



# BURREN NATIONAL PARK

Spring Newsletter 2025

As the days become longer, signs of spring can be found all over the Burren National Park. The leaf rosettes of Early Purple orchid, Spring Gentian and Mountain Everlasting can be found by the eager plant-spotter. Many grassland and woodland plants such as Wood Anemone, Barren Strawberry, Early Dog-Violet, Coltsfoot and Primrose have already appeared providing nourishment to early emerging bees, butterflies, hoverflies and beetles.

Many of the turlough basins in the park have begun to empty but were teeming with caddisfly larvae clothed in their protective casings ingeniously constructed with material from these special Burren wetland habitats. You might still spot some in springs or water-filled grikes. Birds are becoming more active at this time, and an early morning visit to the park offers the reward of the splendid natural symphony that is the dawn chorus!

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# Early Spring Flora

As the days grow warmer and longer, the first signs of spring can already be seen in the Burren National Park to tease us with the prospect of the colourful visual feast that will emerge over the coming months. Many of the first flowers of spring are predominantly white and yellow. Below are some species already in bloom in the Burren National Park.



White flowers such as Wood Anemone *Anemone nemorosa* **Lus na gaoithe** and Barren Strawberry *Potentilla sterilis* **Sú talun bréige** are among the first flowers seen in the pockets of hazel woodland during early Spring in the Burren National Park. White flowers have the advantage of being visible to a wide range of pollinators as they reflect all visible light and UV light. They can also be seen in low light levels such as shady woodlands where they stand out against brown or mossy green backgrounds.



Some of the earliest pollinators are various small flies, hoverflies and beetles which find it easy to see white flowers. UV light, which is invisible to humans, is also important to flies who can perceive UV reflecting patterns on flower petals that guide the insects to nectar and pollen.



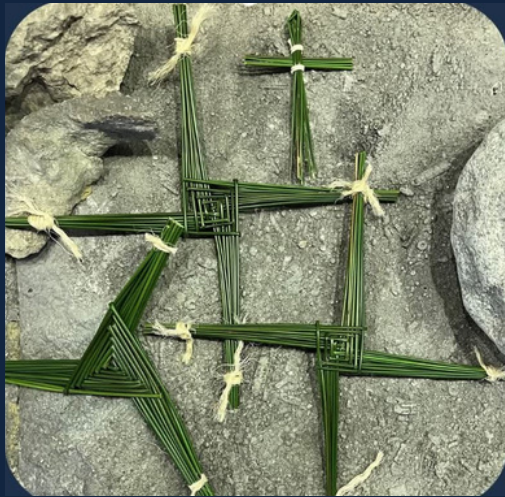
Like white flowers, yellow flowers are generalists when it comes to attracting pollinators, though they may not attract as many species as the white. Lesser Celandine *Ficaria verna ssp verna* **Grán arcán** is pollinated by a number of insects, including solitary bees, which are among the first bees to emerge in Spring, as well as hoverflies, beetles and flies. If insects are scarce it also has the ability to self pollinate.



One of the first flowers to bloom is Coltsfoot *Tussilago farfara* **Sponc** which can be seen as early as February. The lovely bright yellow shaggy flowers appear before its leaves and take advantage of early-emerging pollinators such as the Brimstone butterfly *Gonepteryx rhamni*, on the wing as early as the beginning of March this year in the Burren National Park. These butterflies actually have a preference for purple, blue or pink flowers but yellow flowers will suffice!



# Recent Event: Imbolg



A selection of St Brigid's Crosses (left) made by visitors and staff in the Burren information Point, Corofin to mark St. Brigid's day on February 1st which coincides with the more ancient custom of Imbolg.

Imbolg was celebrated in early February and is believed to be based on a Celtic tradition marking the halfway point between the winter solstice and the spring equinox in ancient Ireland. It is one of four pre-Christian festivals heralding the changing seasons.

Imbolg, or 'i mbolg' in old Irish, meaning 'in the belly', refers to the pregnancy of ewes at this time of year, and was traditionally aligned with the first day of spring, the idea of rebirth and reconnecting with nature.



St Brigid's day, or Lá Fhéile Bríde celebrates both the 6th century saint who founded the monastery of Kildare and the goddess Brigid who are associated with wisdom, poetry, healing, protection, blacksmithing, domesticated and wild animals.

One tradition associated with Imbolg includes the weaving of Brigid's crosses from rushes. These crosses are then hung over the door to protect the household from fire, illness and evil spirits throughout the year, while the previous year's cross is burnt on the fire.

Another tradition involved the Brat Bhríde or Brigid's red cloak, where a piece of cloth symbolic of the cloak was laid outside before sunset on the eve of St. Brigid's Feast Day and brought back in before sunrise. Blessed by Brigid, ancient Spring Goddess and Saint, the dew which fell that night imbued the cloth with powers of healing and protection which lasted throughout the year. It would be kept in a special place in the house and brought out when illness occurred. For example it could be used to cure a headache by wrapping it around the head or it was used by midwives to help women in childbirth, for Brigid was especially known as being the patron of healers and midwives. It was used on sick animals also, especially cows and sheep for which Brigid had a special affinity. It was also a custom in some communities to make Brideóg dolls, visit holy wells, practice divination or partake in spring cleaning.



# Featured Species: Caddisfly




One fascinating creature found in the Burren National Park in early Spring is the Caddisfly. These small, moth-like insects are related to moths and butterflies.


The larvae of the Caddisfly are aquatic and live in the springs and turloughs of the park, while the adult Caddisfly is terrestrial and most active at night, attracted to light like moths. During the day they rest in vegetation or on rocks. There are approximately 149 species known in Ireland.



One of the most intriguing aspects of the caddisfly is the larval stage of their lifecycle. The young caddisfly has a soft, long, caterpillar-like body and lives in freshwater habitats such as springs, turloughs, rivers, lakes or ponds. In order to protect themselves, caddisflies build protective cases from silk which are produced from glands near their mouthparts. They incorporate material from their environment which might include vegetation such as grass and reeds, small pebbles and stones or snail shells. The examples to the left were found in the Burren National Park, the top casing is made from grasses whilst the lower one is made up mainly of Ramshorn snail shells which can be found in the Turlough.



Caddisflies have an important role to play in wetland ecosystems. The larvae often feed on decaying plant material and algae, breaking down nutrients and recycling them. Adult caddisflies and larvae are eaten by birds and by both adult and nymph dragonflies.



Caddisflies are good bioindicators of water quality as many species are sensitive to pollution so their presence in wetlands can indicate a healthy habitat.



# Dawn Chorus: Why do Birds sing?



The thrilling trilling sounds of the Dawn Chorus are already rewarding early risers but why do birds join together in this early morning symphony at this time of year? The chorus is mostly led by male birds of many different species seeking a mate. They are spurred into action by the lengthening days and warmer temperatures. They sing to define, defend and reaffirm their territories each morning. It is also a way to attract a female; a strong, confident song tells females that the singer is fit, healthy and a good mate. The first light of dawn is also the best time to sing as the air is often still and quiet at this time, it is also not bright enough for foraging and low light levels provide some cover from predators.



## Who sings when?

There is an order to the dawn chorus and each species of bird has its own time to sing. Birds with bigger eyes respond to the increasing light levels earlier, with thrushes, blackbirds and robins being the first to sing. As the light grows stronger they are joined by birds such as wrens, warblers, sparrows, finches, wood pigeon and collared dove. In the Burren you may also hear a cuckoo in the mix!



The months of April and May are a great time to experience the dawn chorus at its best. It can begin between 30 - 60 minutes before dawn, which means singing could start between 4:30-5:30am depending on the exact time of sunrise. One of the wonderful things about the dawn chorus is that birds are everywhere, so anyone, whether urban or rural, can enjoy the magic of this beautiful natural symphony for free.

## Did you know....

Birds can sing two notes at the same time! Bird's don't have vocal chords like humans; instead, they have a unique sound-producing organ called the syrinx, which has two independently controlled sides, meaning some birds can sing two notes at the same time, creating intricate melodies. This is known as biphonation, birds such as the Robin *Erithacus rubecula* **Spideog**, Blackbird *Turdus merula* **Lon dubh** and Song Thrushes *Turdus philomelos* **Smólach ceoil** have this ability.



# Meet the Burren National Park Guides



**Name:** Phoebe Larkin

**Role:** Burren National Park *Head Guide*

**How long have you been working with NPWS/ Burren National Park:** Since 2019

**What do you enjoy most about your job:** I find it so rewarding showing our visitors the incredible wonders of the Burren's biodiversity and its stunningly unique karst landscape.

**Areas of special interest/ knowledge:** I like to think I know a bit about everything but am an expert in none! I grew up in the Burren and loved its flora from an early age, especially the Orchids. I also love trying to identify lichens and fungi when the flowers are not in bloom.

**Your favourite place/trail in Burren National Park:** So much beautiful landscape to choose from but the slopes of Sliabh Rua and Slieve Carran Nature Reserve would be a couple of my favourite spots.

**Special sightings/magical moments:** Finding amazing species for the first time such as Autumn Ladies Tresses orchids, Crab Spiders and Adder's Tongue Fern. Seeing Slow Worms is always exciting too.



**Name:** Liz O'Donoghue

**Role:** Burren National Park *Visitor Guide*

**How long have you been working with NPWS/ Burren National Park:**

Since April 2021.

**What do you enjoy most about your job:**

I really enjoy meeting new people and introducing them to the many wonders of the Burren. I also enjoy the opportunity the job offers me to learn new things about the Burren, biodiversity and conservation especially as I grew up here and live in the Burren now.

**Areas of special interest/ knowledge:** I am very interested in the flora and geology of the Burren, I also really like bats! My previous work was in Archaeology so I am fascinated with the Burren as a cultural lived in landscape that countless generations over thousands of years have called home .

**Your favourite place/trail in Burren National Park:**

Reaching the top of Mullaghmore and taking in the stunning limestone geology of the Burren.

**Special sightings/magical moments:**

I'll always remember my first time seeing the Dark Red Helleborine orchid. Meeting a Pine Marten one day on the orange trail in the park is also a very memorable encounter.



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**Name:** Conor Southby

**Role:** Burren National Park *Visitor Guide*

**How long have you been working with NPWS/  
Burren National Park?**

As of the 23 of March 2025: 1 year, 9 months and 23 days.

**What do you enjoy most about your job?**

Getting to meet people from around the world and showing them the unique history and landscape of the Burren.

**Areas of special interest/ knowledge:**

My special area of interest is the local history and folklore of the Burren.

**Your favourite place/trail in Burren National Park:**

The Nature Trail as it has everything and anything you would want to see in the Burren within a 1.5 km trail.

**Special sightings/magical moments:**

I once spotted a black and yellow common lizard *Zootoca vivipara* come out from a grike on the White Trail.



**Name:** Claire Ní Grianna

**Role:** Burren National Park *Visitor Guide*

**How long have you been working with NPWS/  
Burren National Park**

I started working with the NPWS in June of 2023, during that gorgeous heatwave and I'm still here!



**What do you enjoy most about your job:**

It may sound clichéd but the diversity. Being out in nature, seeing the seasons come and go, the flowers, the colours, the life, the beauty, and sharing that with others. There is always something new to see and as we say, every day's a school day!

**Areas of special interest/ knowledge:**

Leading people on mindfulness walks agus turais bláthanna i nGaeilge. Facilitating art in the park events where people can experience and respond to their environment creatively.

**Your favourite place/trail in Burren National Park:**

I have a soft spot for Lough Gealáin, standing at the waters edge, listening to the birds, watching the grasses swaying and the light bouncing off Mullaghmore, Slieve Rua and Knockanes, heaven.

**Special sightings/magical moments:**

Recently I visited Glencurran cave on a frosty atmospheric morning and as we entered the woodland we spotted hair ice! The conditions were just right. When we left an hour later, the temperature had risen and it had disappeared! We just got our magical moment.





**Name: Helen McQuillan**

**Role: Burren National Park *Visitor Guide***

**How long have you been working in Burren NP?**

I started in January this year

**What do you enjoy most about your job?**

Continuously learning and sharing knowledge about the Burren and the role of the NPWS in protecting nature. There is always something new to learn, see and be shown. Nature is full of surprises, no matter what the season or weather – there is always something wonderful to see. Meeting people and visitors who appreciate nature and landscape makes the job really enjoyable, and the curiosity of children is infectious.

**Area of special interest:**

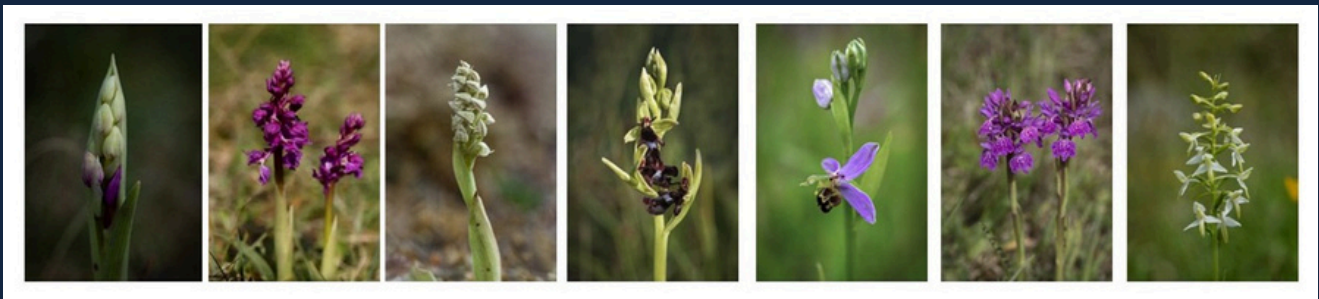
I have been photographing the flora and invertebrates of Burren National Park for almost a decade. I have a special interest in macro photography which captures plants and insects in detail. Flora, especially orchids, are my area of special interest.

**Favourite trail or place in Burren National Park:**

The orange trail is my favourite trail. The first small meadow attracts beautiful moths, butterflies and dragonflies, and has a rich floral tapestry from March until October.

**Magical moment:**

An encounter with a grasshopper, who posed on a knapweed beside me for several minutes.



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# April Events

**Sunday 13th @ 10.30am White Trail Guided Walk**

**Thursday 17th @ 7.30pm Bat Walk in Dromore Wood Nature Reserve**

**Sunday 20th @ 10.30am Mindfulness in Nature Walk  
@ 2pm Slieve Carran Guided Walk**

**Monday 21st @ 10.30am Orange Trail Guided Walk**

**Saturday 26th @ 10am Slieve Carran Guided Walk**

Keep up to date with upcoming events this Summer on our website or follow us on facebook or Instagram.

\*Events are free but booking is essential as places are limited. Please contact us at [burrennationalpark@npws.gov.ie](mailto:burrennationalpark@npws.gov.ie) or phone 065 6827693 for more details and to book.



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# ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPDATES



## Burren National Park Information Point opening hours:

The Burren Information Point in Corofin is currently open seven days a week 10am - 5pm.

Please note the Burren Information Point will be closed on Monday 7th April

Our daily free shuttle bus service from Corofin to the Burren National Park trailhead will begin again at the start of May



Email us at [burrennationalpark@npws.gov.ie](mailto:burrennationalpark@npws.gov.ie) to book a free guided tour with one of our experienced guides to learn about and enjoy this beautiful and unique landscape.

## 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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