

Pollinators in the Park

What do we do for pollinators?

Guide staff from the Ballycroy Visitor Centre in Wild Nephin National Park have been monitoring species visiting the wildflowers across the Park. The public are informed on the importance of keeping wildflower meadows and creating areas for pollinators. Check out the video from 2020 where Guides demonstrated seed collection and sowing wildflower seeds to attract pollinators. Also in 2020 more than 100 biodiversity monitoring surveys were carried out by the National Park Guides and submitted to the National Biodiversity Data Centre. General Operatives that manage the landscape have worked on improving flower beds by selecting pollinator friendly plants such as lavender and mint. There is a reduced mowing regime on the grounds of the Visitor Centre to ensure an adequate food supply for pollinators. These flowering grasslands are also enjoyed by visitors to the site!

Mowing of our wildflower meadow is only undertaken in September so that the wildflowers bloom each year for pollinators and plants can set seed for the following year. There is also a LINNET plot, sown with wildflowers and cereals each year for birds, which has also benefited many pollinators. Last year there were days where over 60 large white butterflies were observed feeding in this plot at any one time. There are also bug hotels for solitary bees.

Pollinator Monitoring Scheme

Guides are taking part in the Bumblebee Monitoring Scheme. They record the diversity and abundance of bumblebees in the Park along a 2km fixed route of the Daithí Bán Nature Trail from March until October. This provides essential data on bumblebee populations. The National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) uses this data to track changes in wild pollinators across the Irish landscape. A walk of this length ensures that the bumblebees you see are representative of the community present in the Park. Of the 21 different bumblebee species in Ireland, below are some of the more regularly seen in the Park.

Bumble bees that regularly visit our wildflowers

When you visit the Park be sure to check out our Dandelions, Heather and Devil's-Bit Scabious, these are some of the bumblebees' favourite food plants.



Carder Bee
Bombus pascuorum



White-tailed Bumblebee
Bombus lucorum



Buff-tailed Bumblebee
Bombus terrestris



Garden Bumblebee
Bombus hortorum

Why Bumblebees? They are Ireland's most important wild pollinators. Many of our rare bumblebee species are threatened with extinction across Ireland, but it is also important that we understand how the abundance of our more common species is changing. These records provide vital baseline data that will be used to assess the impact of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan over time, and a useful measure of how Park management measures are helping increase biodiversity.

Citizen science projects such as the Pollinator Monitoring Scheme helps provide long-term datasets to track changes and detect the early warning signs of a general threat to bumblebees and to the pollination services they provide. In Ireland pollination of many of our crops rely heavily on wild pollinators to fertilise our food plants to produce crops like apples, berries etc. Bees provide an estimated €53million in pollination services annually.

FIT Counts Guides also carry out a Flower-Insect Timed Count (FIT Count) by observing a patch of flowers for 10 minutes and count how many insects visit. The scheme runs from April to September.



Survey quadrant for FIT count

Why is it important? Scientists know that Ireland has declining biodiversity but we lack the baseline data for many of the species. In order to combat the declining abundance and potential species loss of pollinating insects such as bees and flies, we need much more data about them to be able to track changes over time.

Guides at the Park are undertaking Flower-Insect Timed Count (FIT Count) surveys that were designed to collect new data on the numbers of flower-visiting insects. FIT Counts are a very simple survey that anybody can take part in this citizen science project. It involves you watching a patch of flowers for 10 minutes and counting how many insects visit and then submit your data online. The scheme runs from April to September. Doing this across various habitat types in the park and repeating through the year and future years will show you the impact of conservation management measures on insect numbers and diversity within the park.

Butterfly Monitoring Scheme

In Ireland we have 35 resident and regular migrant species of Irish butterfly, of which 20 have been recorded in the Park. Butterflies are significant indicators of the state of Ireland's environment. Taking part in the Butterfly Monitoring Scheme is another great way for the Guides to measure changes in the Park's biodiversity. Although butterflies are less efficient pollinators than bees they are an excellent group of pollinators to monitor as they are very active during the day and are easily spotted. Flowers that are red or yellow in colour or have a strong scent and produce a large amount of nectar are often pollinated by butterflies.

Butterflies at Wild Nephin National Park

Painted Lady (*Vanessa cardui*)
Common Blue (*Polyommatus icarus*)
Dark Green Fritillary (*Argynis agalja*)
Green Hairstreak (*Callophrys rubi*)
Green-veined White (*Pieris napi*)
Large Heath (*Coenonympha tullia*)
Speckled Wood (*Pararge aegeria*)
Orange-tip (*Anthocharis cardamines*)
Peacock (*Inachis io*)
Meadow Brown (*Maniola jurtina*)
Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*)
Ringlet (*Aphantopus hyperantus*)
Silver-washed Fritillary (*Argynnis paphia*)
Small Blue (*Cupido minimus*)
Small Heath (*Coenonympha pamphilus*)
Wood White (*Leptida* sp.)
Large White (*Pieris brassicae*)
Small White (*Pieris rapae*)
Marsh Fritillary (*Euphydryas aurinia*)
Small Tortoiseshell (*Aglais urticae*)



Green Hairstreak



Red Admiral



Painted Lady



Green-veined White

Casual sightings

Guides at Wild Nephin National Park regularly submit casual sightings of bees and hoverflies. All records are very valuable, regardless of how common the species is. We also collect records of species in different habitats like along our Claggan Mountain Coastal Trail or at Letterkeen Forest. We occasionally set moth traps to gauge what species diversity is present in the park after dark as moths too are important pollinators of nocturnal flowers.



Hoverfly species



Tiger Moth



Early Thorn Moth