



Winged Wonders: dragonflies, butterflies & more



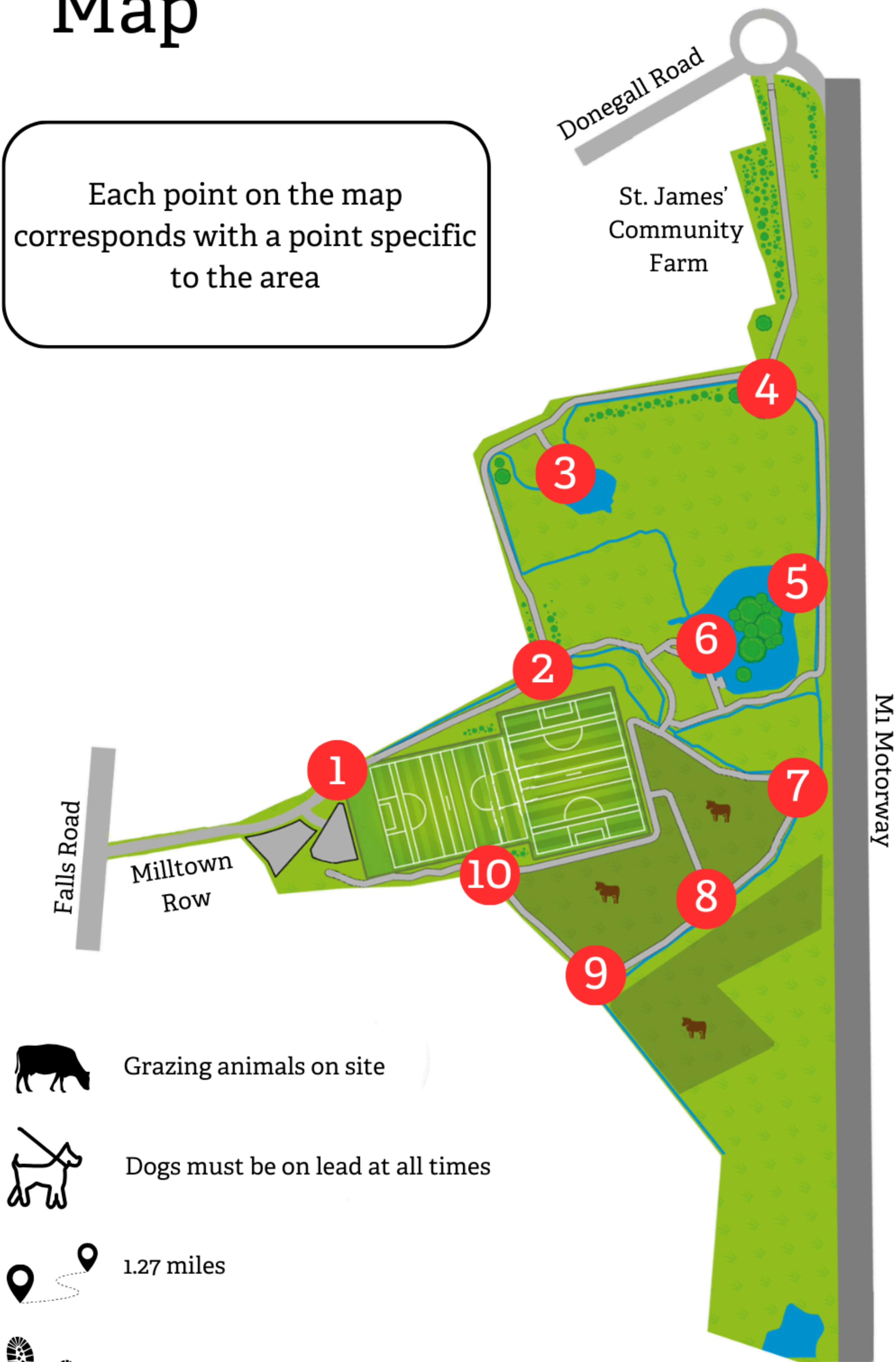
COMMUNITY
FUND



Ulster
Wildlife

Map

Each point on the map corresponds with a point specific to the area



Grazing animals on site



Dogs must be on lead at all times



1.27 miles



3,000 steps



Easy Terrain



Introduction

This walk will celebrate the amazing diversity of insects at Bog Meadows. Despite the fact that insects are often viewed in a negative light i.e. “creepy crawlies” or “bugs”. They are of vital importance, our ecosystem depends on insects and they are currently experiencing a rapid decline.

Bog Meadows is actively managed with insects in mind, we hope you enjoy this summer walk and discover the fascinating world of these beautiful and diverse creatures.



1. Banded demoiselle

Look carefully along the stream edges and you may spot a stunning Banded demoiselle.

This large damselfly lives on the edges of slow-flowing water with lush, damp vegetation.

Its common name comes from the distinctive 'fingerprint' mark on the males' wings. Male banded demoiselle are territorial, performing fluttering display flights to win over females.

They are on the wing from May to August. Males are metallic blue and female's metallic green. Banded demoiselles inject their eggs into plantstems under the surface of the water.

They take two weeks to hatch, and the larvae take two years to develop, overwintering in the mud at the bottom of the river or pond.

The Celts saw Damselflies as a bringer of light and joy associated with the summer sun. They were also associated in stories of the goddess of love and beauty, Arianrhod.



2. Coppery click beetle

The Coppery click beetle is a favourite on minibeast hunts here at Bog Meadows.

It is a large, coppery-purple beetle with long, toothed antennae. Click beetles are known for their jumping ability, leaping out of danger at speeds of more than 2m per second, creating a clicking noise. By arching their backs, they create tension in a hinge in their thorax, which is suddenly released.

The larvae (known as 'wire worms') live underground where they feed on roots and can cause damage to potato crops.



3. Common froghopper or Spittlebug

Have you ever heard of ‘cuckoo spit’, the frothy mass of bubbles that appear on plant stems everywhere?

This is the protective covering for the nymphs of the tiny common froghopper. This tiny insect can vary in colour from black and white to many shades of brown. Its wings cover the whole body, making it look like a stretched oval.

They are champion jumpers, able to leap 70cm into the air, equivalent to a human jumping over a tower block! The initial stages of the jump of the common froghopper are so powerful that a G-force of over 400G is generated; in comparison, an astronaut rocketing into orbit experiences a G-force of 5 gravities. Such amazing force is possible due to the its powerful hind legs.

Adults mate back-to-back, and the nymphs go through several stages before reaching maturity. They feed on plant sap using specialised, sucking mouthparts.



4. Ringlet

Even on dull days look out for the ringlet with its trademark bobbing flying as it seeks out the bramble (blackberry) and privet hedge flowers around Bog Meadows.

Female ringlets lays eggs by perching on a tall grass stem and ejecting them into the air, so they land on nearby vegetation. The nocturnal larvae hatch two to three weeks later.

The name ringlet comes from a series of eyespots on its wings. These false eyes can help distract predators, causing the predator to aim for a part of the butterfly's body that is not crucial to its survival.

The ringlet is an easy butterfly to identify it is medium-sized, sooty-brown butterfly, with a white fringe along its velvety wings.

Leaving a patch of grass long, leaves room in your garden for butterflies to develop.



5. Common darter dragonfly

Dragonflies and damselflies were amongst the first winged insects to evolve, their ancestors dating back to over 300 million years ago, before even the dinosaurs.

Dragonflies spend most of their lives as nymphs in water, eating small invertebrates. After 1-3 years, they climb up onto a perch and at night emerge in the beautiful adult forms. Following this transition, they only live for 2 weeks to a few short months.

Dragonfly names reflect hunting behaviour, skimmers fly low over water, hawkers chase down their prey, and darters zoom in on prey from a perch.

The common darter is a red, narrow-bodied dragonfly seen throughout summer and autumn. They dart forward suddenly to catch their insect-prey then take their catch to a favoured perch to eat it. Males are bright red, and females golden-brown. As a pair, they work together to lay eggs in a sticky jelly substance over submerged plants.

Dragonflies represent good luck in many cultures. In Celtic folklore the dragonfly is directly linked to the fairy folk, who are believed to use the insect as an airborne horse.

Dragonflies are often confused with damselflies, but they are generally larger, have a strong, fast, and agile flight, hold their wings out at right angles to their body during rest and have very large eyes. The best place to see one here is flying along the edges of the reedbed on a sunny day.



6. Water scorpion

In the calm waters of the pond lives an underwater predator, the water scorpion.

They are poor swimmers, preferring to move by walking and hide among dead leaves waiting to ambush prey. Small fish and tadpoles grabbed with pincer-like legs are unlikely to escape.

The water scorpion is dark brown with large front legs, a flattened leaf-shaped body and a long 'tail'. The long 'tail' is a siphon used for breathing, sitting above the water's surface acting like a snorkel. They can bite, but it is not very painful for humans.

Mating takes place in spring and females lay their eggs among algae or plants just below the surface of the water. The larvae hatch and progress to adulthood through a series of moults known as an 'incomplete metamorphosis'. Water scorpions are not real scorpions, but they do look very like one .



6a. Water stick insect

During a rainy pond dip with primary school children in 2024 the first recorded water stick insect was found at the Bog Meadows pond.

This underwater predator is a relative of the water scorpion, it hides among reeds and stems in lakes and ponds and waits, perfectly camouflaged, to ambush its prey. It adopts a mantis-like pose when submerged, capturing passing creatures like tadpoles and small fish.

Like the water scorpion, the water stick insect uses its long, thin 'tail' for breathing like a snorkel. Mating occurs in spring and eggs are laid soon after on floating plants and stems.

The water stick insect has a long, thin, brown body, and a long 'tail'. It resembles a mantis, with long, hooked front legs.

During hot summer days, water stick insects leave the pond to hunt in emergent vegetation, or may fly to a new pond, which is how they travelled to this pond.



7. Common pond skater

Look carefully and see if you can spot little insects ‘skating’ across the surface of the water?

Common pond skaters are found in our ponds and streams. With brownish-black bodies and long legs with water repellent hairs on the feet which allow them to walk on the surface film of the water. Feeling the vibrations of other insects in this film, they hunt their prey and stab them with their ‘beaks’.

The common pond skater emerges from hibernation in April and lays eggs which hatch soon after, the nymphs go through several moults before reaching adulthood.



8. Azure damselfly

On a warm day you are very likely to spot the azure damselfly flitting around the water here.

The male is pale blue with bands of black along the body and the female is green and black.

Damselflies are often mistaken for dragonflies; however, they are smaller, more delicate looking with a thin body, separated eyes, slower flight and when resting hold their wings close along the length of their bodies. Damselflies lay in wait for their insect prey before catching it in mid-air with their legs. They then return to their perch to eat.

When the larvae of damselflies are ready to turn into adults, they emerge from the water and moult their larval skin, leaving behind a cast known as an 'exuviae' – you can sometimes find these on plants around the water's edge.



9. Meadow brown butterfly

Butterflies feature widely in art, stories, and culture throughout the world.

The butterfly life cycle from egg, to caterpillar, then chrysalis to adult is complex and fascinating. It has led to butterflies being seen as symbolic of transformation, freedom, and rebirth, otherworldly messengers of good luck and joy across many cultures.

Celtic mythology regards butterflies as a symbol of the soul. The meadow brown butterfly, a common sight in Bog meadows, carries deep Celtic symbolism with it. Known as the “Eye Butterfly” due to the large circle on the underside of its wings, the meadow brown is associated with the cyclical nature of life and death.

It is one of the most common grassland butterflies and can be seen even in dull weather when other butterflies are inactive, flying low over the grass and flowers.



10. Common carder bee

Finally, a very important group of insects the bees.

Ireland has around 100 types of wild bee, one third of which are threatened with extinction.

Common bumblebee species have experienced a 14.2% decline in abundance in the last five years. Wild bees and other insects are declining because we've drastically reduced the areas where they can nest and the amount of food our landscape provides for them. However, even small changes to gardens can really help our bees.

There are 21 different bumblebees, one of our most common, the common carder bee emerges early in the spring and can be seen feeding on flowers right through to November. The fluffy, brown-and-orange bumble bee nest in cavities, old birds' nests, and mossy lawns. The social insects can nest in colonies with up to 200 workers. Common carder bees are one of several 'long-tongued bees' that feed on flowers with long tubular florets, such as heather, clover and lavender.

The queen emerges from hibernation in spring and starts the colony by laying a few eggs that hatch as workers; these workers tend the young and nest. Males emerge later and mate with new females who are prospective queens. Both the males and old queen die in the autumn, but the new queens hibernate, and the cycle begins again next spring.



This walk has provided you with a tiny glimpse into the world of insects.

Although insects are the largest group of animals, they are typically a group least known to people. Their importance in the ecosystem cannot be overstated they are pollinators, predators, decomposers, and food for other animals.

The statistics of insect decline are shocking e.g. a Buglife UK survey found flying insects have declined by 60% in the last 20 years.

The good news is that you can be part of the solution. If you have any green space, consider leaving, an area to nature or plant pollinator friendly plants you will be amazed at how quickly insects move in.

For ideas check out.

<https://www.ulsterwildlife.org/let-nature-in>

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