



Winter Wildlife



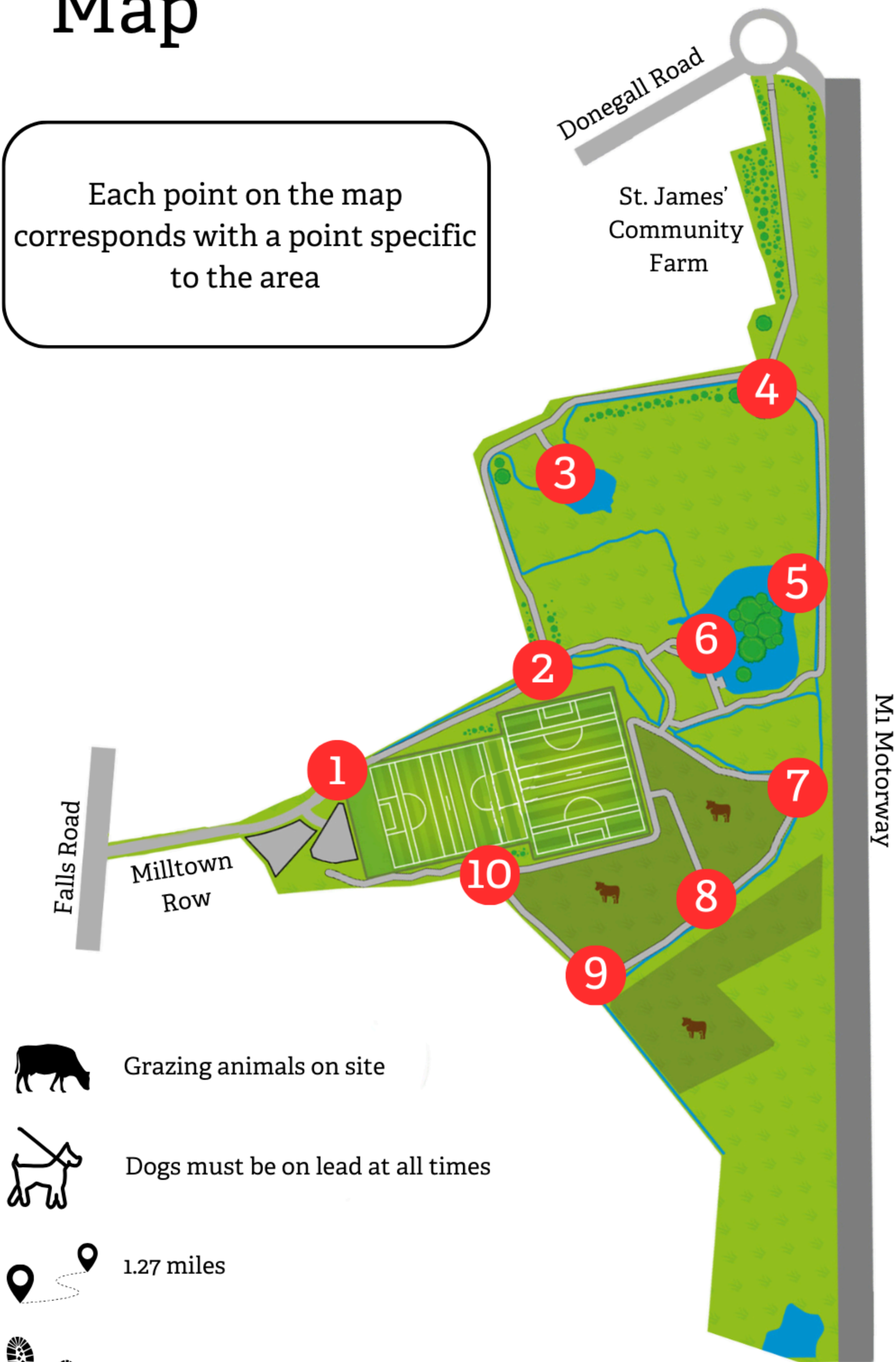
COMMUNITY
FUND



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

In winter, life can be hard for wildlife – days are short and finding enough food to survive takes up almost every hour of daylight.

Some animals solve the problem by hibernating, others have left to spend the winter in warmer climates, and some will be busier than ever, foraging for vital nutrients to get them through the cold months.

The lack of sunlight in winter can also be a challenge for us, however, there is still beauty to be found in the natural world around us.



1. Grey Wagtail

Seen a yellow flash flying along the stream? It could be the grey wagtail, a common winter visitor having moved down from fast flowing, upland streams.

Hopping along the shallower waters of the stream and along the riverbanks, the grey wagtail feeds on a range of invertebrates such as midges, snails, and beetles, as well as occasionally tadpoles.

The name wagtail comes from its constantly flicking tail. There are many theories why they do this, from telling predators they are alert and not an easy target to flushing out their insect prey.

Scottish folklore says seeing the grey wagtail is a sign of bad weather to come.



2. Blackthorn - Sloe Berries

The blackthorn tree is easy to identify at this time of year as it is covered in sloe berries. The beautiful berries are coated with a frost that reflects UV light that birds can see when flying above.

These berries will only be visible to birds when they are perfectly ripe. They provide great winter food for the blackbirds of Bog Meadows. Not only do our birds enjoy the berries, but many people also make sloe gin with the berries.



3. Reedbed

Look across the reed bed at all the ponds and water. The phrase “water is life” really is true. Water increases the biodiversity and health of an ecosystem.

Take a moment to imagine the thousands of insect eggs waiting to hatch. Look forward to summer when this space will be filled with colourful and beautiful dragonflies and damselflies along with swallows arriving to breed and feed on the insects waiting to hatch.



4. Robin

Closely linked to the holiday season, the robin's iconic red breast was once associated with the red uniforms of postal workers in Victorian England, when sending Christmas cards was becoming a tradition. This led to them being nicknamed 'Robins'.

Robins have become synonymous with Christmas.

Gardeners are familiar with tame robins following their spade to glean worms unearthed by digging. It's thought this echoes ancestral behaviour of robins following wild boar that once shared their woodland habitat.

Although resident in Britain and Ireland all year round, Robins are joined by their migratory cousins from Northern and Eastern Europe in the winter months.



5. Long-tailed Tit

The long-tailed tit is a beautiful dainty bird with black, white and pink feathers, and a tail longer than their body.

In winter, these little birds form family groups and can be easily spotted flying throughout the bare hedgerows calling to keep in contact with their group.

With the leaves having fallen, winter is a great time to search the hedgerows for last year's nests. Intricately woven with up to 6,000 pieces of moss, lichen and spider webs, and lined with soft feathers, these nests are an amazing feat, all using only a beak!



6. Lesser Redpoll

A member of the finch family, the lesser redpoll with its striking red face is a real treat to come across while walking through Bog Meadows.

Lesser redpolls have small beaks, adapted to feed on the fine seeds of birch, alder, and larch. This tiny bird, only slightly larger than a blue tit is on the Northern Ireland Priority Species list meaning it is at risk of extinction.

As winter progresses and food becomes scarce you may see them on your garden bird feeder, a good reason to keep it topped up at this time of year and do your bit for wildlife.



7. Coot

A familiar face in our pond, the coot is a year-round resident.

Ducking and diving below the surface, the coot is a bottom feeder, munching on a variety of vegetation.

During the winter, our resident coots may be joined by others from further east and can be seen grazing on the short grass around the pond. The saying 'bald as a Coot' actually refers to the white patch just above the bird's bill, rather than lack of feathers.



8. Common Snipe

In the fields, nestled amongst the rushes is a very special bird, the common snipe.

Once a breeding species here during the summer, the snipe is now a priority breeding species in Northern Ireland.

The tip of the snipe's beak is actually quite flexible and full of nerves, this allows them to feel their invertebrate prey when the beak is poked into the soil.

In the summer if you are lucky you can hear the drumming sound of their tail feathers in flight.

This amazing winter visitor is one of the many reasons to keep your dog on a lead when walking around the reserve.



9. Holly

Holly with its dark green, glossy leaves and bright red berries brings a beautiful splash of colour to even the dullest winter day.

Interestingly, there are male and female holly trees, with the females being the ones to produce berries after being pollinated by insects.

Take a close look at the leaves on the holly tree. Notice leaves that are high up are smooth and oval, while ones closer to the ground are twisted and have thorny points. This is due to an amazing ability holly has. Holly can switch on a gene in each leaf to make them spiky in response to being nibbled on! In Bog Meadows, the trimming back of the holly also elicits this response, as you can see.



10. Hibernation

From hedgehogs to butterflies, many of the species that call Bog Meadows home, hibernate during the colder months.

Hibernation allows animals to conserve energy by slowing their heart and breathing rate when food is in short supply. Hibernation does not mean complete inactivity as these animals may still wake up to use the toilet or venture out on warmer days.

During hibernation, a bat's heart rate drops to around 10 beats per minute, in comparison to 1,000 beats per minute when flying! The hedgehogs heart rate also drops to 20 beats per minute during hibernation, from 190 beats when active.

Small tortoiseshell and peacock butterflies hibernate as adults in dark places such as sheds and holes in trees. This allows them to feed and mate as soon as the weather allows it, giving them an advantage over other species which must complete their metamorphosis before breeding.

Hibernation is a life-saving ability, allowing these animals to survive our coldest months in relatively comfortable conditions.



As you can see from this walk, there is still an abundance of life even on the darkest days. We hope you enjoyed sharing your winter day with our hardy wildlife.

To find out how you can help wildlife in your garden all year round, why not join our 'Let Nature In' campaign at www.ulsterwildlife.org/let-nature-in

Enjoyed this self-led walk of
Bog Meadows Nature Reserve?

You can help protect this special
haven for wildlife by becoming a
member of Ulster Wildlife today.

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