



The Grasslands Trail

Showcasing some
Great Irish Grasslands



An tSeirbhís Páirceanna Náisiúnta
agus Fiadhúlra
National Parks and Wildlife Service

National
Biodiversity
Data Centre
Documenting Ireland's Wildlife



What is the 'Grasslands Trail'?

The 'Grasslands Trail' is a network of mostly publicly accessible grasslands spread across the country. All of these sites are managed sensitively, with nature conservation and grassland diversity in mind. Some also have more intensively managed parkland areas – so make sure to explore the wildest parts!

The Grasslands Trail allows locals and visitors to gain a better understanding of endangered pasture and meadow habitats. You can see and experience up close what great Irish grasslands look like. Many of these sites are close to other amenities and attractions, so might be a peaceful place to stop for a walk or a picnic on a busy day.

When to visit

Summer is the best time to visit most grasslands, but at these sites there is lots to see year round. For example, you might see a meadow being mown in late summer, or a grassland full of wild spring flowers in March/April. Autumn is the time that birds feed on seedheads in grasslands, and in mid-winter ponies might be grazing thick grass so that the pastures can be left for biodiversity the rest of the year.

The site profiles

Each site profile in this booklet will give you a flavour of what you might see, from orchids to rare breed cattle, from patches of meadow to vast areas of grassy habitats. All the grasslands on the Grasslands Trail are supported by a range of management actions to ensure that they are in the best condition for wildlife. As a result, you will see butterflies and hear insects buzzing in the species-rich grass. There is also information on parking and access, and links to find out more.

Future plans and feedback

The Grasslands Trail is being rolled out as a pilot initiative, featuring nine sites. These are just a few examples of great Irish grasslands. Please use the hashtag #GrasslandsTrail to share other locations which might be added in the future! Over time, we hope to expand the trail, but for now, we hope you enjoy those highlighted.



Share your pictures or ideas on social media using #GrasslandsTrail or #GreatIrishGrasslands



Semi-natural grasslands

All the grasslands on the Grasslands Trail are what ecologists call 'semi-natural grasslands'. They are not fully natural habitats because their existence is dependent on some human management. Without this, most would change to scrub or woodland. Semi-natural grasslands have not been heavily altered by agriculture, but instead, are managed in a less intensive way.

Grassland types

Just as there are different types of woodlands, there are different types of semi-natural grassland on the island of Ireland. Broadly, a grassland can be wet or dry, acidic or calcareous (= lime-rich), and rich or poor in nutrients (e.g. nitrogen, phosphorus). The type of grassland is also influenced by the soil, geology, climate, and past management. All of these factors combine to give us an amazing array of subtly different grassland types in Ireland.

The Grasslands Trail is a tour through the amazing diversity of Ireland's semi-natural grasslands. From dry grasslands managed to balance leisure activities with nature at Ballycastle Golf Course, coastal grasslands on calcareous soil (machair) at Sheskinmore Nature Reserve, and suburban/parkland areas managed as hay meadows at Newbridge House and Farm, Castletown House or Tymon Park. There is a diverse farmland pasture managed by grazing, a site within the unique limestone pavement of the Burren, a damp grassland in the Doneraile Estate, and a pasture within the wooded Glengarriff Nature Reserve.

Accessibility:

Note that while most of these sites have footpaths or relatively even areas for walking, many will not be fully wheelchair accessible. If you have accessibility or other queries, it's best to contact the location directly.



GRASSLAND

any area dominated by grasses

MEADOW

usually a grassland managed by mowing

PASTURE

a grassland managed by grazing



ABOUT US

This booklet has been developed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, with support from the National Biodiversity Data Centre and the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan. Visit the [Great Irish Grasslands](#) website for more information.

Why are semi-natural grasslands important?

Semi-natural grasslands are more important than you might think!



Nature

Semi-natural grasslands are hugely important for our native biodiversity, supporting vast arrays of plants and animals, many of which will only thrive in open grassland habitats. This includes many orchids and other wildflower species, many insects (e.g. grasshoppers, butterflies, etc.), and a range of farmland birds, such as Corncrake, Yellowhammer, Barn Owl and Skylark.



Carbon

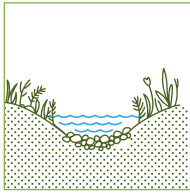
They capture and store great quantities of carbon. Some grassland types, such as floodplain meadows, rival woodlands for carbon capture.



Soils

Diverse grassland plant communities support healthy soils, with thriving ecosystems of their own. There can be up to 1 billion individual microscopic cells and around 10,000 different species in a gram of healthy soil!





Water

Grasslands work hard to filter water through their healthy soils, helping to provide us with clear water in our streams and rivers.



Flooding prevention

They carry out a valuable function in times of flooding, by holding water and slowing its flow downstream. We need more grasslands and other semi-natural habitats to hold water in times of extreme rainfall and to help keep urban areas free from flooding (see page 26).



Health & wellbeing

There is little better than a flowery, buzzing summer meadow. We all derive great pleasure and sustenance from being in nature, and diverse, functioning grasslands help us to feel good and connected to nature.



Tourism

Flourishing grasslands can support tourism, by providing visitors from near and far with beautiful views and experiences.



A disappearing habitat:

Recent data from the National Parks and Wildlife Service in the Republic of Ireland show losses of about 30% for some of our most special grassland types, over a period of just ten years. The main causes of loss are:



- A. conversion to intensive agriculture (e.g. ploughing, re-seeding, fertilising),
- B. planting with forestry,
- C. and perhaps counter-intuitively, abandonment. This is because lack of management quickly leads to decline in quality in most semi-natural grasslands.





Castletown House

Celbridge, Co. Kildare



In mid-June, this meadow is a mosaic of colour, with Pyramidal Orchids, Common-spotted Orchids, Bee Orchids, Yellow-rattle, Goat's-beard and Hawkbits all providing essential food for bumblebees and solitary bees.

MANAGEMENT

The 25 ha area of long-flowering meadow is mown in September each year, and the cuttings are removed. The 8 ha area of rough grassland which borders the River Liffey is cut every five years.

WHERE TO FIND OUT MORE:

<https://www.castletown.ie/>

DESCRIPTION

Meadows are the centrepiece in this restored 18th century landscape. Flowering from March to September, each month provides a feast for our pollinating insects.

We have managed our meadows for almost 20 years now, cutting in September and removing the biomass, and so reducing the soil fertility and allowing a higher diversity of species to flourish. During that time we have witnessed an amazing transformation. 16 ha are now considered to be the rare habitat type 'Lowland Hay Meadows' (listed for protection on Annex I of the EU Habitats Directive), and a further 8 ha are almost at that level.

Majestic Oaks and Lime trees, dotted through the meadows, enhance the views of the Dublin mountains in the distance. Pathways through the meadows enable visitors to experience the sights, sounds and smells of these species-rich and threatened habitats.



Large Carder Bee

ACCESS:

Publicly accessible year-round

SIZE:

33 ha

PARKING:

yes, free

CAFÉ:

yes

TOILETS:

yes

OWNERS:

Office of Public Works (OPW)

Collecting meadow seed





Tymon Park

Tallaght, Co. Dublin



Tymon Park boasts a number of great grassland areas. There are large expanses of meadows, and smaller areas of species-rich calcareous grasslands, some of which are on an old esker ridge.

MANAGEMENT

The grasslands in the park are managed to have a mixture of short-flowering and long-flowering meadows. The long-flowering areas are mown in late summer, with the cuttings removed.

WHERE TO FIND OUT MORE:

<https://www.sdcc.ie/en/services/sport-and-recreation/parks/tymon-park.html>

<https://www.sdcc.ie/en/services/environment/pollinators/>

DESCRIPTION

In parts of Tallaght and Greenhills there are unimproved esker soils, and these offer great potential for species-rich grasslands. This potential was realised when the grass cutting management practices in Tymon Park were altered by South Dublin County Council to facilitate flowering species and pollinating insects. Most of these meadows are now cut only once a year, and clippings are removed to continue to decrease fertility and to encourage further wildflower species.



Hoverfly on Buttercup

A biodiversity monitoring programme commenced in 2020, with support from NPWS's Local Biodiversity Action Fund. These surveys found that significant areas of the meadows now align with 'Lowland Hay Meadows', and some with 'Species-rich Calcareous Grassland' (both listed for protection on Annex 1 of the EU Habitats Directive). This botanical restoration supports healthy insect and pollinator populations, offering a critically important green infrastructure resource to a wide range of species in an urban environment in a time of biodiversity and climate challenge. In 2023, a pilot project was undertaken to collect and store seed from some of these meadows, with the potential to use this seed in other appropriate restoration projects in the locality.

ACCESS:

Publicly accessible year-round

SIZE:

49 ha

PARKING:

yes, free

CAFÉ:

coming soon

TOILETS:

yes

OWNERS:

South Dublin County Council

"Having seen the decline and loss of wonderful species-rich grasslands across Ireland over the course of my career, I jumped at the opportunity to help restore South Dublin County Council's esker grasslands and the invertebrate biodiversity they support. To see such a diversity of plants and insects on my urban doorstep is a pure joy!"

Rosaleen Dwyer, Heritage Officer, South Dublin County Council





Glengarriff Nature Reserve

Glengarriff, Co. Cork



The 'wood pasture' grassland in the Big Meadow features swathes of purple Devil's-bit Scabious in late summer, many ant hills and several stately Oak.

MANAGEMENT

The pasture is grazed from late summer into the winter by a small organic herd of Kerry cattle. If scrub begins to encroach, it is strimmed. Rushy areas are occasionally topped.

WHERE TO FIND OUT MORE:

<https://www.glengarriffnaturereserve.ie/activities/>



DESCRIPTION

'Big Meadow' is an island of grassland in the middle of the almost entirely wooded Glengarriff Nature Reserve (301 ha). It adds to the diversity, and is home to many invertebrates. The area has not been ploughed, reseeded or fertilised in living memory, but has been lightly grazed in autumn by cattle for many years.



Bumblebee on Devil's-bit Scabious

This long history of low intensity management gives the grassland a special character. It has many anthills (see photo on left), which form their own microclimate, their grassy humps slightly warmer and drier than the surrounding vegetation. It is possible that some of these anthills are over 100 years old. Another striking feature is the swathes of Devil's-bit Scabious, with their sea of purple-blue blossoms in late summer. Even in September, the grassland buzzes with life as pollinators of many kinds are attracted to this late source of pollen. Devil's-bit Scabious is also the food plant of the rare Marsh Fritillary, and these pretty butterflies can be seen flying here in June, along with other species such as Meadow Brown and Ringlet. In early summer there are many Heath Spotted-orchids, easily seen from the path that runs along the edge of the meadow. Other parts of the grassland are quite acidic with damp hollows, rushy patches and tussocks of Purple Moor-grass.

ACCESS:

Publicly accessible year-round (via the 3km 'Big Meadow Trail', which starts in Nature Reserve main carpark)

SIZE:

5 ha

PARKING:

yes, free

CAFÉ:

no

TOILETS:

no (Glengarriff Village, 1 km away)

OWNERS:

National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS)





Farmland at 'The Rocks'

near Taughmaconnell, Co. Roscommon



This farm has a large area of semi-natural grassland on well-drained calcareous soil. There is an array of wildflowers, helped by conservation grazing. Like a mini-Burren!

MANAGEMENT

Grazed in winter by Hereford cattle.

WHERE TO FIND OUT MORE:

<https://www.facebook.com/Walk theRocks>



Lesser Butterfly orchid

DESCRIPTION

Large areas of species-rich calcareous grassland are found in this area. Many orchid species have been recorded including - Common Spotted-orchid, Frog Orchid, Heath Fragrant-orchid, Heath Spotted-orchid and Lesser Butterfly-orchid. A succession of flowers bloom from early spring until autumn, including Primroses, Mouse-ear-hawkweed, Lady's Bedstraw, Wild Thyme, Common Bird's-foot-trefoil and Common Knapweed. Rarer species like Mountain Everlasting, Kidney Vetch, Carline Thistle, Rough Hawkbit, Burnet-saxifrage and Fairy Flax are also found. It is thus not surprising that it is a haven for wildlife, with insects, birds and mammals found throughout.



Kidney Vetch and
Mouse-ear-hawkweed

The landscape is like a time capsule, a glimpse of what was once widespread in South Roscommon. This is directly linked to the sensitive management and traditional farming practices of the local farming families over many generations, and it is worth protecting for the generations that come next. Cattle are allowed to graze the land through the winter months, and are taken off in early spring. In late August, some light grazing takes places with daily monitoring of the herd. This landscape supplies fresh drinking water to a large catchment area in Roscommon.

ACCESS:

Private, but walks with farmer possible by request
(liamkildea@gmail.com)

SIZE:

20 ha, set within a wider area known as 'The Rocks'.

PARKING:

by arrangement only

CAFÉ:

no

TOILETS:

no

OWNERS:

Privately owned farmland



Ant hill, orchid and hawkbit





Sheskinmore Nature Reserve

near Ardara, Co. Donegal



Sheskinmore (An Seascann Mór, the big marsh) and Magheramore (Machaire Mór, the big sandy plain) perfectly describe what to expect at this site - a fen with wet grassland behind a machair plain, with undulating fixed dunes and saltmarsh meadows, helped by conservation grazing.

MANAGEMENT

The fixed dunes, machair and saltmarsh are grazed from October to May with cattle or horses. Some grassland parcels are cut once for haylage in late summer. The fen area is lightly summer-grazed with horses or Aberdeen Angus bullocks, with the animals being moved around to prevent poaching. The species-rich wet grassland is lightly cattle-grazed at various times of the year. Some of the farmers have Moiled cattle, an old Irish breed.

WHERE TO FIND OUT MORE:

<https://www.npws.ie/nature-reserves/donegal/sheskinmore-nature-reserve;>

<https://sheskinmore.wordpress.com/home>

DESCRIPTION

Winter grazing with cattle on fixed dunes and machair is ideal for floral diversity. After the stock are removed, plants can grow, flower and set seed, resulting in a succession of wildflowers. In May, Early-purple Orchids appear in their 1,000's, followed by a beautiful variety of Early Marsh-orchid in June. In mid-summer, rarer species appear like Dense-flowered Orchid, Bee Orchid and the well-camouflaged Frog Orchid. Showier are the Marsh Helleborine and Fragrant-orchids. And it's not only orchids - Grass-of-Parnassus, Devil's-bit Scabious and Field Gentian flower in August, signalling the end of summer.



Marsh Fritillary Butterfly

As well as dunes and machair, other important grassland types occur, such as 'Species-rich Calcareous Grasslands' and 'Molinia Meadows' (both listed for protection on Annex 1 of the EU Habitats Directive). The combination of acidic bedrock, with alkaline sand, interspersed with wet peaty hollows, over undulating ground, makes every corner worth exploring for wildlife. For example, the protected invertebrates Marsh Fritillary butterfly and marsh snail, *Vertigo geyeri*, are found here, as well as a wealth of breeding waders.

NPWS have recognized the importance of the area since the 1980s, having bought 385 ha of land around the Lough. A number of private farmers are involved in a results-based agri-environment scheme (NPWS Farm Plan Scheme), in which land parcels are scored for floral diversity each summer, with payments linked to habitat quality.

ACCESS:

Publicly accessible year-round (search for 'Sheskinmore NR car park' on google maps for the northern entrance point)

SIZE:

385 ha (across whole Reserve)

PARKING:

yes, free

CAFÉ:

no

TOILETS:

no

OWNERS:

National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), and some privately owned land



Early Marsh-orchid





Newbridge House and Farm

Donabate, Co. Dublin



This historical house has a working farm with hay meadows. It also has pastures, grazed by rare breeds.

MANAGEMENT

Pastures are grazed by Irish Moiled cows, a herd of Kerry cattle, Irish Draught horses and Jacob's sheep. Hay meadows are cut once a year.

WHERE TO FIND OUT MORE:

<https://newbridgehouseandfarm.com>



Hoverfly on Devil's-bit Scabious

DESCRIPTION

Large areas of parkland with sensitively managed meadows provide a nice contrast to the grazed areas at this diverse site. Some meadow areas are distinctly damp (look out for species such as Meadowsweet), and others are much drier (in spring, search for the Cowslips to help you find the dry calcareous grassland).



Meadow Barley

The site supports some unusual species, with rare grasses such as Upright Brome and Meadow Barley to be found. Meadow Barley is listed on the Flora (Protection) Order, 2022. The presence of Upright Brome helps to demarcate the extent of the EU Habitats Directive-listed 'Species-rich Calcareous Grassland'. The beautiful Meadow Barley is found in damper areas of grassland, which are mostly managed as meadow, with one cut late in the season. At this site, not all areas are managed in the same way. Some are grazed, others are allowed to grow taller and wilder, and some areas are managed as shorter-flowering meadows. This ensures that there is a great diversity of grassland types and sward heights to be found.

While the woodland areas here are undoubtedly of value, a recent ecological study noted that the meadow areas are the most important of the semi-natural habitats within the demesne, particularly as they support rare grass species.

ACCESS:

Main park grasslands publicly accessible year-round (some facilities closed Mondays from Oct to Mar). Charge applies to visit Farm Discovery Trail

SIZE:

100 ha

PARKING:

yes, free

CAFÉ:

yes

TOILETS:

yes

OWNERS:

Fingal County Council



Cowslip





Slieve Carran/ Keelhilla Nature Reserve

part of Burren National Park, Co. Clare



Against a dramatic wooded cliff backdrop, this site boasts limestone pavement, orchid-rich calcareous grassland, woodland and scrub. It is an excellent place to see a wide range of Burren-speciality plants.

MANAGEMENT

This site is winter grazed by cattle, via agreement with a local farmer.

WHERE TO FIND OUT MORE:

nationalparks.ie/burren/



Mountain Avens

DESCRIPTION

Slieve Carran is also known by two other names - Keelhilla and Eagle's Rock. It's easy to see why it has the latter name, due to its dramatic limestone cliffs. Today Peregrine Falcons nest here, as do Ravens. At the base of the cliffs there are large areas of scrub and woodland, and the ruins of an old church and holy well. There is a magical air about the place, and a number of legends are known to locals. Come in spring to experience a veritable sea of Wild Garlic.



Lady's Bedstraw with
Bloody Crane's-bill

The more open areas are mostly a mix of limestone pavement, grassland and scrub. In some areas, however, there are pockets of deeper soils, and here there are areas of permanent grassland. They are very species-rich, and need to be kept open by grazing (and occasional sensitive scrub removal).

The grasslands support a range of orchid species, and a wide variety of other flowers, grasses and sedges. Among the rarer orchids are the Dark-red Helleborine and the Frog Orchid. An experimental grazing enclosure stands in one of the grassland pockets, and can be seen from one of the walking trails. This has been surveyed for its plants and snails a number of times since its erection in 2005, providing invaluable scientific data on how important grazing management is for maintaining the diversity of such habitats.

ACCESS:

Publicly accessible year-round

SIZE:

c.5 ha of permanent grassland, much more scattered through the limestone pavement

PARKING:

yes, free

CAFÉ:

no

TOILETS:

no

OWNERS:

National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS)



Harebell





Doneraile Estate

Doneraile, Co. Cork



This semi-natural damp grassland is beautiful in high summer, with lots of colour, and plenty of orchids. It is also an excellent place to see some uncommon grass species.

MANAGEMENT

The meadow is found in the north-east of the estate, and has paths cut through to allow public access. It is cut late in the summer each year, with local farmers typically taking the hay.

WHERE TO FIND OUT MORE:

<https://doneraileestate.ie/>



7-Spot Ladybird

DESCRIPTION

In total, there are over 160 ha of parkland to roam and explore at Doneraile. So as well as the grasslands, you can spot the deer, squirrels, otters, and heron, and explore the majestic ancient trees, fishponds, tracks and trails.



Irish Marsh-orchid

At the north-east there is a large (22 ha) and diverse semi-natural grassland, which is managed as a meadow. A visit by the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI) in 2021 recorded numerous vascular plant species growing there, including some uncommon species such as Common Spotted-orchid, Irish Marsh-orchid and the grass, Smooth Brome.

This meadow has been used as a donor site for a 'green hay' project on a nearby farm. This is where hay is cut from a species-rich site, and on the same day, it is strewn at a species-poor site. Thus seeds from a range of species can be introduced to the recipient site. Detailed botanical data have been collected as part of this project, and show that the vegetation in the meadow in Doneraile has a good species-richness, with a range of typical grass and herb species found, such as bent grasses, meadow-grasses, Meadow Foxtail grass, Sweet Vernal-grass, clovers, Yarrow and Cat's-ear.

ACCESS:

Publicly accessible year-round

SIZE:

22 ha, set in wider parkland area

PARKING:

yes, free

CAFÉ:

yes

TOILETS:

yes

OWNERS:

Office of Public Works (OPW)



Doneraile House, OPW



Common Spotted-orchid



Ballycastle Golf Course

Ballycastle, Co. Antrim

.....



This golf club has lovely areas of meadow throughout, which also act as 'roughs' for the course.

MANAGEMENT

The management regime that creates the best 'rough' areas also helps maintain a flower-rich meadow habitat. This involves one late cut (Sept/Oct) for hay, which is paid for and used by a local farmer.

WHERE TO FIND OUT MORE:

<https://www.ballycastlegolfclub.com/>

DESCRIPTION

The meadows developed at Ballycastle Golf Club were created with golf in mind, but they also support a species-rich grassland habitat. The fact that these meadows are great to look at in the summer, are full of wildlife, and are free to maintain (a local farmer takes the species-rich grass to feed to his cattle), is a bonus.



The sandy, nutrient-poor soils on the course create ideal conditions for many wildflowers, and have allowed the meadows to develop quickly. There are wonderful displays of wildflowers throughout the season from the early Dandelions to the late flowering Devil's-bit Scabious (larval food plant for Ireland's only legally protected butterfly species, the Marsh Fritillary), Eyebright and Harebell.

ACCESS:

Limited access – priority for golfers

SIZE:

2.4 ha in the managed 'roughs'

PARKING:

yes, free

CAFÉ:

yes

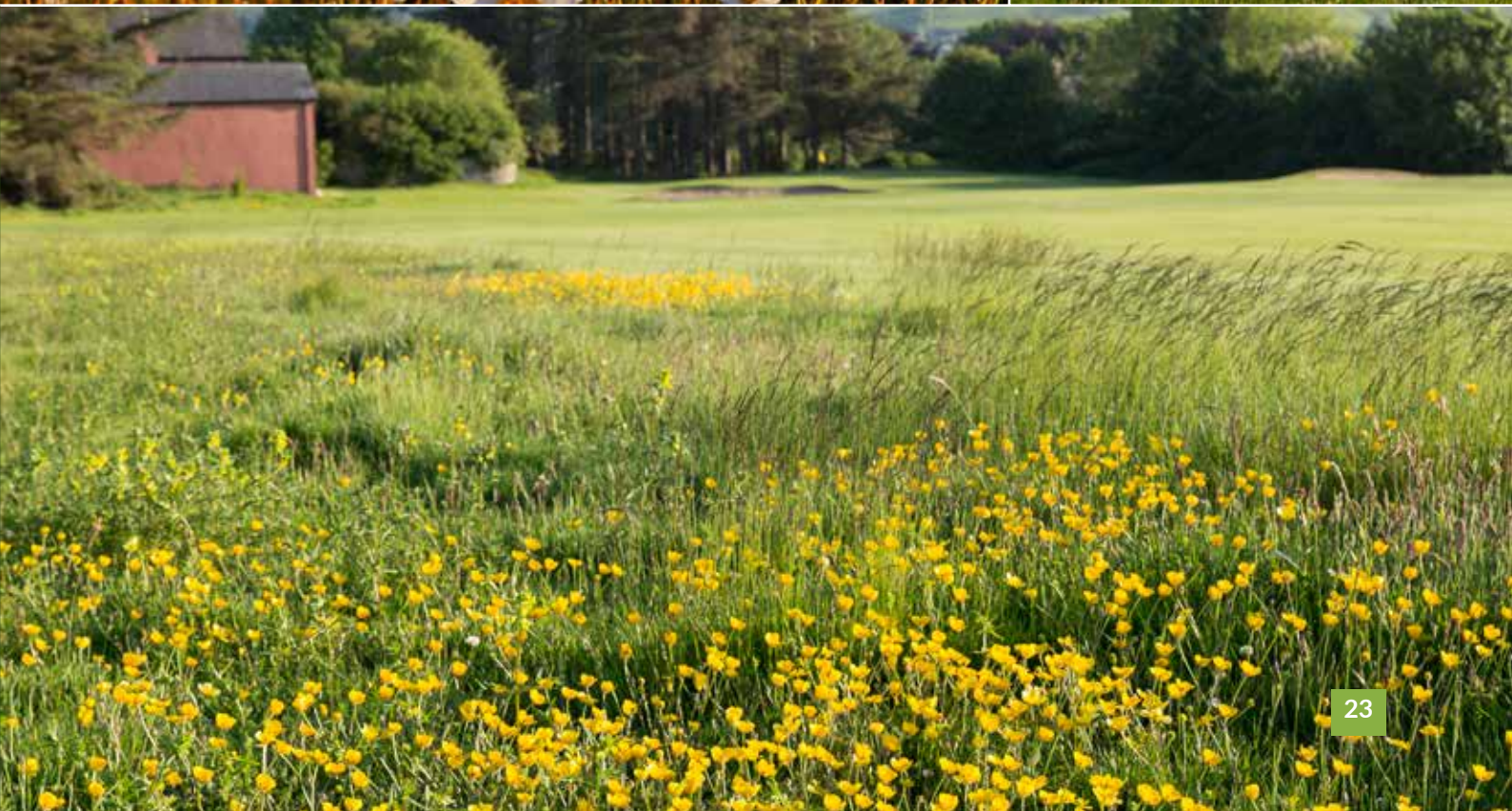
TOILETS:

yes

OWNERS:

Ballycastle Golf Club

Oxeye Daisy



Some key principles for managing semi-natural grasslands:

Nutrients

On sites with high nutrient levels (e.g. heavily fertilised grasslands), a small number of grass species will dominate, along with plants like thistles and docks. These species thrive when nutrient levels are high, and squeeze out many other species. If you want floral diversity, nutrient levels must be lowered.

- Avoid or reduce fertiliser.
- Remove all cuttings if the area is mown. The cuttings are like a layer of compost if left on site.

Timing

If grasslands are mown or grazed at the height of summer, then many species don't get to flower or set seed.

- Winter-grazing is ideal for dry sites but may not always be practical.
- Mowing in late summer allows many plants and invertebrates to have completed their life cycle. But like many things, a diversity of mowing times is also beneficial – having an earlier cut the odd year is no harm!
- Using a combination of mowing and grazing can be very beneficial.

Grazing

If the grassland is pasture, rather than meadow, then the species and breed of grazer will have an impact.

- Sheep graze grasslands tight. Cattle and horses create more diversity of structure. Goats are great for managing scrub but can be hard work to fence in!
- Traditional breeds of stock can have many benefits such as being lighter (less poaching), hardier (less vet bills, less need to house in winter), and some even thrive on rough vegetation (less need to supplementary feed).

Advice

Always get appropriate advice – this is likely to come from more than one source. Depending on your starting point (e.g. abandoned scrubby area, intensive agricultural grassland), management needs will differ, at least initially, making relevant advice even more important.

- Consider speaking to an ecologist.
- Find a nearby farmer who already does what you'd like to do and ask them for advice. 'Farming for Nature' has lists of such farmers, along with farm visits which are highly recommended.
- Explore some of the resources provided at the end of this booklet.





Expectations

When managing or restoring a semi-natural grassland, the aim should always be a diverse and well-functioning grassland, rather than a showy sward. A typical and healthy grassland is, perhaps unsurprisingly, grassy!

- Rest assured, a healthy grassland will be excellent for pollinators, other invertebrates, and a range of other biodiversity, and it will be humming with life, especially in summer.
- There will be a good mix of native grass and other plant species, but it may look green, brown or messy, rather than flowery all the time.
- It may look a little 'boring' to some eyes (but not the creatures that use it), and it may look untidy, particularly at certain times of the year - hence managing expectations is key.
- We all need to re-calibrate a little, and appreciate the beauty and wonder in the ordinary.



"I just love species-rich grasslands! There are so many colours, smells and sounds even in the smallest corner of these deceptively diverse and fascinating habitats. I also love that they provide so many functions, above and below ground, not least supporting the diet of the lucky livestock who graze them, or who get to eat the meadowed hay later that winter. The Burren really got me hooked on this habitat, but it's always thrilling to find them elsewhere, like a surprise encounter with a familiar friend. This booklet is like a taster menu for some of Ireland's great remnant grasslands, I hope you get to enjoy at least some of them as much as I still do - and if you happen to meet the farmer when visiting, do congratulate them on their custodianship of these very special places."

Brendan Dunford
Burrenbeo Trust



In winter the floodplain meadows of the Shannon Callows are fully submerged, but these will be productive and flower-rich grasslands in summer, after the waters recede.

POEM

'Time Cycle Repeat'

by Jeff Coles (@jeffcolesart)

River water rain, flood plain
Silt soil seed, knapweed
Flood river rise dragonflies
Seed soil roots, muddy boots
Flower birds honeybee, biodiversity
Horse sheep cattle, yellow rattle
Mow crop hay, sunny day
Time cycle repeat, meadow sweet

This poem featured in a calendar produced by Alice Walker and the Floodplain Meadows Partnership in 2022, and was 'inspired by a day sketching and a lecture at Long Mead Meadow'. It beautifully captures the many elements that make up floodplain meadows, or as they are often known in Ireland, 'callows' grasslands.

Where to find further information:



1. GREAT IRISH GRASSLANDS WEBSITE

Information on semi-natural grasslands in Ireland

<https://www.greatirishgrasslands.ie/>



2. BSBI 'IRISH GRASSLANDS PROJECT'

Excellent training videos for plant identification

<https://bsbi.org/irish-grasslands-project>



3. NPWS GRASSLANDS PAGE

Scientific surveys and grassland map viewer

<https://www.npws.ie/research-projects/grasslands>



4. ALL-IRELAND POLLINATOR PLAN

Resources and information on pollinators and their habitats

<https://pollinators.ie/>



5. FARMING FOR NATURE

Showcasing nature-friendly farmers, including frequent farm walks

<https://www.farmingfornature.ie/>

Text: Maria Long, Phoebe O'Brien & Úna FitzPatrick.

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An tSeirbhís Páirceanna Náisiúnta agus Fiadhúlra
National Parks and Wildlife Service

