



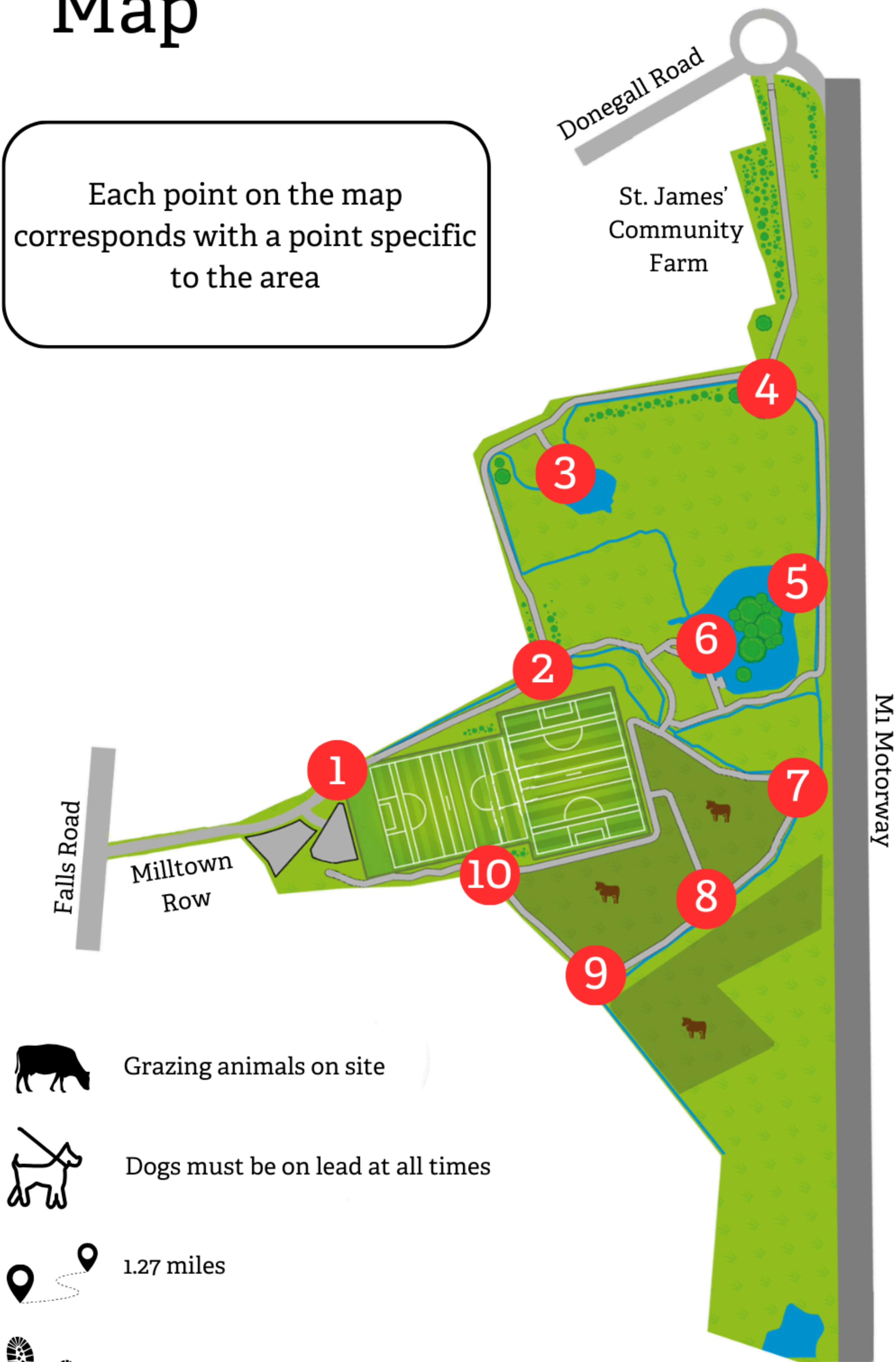
# Summer birds at Bog Meadows





# 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

May is a fantastic time to look skyward and appreciate the amazing migratory birds, who are arriving daily from Africa to raise the next generation.

This is when Bog Meadows really comes alive with birdlife.





# **1. Song thrush - Smólach ceoil**

**A year-round resident of Bog Meadows, the song thrush gained its name from its beautiful song.**

Once a common sight, the song thrush is now sadly in decline. They eat a variety of food. You may see them hunting for earthworms or, when the ground becomes too hard, catching snails.

The song thrush is famous for its practice of smashing snails against rocks, to get to the soft parts inside – a behaviour that is unique to these birds.





## **2. Common swift - Gabhlán gaoithe**

**Have you ever seen arrows whirling through the sky and wondered what it was?**

Swifts, the fastest of all birds in level flight, clocking in at 69.3pmh!

Looking a bit like a boomerang, the swift lives most of its life soaring the skies, only landing to nest and rear its young. The aerial lifestyle is reflected in their Latin name – *Apus apus* meaning ‘without feet’.

Feeding on flying insects, swifts can gather up to 100,000 insects per day to feed a brood of chicks, a huge energy requirement and a reason to protect habitats that favour insects.

While most chicks fledge the nest then spend a couple of days gaining their strength, hopping around from branch to branch, swift chicks do press ups in the nest from around one month old, strengthening their wings.



This means when it's time for them to fledge, it is straight into the air, off on an epic 6000 mile flight to the south Sahara not landing until they return to breed themselves 2 or 3 years later.

In a single swift's lifetime it may fly some 1.3 million miles, equivalent to over 40 times round the earth.



### **3. Willow warbler - Ceolaire sailí**

**The willow warbler is a bird that is easier to hear than see.**

It's a slim, delicate bird, that looks like a chiffchaff, and can be heard singing a melodious, warbling song.



They moult all their feathers twice a year - once at the breeding grounds and once at the wintering grounds; the reason is still a mystery.

It is green above and pale yellow below, with an off-white belly and eyebrow stripe and is a common summer visitor.

They create an intricate domed nest, shaped like a pizza oven, close to the ground in which they can have two broods of 4-8 eggs. At the end of the summer, they will leave to spend the winter in Africa, south of the Sahara.





## **4. Sedge warbler - Ceolaire cíbe**

**Look across the reedbed and see if you can spot the sedge warbler.**

A medium-sized wetland bird that can be spotted singing from reeds and willows. A great mimic, the male introduces random phrases, never singing the same song twice; the more phrases his song has the more mates he attracts. The song is a loud, mix of phrases which may include mimicry of other birds. The main call is a quiet “tschick”.

They feed almost exclusively on insects and other invertebrates. They are sandy brown, paler underneath and streaky above, with a dark, streaked cap. They have a distinctive white eyestripe.

These African migrants travel to Bog Meadows to nest in the reeds.





## **5. Reed bunting - Gealóg ghiolcaí**

**A small well camouflaged bird which chooses to nest low down in the reedbeds.**

In summer reed buntings stay in the reed beds eating insects but switch to seeds when food is low in winter which is why if you live nearby, you may sometimes see one at your garden feeder.

The female can be tricky to identify but the male is unmistakable in breeding plumage with a dark head and white droopy moustache.



Their nests are cup shaped, built with moss and grass, and lined with fine grasses and hair. The female lays 4-5 eggs which hatch after 12-13 days. If a predator comes too close to the nest, adults may try cause a distraction by hopping away, pretending to be injured.



## **6. Mallard**

**When looking at the birds in the pond, do you notice anyone missing?**

At this time of year, female mallards leave the pond to find somewhere quiet to nest and raise young.



Drab in comparison to the showy male, her mix of brown, black, and white keep her hidden amongst the vegetation as she incubates her eggs. She forms a shallow depression on the ground and pulls nearby vegetation towards herself then lines the nest with grasses, leaves, and twigs. A mallard can lay up to 13 eggs which are incubated for about 30 days.

The ducklings are ready to leave the nest within 13-16 hours and you will sometimes see our local urban mother ducks commuting with their chicks from the nest sites across roads etc. to the pond. If you are lucky enough to witness this, please give them as much room as possible and keep dogs away so the mother and chicks do not get separated.

The ducks have everything they need in the pond but if you would like to feed them, please do not use bread. Try lettuce, oats, and seeds. Bread is damaging to the water quality and the ducks.





## **7. Long-tailed tit - Meantán earrfhada**

**Long-tailed tits are very cute, tiny birds with long black and white tails and fluffy pale pink breasts, sometimes called “flying lollipops”.**

All winter they fly around Bog Meadows flitting from branch to branch in a small noisy and lively flock of parents with last year's chicks and a few “friends”, unrelated birds that remain part of the same family. They can be seen visiting feeders for peanuts or checking for moth eggs when spiders and insects are in short supply. Working together they will protect their territory.



In the spring they form pairs to raise 6-12 eggs. Their beautiful and intricate egg-shaped nests are made from up to 6,000 pieces of moss and lichen woven together with cobwebs which expand and stretch with the growing chicks inside.



## **8. Corncrake - Traonach**

**The now endangered Corncrake once called Bog Meadows home during the summer months.**



Related to coots and moorhens, the corncrake is a round bodied bird with a long neck, and yellowish-brown colouration.

Nesting in areas with lots of tall plant cover where they are hidden from view, their strange 'crex crex' call is often the only sign of their presence.

Bog Meadows was the last known place in Belfast for corncrake and although it is no longer here, its legacy lives on as Bog Meadows was saved from development by a local community group who made everyone aware of the importance of the site for birds and the need to protect a home for the corncrake.

Northern Ireland is now one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world with one in nine species at risk of extinction, highlighting how precious sites like Bog Meadows are.





## **9. (Barn) swallow - Fáinleog**

**Seeing the first swallow of the year is regarded as a good omen, look out for them performing great aerial movements catching insect-prey on the wing over the meadows.**

Travelling all the way from Africa to spend its summers here at Bog Meadows the swallow is glossy, dark blue-black above and white below. It is sometimes mistaken for a similar bird the house martin but the swallow has orange cheeks and long tail streamers.



They take advantage of the cows here during the summer, following them to snag insects flushed out by their movement through the meadows.

When nesting, both the male and female create their cup-shaped nest using mud and will reuse nests from previous years, cleaning out old feathers before laying their eggs. Swallows lay 3-7 eggs, with the chicks hatching 12-17 days later, naked except for sparse grey down, and their eyes closed.

Its amazing to think that by the end of summer they will fly to Africa for the winter.





## **10. House martin - Gabhlán Binne**

**Arriving in April, the house martin is a summer visitor to Bog Meadows, drawn by the booming insect population.**

Each year they travel all the way from Africa to nest here in the same spot!

In the past they would have built their nests on cliffs but now they have moved in with us often using the space just under house eaves.

The impressive nests are made of only mud and can take up to 10 days to complete. Each nest is made up of at least 1,000 beak-sized mud pellets, something we have in plentiful supply at Bog Meadows.



To spot the house martin, look out for a glossy black back, white belly, and rump and a short, forked tail. Young birds from the first brood have often been observed helping their parents feed the next brood, an unusual occurrence in birds.

They are often the last of the summer visitors to leave.



**We are privileged to be able to enjoy such a variety of bird life at Bog Meadows in the summer.**



Many of these birds face increasing threats to their survival and with some travelling thousands of miles to join us, it is crucial that Bog Meadows continues to provide a safe haven for them to feed, nest and raise their young.

You can play a role in their protection by helping keep our ground nesting birds safe by walking dogs on a lead and sticking to the paths while visiting Bog Meadows.



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