

# Your Burren National Park Newsletter | Spring 2021

Welcome to the first edition of our Newsletter



The Burren National Park is open and with Spring progressing there is lots to see. Buds are swelling, flowers are blooming, birds are singing and bees are humming.

Here are some more Spring flowers you may see on your travels. Can you name them? (answers in next month's newsletter)



Our featured flower this month is the Cowslip. In flower now, it is a native perennial of grassland and meadows. The flowers are drooping and typically on each stem, which rise from a rosette of wrinkled toothed leaves, you will find many flowers in a head. At the base of each petal tube is nectar, sought by bees and moths. The perfumed flowers can be used to make a good wine. The nodding flowers are said to look like a set of keys. The Cowslip has been used to treat ailments including insomnia





There are five walks in the Park and all start at the trailhead in Gortlecka. Today we are going to highlight the Orange Trail. This trail is a looped walk 1.3km long. It is generally level and you will walk through hay meadow, mature ash and hazel woodland and alongside the turlough (more about that below). The walk will take about 40 minutes and is suitable for all ages. Just follow the marker posts. Relax and enjoy.

The turlough, Knockaunroe, beside the southern stretch of the Orange Trail, is a seasonal lake, and after the winter precipitation, was at a high level. Today, after the warm dry spell one of the turlough basin beds is dry and clearly visible. Typically, the turlough is submerged for 7 months and it takes 50 days or longer to empty. The turlough area is 79 hectares, it has multiple basins, and its catchment is over 350 hectares. The water is crystal clear and exceptionally clean which is typical of a limestone lake. The lakebed is covered in marl, a white lime rich mud of calcium carbonate and clay. The calcium carbonate, a white mineral (calcite) found in limestone, stains the vegetation around the turlough white. Keep an eye out for herons, hares, frogs, spiders and brimstone butterflies.



Plants are starting to burst with blossom and new green leaves are emerging. One shrubby tree, the Blackthorn, is blossoming now. It is unusual in that the creamy white blossom appears before the leaves. This way the tree is in flower when other species are not, and it has the pollinators to itself. Blackthorn can be confused with Hawthorn, both have five petalled similar looking flowers. The Hawthorn is also known as the May tree, as its flowers blossom in May, after the leaves. Both have thorns on the twigs. The Blackthorn thorns tend to be bigger. Later in the growing season the Blackthorn will produce the familiar distinctive blue-black sloes, used to flavour gin and can be made into jam. The Hawthorn berries or haws are red and fleshy and are an excellent source of vitamin C. Blackthorn wood can be used to make the shillelagh, a wooden walking stick, in Ireland.



## Watch This Space For Future Events

We Are Working On a Programme of Walks, Talks, Events and Other Activities



One pollinator recently seen in the Park, is the Buff-tailed Bumblebee. Here is a picture of the bee seeking nectar from a dandelion. The queens emerge from February and workers (females) a few weeks later. The males appear in midsummer. Bumblebee colonies are usually up to 200 bees in size. Worker bumblebees prefer to forage up to 500m from the nest. Bees use their tongues to get the nectar. To reach the nectar they can use their weight on the flower head or bite a hole in the flower tube. They have a trick called 'buzz pollination', by which they use their strong wing muscles to create vibrations to release pollen from the flower in a cloud which sticks to their body. The young bumblebee larvae feed on nectar and pollen. Bumblebees don't make honey but store nectar in wax pots in the nest, which means the food stock is low and the bees are always not far from starvation.

In response to the global loss of biodiversity, the European Native Seed Conservation Network has brought together many members from EU countries involved in the conservation of native plant seed. In 2019 the Office of Public Works proposed a project at the national biodiversity conference to establish the National Seed Bank. The National Botanic Gardens, in Dublin, will be the base for the Irish seed bank. The Burren National Park are pleased to be collaborating with the NBG in this significant and vital project. As the Burren area contains over 70% of the Irish flora it was logical that seed collection, in accordance with strict international best practice guidelines, would begin in the Park. Trained National Parks & Wildlife Service staff are involved in identifying and collecting the seed. Seed collection will run until 2025. We will update you on progress.

The Burren National Park is managed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service. In the Mid-Western Region of the Service, which covers Clare and east Galway, there are two other notable sites open to the public all year.

### **Coole Park Nature Reserve**

Located in the Gort lowlands karstic landscape of Galway, the nature reserve covers an area of approximately 400 hectares (1000 acres) almost half comprising of mixed woodland. Coole is at the centre of a rare and complex wetland system designated as a Ramsar Convention site of international importance which includes underground rivers, seasonal lakes (turloughs), springs and swallow holes. Coole Lough has the largest range in water level fluctuation of any turlough in Ireland. Water levels in the lake can fluctuate by over 10m. A unique feature of the reserve is that the woods border the wetland and are flooded each winter. When the waters retreat in summer an abundance of wildflowers appears.

Coole recently featured in an Irish wetlands video to celebrate World Wetlands Day 2021. The video can be accessed here - <http://irishwetlands.ie/the-irish-wetlands-video-series/>

The site is designated as a Special Area of Conservation, under the EU Habitats Directive, designed to protect the prime wildlife conservation sites in our country. Coole qualifies as it contains turloughs, natural eutrophic (or nutrient rich) lakes, calcareous grasslands, yew woodland and limestone pavements. The nature reserve is a stronghold for the red squirrel as well as being home to pine marten, stoat and badger. It is also designated a Special Protection Area for birds under the EU Birds Directive mainly to protect the winter waterfowl, most importantly the whooper swans that come from Iceland each year.

Coole Park was formerly home to Lady Gregory, co-founder of the Abbey Theatre, dramatist and folklorist, for nearly 50 years. Coole became the centre of the Irish literary revival in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This inspirational landscape drew many artists, playwrights and poets, most notable being W B Yeats who celebrated the magic of this beautiful place in his poetry.

There are two main waymarked walks, the Family Trail of 1.75km, suitable for wheelchairs, and the longer Seven Woods Trail of 4.5km. Other features of interest include a 4.5 acre walled garden, the remains of historic buildings and a deer enclosure.

The award winning tearoom, situated in the cobbled yard is open for takeaway service. There is (ample) free parking on site. The visitor centre is currently closed. More information and details are available on the Coole Park website - <https://www.coolepark.ie> and Facebook page.



## Dromore Wood Nature Reserve

Is located near Ruan in County Clare, 10km north of Ennis. The reserve of 370 hectares contains an assortment of wildlife habitats including mixed woodland, callows (a seasonally flooded meadow), flower rich grassland and glades, limestone pavement, several loughs and extensive reedbeds. The River Fergus flows down the eastern boundary of the reserve. The site is rich in history and archaeology. The remains of Dromore Castle, a 16<sup>th</sup> century tower house sits proudly over Dromore Lough, in the centre of the reserve.

The reserve is designated a Special Area of Conservation, to protect the habitats and species in the reserve.

Dromore is a stronghold for bats and the pine marten, and red squirrels, badgers, stoat, buzzards, and dragonflies and butterflies are resident in numbers. There are regular sightings of herons, swans, waterfowl and woodland birds. You may even see otters. There is a rich variety of flora in the reserve.

There are seven waymarked walking trails (including a National Looped walk) totalling over 20km, in the reserve. The shortest walk, Rabbit Island, 1.5km, is a hard path suitable for wheelchairs.

There is ample free parking on site. The visitor centre is currently closed. More information and details are available on the Burren National Park website – <https://www.burrennationalpark.ie/> and Facebook page.



## Insect of the Month

### Mayfly

They were one of the first flying insects, fossils date back over 300 million years. Mayflies are now on the wing and may be seen over or near to the water in the park. They spend most of their lives as aquatic nymphs feeding on algae and plant debris for up to two years. When fully grown the adult floats to the surface and the winged insect breaks out. Mayflies are unique among insects in having two winged adult stages. They fly from the water to nearby vegetation, where they moult again into a shinier skin. The adult insects go to find a mate and lay eggs. You may see their mating dancing swarms over water. They only live a day or two. Consequently, they have no need to feed and their food canal is filled with air to lighten their bodies. The three 'tails' or bristles are distinctive. They have weak flight and are easy prey for birds like swallows.



### List of animals, birds and flowers recently seen along the trails in the Park:

Pine Marten, Heron, Robin, Blue Tit, Stonechat, Wren, Blackbird, Common Blue, Speckled Wood and Brimstone butterflies, Hoverflies, Buff-tailed bumblebee

Primrose, Cowslip, Spring Gentian, Rue-leaved Saxifrage, Wood Anemone, Wood-sorrel, Common Dog-violet, Early Dog-violet, Early-purple orchid, Lesser Celandine, Wild Strawberry

### Burren National Park:

**Information Point:** Clare Heritage Centre, 2 Church Street, Corofin, Co. Clare, Ireland, V95 T9V6 (please note this is currently closed).

**Website:** <https://www.burrennationalpark.ie>

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