



# BURREN NATIONAL PARK



The Burren National Park was covered in a beautiful blanket of snow during the final weeks of November as the winter made its presence felt. Despite the changing weather, there is still plenty to be seen in the park. Be on the lookout for flocks of Golden Plover and Whooper Swans who come here from Iceland to overwinter around lakes and turloughs in the Burren.

Winter in the park also provides the perfect opportunity for nature enthusiasts to appreciate the hardy green stillness of the many species of fern that grow in the park.

The colder months are a good time to think about how we can help wildlife. This can be as simple as leaving leaves on the ground for overwintering insects or feeding the birds.

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# Fascinating Ferns

Winter in the Burren National Park brings ferns to the fore. The showy displays of colour of the flowering plants are long gone and the lush green and russet browns of ferns stand in contrast to the grey of the limestone pavement or grow amongst the decaying leaves in the hazel woodlands. Below are some of the ferns you may see when walking the tracks and trails in the park.



Wall-rue *Asplenium ruta-muraria* **Luibh na seacht ngábh** is a small evergreen fern belonging to the genus *aspleniaceae* or spleenworts. It favours rock crevices and mortared walls. This fern has a frond of irregular tufted club-shaped leaves. Its spores ripen from June to October.

Luibh na seacht ngábh  translates to ‘Herb of the seven dangers/complaints’ as it was said to cure seven different types of ailment.  It was also said to offer protection against fairies.



Spleenworts are a group of ferns usually with delicate leaves and a strong central stipe (leafstalk). The term spleenwort comes from a traditional belief that they could cure problems of the spleen and spitefulness!

Hart’s-tongue fern *Asplenium scolopendrium* **Creamh na muice fia** can be found throughout the Burren National Park, from the woodlands to the hedgerows and limestone pavement. It is an evergreen plant with elongated, wavy leaves that taper to a point. The fronds (leaves) of this fern are said to resemble the tongue of a deer. ‘Hart’ is an archaic word for the male red deer and derives from the middle English ‘hert’ or the old English ‘heort’. This fern is also thought to be a good indicator of ancient woodland.



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Maidenhair Spleenwort *Asplenium trichomanes* **Lus na seilge** is a pretty and delicate fern which favours crevices and can often be seen growing on the glacial erratics and limestone pavement throughout the park. In Wales this plant was considered to bring good luck and it was believed that fairies liked to dance around its fronds.



Rustyback fern *Asplenium ceterach* **Raithneach rua** is a small evergreen fern. The undersides of this fern's fronds are covered in brownish, rust-coloured scales which cover the spore-producing sori. In traditional medicine this fern was used to treat everything from kidney stones, to respiratory complaints and disorders of the spleen.



Maidenhair fern *Adiantum capillus-veneris* **Dúchosach** is quite a rare plant in the wild and in Ireland it is found mainly in the Burren and on the Aran Islands. It is identifiable by its fan-shaped segmented leaves on shiny black/brown stalks. The clusters of spores (sori) are found close to the leaf margins on the underside of the leaf. Some species of this fern are a popular and attractive indoor houseplant.

Ferns are an excellent habitat for bugs, insects and spiders. In warm weather they provide a shady, humid spot in which to shelter for both minibeasts and frogs, especially in the hazel woodlands of the Burren National Park.



Ferns are an ancient type of non-flowering plant that first evolved about 390 million years ago, long before the first flowering plants, grasses or trees. They do not produce seeds like these other plants but reproduce by spores, stored in the sporangia and arranged as sori on the underside of the fronds. Examining the sporangia can be helpful in fern identification. Ferns, like flowering plants, do contain a vascular system or network of 'tubes' that run throughout the plant transporting nutrients and other substances such as growth regulators from the roots that anchor them in the ground.



# Winter Visitor: Golden Plover



The Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria* **Feadóg bhuí** is a notable winter visitor from Iceland in the Burren National Park at the moment. Large flocks of this medium sized wading plover can be encountered flying above the limestone pavement from around October until February. Their winter plumage is a light flecked brown with white underparts and in flight they can have an almost twinkling appearance as they lift into the air en masse.

They are omnivorous and feed mainly on invertebrates such as worms and beetles but will also eat grasses, seeds and berries.

Breeding Golden Plover visit Ireland during the summer arriving here from France and Iberia. They are largely confined to blanket bogs in the uplands in the northwest counties of Ireland. The summer plumage of the male Golden Plover is quite different to the winter visitors we see in the park. The white underparts are replaced with dark feathers which extend up the throat to each eye creating a patch-like appearance.



The Irish for Golden Plover is **Feadóg bhuí**. 'Feadóg' means whistle and is probably related to the piercing call of the plover. It was believed in some parts of Ireland that to hear a plover at night indicated frosty weather. In Wales the call of the plover near the home of an unwell person was an omen of death.



The Golden Plover that winter in Ireland return to Iceland in March each year and this is an important event in the Icelandic calendar with the media reporting on the first plover sighting of the year. It is said their arrival heralds a change in the weather and a 19th ode to the plover contains the line 'The golden plover arrives to sing away the snow'.



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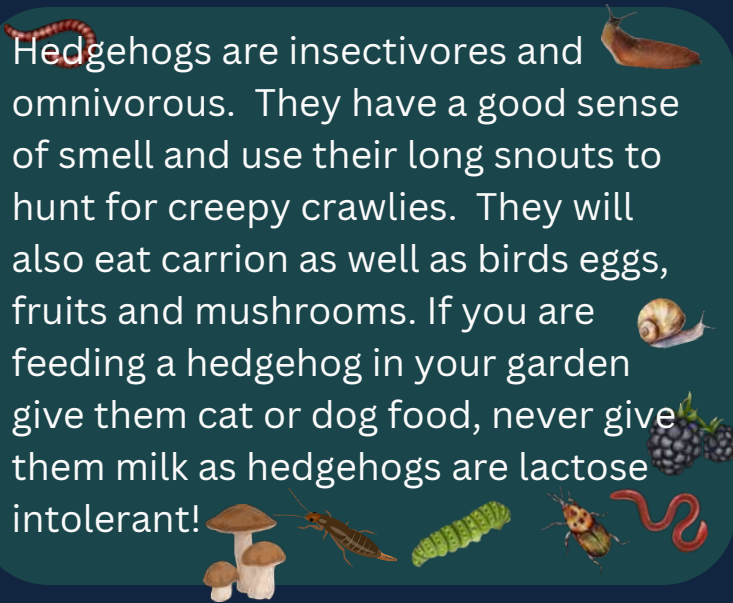
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# Featured Species: The Hedegehog



The Western European hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus* **Gráineog** was first recorded in Ireland during the 12th century, possibly brought here by the Normans as a food source. They are widespread throughout Ireland and can be found in farmland areas in and around the Burren but not in areas of limestone pavement or on wetlands.

Hedgehogs are insectivores and omnivorous. They have a good sense of smell and use their long snouts to hunt for creepy crawlies. They will also eat carrion as well as birds eggs, fruits and mushrooms. If you are feeding a hedgehog in your garden give them cat or dog food, never give them milk as hedgehogs are lactose intolerant!



The International Union For the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has recently updated the conservation status of the Western European Hedgehog to 'Near Threatened' on its Red List as hedgehog populations continue to decline across Europe. The main threats are habitat loss and road traffic. Hedgehogs need hedges or small woodlands near open spaces to thrive.



## Leave the leaves....

Leaving the leaves that fall during autumn to pile up in parts of your garden provides hedgehogs with crucial nesting material for their hibernation sites. Hedgehogs must hibernate when the weather gets colder from around November until March. Hedgehogs use the leaves to make their nests which they build in vegetation such as long grass, brambles and shrubs or under woodpiles, sheds or compost heaps.

Fallen leaves and dead wood also provide important overwintering sites for pollinators and invertebrates and add to the health of the soil as they decay.



**Become a citizen scientist and submit your hedgehog sightings to :**

**<https://records.biodiversityireland.ie/record/hedgehog-survey#7/53.455/-8.016>**





# Winterage Festival

Each year the Burren Beo Trust organises and coordinates the Burren Winterage Weekend festival in celebration of the centuries-old farming tradition of winterage. This year's event ran from the 25th-27th of October culminating with the community cattle drive. The NPWS had the honour of hosting this year's drive as well as the Burren Food Fayre organised by the Burren Eco Tourism Network (BEN) at McGann's Farm in Tullycommon.

The NPWS recently purchased the farm in Tullycommon, Kilnaboy. This was formerly the home of Gerald McGann, a traditional shorthorn cattle farmer. A name stone has been built into the wall at the entrance to the farm and a plaque to honour the the late Mr. McGann was unveiled on the day of the cattle drive.



Despite the very wet weather, over 700 people attended the event to accompany the cattle to their winter grazing grounds on the limestone uplands of Tullycommon. Winterage is a type of reverse transhumance practised mainly in the Burren region and the Aran Islands. These upland limestone pasture lands offer superb herb-rich winter foraging grounds for cattle. The warm limestone bedrock helps to extend the growing season while the grazing livestock help to keep scrub at bay at a time when flowering plants are dormant. This means that when the cattle are moved off the uplands in Spring, the unique Burren flora have space and light to thrive. This has helped give rise to the remarkable biodiversity found in Burren in terms of flowering plant species and insects. The practice of winterage is now recognised as part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Ireland.



A number of native Irish breeds of cattle are currently wintering on our Tullycommon farm. These breeds include the rare and distinctive Irish Moiled cattle (pictured right) along with Kerry cattle and Droimeann cattle. The farm is also currently home to some Connemara ponies.



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# ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPDATES



## Burren National Park Information Point Christmas opening hours:

We will be closed 25th and 26th December and 1st January  
Apart from the above dates we are open daily from 10am to 5pm.

### Free Guided Tour:

There will be a free guided tour of the Nature Trail on  
Sunday 22nd December at 2.30pm. Booking essential.  
Please contact us at 065 6827693 or  
burrennationalpark@npws.gov.ie for more details and to  
book.



Nollaig Shona dár gcuariteoirí go  
léir agus gach rath ar 2025  
ó gach duine i bPáirc Náisiúntana  
Boirne

## Burren National Park:

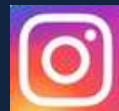
**Information Point:** Clare Heritage Centre, Church Street, Corofin, Co. Clare  
V95 T9V6

**Páirc Náisiúnta Bhoirne Ionad Cuairteoirí,** Sráid an Teampaill, Cora Finne, Co an  
Chláir V95 T9V6

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

**Email:** [burrennationalpark@npws.gov.ie](mailto:burrennationalpark@npws.gov.ie)

**Phone:** 065 6827693



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