



Their white cross-like flowers are pale enough to be visible at dusk and emit their strongest vanilla like scent in the dark to attract moths. 48% of this flowers Irish historical range has been lost and it was last documented in west Mayo pre 1970 (Harrap, 2005).

So take your time as you stroll past the road verges/ hedgerows. There's always something beautiful to see, you just have to take time to look. They're not just full of "weeds", these plants are our native wildflowers. Hedgerows are an ancient and beautiful feature of our landscape. Enjoy.

Fauna:

Otters (*Lutra lutra*): Ireland is considered to hold one of the most important otter populations remaining in Western Europe. The otter is listed on the Annex II and Annex IV of the EU Habitats Directive and Appendix II of the Bern Convention '79. It is Red data book listed as Vulnerable and fully protected by the Irish Wildlife Acts '76 and 2000.

In a national survey carried out in 2004-05 (Bailey, M & Rochford, J), six sites in the Owenduff/Nepin SAC were surveyed (looking for signs of otter presence or absence), five of which had signs of otter.

Otters normally feed and travel by night, only betraying their presence to us by the smears of their shiny black faeces (spraints). This has a sweetish musky scent and usually deposited on prominent areas like on a stone or drainage pipes to mark their territory. They have webbed five-toed paws and their prints can be seen sometimes in the mud along the river bank. They have a varied diet, from eels, fish, shrimp and beetles. They are biological indicators of good water quality. They are playful animals and can be seen weaving in and under and round each other as they swim. They convey a sense of exuberance and enjoyment of life.

Did you know?

Have you ever come across a frothy sud like material on the grass or twigs in June?

Commonly known as cuckoos spit, this is in fact produced by the nymph (infant) of an insect called the frog hopper, known so because of its leaping ability. You can make it hop if it lands on you by gently nudging it with your finger tip. The young insect blows air into a liquid it exudes from its anus, to prevent it from drying out and gives it some protection from predators.

There you go, weird but wonderful.



If you would like to be included in the next newsletter's mailing list please contact the Lagduff office (098) 49996.



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

Ballycroy National Park

**National Parks &
Wildlife Service**

Lagduff Office: 098 49996

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National Park Visitor Centre update:

The BCNP visitor centre construction is near completion. The next step is for the interpretation exhibition to be built and installed. This contract has been awarded to Cod Steaks Ltd (they were the set makers for Wallace & Gromit: The curse of the Were Rabbit). The proposal for the layout and content looks great and we look forward to opening the Visitor Centre to the public next Spring.



Looking East over the bog from Scardaun towards Corslieve and Tawnyanruiddia.

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

- The Bird Atlas 2007-11 survey, co-ordinated by Bird Watch Ireland (BWI), is currently out for a summer break (where's the sun?) but will be starting up again this November with the winter records. This survey aims to provide maps of all bird species breeding and wintering in Ireland and the UK.

In Mayo 38 tetrads (2km x 2km square) were surveyed during the winter and summer breeding season last year. So far Mayo has about 90% species coverage. Great result for everybody involved and most importantly, the birds.

If you wish to take part by visiting a square twice during a season or by submitting your casual sightings, you can call BWI on 057-9151676 or go on their website www.birdatlas.net

- Quad bike markings have been noted in the NP and are having a negative impact on the land. This activity requires a permit from NPWS, please contact the office for further information. The tracks are being monitored and recorded closely.
- We hope to commence Rhododendron clearance on some NPWS lands this winter. Good Farming Practice includes the control of invasive species. If you are in REPS this could be included in your plan. However it is a laborious task and needs commitment.

If land is in a designated area a “Notifiable Action” application to NPWS is required. If you would like to know more about the best practice guidelines for this work you can go onto the NPWS website and visit the Killarney National Park section. This gives tried and tested methods and pro’s and con’s of each. Alternatively contact Conservation Ranger Nicola Carroll at the Lagduff office.

- The Batlas survey 2007-2010 has commenced in the area. Many thanks to those who informed us where they have seen these fascinating mammals. For the survey a 10km square is monitored and a list of species (we have ten in Ireland) heard (using a bat detector) are recorded. This hopes to show the distribution of bats in Ireland as presently there are loads of places where bats have never officially been recorded and documented, BCNP included. So once again if you would like to assist and know of bat roost or feeding sites, do get in touch.

The midges sometimes can be a nuisance but just think that one bat can eat up to 3000 a night. They deserve our gratitude don’t you think?

- The Hen Harrier is quite a rare medium sized bird of prey found in upland areas in the spring and summer and lowland and coastal areas in the winter. They are slightly bigger than a grey crow, the female has dark brown upperparts and broadly streaked under parts. The male has striking grey-blue plumage with black wing tips. Both sexes have a white patch on the rump.



Photo copyright: Barry O’Donoghue

They gather at communal roosts in the winter evenings. There is only one known roost site in this part of Mayo but we are certain there has to be more. We are assisting in the National Hen Harrier survey and ask members of the public to help out and inform us of any sightings of these birds, which may help identify further roosts. There will be more information in the next newsletter.

- Just a reminder that the first period for the off wintering season of stock on the Owenduff/Nepin SPA starts again on the 1st of November – 31st of December. Aerial and ground monitoring will continue during this time. The second period is from 14th February - 13th May.
- Seeds from the flower purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) have been collected in the area and sent to the Society of Wetland Scientists in the Czech Republic. This species is causing controversy regarding its “outbreak” in North America. The genetic origin of the species in North America will be compared to that of the flowers collected in Ireland and will assist in the understanding of its invasiveness there.

Flora:



Marsh Saxifrage, *Saxifraga hirculus*, is one of the rarest flowering plants in Ireland. We are privileged to have it growing in the area in mineral flushes, where there is an up-welling of nutrients to the surface.

It is listed in Annex II of the EU Habitats Directive and is listed as endangered in the Red Data Book. It is also protected under the Flora Protection Order 1999. In the case of all protected plants it is illegal to cut, uproot or damage these or their habitat in any way.

There are only eight known populations of this flower in the Republic of Ireland and all are located in Co Mayo. It is a beautiful flower with bright yellow petals with red spots at the base. It flowers from July to September and adds a splash of colour to the bog. The

decline of this species is believed to be due to the drainage and exploitation of its peatland habitat.

Orchids, you couldn’t help but notice them in bloom this year. They looked fantastic. We have 27 species of orchid in Ireland. Their stunning flowers are not there just to delight us but to attract suitable pollinators. Bright colours and heavenly scents advertise their presence and the lip of the flower provides a convenient landing platform for insects.

Orchids have an extraordinary life-cycle. Orchid seeds are some of the smallest known. They are dependent on the nutrients that it obtains with the help of fungi. The fungi get carbohydrates from organic matter in the soil and this is transferred to the seed.

On one of the road verges in the area this year the beautiful Lesser butterfly orchid (*Platanthera bifolia*) was found. In recent years a lot of our hay meadows have been lost or harvesting practice intensified, so road verges are often some of the only places where unimproved grassland can be found which is ideal for wild flowers.