



COOLE PARK NATURE RESERVE

Autumn Edition
Newsletter 2025



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NPWS

An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta
Náisiúnta agus Tuaiscirt
National Parks and Wildlife
Service

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING?

APPLE STORE/BAT HOUSE LAUNCH

Special guests Sean Canney TD, Cicely Muldoon, former Superintendent of Yosemite National Park and Mary Martin former Superintendent of Mojave National Preserve, launched our new Bat House on 1st August. This historical building in our Red Deer enclosure was originally utilised as an apple store when this area used to be an orchard and kitchen garden during Lady Gregory's era. It has been renovated as a roosting site for the Lesser Horseshoe Bat, a key protected species in Coole Park Nature Reserve. You can read more about this elusive creature on Pg. 5



SUMMER PROGRAMME FOR KIDS

We had a fun-packed young ecologists programme throughout July and August with lots of budding botanists, entomologists, zoologists and ornithologists taking part in our Weekly Wildlings and Open Your Eyes to Nature activities! We covered plant identification, investigated methods of looking more closely at our invertebrate residents, learned about tracks and signs as evidence of the presence of certain creatures and also started identifying bird species from their calls. Thank you to everyone who took part.




HERITAGE WEEK

We revisited 'Me and Nu's' childhood days with our heritage week offerings this year. Traditional fun and games, from marbles and hopscotch to skipping and, the firm favourite, Hunt the Thimble! In addition, we ran a Zoetrope-making workshop – one of the early forms of motion picture creation.



RED DEER



Coole Park Nature Reserve is home to a herd of 6 native wild Irish Red Deer, gifted by Killarney National Park in the 1990s and they have lived in the enclosure beside the Visitor Centre since their arrival. In the wild in Ireland, there are large numbers of non-native Sika deer that can hybridise with the native Red Deer, so their containment is to help preserve the genetic integrity of the species.

Coole currently has no wild deer outside of the enclosure within the reserve, but for the first time on record, a wild Red Deer stag visited Coole last October. His focus was on the 3 enclosed hinds (female Red Deer), but our resident stag defended his harem gallantly every evening, through the railings! Hoof prints of the visiting stag could be found around the perimeter of the deer pen as he circled the area each night throughout the rut season. With no success in his mission, he disappeared just as mysteriously as he had appeared a few weeks' previously!

The deer rut season, (annual breeding season), begins in October. Listen out for our bellowing stag whose call will grow louder and deeper as the season progresses. His coat will thicken out and he will try to make himself look as large as possible to challenge potential rivals. His antlers will have reached their maximum growth and the velvet covering will start to shred adding to his menacing appearance. Come spring, his antlers will fall off and regrowth will begin immediately to prepare them for the next rut. They are the fastest growing material in the animal kingdom, dropping off in March and fully re-growing in 7 months. Each point, or *tine*, of the antlers represents approximately one year of a healthy stag's age. A stag with 12 tines is known as a Royal stag, 14 an Imperial and 16 or more points, a Monarch. Which is Coole's stag?

AUTUMN-FLOWERING PLANTS



Ireland's native autumn-flowering plants not only add natural beauty to the landscape, they provide a vital source of nectar for bees, butterflies and other pollinators too, supporting local biodiversity. As native species, they have adapted over millenia to Ireland's climate and soil conditions. While we see most of our native plants in flower in the summer months there are some that bloom well into autumn such as:



Strawberry-tree *Arbutus unedo* Caithne

Flowering Period: September to December

This is one of the Lusitanian species and although it is considered native, it is only found naturally in counties Sligo, Kerry and Cork. How it came to be in Ireland is a bit of a mystery, but its pollen - dated at over 4000 BC - has been found in Irish peat bogs. It belongs to the Heather family. Its natural habitat is oak woods and rocky ground. Its scientific name '*unedo*' means 'eat only one' - apparently they don't taste very nice!

It is classed as NEAR THREATENED in the Red Data List of Vascular Plants 2016.

Can you find the one planted in our Walled Garden?



Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis* Odhrach bhallach

Flowering period: July to October.

Devil's-bit Scabious is found widely throughout Ireland on damp ground in fields and on roadsides, heaths and cut-away bogs and its purple pom-pom heads are a lovely pop of colour at this time of year. It is also the main larval food plant of the Marsh Fritillary butterfly which is legally protected in Ireland.

Keep an eye out for it along our trails.



Winter Heliotrope *Petasites pyrenaicus* Plúr na gréine

Flowering period: November to March

This plant is not a native to Ireland and can be very invasive. Historically planted as game cover in large estates, it can be a valuable source of winter food for certain pollinators. However, its dense smothering habit drastically inhibits growth of native plants upon which many more native insects and animals depend. This autumn, the NPWS will be removing large patches of Winter Heliotrope in the Nature Reserve using mechanical methods, digging out its rhizomes to prevent regeneration, allowing native species to reestablish.

LESSER HORSESHOE BAT



As we approach Halloween and enter the darker half of the year, let us investigate a mysterious animal that embraces the darkness, the Lesser Horseshoe Bat.

Weighing between 5 to 9 grams (similar to a €2 coin), the Lesser Horseshoe Bat belongs to the *Rhinolophidae* family of bats, characterised by their distinctive horseshoe-shaped skin folds on their face. These unusual noseleaf structures are thought to assist in hunting by focusing or directing the ultrasonic sound emitted to echolocate prey. The other eight resident bat species found in Ireland belong to the *Vespertilionidae* family so the Lesser Horseshoe Bat really is quite special.

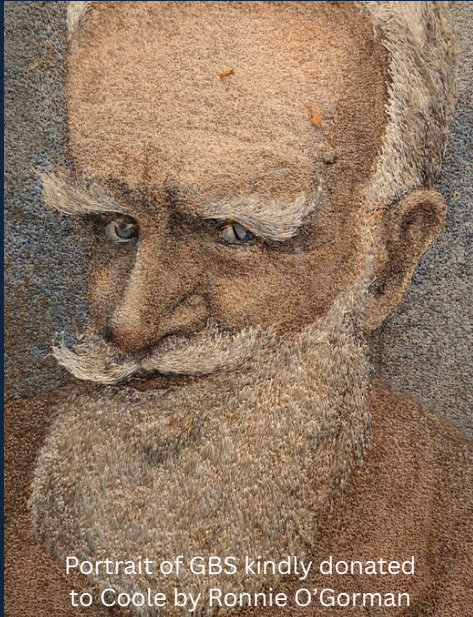
The Irish population of approximately 14,000 individuals spread across the six western counties of Kerry, Cork, Limerick, Clare, Galway and Mayo, is vitally important as the species has faced a startling decline in many parts of Europe. The broadleaf and mixed woodland of these western counties has been essential in the survival of the species as it relies on these habitats to hunt and catch small flying insects. Coole Park Nature Reserve is an ideal hunting ground for the Lesser Horseshoe Bat and as such, is a designated Special Area of Conservation for the species under the EU Habitats Directive.



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(<https://eunis.eea.europa.eu/species/1545>)

BAT FACT!
The Lesser
Horseshoe Bat
is only Irish bat
species to hang
upside down,
cloaked in their
wings when
roosting.

So this Halloween, when it is dusk and the darkness of night is descending, keep your eyes to the skies. You might be lucky enough to see the dark silhouette of a bat, and it may well be the elusive and secretive Lesser Horseshoe Bat! It could be your last chance to see them before they retreat to their spooky caves to hibernate for the winter months.



Portrait of GBS kindly donated to Coole by Ronnie O'Gorman

A regular visitor to Coole Park, George Bernard Shaw won the Nobel Prize for Literature one hundred years ago this year. Shaw was recognised for his sharp humour, witty and intelligent plays, and his sometimes divisive opinions about society. Shaw was born in Dublin and spent much of his life in England. However, his close friendship with Lady Gregory drew him to the Literary Mecca of Coole Park on many occasions.

[Click here to learn more](#)

READ MORE



STAFF PROFILE



Susanna is ainm dom. Susanna is my name.

I am delighted to be working as a Visitor Guide in Coole Park Nature Reserve. I have been here since May 2023. As a National Tour Guide, it brings so much joy sharing the rich natural and wildlife heritage of Coole alongside its incredible history, with groups from all walks of life.

I am grateful for the legacy of Lady Gregory. Without her, I might never have learned even a wee bit of Irish. Is Gearmánach mé. German is my first language.

Coole is an ideal place for children to connect with nature. My favourite moments are when they look through our microscope, get the adjustment just right, and say “wow” as the image comes into sharp focus. It does take patience to operate a microscope, but the reward is priceless. I truly enjoy exploring nature with our young visitors, individuals on the neurodiverse spectrum and those with special needs. Don't be shy about asking questions, even about our spookier specimens like feathers, bones, skulls, scat or our infamous bumless bumblebee in our Visitor Centre! Every day brings new learnings, whether it's about Coole's history, or what draws most of my attention, nature and wildlife. I am particularly fascinated by birds and feathers, but my other passions include leading our Nature Art sessions and educational games, such as our Scavenger Hunt Extravaganza.

Personally, I always feel there is never quite enough time to cover all topics on our guided walks.

Tóg go bog é. Take it easy.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPDATES

Upcoming Events

We have a great team of professional NPWS staff that take care of Coole Park Nature Reserve, from management to maintenance. Our Visitor Centre is staffed daily by a cohort of knowledgeable guides, who offer free guided walks and education services, and plan a variety of events for the public throughout the year. Check out some of our upcoming events and talks below:

Leaving Cert Ecology Field Studies

We are prioritising our NPWS Senior Cycle Education Programme throughout Autumn for LC Biology students. Please get in touch if you would like to find out more for your school.

Halloween Beastly Laboratory

Don't be afraid...come and explore our beastly display of Coole's creatures great and small in our Visitor Centre
30th Oct - 2nd Nov

For more detailed information on our services, events and booking, please follow us on social media or visit our website.

See our contact details below.

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**Coole Park
Nature Reserve**



cooleparkofficial