. The dry seeds rattle in their pods when in the wind hence the nick name "red



Another strategy
hemi-connect
extracts
make
shaken rattle".

Did you know?

Lichens - this species of plant is found growing everywhere we look, from gravestones, trees, roofs etc. Lichens are actually an algae and a fungi combined. The algal part contains chlorophyll and so is able to make food (photosynthesis, you remember this from school, the process of making sugar from carbon dioxide and water vapour in the atmosphere using sunlight as energy). The fungal part is the distribution system, the railway track so to speak.

Lichens are excellent biological indicators. Their presence or absence on the tree trunks of an area depends on the air quality. They have no roots, they absorb all they need from the air and rain. If the air is good quality they will grow in abundance. But if there are pollutants in the air they will absorb them and die.