



COOLE PARK NATURE RESERVE

Spring Edition
Newsletter 2025

WELCOME!

Welcome to the first edition of Coole Park Nature Reserve's newsletter! We hope that you enjoy our articles and learn something from them. If you have any suggestions of topics you might like to see featured in future editions, please get in touch.



CONTENTS

PAGE 2

Round Up of the Year

PAGE 3

Crowing About Corvids

PAGE 6

Blooming Ivy

PAGE 7

Spring Flowers

PAGE 9

Staff Profile

PAGE 10

Announcements
& Updates



NPWS

An tSeirbhís Páirceanna
Náisiúnta agus Fiadhúlra
National Parks and Wildlife Service

ROUND-UP OF THE YEAR SO FAR

We've had a whirlwind start to the year in Coole, literally, in the form of Storm Éowyn, which left us without power and significantly fewer trees, a situation sadly echoed throughout the country. Clearance of the trails and felling of dangerous trees took longer than expected and we thank you all for your patience waiting for the gates to reopen while our staff worked hard to make the trails safe again. Some areas of the nature reserve are noticeably different as some very large trees came down, opening up the woodland canopy.



While we lament the loss of some beautiful trees, nature will do what it does best and regenerate in ways we may not expect. Fallen trunks will slowly cloak with moss and lichens, invertebrates will make their homes in the dead wood and upturned root plates, fungi will feast on the decay and return nutrients to the woodland floor, and new plants will flourish where it was once too dark. This is the natural cycle of a forest and we eagerly await what happens next.

WILDLIFE NEWS: NEW BARN OWL FAMILY?

We are closely monitoring our Barn Owl box situated in the cobbled yard after a year of no tenants! In 2023, the nesting pair successfully bred 5 owlets, and 3 and 4 owlets in the previous years, so we hope to see some new barn owls fledge this year too. Courtship typically begins early in the year, and we noticed some owl pellets beneath the box in January...these are gunky masses of undigested regurgitated fur and bones of the creatures they've preyed upon...and we've been checking daily for further signs of nesting. We'll keep you posted!



Crowing about Corvids

Corvids are one of the most fascinating bird families to investigate. More commonly referred to simply as “crows”, they are often misunderstood, overlooked or even despised and persecuted. However, if one pauses to observe and study these creatures you will be amazed by their intelligence, adaptability and resourcefulness. Here is an introduction to Ireland’s seven species of crow, highlighting some of their individual traits, behaviours and characteristics. Hopefully this will aid you in identifying each individual species. We’re sure they would very much appreciate being addressed by their proper title!

The rook is common throughout most of lowland Ireland. A large crow that can reach a length of up to 47cm, they have beautiful glossy black plumage. Up close, you may notice a grey/white bald patch at the base of their bill as well as the feathery ‘trousers’ on their legs. An extremely sociable bird, they gather together in large colonies which can be noisy boisterous sites where the harsh characteristic “cawing” is obvious. They nest high in tall trees which are called rookeries

Also widespread in Ireland despite being rare in other parts of Western Europe, which is dominated by the all black Carrion Crow, but the Hooded Crow with its grey body, black wings, tail and “hood”, maintains an outpost territory here. Of similar size to the rook, but more cautious around humans and often seen in smaller groups. It has a harsh, croaky call. They have been extremely successful due to their adaptability. They will source food from bins, dumps, scavenge on carrion, take young birds and eggs. This has resulted in a nasty reputation, but it is the reason for their success and evidence of their intelligence.



Rook
Corvus frugilegus
Rúcach



Hooded Crow
Corvus corone
Feannóg



A smaller, more compact crow with a shorter bill. The back of the neck and sides of the head are an ashen grey. You will notice the beautiful piercing pale grey eyes differentiating it from other species of crow. Widespread in both urban and rural areas, it nests in a variety of sites including old buildings/ruins, chimneys, tree holes and rock crevices. Highly sociable, jackdaws form large flocks often alongside rooks. Feeds on insects and seeds but will take the opportunity to snatch eggs from smaller birds. In flight, the jackdaw is agile and acrobatic showing impressive aerial displays.

Jackdaw
Corvus monedula
Cág



The largest crow in our list, growing to a length of about 64cm with a wingspan of up to 150 cm, making them even larger than the buzzard. An all black crow with a strong arched bill, wedge-shaped tail and a deep, low pitched croaking call. Their numbers have increased dramatically over the past 50 years. Pairing for life, their dramatic, acrobatic aerial manoeuvres are a sight to behold, especially during courtship. Ravens have a varied diet, mainly carrion, but also rodents, birds, eggs, frogs, fruit and humans' leftover scraps.

Raven
Corvus corax
Fiach dubh



A highly intelligent species, the Raven demonstrates amazing problem-solving abilities, learning capabilities and communication skills. They will share information with each other regarding food sources and experiments have shown their use of tools to acquire food. Often associated with death in Irish culture, the Raven appears in many of our myths and legends. The Celtic goddess of war, the Morrigan, chose to manifest as a Raven on Cuchulainn's shoulder as he died on the battlefield.



An instantly recognizable bird with black and white plumage and a long wedge tail. It is widespread and very common. The noisy, rattling “kak-kak-kak” call announces their presence, to the detriment of young birds and eggs which they will target. Magpies will also feed on insects and carrion. It builds large nests from twigs and can reach large numbers in urban areas. Often associated with superstitious beliefs and as the old rhyme goes "one for sorrow, two for joy, three for a girl, 4 for a boy... "

Magpie
Pica pica
Snagbreac



The most colourful member of the crow family, with its unmistakable pinkish-brown body and barred blue wing patch. Quite elusive, inhabiting wooded areas, people are often surprised by this magnificent bird and even more surprised that it is a member of the crow family. Very wary of humans, it is often seen flitting from branch to branch or flying away making its loud harsh screeching cry. We actually have our very own subspecies, with darker plumage, especially on either side of the head. With a particular love of acorns, jays often bury them in preparation for lean times. Not all of the acorns will be recovered and as a result the jay plays a vital role in planting oak trees. Consequently, it is actually expanding its own habitat. Coole Park Nature Reserve is a fantastic place to spot this stunning creature.

Eurasian Jay
Garrulus glandarius
hibernicus
Scréachóg choille



The unusual red legs and long curved red bill set the chough apart from the other black crows. Much more numerous here than in Britain, they are mostly confined to southern and Atlantic coastal areas. Choughs love to probe with their long bill in coastal grassy areas for larvae and invertebrates. Often seen on cliffs and beaches, it is a wonderfully aerobatic and social bird whose name derives from its loud call. Caves are a frequent nesting site which suits their wary nature around humans.

Chough
Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax
Cág cosdear



Blooming Ivy

Contrary to popular belief, ivy does not strangle or inflict harm to trees. In fact, it often helps to support dead, or damaged trees. Ivy is also not a parasite; it has its own root system growing from the ground, providing it with nutrients. Many believe that by removing ivy from a tree, it is being 'saved', but there is no scientific evidence to support this and it can cause more harm than good to the surrounding wildlife, as many species are being deprived of a vital source of food and habitat.



IVY *Hedera helix* Éidhnéan

Ivy is a woody creeping or climbing perennial that clings by small roots. Its leaves are dark, glossy green, and it produces greenish-yellow flowers in umbels, that ripen to black berries in winter. Widespread and abundant, it can be found in hedges, woodland, walls and rocks. Two subspecies are sometimes distinguished and recent evidence suggests that the Irish subspecies *hibernica* may be a distinct species from *Hedera helix*.

Ivy is a native Irish species, which has many important functions within a woodland habitat. It uses existing trees for support, climbing and winding its way up the stem forming large evergreen leaves. In springtime this provides a vital habitat for nesting birds and daytime roosts for bats. In autumn ivy produces its yellow/green flowers which are an important food source for pollinators. Ivy is especially important in winter as the clusters of black berries are a crucial food source for birds, when finding food may prove challenging.



Folklore

Ivy as a Symbol of Enduring Fertility and Life

Its clingy nature has made it a symbol of fidelity and loyalty since ancient times. In many parts of Britain and Ireland, ivy was used by young maidens in the hope of dreaming of their future love.

An Irish rhyme provides a method of divination involving nine Ivy leaves.

**Nine Ivy leaves I place under my head
To dream of the living and not of the dead
To dream of the man, I am going to wed
And to see him tonight at the foot of my bed.**

Being an evergreen, ivy makes a good shelter against cold and wind and this features in several Irish legends. According to the 'Lays of Fionn', the young Fionn MacCumhaill was nursed in hiding by his foster mother Bodhmann in the hollow of a tall, ivy-clad tree. He was given the nickname 'lad of the hollow' on account of this.

In some versions of the Old Irish Brehon Laws on trees and shrubs, as one of the bushes of the wood, the unlawful clearing of a whole stand of ivy was subjected to a fine of one dairt (one year old heifer) under the laws.



Spring Flowers

As spring arrives at Coole, our woodlands fill with vibrant flowers, providing vital food for insects. Let's explore four notable spring plants and some insects that pollinate them, showcasing the delicate balance of nature and the importance of protecting these ecosystems.

Butcher's Broom - *Ruscus aculeatus*

An evergreen shrub with stiff, spiky leaves and small, greenish-yellow flowers. These leaves are actually modified stems known as *cladodes* – flat, leaf-like stems. The tiny flowers bloom right in the center of these cladodes, making this plant quite unique. It grows up to about one meter tall and blooms from January to April. The flowers are pollinated by various insects, with bees and flies feeding on the nectar. In autumn, the small red berries provide food for birds. Originally from southern Europe, it's found in parts of Ireland, especially in the north-east and south-east, growing in dry woods, hedgerows, and parklands. Butcher's Broom contributes to the ecosystem by supporting various wildlife species.



Lesser Celandine - *Ficaria verna* – Grán Arcáin

A small, easily recognized plant that carpets the forest floor with bright yellow flowers and heart-shaped leaves. Blooming from February to May, it thrives in damp woodlands, especially near streams and riverbanks.

Clusters of these flowers appear alongside other spring blooms, attracting early-season pollinators. Beetles and early-emerging bees seek nectar and pollen, relying on Lesser Celandine as an important food source after winter. This early flowering helps support insects as they wake from hibernation. Look for its sunny yellow blooms lighting up Irish woodlands in early spring.



Wood Anemone - *Anemone nemorosa* – Lus na Gaoithe

In Irish, Lus na Gaoithe means “plant of the wind” because its flexible stem bends with the breeze. This delicate flower has white, sometimes purple or pink petals and fern-like leaves. It thrives in shaded deciduous woodlands, blooming from March to May before trees fully leaf out. Wood Anemone is a key indicator of ancient woodlands. Its subtle fragrance and nectar attract hoverflies and other insects, which aid in pollination. This relationship helps the plant reproduce while providing food for pollinators. Look for large clusters of these beautiful flowers in Irish forests each spring.



Ramsons/Wild Garlic - *Allium ursinum* - Creamh

These are a fragrant spring feast for pollinators like bees and hoverflies. Found in damp, shady woodlands and hedgerows, they bloom from April to May, with clusters of white, star-shaped flowers releasing a strong garlic scent. Rich in nectar, honeybees and bumblebees visit frequently, collecting nectar and pollen. The European Ramsons Hoverfly (*Portevinia maculata*) plays a unique role – its larvae tunnel through and overwinter in the bulbs, while adults feed on nectar, aiding pollination. This mutualistic relationship helps the plants reproduce while providing food for insects. When crushed, Ramsons leaves release a strong garlic scent, making them easy to identify in spring woodlands.



Did you know?

Ramsons and Wood anemone are indicators for ancient woodlands. All of the above species are essential for woodland health and local wildlife. By preserving their habitats, we help ensure future generations can enjoy nature's beauty. Let's protect plants and insects by staying on marked paths and not picking plants.



Staff Profile



My name is Clare, and I am a Guide here at Coole Park Nature Reserve. I have been working with the National Parks and Wildlife Service for over two years, and I have thoroughly enjoyed my time in Coole Park in Co. Galway, as well as in Dromore Wood Nature Reserve in Co. Clare.

Recently, I started my QQI Level 6 in Irish Sign Language with Munster Technological University. I began learning Irish Sign Language during COVID-19 and fell in love with this beautiful and unique language.

Irish Sign Language (ISL) is one of Ireland's three national languages, alongside English and Irish. It is the first or preferred language of about 5,000 Deaf people in Ireland, along with approximately 40,000 people who use ISL to communicate with Deaf family members, friends, and colleagues.

ISL is not based on spoken English or Irish; it is a complete language with its own linguistic structures, grammar, syntax, and features. It is a visual and spatial language articulated through the hands, facial expressions, and body movements. Only 30% of ISL is understood through hand shapes; the rest relies on movement and facial expressions, which provide tone and emphasis to the signs.

It is important to note that sign languages worldwide are not universal, and Ireland has its own unique sign language. ISL features gender-based variations for some signs, a characteristic not found in other sign languages. This distinction arose from the education of Deaf students in separate schools: St. Mary's School for Deaf Girls and St. Joseph's School for Deaf Boys. These schools have since merged to form the Holy Family School for the Deaf in Cabra, Dublin, resulting in gender-based ISL becoming less commonly used.

In 2017, Irish Sign Language was officially recognized as one of Ireland's languages with the passing of the Irish Sign Language Act. To commemorate this bill, National Irish Sign Language Day is celebrated every year on December 14th. There are many resources available to learn ISL, so why not give it a try!

We hope to organize some Deaf-friendly events here in Coole Park Nature Reserve soon, especially for International Week of Deaf People 2025. Keep an eye on our website and social media pages or call in to the Visitor Centre for event updates. We would love for you to share any ideas you may have for Deaf-friendly activities, and we look forward to seeing you soon to celebrate one of Ireland's most beautiful languages!



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:

April

11th Evening Bat Walk:

Join us to discover these elusive creatures of the night

18th-21st Easter Orienteering Hunt:

Family Fun Hunt for Easter Weekend

May

4th Dawn Chorus Walk:

Spring Birdsong Discovery Guided Walk

16th & 17th 48-hour Community Bioblitz:

Become a Citizen Scientist for a day, or just drop in to one of our talks

June

2nd Show & Tell History of Coole Community Event:

An open invitation for visitors to drop in and tell us their memories of Coole

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

Please see our contact details below.

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