

Irish Hare



**HELP WILDLIFE
THIS WINTER**

10 ways you can support
your garden wildlife

**ENJOY A
WILD WINTER**

Five ways to embrace
the great outdoors
this winter

URBAN WILDLIFE

City slickers

From foxes to peregrines, discover the wildlife
making a home in our towns and cities

Welcome



Nature in Northern Ireland is in trouble. We are the most nature-depleted part of the UK and one in five species is facing extinction, from barn owls to bees. The recent climate strikes, with significant turnouts here (p. 3), show that there is now much greater awareness and concern about the state of nature and our climate, and their inherent connection.

Time is running out to avert an ecological crisis. We need transformative and bold change right across society to ensure we can pass on a better environment to the next generation. It seems our Government is taking these threats seriously, with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs having just released a public consultation on an Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland.

This is our chance to ensure an ambitious and legally binding plan to restore wildlife. One of the solutions we would like to see adopted is a 'Nature Recovery Network'. This is a nationwide map for nature that identifies the corridors and areas of habitat where existing wildlife needs protecting, where wild spaces and species can be restored, and where we need to do more. It will connect wild places and bring wildlife into our lives – turning nature's recovery from an aspiration to a reality.

With 75% of our land dedicated to agriculture, farming and wildlife must go hand-in-hand (p. 10) with farmers incentivised for farming in a way that helps nature thrive. We also need greater investment in nature-based solutions to tackle the climate crisis, including a significant increase in native tree planting and peatland restoration.

We urge you to make your voice heard for nature at this critical time by visiting our website and signing our e-action. The more voices we have calling for a 'Wilder Future' in Northern Ireland, the more power we have to achieve one.

Don't forget: every action, no matter how big or small, helps. Take steps to make your garden more wildlife-friendly (pp. 8 & 9), consider other ways you can support nature's recovery, such as leaving a gift in your will, and speak up for wildlife whenever you get the chance.

Jennifer Yulston

Chief Executive of Ulster Wildlife

Ulster Wildlife *Get in touch*

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You are receiving this magazine as part of your Ulster Wildlife membership. To stop this mailing, please contact us and let us know if you'd prefer an email version.



Together we're stronger

Here are some of the ways your membership has been helping

211 ha

The area of precious peatland nature reserves we were able to protect this year, thanks to you.

You protected our seas

With your support, 684 bags of rubbish were collected at beach cleans across NI last year.



Thank you!

28

The number of barn owl volunteers you helped to support this summer with our annual survey of this endangered bird.

You helped red squirrels

Thanks to your support, red squirrels have returned to Silent Valley, Montalto Estate, and Cairn Wood.



WILD NEWS

All the latest local news from Ulster Wildlife



David Sandford and his wife with their two new arrivals.

Boost for barn owls

Northern Ireland's barn owl population has been given a much-needed boost with the discovery of a new nest site and two fluffy chicks, outside Strangford, in a nest box we erected five years ago on David Sandford's wildlife-friendly farm (p. 10).

Also, some great news from the Crumlin nest site. Our breeding pair has raised two broods of three and two chicks, respectively – a first for Northern Ireland – thanks to a helping hand from their

volunteer nest-minder Ciarán Walsh.

The healthy barn owl chicks were ringed to help us monitor their survival, movements, and behaviour – essential information in our efforts to help protect this endangered bird.

Thanks to your support, we've raised £10,565 for barn owls but we still have some way to go to reach our £20k fundraising target. Donate today and help safeguard their future – ulsterwildlife.org/donate

Magnificent Members' Day

We were delighted to welcome 140 members to our Annual AGM & Members' Day at Glenarm Estate this September, for what was undoubtedly one of the best yet.

From moth discovery sessions and guided walks around Glenarm Nature Reserve to fascinating talks by guest speakers Chris Baines, Jim McAdam, and Joe Breen on everything from gardening for wildlife to horse mussel restoration in Strangford Lough, it was a packed day.

For more information visit ulsterwildlife.org/agm-2019



IN BRIEF

Support for Climate Strikes

We stood in solidarity with young people and other e-NGOs this September to show support for the Global Climate Strike in Belfast and to help raise awareness of the climate emergency facing wildlife and our own lives. Find out more ulsterwildlife.org/climate-emergency



New Glenarm wildlife guide

We are delighted to have teamed up with Glenarm Wildlife Group to produce an illustrated guide to the rich wildlife found along the Glenarm coast, from orchids and otters to seagrass and seals. The guide is available from Glenarm Visitor Centre or can be downloaded from our website.



Tribute to former colleagues

We were saddened to learn of the death of David Erwin (below), a former CEO and Chairman of Ulster Wildlife, and Howard Platt, a trustee. Both did much to further nature conservation in Northern Ireland and we are grateful for their support and dedication. Our sympathies to their families.





SEE THIS

Look out for lots of cute and fluffy grey seal pups around the coast during November and December. Best haul-outs include Strangford Lough, Minerstown, the North Coast, and Carlingford Lough.

DO THIS

Discover what wild creatures have been visiting your garden by examining tracks in mud or snow. Look out for double-slot tracks of deer, four narrow toe prints of a fox, and five wide toe prints of a badger.

HEAR THIS

As winter bites, the loud 'cronk' call of a raven soaring above is a welcome sound, and is likened to an old-fashioned car horn. These intelligent birds can even mimic human voices.

FORAGE FOR THIS

The dark purple sloe berries of the blackthorn bush are ready for picking from October to December. Although they may look like blueberries, sloes are bitter and are best preserved in sloe gin or home-made wine.



SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Finches

With their stunning array of colours and beak shapes, finches are a welcome sight in winter.

About finches

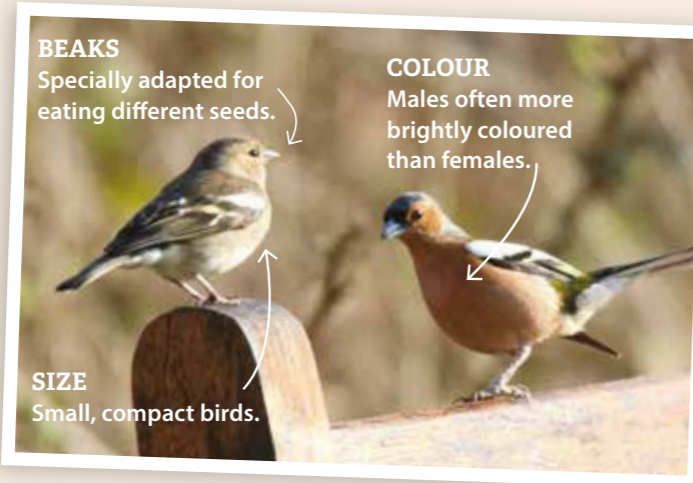
Finches are compact little passerine birds, closely related to sparrows and buntings, that feed on seeds and grains. Finches are a widespread and varied group of birds – fourteen different species have been recorded in Northern Ireland to date. This includes four rare species – common rosefinch, hawfinch, mealy redpoll, and two-barred crossbill – but with a bit of luck, it is possible to catch up with the other eleven in a normal Northern Irish bird-watching year.

Know the difference

As a group, finches vary quite a lot in appearance: goldfinches and chaffinches are multi-coloured, whereas the most striking feature of the crossbill is that the bill tips overlap. In fact, each species of finch has a bill specially adapted for feeding on different seeds: goldfinches delicately pick out seeds from a teasel, while the hawfinch uses its powerful bill to crack nuts. Most finches are sexually dimorphic, which means that males and females often look quite different: males are conspicuous, being more brightly coloured than females.

Where to see them

Finches can be found in a wide variety of habitats, depending on the time of year and the species involved. Chaffinches are woodland breeding birds but are often found in fields during winter, and twite breed in moorland areas but move to the coast at the end of summer. In fact, some species are seen here only in winter, such as the brambling, which migrates here in small numbers from



BEAKS

Specially adapted for eating different seeds.

COLOUR

Males often more brightly coloured than females.

SIZE

Small, compact birds.

its breeding grounds in Scandinavia. Linnets breed in scrubby grassland areas but will join mixed flocks in stubble fields and along the coast in winter, while bullfinches are a woodland edge and hedgerow species.

Attracting finches

Many of the more common species are garden birds or regular visitors to bird feeders, especially in winter – these include familiar species such as chaffinch, goldfinch, greenfinch, redpoll, and siskin. The more variety of foods that you leave out, the greater the array of species you will attract. However, certain foods are particularly good; e.g., goldfinches seem to prefer black niger seeds. Also, delay cutting seed heads on garden plants.

SEE THEM THIS WINTER

- **Balloo Woodland** Check along the woodland edges for species such as bullfinch and chaffinch.
- **Bog Meadows** Hedgerows and fence lines are the best places to see finches here.
- **Slievenacloy** Goldfinches are the most numerous finch seen at this grassland site.

 **To find out more** please visit our website ulsterwildlife.org/nature-reserves

Top tips
3 SPECIES TO SPOT

Brambling

A winter visitor in small numbers – look for brambling amongst flocks of chaffinches.



Redpoll

A small brown and streaked finch, named after the red cap of feathers on its forehead.



Greenfinch

Not as common as they used to be, so greenfinches are a welcome sight at bird feeders.



NOT JUST FOR KIDS

Five ways to enjoy nature this winter

Although winter can be bleak, there are still plenty of wild things to do and see outdoors.



1 Search the strandline

A retreating tide always leaves a fresh bounty for the eagle-eyed beachcomber. Look for balls of creamy egg cases of the common whelk, flea-like sandhoppers leaping into the air, and leathery pouches or 'mermaid's purses' once home to baby sharks or rays.

2 Explore a wetland

Winter is a fantastic time to visit Bog Meadows Nature Reserve as swans, geese, and ducks descend on the pond in loud colourful groups. From tufted ducks and little egrets to flocks of black-tailed godwits on the neighbouring fields, there is always something interesting to see at this urban oasis.



4 Admire spiders' webs

Take an early-morning walk on a dewy or frosty winter morning to gaze in awe at the multitude of spiders' webs that were previously invisible owing to the transparent nature of silk. These beautiful and intricate structures are spectacular, especially the silken orb of the garden spider.



3 Clean up your beach

If you're heading to the coast, why not grab a bag and see if you can help reduce marine litter polluting our seas by doing a two minute beach clean? All the family can get involved and make a difference for wildlife. Some beaches even have special beach-cleaning stations, such as Glenarm, Newcastle, Portrush, and Donaghadee.

5 Plant holly for wildlife

With its shiny spiky leaves and bright red berries, holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) is a much-loved evergreen tree bringing colour and life into our gardens and homes in winter, particularly at Christmas. Our wildlife enjoys holly too: blackbirds, thrushes, and wood mice feast on its berries; its flowers provide pollen and nectar for bees; and caterpillars of the holly blue butterfly and various moths eat its buds, flowers, and leaves. Plant it as part of mixed native wildlife hedge or individually.



GREY SEAL PUP: TOM MARSHALL; CHAFFINCH PAIR: NICK GOODRUM

© HARRY HOGG

© BOB COYLE

© ADAM JONES

© SZUSZANNA BIRD

Meet the City Slickers

We are experiencing rapid demographic and unsustainable development; to date, this has been an all-consuming tide that leaves little in its wake. Urbanisation is often synonymous with habitat destruction, pollution, and non-native invasive species – what a disaster. On the other hand, our native wildlife sometimes finds ways to adapt. Not all of it can keep pace with our rate of change, but some species find a niche and make it work in our towns and cities, as Andy Crory explains.

Fox

Vulpes vulpes

We've all heard of urban foxes; they're now a firm feature of city life. This is a combination of how untidy our towns and cities are and how sterile the wider countryside has become. Urban foxes choose moments of least human activity to feast upon the food items that we fling away. It may not be the healthiest of diets but, from the point of view of a fox, scavenging makes more sense than having to hunt for a meal.



Peregrine falcon

Falco peregrinus

The world's fastest animal (reaching a peak dive speed of 220 mph) found in Belfast City Centre! If I were a peregrine falcon, in the olden days, I would breed on a cliff and spend my time eating rock doves. Hold on a minute, there's a place called a 'city' that has tall cliffs (with things called windows) that provides an almost limitless supply of pigeons for dinner! Cities have now expanded the available habitat for a bird once threatened with extinction by pesticides and persecution.



Hedgehog

Erinaceus europaeus

Hedgehogs have undergone a catastrophic decline over recent decades, but some urban populations are bucking the trend, thanks largely to sympathetic homeowners. Gardens make superb hedgehog habitat provided they are accessible (a 13-cm square hole in a fence or wall is sufficient), and contain sufficient cover and invertebrate food. Small slugs, beetles and grubs make up the bulk of the diet – the ultimate organic pest control.



Waxwing

Bombycilla garrulus

To look at a waxwing you'd be forgiven for thinking it was a tropical species. In fairness, a waxwing would find a Belfast winter unreservedly balmy, given that they come here from Scandinavia and beyond. Waxwings are an 'irruptive' species: some years they are few and far between, but thousands can arrive during a cold winter. Berries are the main attraction, and urban parks, gardens, and even supermarket car parks provide a wealth of menu choices for a hungry horde of waxwings.

Feral pigeon

Columba livia domestica

Pigeons get a bad rap: the archetypal 'flying rat' – very few people have love for this humble street bird. In fact, there's very little that's humble about them; they are just extremely successful. We build them structures that mimic their natural breeding sites, and provide food and warmth; then we put up bird netting and spikes, and employ falconers to scare them away. If they were not so pigeon-brained, they would think we were mad! I don't think peregrine falcons are complaining about them either.



Starling

Sturnus vulgaris

A murmuration – put simply: the collective noun for a starling flock. Happily, life is often less prosaic and you can experience a breathtaking murmuration for yourself over the Albert Bridge in Belfast – where starlings seek out the warmth over water at night in winter. When the nights start to close in, and it gets a bit nippy, they perform some mind-bending avian displays over the River Lagan. Top tip: If you're going to stand on the bridge itself, arm yourself with an umbrella in case of bird poo!

House sparrow

Passer domesticus

It's not all good news. Some formerly abundant urban birds, like the house sparrow, are in serious trouble. Imagine if sparrows became extinct in our lifetime! This is a bird that has evolved alongside us in towns and cities, piggybacking on our success over thousands of years. Its widespread decline raises alarm bells, as it is an indicator of the health of human environments. Feed garden birds in winter, and provide nesting sites and habitat where you can.

It's time to give nature space to recover



Nature is in trouble and we need every space to count. Our towns, cities, houses, parks, streets and gardens play a vital role in helping nature to recover creating vital corridors that connect larger wild oases. Letting wildflowers bloom along road verges, installing green roofs or walls on urban buildings, rewilding public parks, planting more street trees, providing wildlife features such as window and bee boxes on our houses – all of us can help take action for wildlife where we live and work.



Andy Crory looks after our suite of nature reserves and is passionate about moths and birds

FOX: SAM HOBSON; PEREGRINE FALCON: BERTIE GREGORY; STARLING: MURMURATION: SHARON CUATRIZ; WAXWING: TERRY WHITTAKER; HEDGEHOG: TOM MARSHALL

How you can help wildlife this winter

From log and leaf piles to open compost heaps and towers of terracotta pots by the side of the shed, **Kate Bradbury** reveals how we can provide safe habitats for overwintering wildlife in our gardens.



Kate Bradbury is passionate about wildlife-friendly gardening and the author of *Wildlife Gardening for Everyone* and *Everything* in association with The Wildlife Trusts.

With the notable exception of birds, most garden wildlife lies dormant over winter, with only a few species, such as hedgehogs, truly hibernating. The rest spend winter in various states of 'torpor' – not fully shutting down their bodies as true hibernating animals do. That's why, on sunny days, you may spot frogs swimming at the bottom of your pond, or bats flying on mild evenings. Even true hibernating animals have a break from all that sleeping – hedgehogs wake up and move nest sites at least once during the cold months.

But on the whole, much of our wildlife isn't seen from around November to March. Where does it go? Insects might crawl into seedheads or wedge themselves beneath bark for winter. A pile of leaf litter might shelter anything from caterpillars, beetles, centipedes and woodlice to larger species, such as amphibians and mammals. Others hide

deep down in the thatch of long or tufty grass, bury themselves in the soil, or shuffle into the still-warm grass clippings and food waste in the compost heap.

Wildlife is very vulnerable at this time. Disturbing mammals can cause them to waste energy that they can't easily replenish, while insects can be exposed to fungal infections if they get damp. Providing winter refuges (called hibernacula) will help wildlife overwinter – but not disturbing these habitats once you've created them is imperative to their survival.

Spare a thought for birds, too, which have to battle it out in winter, instead of hibernating. Growing berrying plants, feeding them and creating cosy roosts can help them in winter, too. 🍷

🌱 Gardens of all sizes are an essential part of a Nature Recovery Network. For more tips visit ulsterwildlife.org/help-wildlife

Bird box
Birds may use these to roost communally on very cold nights. Fill them with dry leaves or similar material to make them warmer.



Shed
Adult butterflies may sneak into your shed or outhouse to overwinter on the walls, where they resemble leaves. Make sure there's a gap so they can leave in spring.



Bird feeders
Birds need as many calories as they can find during the short winter days to give them the energy they need to survive each night. Provide energy-rich suet products, peanuts and sunflower hearts. You can even buy window-mounted feeders if you don't have a garden.

Long and tufty grass
Caterpillars and other insects hunker down in the thatch. Some caterpillars may emerge on mild days to eat the grass, so try to leave it uncut until mid-spring.

Log pile
Insects hide beneath the logs, while amphibians and small mammals, such as these wood mice, shelter in gaps. Fill them with autumn leaves to make them more snug.



Compost heap
A large, open heap will attract insects including bumblebees and amphibians, such as this smooth newt. It may even lure mammals such as hedgehogs. Try to leave it undisturbed until April.

Pond
Frogs (particularly males) overwinter at the bottom of ponds so they can be the first to mate in spring. Float a ball on the surface to stop it freezing over.

Seedheads
Seedheads provide shelter for ladybirds and other insects in winter, and offer a natural source of food for birds, so leave them standing until spring.

Soil
A wide range of species overwinter in the soil, from slow worms to moth pupae and bumblebees. Try to resist digging the soil until mid-spring when they'll be awake.

Garden borders
Lots of insects like to shelter among fallen plant stems, particularly hollow stems. Try not to cut back or tidy the border until spring – leave it to rot down naturally, instead.



David Sandford

Farming with Nature

Over 20 years ago, I moved with my family back to our home farm on the southern shore of Strangford Lough; not a day goes by when I don't thank my lucky stars to live in such a beautiful part of the world!

My father had farmed previously, but latterly the land had been let to other local farmers. I soon noticed that the wildlife was not as I remembered it to have been as a child: no longer did I see owls patrolling the hedgerows at night; the seagulls didn't follow the plough in the numbers they used to; I didn't see woodcock and snipe roding in spring; wildfowl numbers were lower, and even the sparrows that I remembered around the farmyard had virtually disappeared.

I decided to see what could be done to reverse the wildlife decline and try to restore the farm's biodiversity to how I remembered it. Was this simply a mad pipe-dream, doomed to failure? I entered the farm into an environmental farm support scheme – then called the Countryside Management Scheme – to revert from grass to arable crops. The scheme allowed farmers to earn financial support for providing wildlife-friendly habitats on their farms.

I established additional grass margins on all our fields, sowed wild bird feed crops, left my arable field stubbles unploughed until the following spring, protected my species-rich grassland, and created two new ponds. This was all done whilst still farming in the conventional way and mainly by utilising the less productive areas of the farm.

I also carried out worm counts on our fields and decided to change our cropping to spring-sown crops with ploughing down an appreciable quantity of straw from the previous crop, thereby improving



Wild bird cover on David's farm

the soil structure. I utilised the Forest Service planting grants to join up scrub areas by planting thousands of trees and established broadleaf plantations, again mainly on the less productive areas of the farm.

Over the last 10 years, I am delighted to say that we have seen a remarkable transformation. We regularly see otter and pine marten, we now once again have both long-eared owls and barn owls, 67 different species of birds were recently recorded by RSPB, Irish hares are commonplace, and wildfowl visit our new ponds in increasing numbers.

I have welcomed politicians, civil servants, other farmers and wildlife enthusiasts, and have tried to demonstrate that when the building blocks of habitat recovery are provided, wildlife will quite quickly respond – and that it is never too late.

With 75% of NI's land farmed in some way, taxpayers' money is well spent supporting farmers when they farm in a nature-friendly way. Our ability to produce food relies on us having healthy soils and the things that nature gives us free, from pollination to natural pest control. Now is the time to consider a change in Northern Ireland agriculture that enables farmers and nature to thrive together, creating a countryside that is both productive and bursting with wildlife.

SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

We want to see farmers rewarded for helping nature in the Environment Strategy for NI. Add your voice at ulsterwildlife.org

A LITTLE BIT WILD

HELP THE FARMER'S FRIEND

Barn owls need your help. Provide plenty of uncut field margins, maintain thick and healthy hedgerows, and avoid using rodenticides ulsterwildlife.org/barn-owls

DAVID SANDFORD

is Chair of the Nature Friendly Farming Network (NFFN), a group of farmers who have come together to champion a way of farming which is sustainable and good for nature – nffn.org.uk

PARTNERSHIPS FOR WILDLIFE

Want to get involved? Contact Vickie on 028 9046 3108



NIE Networks scoop 'wildlife aware' accreditation

We are delighted to have awarded NIE Networks a 'Wildlife Aware' accreditation for their commitment to educating employees and contractors about some of Northern Ireland's most protected wildlife, and ensuring their work has minimal impact on the wider landscape.

As part of our ongoing partnership, a bespoke guide and training programme was developed for employees to help them protect and identify wildlife they encounter daily.

Hal Steele at NIE Networks explains "We deliver a vital public service and there is essential work we must carry out to ensure we have a reliable electricity network. However, many of our sites are natural habitats for protected species.

Thanks to our partnership with Ulster Wildlife, our staff members are now better equipped to identify where their work could have an impact on wildlife and the steps they need to take to protect species such as birds, badgers, otters and bats."

Vickie Chambers, Supporter Relationship Manager at Ulster Wildlife, said, "We are delighted that NIE Networks have taken this very positive step to further educate their staff and create an awareness of looking after our natural environment. We hope others will follow their lead to becoming more wildlife aware."

[Find out more at ulsterwildlife.org/corporate-support](http://ulsterwildlife.org/corporate-support)

Corporate Members of Ulster Wildlife

Platinum AES UK & Ireland

Gold Bombardier Aerospace, Translink

Silver AllState Northern Ireland, Belfast International Airport Ltd, CES Quarry Products Ltd, Encirc Ltd, NIE Networks

Bronze Alpha Housing, Belfast Harbour, Henry Brothers Ltd, Lafarge Cement

Standard Chaka Travel, Danske Bank, Henderson Group Ltd, Finlay's Food, Pritchitts – A Lakeland Dairies Company

HIGHLIGHTS

Welcome on board Translink

We are delighted to welcome on board Translink as a corporate member and see our partnership for wildlife grow from strength to strength. Most recently, we have been delivering 'wildlife aware' training to employees, with new biodiversity projects in development.



Volunteering for wildlife

A huge thanks to Citi Group, Danske Bank, and other corporates who rolled up their sleeves this summer and helped us to look after our special places for wildlife. If you are interested in corporate volunteering on our nature reserves, contact Sheila on 028 9046 3114.



Could your business help barn owls?

Do you fundraise? Could you raise £500 for barn owls? In return, we will offer you a barn owl education session at your premises with a visit from an actual barn owl. To find out more about fundraising for barn owls, contact Vickie on 028 9046 3108.





**Ulster
Wildlife**

Want to see
A Wilder
Northern Ireland?

**Time is ticking to bring wildlife back.
We need an ambitious Environment Strategy for
Northern Ireland to ensure nature's recovery**

**Please show you care by making your voice heard at
www.ulsterwildlife.org before 23 December**

