

The name “viviparous” comes from the fact it appears to give birth to live young, as opposed to eggs like most other reptiles. The young lizards do however develop within an egg membrane inside the female body, break out of the egg while still inside and emerge as free living young. This is thought to be an adaptation to life in the colder regions of Europe as *Lacerta* populations in warmer areas like South France do lay eggs. If you see this Lizard while you’re out and about, please do let us know here at the Lagduff office.

### **Flora:**

Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*) is a low growing deciduous shrub, commonly seen higher up on the dryer mountain slopes on the SPA. It has bright green leaves found on 3-angled stems and pinkish flowers in April-June that ripen to edible purplish fruits in the autumn.

This dwarf shrub can also be found in woodlands but is taller there as the high winds up the mountains could snap tall stems and uproot the plants. Consequently most plants up the mountains don’t push their heads up more than a few inches above the ground.

Bilberries, or fraughans, have been valued as a tasty and nutritious food source since the earliest of times.



### **Did you know?**

Being stung by a nettle can be quite painful because the sting contains an acid. The old saying that rubbing a dock leaf on the sting to ease the pain could be true because dock leaves contain an alkali that will neutralise the acid and therefore reduce the stinging effect.

However a dock leaf is useless against wasp stings because they also contain an alkali. If this theory is to be used, vinegar (an acid) can be used to neutralise the sting.

### **For your information.**

Red clover, common nettle, sorrel, stitchwort, vetch, birdsfoot trefoil, slender St John’s wort, cow parsley, cowslip, knapweed, bog pimpernel, white clover, yellow flag iris, yellowrattle, daisy, ragged robin, dandelion, fairy flax, buttercups, eyebright, plantain, orchids, ferns, cuckoo flower, grasses.

Sounds like a meadow in a fairy tale but these are some of the wildflowers currently in full bloom on the road verges and undisturbed fields in the local area. Enjoy.

Just a reminder that past issues of the BCNP Newsletter can be seen and downloaded from our website, [www.ballycroynationalpark.ie](http://www.ballycroynationalpark.ie). You can contact the Lagduff office to put your name on the mailing list for future issues too.



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

## **Ballycroy National Park**

**National Parks &  
Wildlife Service**

Lagduff Office: 098 49996

### **Newsletter July 2009 – Issue 6**

#### **National Park Visitor Centre update:**

The interpretive displays in the visitor centre have been installed. Some final tuning has to be completed but so far it looks great.

The paths around the centre are near completion. Given that the main body of the National Park (NP) is difficult to access, this path will enable visitors a chance to experience the type of habitat found along a 2 km walkway close to the centre. It is also wheelchair accessible.

It is all coming together splendidly and we hope visitors will be informed, educated and impressed by their visit to the NP.

The centre will be open to visitors shortly. A date for the official opening has yet to be confirmed.



#### **What’s happening in the National Park and Owenduff/Nepin SPA?**

- The closed period for stock grazing on the Owenduff/Nepin Special Protection Area (SPA) has come to an end for another year. This was the third year of this five year initiative to assist with vegetation regeneration of the damaged habitats within the SPA.

Field staff monitoring the area noted the majority of stock owners who graze the SPA were compliant with the agreement.

- The *Carabus clatratus* beetle survey that took place in the SPA last year (see issue 3) has been extended to a two year national study (the first national endomological survey in the Republic of Ireland) to try to gain a better understanding of the ecology of this important species.

Internationally this ground beetle is considered rare, with some of the largest populations found in Ireland. It is found here on the SPA and likes water logged soils.

Early data from the study on the SPA indicates that this beetle has been found on most sites surveyed but tended to avoid conifer plantations.

Dr Christopher Williams, NUIG, has been overseeing this project and we would like to take this opportunity to thank him. More information on ground beetles can be found at [www.habitas.org.uk/groundbeetles](http://www.habitas.org.uk/groundbeetles).

- A recent fire in the BCNP at Muingnahalloona, covering 5 hectares of bog, was reported on the 20<sup>th</sup> April. The dry undergrowth of this vegetation can burn fiercely especially if driven by a light wind resulting in loss of and damage to habitat. The fire destroyed the vegetation which was potential nesting ground for the protected Red Grouse (droppings were located in the fire damaged area), Golden Plover and other birds like the Meadow Pipits and Skylarks. Invertebrates were found scorched and the fire came close to a forestry plantation in the area. Local volunteers and two units of the Fire Brigade extinguished the fire before it got too far out of control. We would like to extend our sincere thanks to all involved. It is illegal under the Wildlife Act to burn vegetation during the bird nesting season (1<sup>st</sup> March-31<sup>st</sup> August). It is also an offence to start a fire within a mile of established forestry. Please remain vigilant to fires in the area and report them immediately to the Gardai.
- This is your last chance to get your records in and counted on the butterflies in your area for the 2005-2009 Atlas survey. This area of Mayo is poorly recorded and

[www.butterflyireland.com](http://www.butterflyireland.com) would appreciate it if we all made an effort to send in reports of butterflies seen. The rare Marsh fritillary butterfly has been recorded on a new site in the National Park. This species is Ireland's only butterfly listed as Annex II under the EU Habitats Directive and it and its habitat is awarded full protection.



Butterflies are not only beautiful to watch, they (and their larvae) are an important food source for other animals, they are important pollinators and are considered an ideal biodiversity indicator. Contact the Lagduff office for more details.

- Several large Red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) have been seen grazing on numerous occasions around the SPA this winter. The stags lose their antlers every year in early spring, so keep an eye out for them on the bog, forestry plantations etc. Deer were released illegally into the area in the past and have now increased in numbers and have spread. They can cause damage to young forestry and crops. You can contact the Lagduff office for advice if you have any concerns about this.
- The Breeding season transects of the Birdatlas 2007-2011 survey continues for the second year (see past issues for details). Eight tetrads are been covered in the SPA by NPWS field staff this summer. Have you joined up yet? If so, hopefully you are enjoying it and if we can be of any assistance please don't hesitate to call. If not, you are missing out on the opportunity to get the local bird population recorded and listed for this Irish/English survey. We all have a part to play in this important survey and who knows, according to the records there might not even be a robin listed in your area!!!!

### Fauna:

You may be surprised to hear that we have a native Lizard living here in Ireland. The Common lizard (*Lacerta vivipara*) is our only indigenous reptile species (it's in the same Class as snakes, turtles and crocodiles). It is about 6-7 inches in length and varies in colour but usually its brownish-grey with patterns and dark lines running down its scaly skin and its underside is whitish or reddish. It has short stumpy legs and a long tail.



It is mostly seen scurrying from open patches on the ground to the cover of long grass or rocks. They rely on external heat to regulate their body heat. They can't generate their own heat. Hence the best time to see them is early morning when they're basking on boulders and logs to soak up the sun. They need to warm up before they can start their day and are sluggish before they reach approximately 30°C. And if they get too hot, they head for shade. Because they rely on the sun's heat to remain active, they hibernate through

the Irish winter.

They feed on insects and spiders and can be found on a variety of habitats from bogs, meadows, sand dunes to name but a few.

They can and do shed their tail if grabbed by a predator. By this I mean if a bird catches it by the tail, it will break off its own tail and scurry away, leaving the bird with a wriggling tail in its beak. It can re-grow another tail later.