



Spring is in the Air

The winter of 2009/2010 has been labelled the coldest since 1963/1964, so Spring arrived a little later than usual this year. Horse Chestnut leaves were recording opening on the 22nd of March this year. This tree grows right across Europe so many countries are recording it's "budburst" to date the arrival of spring to the different parts of Europe. This has also help in identifying that spring is, in general, arriving earlier and earlier, this may be a sign of global warming.

According the Nature's Calendar, naturescalendarireland.com) the Horse Chestnut's bud burst is identified when the green of the leaves start pushing out of the bud. All the Horse Chestnut trees in Ireland should have their leaves out by mid April. However, this will differ between the counties so some may have to be more patient.

The bluebells have grown and they are beginning to flower. They normally flower April through to May, however, they may be around for longer this year. Ireland used to have incredible bluebell carpets, but with ever de-



creasing biodiversity, these bluebell carpets are becoming a rare sight. Primroses are in full bloom and should continue on

into May. Primroses can be found on the edge of native woodlands and along hedgerows. Hawthorn's small white flower starts to open in April but the full bloom will occur more towards the end of May. This is mainly a hedgerow species. Finally, the arrival of Swallows from South Africa are another species that signify spring time in Ireland.

At An Taisce, we would love to know when bluebells, primroses

and hawthorns are in full flower around you or tell us when you hear the Cuckoo's call. Please let us know through our Facebook page. or by emailing naturalenvironment@antaisce.org

We will collate all the observations received and submit these records to the relevant organisations, such as Bird-Watch Ireland, and the National Biodiversity Centre and naturescalendarireland.com.



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photos above
taken by Abby
McSherry and
from Bird-
watchireland

Secondary Schools Cycle Challenge

As part of Bike Week 2010 and in conjunction with the An Taisce Green-Schools Travel programme secondary schools are being asked to saddle up and get cycling to school. The secondary schools cycle challenge will run between 10th – 14th May 2010 as a lead up event to Bike Week 2010. Secondary schools are being asked to run a cycling event at their school during the week.

The ultimate aim is to encourage as many students, staff and parents to cycle to school on their chosen day. Schools can also look at bike maintenance sessions, safety talks, critical mass cycles, healthy breakfasts for cyclists and sustainable transport users. If the school uniform is a barrier then why not have a non uniform day and raise some money for the school or charity. Once your event is

over you can then submit a short report along with 3 images to be in with a chance of winning cycle parking for your school. If your local secondary school is interested then you can get further information by going to <http://bikeweek.ie/secondary-schools-competition> or by contacting Ally Menary, An Taisce EEU Cycling Development Officer amenary@eeu.antaisce.org / 00353 1 400 2215

10 Messages for 2010



2010 International Year of Biodiversity



European marine biodiversity is primarily protected by establishing Natura 2000 sites under the Habitats and Birds Directives but there are serious delays in identifying areas and even greater delays in establishing their status

Every month the European Environment Agency EEA is issuing a "message for 2010", which will highlight one theme per month until the tenth meeting of the conference of the parties (COP) to the United Nations convention on Biological diversity (CBD). Each message provides a short assessment focusing on a specific ecosystem or issue related to biodiversity in Europe. A summary of April's message is below; follow the link to see the full message.

Marine ecosystems

Marine ecosystems provide key services both globally and locally which are essential for maintaining life on our planet however marine biodiversity faces an unprece-

dent range of pressures. Climate change has caused changes in species distribution and is causing oceans to become more acidic

To read more go to:

<http://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/10-messages-for-2010/message-4-marine-ecosystems.pdf>

This message was written by Marcus Zisensis (ECNC, ETC/BD), with contributions from Trine Christiansen (EEA), the ETC/BD by Dominique Richard/MNHN, Brian Mac Sharry/DEHLG, amongst others.

ABC of Spring Foraging

Spring is not just in the air, it is all around us, bursting out all over, why not have a walk in the countryside and see what food plants you can find. A couple of things to remember before you head off picking random plants for a woodland salad: get to know your plants, by sight, shape and scent. Get a good ID book, start with familiar plants, or best of all go foraging with an expert. Also be careful to only take a few leaves or flowers from each plant so as not to destroy it.

Beech. Timing is crucial with this common tree, get the leaves young and beechmast when it has just fallen. Leaves make a great addition to salads, can be added to vodka to make a delicious liquor. The mast can be roasted, shelled and used in crumbles or ground for flour.

Birch is probably the best food source in the woods. Twigs can be infused for tea, the wintergreen taste is popular in ice creams, syrups or as an accompaniment for peas, the trees can be tapped for sugary sap like maple syrup.

Cherry bark can be scored and the sticky sap made into chewing gum. The fruit both sweet and sour make great fruit dishes and the blossom used to infuse milk and custard.

Chickweed has a mild flavour which is great as a salad base, good with the seafood.

Common sorrel is a key element in French cuisine, the intense lemony flavour goes well with salads, but particularly with fish.

Daisy leaves can be used in salad or sandwiches, but are nicer wilted as a vegetable, flowers are not as flavoursome, but are edible and look lovely in a salad.

Dandelion roots and leaves can be used to make tea or fizzy drinks. Roots can be roasted and chopped for coffee substitute, but are best

fried with bacon.

Dock comes in many varieties. The young leaves of Wood, patience and curled dock are all good eating. Fry with onions and garlic, served with cooked tomatoes or eggs.

Elder flowers and berries can be used to flavour sorbets, icecreams and drinks and make great wine.

Goosegrass leaves and stems can be steamed and used as a vegetable (the sticky hairs disappear in cooking).

Gorse has wonderful coconut flavours which are wonderful in wines and infused for teas.

Hawthorn has been used for food from time immemorial, young leaves and bud are often called bread and cheese and make a tasty sandwich filling, they are good for the heart.

Hazel what? Are you nuts!!!!? You want to know what you get from a hazel tree?

Honeysuckle flowers are lovely in salads or as a garnish on puddings.

Lime leaves are good in salads or stuffed with savoury fillings like vine leaves.

Meadowsweet is very versatile and has healing properties. Use it to make teas and wines and the leaves are delicious in a salad.

Nettle has so many uses that I'll not write them here, but would suggest that you get "101 uses for stinging nettles" by Piers Warren.

Greater Plantain leaves have a mushroomy flavour and can be chopped finely and cooked like spinach.

Primrose flowers can be used fresh or candied in spring salads and the leaves can be cooked or eaten raw and have a slight lingering honey taste.

Vetch leaves can be used in salads.

Wild strawberry leaves can be used in salad and of course don't forget the fruit!

"Wild edible plants don't have to be watered or fertilized, nature knows exactly what is best for them, For a lazy gardener they are a wonderful bounty"



Nettles and common sorrel

Good News for the Fresh Water Pearl Mussel

A SURE sign of a healthy river is the presence of the freshwater pearl mussel which has largely disappeared in Ireland in recent decades. The reasons for its demise are obvious – the species survives only in pristine water.

Believed to be one of our longest living animals, with a lifespan of up to 120 years, it was once widespread, but is now found in very few catchments. Ireland is estimated to hold around 46% of Europe's freshwater pearl mussel population, with the Munster Blackwater catchment said to have a large part of the national population.

The need for pristine water conditions lead to Anja Murray, our Natural Environment officer and her team to make a detailed submission to the Department of the Environment. We outlined our concerns and threats to the freshwater mussel from forestry and farming operations, and said it was essential the forest service complied fully with the EU Habitats Directive.

"In doing so, the forest service must ensure that no damage occurs to the habitats and populations of freshwater mussels through granting of licences for afforestation, felling licences and forest road approvals," said Anja.

"It is with these licences that the forest service approves species mixes, use of pesticides and fertilisers, lays conditions for sediment traps and buffer zones, and approves planting regimes which dictate future management options."

Anja also states that the use of chemicals in farming poses huge risks, and warns that one accidental spill, or careless discharge, could obliterate a mussel population. The use and

regulation of chemical products needs further investigation.

Furthermore, exemptions to the Nitrates Directive in sensitive areas were 'not compatible' with mussel conservation. An Taisce also highlighted problems caused by discharges to watercourses from septic tanks that were not working properly. This serious issue is not being addressed.

One further possibility for helping with mussel conservation would be a subsidised support scheme. Suggestions for this scheme include buffer zones for silt and nutrients, and farming without toxins. To see the full submission go to <http://www.antaisce.org/naturalenvironment/Biodiversity/FreshwaterPearlMussel/tabid/611/language/en-US/Default.aspx>

And there is further good news for the beleaguered mussel, it has been given a welcome boost by a 12 year captive breeding project in Queen's University Belfast. Over 300 mussels, have been released back into the wild at a range of secret locations. The mussels also had Passive Integrated Transponders attached to them so they can be easily located and monitored.

In Northern Ireland they are currently teetering on the brink of extinction and the only counties in which mussels currently exist are Tyrone and Fermanagh, according to Conor Wilson, a PhD student at Quercus, Queen's research centre for biodiversity and conservation science.

"Freshwater mussels are an important part of the ecosystem in many rivers as they filter water keeping it clean and clear. This improves the environ-

ment for other plants and animals, and ultimately, humans," he said. Freshwater mussels are listed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature as globally endangered. They have undergone a substantial population decline over the last century due to habitat loss, pollution, pearl fishing, river engineering and siltation.

Their life cycle involves mussels releasing larvae into the water. The larvae need to attach to fish gills, usually salmon or trout, for a period of about six months before falling on to the river bed to settle and grow into young mussels. They burrow into sandy substrates, often between boulders and pebbles, in fast-flowing rivers and streams, and require cool, well-oxygenated and soft water which is free of pollution.

It is hoped that through a programme of breeding and tracking, equilibrium will be restored in these rivers with numbers of mussels back to what they were 100 years ago, before they were affected by a variety of factors including overfishing and habitat degradation.

The year-long release programme of the mussels has just been completed and those involved say it has been a big success.



Obituary- Bill Watts

The death of Bill Watts former provost of TCD and Chairman An Taisce 1967-69 Hon Sec 1966-67 took place on Monday April 26th. The funeral took place on Friday 30th April.

Bill was a long term supporter of An Taisce and was instrumental in securing prescribed status for the organisation. He was retained by An Foras Forbartha (The Physical Planning Institute funded by the state) to advise local authorities on nature conservation in 1965 and was joint author of the seminal Dublin and Dunlaoghaire Study published by An Taisce in 1967. His death, following that of Frank Mitchell brings to an end the direct line to Praegar and Trinity of the founders and shapers of the An Taisce we have inherited. He is among the giants on whose shoulders the organisation stands, he was always ready to help and provide good counsel when asked. He will be sorely missed.

Property Focus: Gortlecka

In 1977 An Taisce raised funds to buy 38 acres of land at the foot of Mullaghmore, bordering Lough Girraun. When we acquired the land, the Burren's importance was not universally recognized and the property has played an important role in both stimulating volunteer activity to protect the region and in showing best practice in conserving it. The Burren is now a Tentative World Heritage Site and the land surrounding our core holding is protected as a National Park.

Today Gortlecka is grazed by goats and Galloway Cattle in order to keep the biodiversity intact and its management is advised by a Management Advisory Committee under the leadership of An Taisce's Clare Association. The property contains a microcosm of the Burren's unique landscape features including karst limestone pavement with characteristic clints and grikes filled with the world famous flora such as the spring gentian. There are also patches of acid drift and drift choked limestone. A beautiful fen bordering a turloch or seasonal lake provides wetland habitat, and a ridge of limestone covered by ash-hazel woodland adds



further biodiversity. Spectacular views of Mullaghmore can be had from the ruin of a cottage perched on the edge of the lough.

An Taisce is looking to acquire more land when possible to link this property to others along the green way walking route which passes nearby. The property can be only currently visited with a guide provided by the local association although there has long been an ambition to provide a marked trail to make access more convenient for visitors. The site can be clearly seen from the public road when viewing Mullaghmore.

A trip to Mullaghmore wouldn't be complete with out a visit to the Crane in Gort, another of our properties. These two properties go together because Gort Heritage Town is a natural entry point to the Burren for many visitors. The Crane is a restored cut stone market weigh house in the

Market Square of Gort. It has a fully working 19th century mechanism for weighing the produce of the traders of old so that tolls or taxes could be levied.

How to get there:

Gort is on the N18 south, 35km from Galway City, for The Burren and Mullaghmore take the R460 via Aughrim towards Corofin.

Where to Stay:

For B&B's or self catering in Gort click on

www.galwaytourisit.com or

www.gortonline.com

Other Activities

Major Heritage Sites nearby include; Thor Ballylee, Coole Park, Kiltartan Georgory Museum and Kilmacduagh Monastery.



Green-Schools' National
Walk to School Week
17th - 21st May 2010

National WOW Day
19th May 2010

March on Monday
Fly on Tuesday
Walk on Wednesday
No Car Thursday
Feet First Friday

Planned Events:

An Taisce, Fiús, Smart Travel

Contact your local Travel Education Officer for more information or visit www.greenschoolsireland.org

Green-Schools National WOW day is Wednesday 19th May 2010 and we are encouraging all schools to take part and help us get 20,000 students walking to school. Schools can phone the Green-Schools Travel team on 01 400 2202 to tell us the number of students that took part during the week or contact their Green-Schools Travel Officer. Further information can be found on www.greenschoolsireland.org

On The Way to a Windpowered Ireland?

Ireland has broken a record regarding wind energy generation! At 6pm on the 18th March 22.1% of our peak electricity demand was generated by wind. Ireland also made a **world record** in August of last year when we achieved 43% however that was at around 4am when demand is at its lowest. If this trend continues with the increase of installed wind power and the forthcoming revolutionary advances in wave and ocean energy at which Ireland is at the forefront, we are set to achieve our 40% renewable energy target by 2020. Ireland is in the vanguard of green energy development - leading the world and displacing fossil fuel generation at a rate that will ensure that our carbon emissions and our climate change targets will also be achieved and An Taisce's vision of a clean environment for future generations will be a reality.



An Taisce

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Preserving our built and natural heritage for future generations

Your views are important to An Taisce. Please don't hesitate to send us any feedback on content, format, etc. of this newsletter, and if there are any topics in particular that you'd like to see covered, we'll do our best to get them in.

Sincerely,

Jeff Young

Hon Secretary, An Taisce -- the National Trust for Ireland jeff@rokeby.ie

and **Abby McSherry, Local Associations Officer**

membership@antaisce.org

Please remember to pass this newsletter on to others who may enjoy it