



COOLE PARK NATURE RESERVE

WELCOME BACK!

We hope you enjoyed our Spring Edition.
A lot has happened since then! read on
for our latest news and articles.

Summer Edition
Newsletter 2025

CONTENTS

PAGE 2

What's Been Happening

PAGE 5

Rare Plants in Coole

PAGE 6

Ecosystem Engineers

PAGE 7

Announcements &
Updates



NPWS

An tSeirbhís Páircenna
Náisiúnta agus Fiadhlíra
National Parks and Wildlife
Service

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING?



We've been busy since our last newsletter! Our Visitor Centre got a new roof although the works took a little longer than expected due to some members of our Pipistrelle and Brown Long-eared Bat colonies taking their time to emerge from hibernation. Our doors are now open again daily from 10am - 5pm. We thank you for your patience.



WILDLIFE NEWS: UPDATE ON BARN OWLS

Barn Owls are one of three native species of owl in Ireland, the other two species being the Long-eared Owl and the visiting Short-eared Owl in winter. Despite the regular presence of Barn Owls in Coole Park Nature Reserve over the last number of years, they feature on the conservation Red List as a threatened species due to loss of breeding habitats and the widespread use of rodenticide, which poisons the prey they rely on. An adult will consume 3-4 small mammals a night, including rats, bank voles, wood mice, shrews and sometimes frogs, and in a busy nest, the parents will hunt continuously to feed each chick roughly the same amount. It has been estimated that a single adult barn owl can consume around 4000 small rodents per year. How's that for pest control! Sadly, our Barn Owls did not breed successfully this year, but we still have plenty of activity from neighbouring nests.



48-hour Community Bioblitz



Thank you to everyone who came along and contributed to our Bioblitz event . A Bioblitz is a specified time-period to go and record as many different species as possible in a particular location. This year we hosted bat walks, a dawn chorus walk and many drop-in talks for the public to help raise awareness of the richness of life that calls Coole Park Nature Reserve home. Visitors and specialist ecologists alike were invited to explore and record everything from trees, mosses and lichens to moths, butterflies and aquatic insects.



Green Silver-lines Moth
Pseudopsis prasinana

We'd especially like to thank Dr. Frances Lucy and her team from EU Green at ATU for their display of freshwater invertebrate samples from Coole Lough, and Prof. Grace McCormack and team from Galway University for their information on their native wild Irish Honeybee project. In addition we had Karen Healy from Bat Conservation Ireland host a fun Bat Quiz for our younger visitors. Our total tally was 496 species! This is an incredible number for Coole and highlights the importance of conservation of sites like this.



LNT Ireland Awareness Course
attendees and NPWS instructors

Leave No Trace Ireland Awareness Course

Some of this year's intake of the L6 Special Purpose Award Nature Conservation and Interpretation Course, facilitated by the NPWS, Leave No Trace Ireland and Munster Technological University, came to Coole to undertake a LNT Awareness Course in May, delivered by NPWS Guides. We look forward to welcoming some of them back to the region for their work-based learning module this summer.

Happy Birthday to Coole's
newest resident - a
beautiful Red Deer calf
born on 25th May



Coole Community Heritage Day



Our Community Heritage day was a huge success. The idea was born when NPWS Guide staff were stationed at the front gate following Storm Éowyn, informing visitors of the reserve's closure while clean-up operations were underway. During this time, we met and chatted to many members of the local community and listened to some wonderful stories of Coole! We decided that a bigger event would be required to capture these historical anecdotes and so we unearthed old photographs, maps and letters to create a public exhibition in our Visitor Centre and then set about personally inviting our Coole neighbours and people of Gort and surrounds to our event, suggesting that they bring along any artefacts, publications or stories they wished to share. Thank you to everyone that did! We had a wonderful turnout and we were privileged to see original paintings by Lady Gregory and rare books that used to reside in Coole's library. We heard stories about life working as foresters on the estate and family connections responsible for some of the woodland that exists today. All notes and items were documented and we will continue to reach out over the coming months to those unable to make it on the day. Once we have collated all material, we hope to produce a small publication and continue the legacy of gathering local stories for posterity.



Rare Plants in Coole



Bird's-nest orchid
Neottia nidus-avis

The **Bird's-nest orchid** is a rare yellow-brown parasitic plant, with flowers forming a spike-like head on single stems about 35cm high from May - July. The lower part of the plant has scale-like brown leaves. It is the only Irish orchid that does not contain any chlorophyll. Instead, it is an obligate myco-heterotroph plant that derives all of its nutrients by parasitizing fungal growths found on the woodland floor. A member of the *Orchidaceae* family, this plant got its name from its tangled root system which resembles a poorly made bird's nest. It is a perennial and reproduces via rhizomes, and seeds, which are spread by ants

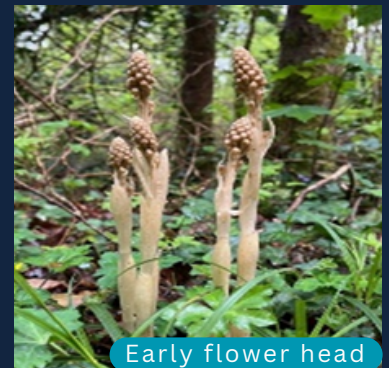
Habitat: Shaded areas of mixed deciduous woodland, such as Beech or Hazel, in limestone or chalky soils predominantly in west and north west of Ireland. It has been found growing in Coole in 2024 in a few locations.

Conservation: Still relatively abundant in certain areas, especially the Burren region, but declining throughout Britain and Ireland due to habitat loss and depleting forest cover. It is currently a protected species in N. Ireland. Protection of its woodland habitats is essential for the survival of this intriguing and ghostly species.

Yellow Bird's-nest, belonging to the heather family, *Ericaceae*, is another rare plant with no chlorophyll. Its flowering stems, from July - October, are whitish-yellow and up to 30cm tall. It produces small clusters of waxy flowers which usually hang to one side. Like the Bird's-nest orchid, this plant does not rely on light and is parasitic in nature but not considered harmful to its host plant. It extracts its nutrients indirectly, using fungi to obtain nutrients from living trees in the surrounding area.

Habitat: Usually found under Beech or Hazel on calcareous soils, and under pines on more acid substrates. Over 90 flower spikes were recorded in Coole in 2024! Further afield, it is widespread across the Northern Hemisphere, but rarer towards the north and west. It is thinly scattered across a wide area of N. America, Europe and Asia. In America it is known as Indian Pipe or Pinesap.

Conservation: It is listed as rare on the Irish Red Data List of protected plants in Ireland.



Early flower head



Yellow Bird's-nest
Monotropa hypopitys

Ecosystem Engineers - Earthworms of Coole

Ireland has 32 species of Earthworm, most of which can be found in any habitat in Ireland! Coole Park Nature Reserve has a wide range of habitats, meaning a wide range of earthworms can be found here.



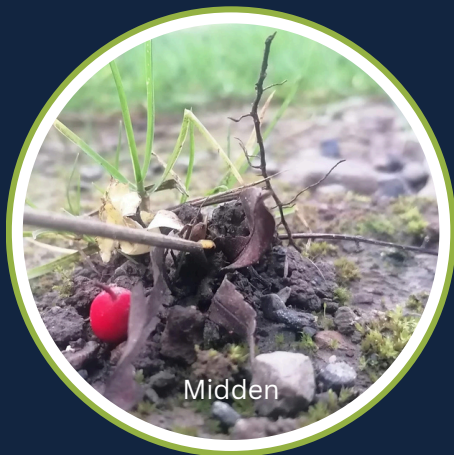
Common Earthworm

Epigeic earthworms live on the surface under leaf litter and in dead wood and do not make burrows. They feed on the leaf litter around them and also on dung and deadwood. The abundance of fallen leaves here in Coole plus all the fallen trees (even more thanks to Storm Éowyn) provide ideal habitats and food source for these species.

Endogeic earthworms live in the soil. They make horizontal burrows and feed on living organisms within the soil. To do this, they ingest soil as they move through their burrows to process their food source. They don't often come above the soil, but you might see them on the trails after heavy rainfall. Earthworms breathe through their skin and when their burrows become flooded and all the oxygen in the soil has been used up, they need to leave their burrows to breathe.



Blue-grey Worm



Midden

Anecics are the largest of the earthworm species in Ireland. These are deep burrowing earthworms and their burrows can be up to 2.5 metres deep! They feed on dead leaves that they pull from the surface down into their burrows and create what are known as "middens". Middens are little piles of organic materials like soil, leaves, twigs, grasses and sometimes stones that are created at the burrow entrance to protect themselves from outside factors. Keep an eye out for some earthworm middens along the sides of the trails in Coole Park!

Earthworms are valuable "Ecosystem Engineers" because of their ability to directly influence the environment they live in. They can improve soil health, by aerating it, improving drainage and by releasing nutrients back into it, increasing soil biodiversity. They also create new soil through their "casts" which are deposited on the surface. Casts are earthworm poo! Keep an eye out for them in the grassy areas of our walled garden.



Earthworm cast

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:

Summer Programme of Children's Activities

July & August

Open Your Eyes to Nature - Tuesdays @11:00am - 12:00pm

- Outdoor Fun Activities for 5-8 year olds -

No booking required, just drop-in to the VC on the day

Weekly Wildlings - Wednesdays @10:30am - 12:00pm

-Young Ecologists Programme for 8-12 year olds-

BOOKING ESSENTIAL

Family Fun Day Sundays @11:00am - 12:30pm

-Orienteering Hunts, Nature Art, Scavenger Hunt Games for all the family-

Heritage Week Events TBC

Contact us for more details

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.

Website: www.coolepark.ie
Email: coolepark@npws.gov.ie
Phone: 091 631 804



**Coole Park
Nature Reserve**



cooleparkofficial