

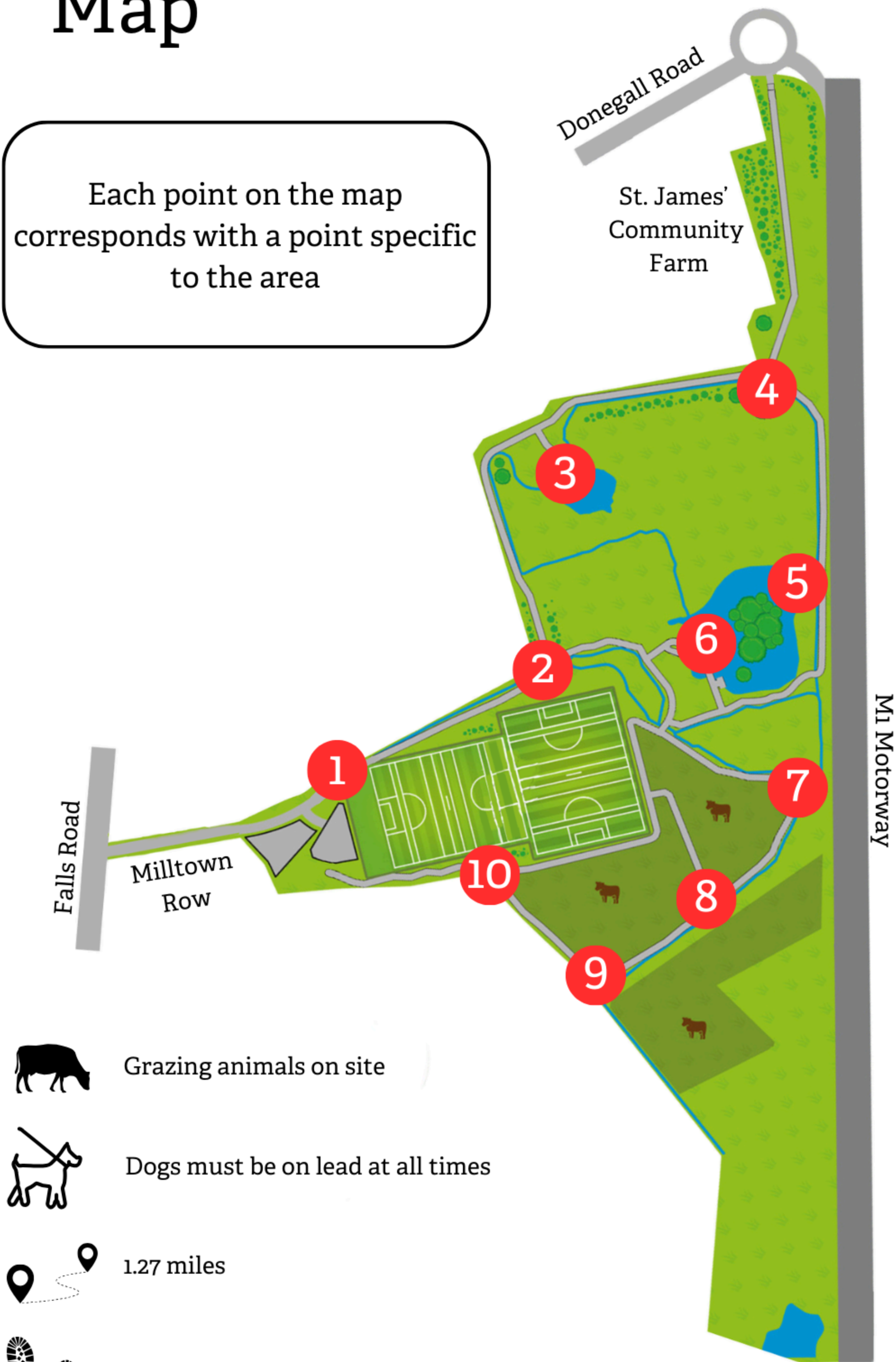


Signs of Spring



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

As winter gives way to spring and days start getting longer and warmer, the natural world begins to come to life. From insects hatching to flowers blooming and birds getting ready for the busy summer ahead, there are many signs that let us know spring is underway.



1. Lesser celandine

After the winter, the blooms of lesser celandine flowers are a joy to see while walking through Bog Meadows.

As one of the first spring flowers to bloom, this carpet of sunshine-yellow provides a valuable nectar source for early insects.

Lesser celandine has heart-shaped, glossy green leaves, with star-like yellow flowers that open in the sunlight. Victorians used this flower to symbolise “joys to come” and giving it the name “Spring messenger”.



2. Queen bees

Having spent a long winter in hibernation, queen bumblebees are waking up and beginning to look for new places to begin their colony.

When the queen lays her eggs, she will only fertilise some of them which develop into females, the unfertilised eggs become males. The males leave the colony to find another queen which he can mate with while the female worker bees live together in a large social group with the queen, protecting the young and defending the hive.

Bumblebees are very important pollinators around the world, including here at Bog Meadows, however, they have suffered an unfortunate decline due to factors such as habitat loss.



3. Chiffchaff

Bog Meadows is home to many migrant birds during the summer months, and the earliest arrival is the chiffchaff.

While some of these little birds stay year-round, most migrate from Africa to breed and raise their chicks. They nest on or near the ground, hidden among nettles and brambles.

The chiffchaff camouflages so brilliantly with its surroundings that you may not see them but stand close to the reedbed and keep an ear out for their distinctive song “chiff chaff chiff chaff”.



4. Mammals emerging from hibernation

As the weather warms and more food become available, hibernating animals begin to wake up including our beloved hedgehogs.

Having gone into hibernation in late October, the males are the first to emerge in March hungry and thirsty.

If you don't have a source of water in your garden, a shallow bowl of water can be a lifeline to a hedgehog.

Another native mammal waking from hibernation is the bat. Bog Meadows is home to three species of bat, the common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle and leisler's bat.

Roosting in tree holes and bat boxes, the bats at Bog Meadows entered hibernation in November, during hibernation a bats heartrate can drop to less than 10 beats per minute, impressive considering their heartrate can be over 1,000 beats per minute when flying.

They emerge in March/April but may not be fully active until mid-May. You can often see them dipping low over the pond on a warm evening.

Unfortunately, all our native bats are now on the priority species list. You can help these amazing little creatures by allowing places for insects to thrive in your own garden. #LetNatureIn



5. Small tortoiseshell butterfly

If you notice a butterfly with flashes of bright orange, it could be the beautifully painted wings of the Small tortoiseshell butterfly.

Waking from hibernation in late February, the small tortoiseshell is one of the first butterflies to emerge. Their deep orange colouration with black and yellow markings on the forewings and rings of blue around the edges of the hindwings add a pop of colour to early spring.

Adults may be seen drinking nectar from dandelions and thistles, while caterpillars may be found feeding on nettles.



6. Bullfinch

This brilliantly coloured little bird is a year-round resident at Bog Meadows and well worth taking the time to spot.

They are shy and can be tricky to see as they do not generally venture into the open, even their song is quiet. This changes in spring when they can be seen more easily feeding on new buds of trees a sure sign that spring is underway.

The name bullfinch comes from their front heavy faces, reminiscent of a bull, with their short and thick beak adapted for eating buds. The males have beautifully pink chests, and females have duller hues.

Bullfinches form strong relationships and pairs stick together for years. Take a closer look to see if you can spot one of these bonded couples.



7. Toothwort

Bog Meadows is home to one of Ireland's most unique flowers which emerges in spring.

Toothwort resembles an orchid with its pinkish-white flowers; however, it is a parasitic flower that spends most of the year underground feeding on the roots of trees.

The name toothwort comes from the fact that the flower head looks like a stack of teeth raising from the ground. Other names for this flower include “Corpse flower”, as it was rumoured that the flower grew in the soil above buried bodies.

As you pass the pond look to the left under the hazel trees to glimpse this special flower.



8. Amphibians emerging from hibernation

After a long, cold winter, the amphibians are waking up from hibernation. Bog Meadows is home to two amphibians: the common frog and the smooth newt.

Look into the nearby stream, can you see any blobs of frogspawn? Before spring frogs will lay their eggs in in the ponds and streams around Bog Meadows.

Unlike the frogs, female newts wrap each egg separately in the leaves of water plants. Once hatched, both newts and frogs will live in the water for the next few months as tadpoles before morphing into adults and leaving the water.



9. Buds & blossoms

The most common association with spring is the flowering buds and blossoms.

Many trees, shrubs and flowers are coming into bloom. Blackthorn's white flowers appear first quickly followed by the pinkish-white blossom of hawthorn.

Gorse was voted the county flower of Belfast and is spotted widely around the hills. It blooms from January to December meaning it's a vital resource for pollinators.

With its dense thorny growth it also provides valuable cover for small birds and mammals. If the weather is warm, take a few blooms to smell, they smell of coconut, a surprising scent for Belfast.



10. Scientific signs of Spring

Spring doesn't only show in the flowers and wildlife. The changes in wildlife are a response to the physical changes happening in the Northern Hemisphere.

In March, an equinox marks

the first day of spring. This is when daylight hours and dark hours become equal. The Latin word translates to equal night. Meteorologists split the year into 4 quarters. This method sets spring on March 1st lasting until May 31st.



Humans have a deep rooted connection to Spring as a time of rejuvenation, its significance has long been celebrated in cultures across the world. e.g. St. Brigids Day, Ireland, Cherry Blossom Festival, Japan.

After you leave Bog Meadows today take time to notice the signs of spring all around bringing beauty and the promise of longer and warmer days ahead.

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