

Wildlife Watch

NORTHERN IRELAND 2025



Ulster Wildlife

Dear Wildlife Watcher

What wild adventures are you most excited for this year? From fluttering butterflies to chirping birds, there's so much to discover! We've packed this newsletter with fun wildlife-spotting tips and wild ideas to help you get outside and explore nature. We know you love wildlife as much as we do, so don't forget to share your amazing pictures and stories with us for your chance to be featured.



Kirsty

A garden full of wild wonders

Abigail Best, aged 10, is a member of Bog Meadows Wildlife Watch group and is passionate about nature. Her wildlife-friendly garden is her happy place, welcoming birds, butterflies and a host of creatures thanks to some small actions that make a big difference.



Ever since I can remember I have loved nature! Our garden is quite large and we have a lot of wildlife visiting and staying. Our bird feeders support a number of different birds, even some rare birds like siskins and bullfinches, which is especially exciting as birds are one of my main interests. In the spring and summer, we let the grass grow long to create a wildflower patch, which attracts a wide variety of pollinators and other insects.

Our garden has large trees, a stream, a bog garden and – our newest feature – a pond. The pond has attracted wildlife that we've never seen in our garden before, like whirligigs, which I love watching. The bog garden has lots of water-loving plants growing wild, including fool's watercress and brooklime. In autumn, mushrooms pop everywhere in our small field margin home to lots of native trees – we call it the "The Secret Garden".

I have always enjoyed recording the wildlife around me and I take part in many of the wildlife organisations' annual counts such as Big Garden Birdwatch and Butterfly Count, I also use apps regularly like Birdtrack and iNaturalist, etc. By taking part in these surveys, you can help scientists protect the wildlife we care about.

I am very grateful for my garden, and the amazing wildlife it has supported – it truly is my happy place! There are still more things I would like to do to improve its biodiversity. No matter how small your garden is, you can do plenty of things to encourage wildlife into it. I hope I have inspired you to bring nature into your life, whatever way you can!

Encourage your parents to sign up to our 'Let Nature In' campaign to receive a FREE wildlife gardening starter pack, full of tips and advice - ulsterwildlife.org/let-nature-in

Join one of our clubs

- ✓ Have a go at exciting outdoor activities
- ✓ Learn how to make a difference to wildlife
- ✓ Make new friends

Lisburn Wildlife Watch

Meets 3rd Wednesday of every month at 6.30pm

Bloomfield Wildlife Watch

Meets 2nd Tuesday of every month at 6.00pm

Bog Meadows Wildlife Watch

One Thursday each month at 6.00pm

Visit our website to find out more

ulsterwildlife.org/wildlife-watch

Visit our website

Want more fun stuff? Head over to wildlifewatch.org.uk to watch awesome wildlife-activity videos, take part in quizzes and read members' wildlife stories. You can also download heaps of activities, wildlife spotter sheets, masks and much more!

Be a Wildlife Champion!

Take part in the Wildlife Watch Awards and complete fun wildlife activities and challenges.

There are three different awards: Hedgehog, Kestrel and Nature Ranger. Once you've completed one, you'll receive a certificate and badge to display on your profile.



www.wildlifewatch.org.uk www.ulsterwildlife.org

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Go wild year round

January



Starling © Mark Robinson

- Join the RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch! Count the birds in your garden and help scientists learn how they're doing.
- Watch huge flocks of starlings create mesmerising patterns in the sky at dusk. Good spots include the Albert Bridge in Belfast.
- Starlings may look black at first, but their feathers shine with purple, green, and blue when the light hits them!

February



© Hazel catkins

- Put pet fur, short pieces of wool, garden moss or dried grass in piles or pack loosely in hanging bird feeders to help birds with nest building.
- Look for early signs of spring such as snowdrops, catkins, and primroses. Download a spotter sheet.
- The long, dangly, yellow hazel catkins resemble lambs' tail swaying in the wind, hence their nickname.

March



Blackcap © Amy Lewis

- Download the Merlin Bird ID app to help you identify all the wonderful spring songsters.
- Visit one of our woodland nature reserves to be bowled over by a symphony of birdsong from blackbirds to blackcaps.
- Most of the songs you hear in the morning are by male birds, as they are looking to attract a mate and defend their territory.

July



Becket's nemone © Paul Naylor

- Adopt a shark this National Marine Week and help ensure the future of these jaw-some creatures in our local seas - ulsterwildlife.org/adopt
- Head to the beach at low tide and look for marine creatures like crabs, sea anemones, starfish, and small fish hiding in the rock pools. Bring a magnifying glass for a closer look!
- Sea anemones have stinging tentacles which help them paralyse prey like small fish and tiny sea creatures.

August



Common pipistrelles © Tom Marshall

- Set up a white sheet with a torch and watch as moths come to the light. Look out for species like the brimstone moth, which is bright yellow.
- Summer evenings are perfect for spotting bats flying overhead. Head to a local park or lake and watch them swoop around catching insects.
- Northern Ireland is home to eight species of bats, all of which are protected. The tiny common pipistrelle is the smallest, while the Leisler's bat is the biggest.

September



Red squirrel © Peter Cairns 2020 Vision

- Spotted a red squirrel, grey squirrel or pine marten? We want to hear about! Submit your sightings at ulsterwildlife.org/red-squirrels
- Keeps your eyes peeled for signs and sights of our native red squirrel, such as neatly halved hazelnut shells and a messy scatter of pinecones.
- In winter, red squirrels grow extra tufts of fur on their ears, making them look even fluffier!

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KEY:

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 Did you know?

Visit wildlifewatch.org.uk to download spotter sheets & 'how to' activity guides. Check out ulsterwildlife.org for places to explore and to sign up to all our exciting campaigns.






Ulster Wildlife



April



Sphagnum moss © Mark Hamblin

-  Encourage your parents to make the swap to peat-free compost this spring to help protect our peat bogs and their amazing wildlife.
-  Explore a peat bog and look for fascinating plants like sundews (carnivorous plants that eat insects!) and bog moss (sphagnum), which helps make peat.
-  Sphagnum moss can hold up to 20 times its weight in water, keeping peat bogs wet and squishy!

May



Hedgehog © Alexa Pixabay

-  Pile up some logs or leaves in a quiet corner of your garden to provide a minibeast buffet for hedgehogs.
-  Listen out for a range of snuffling, snorting and grunting sounds as hedgehogs root through your garden for food.
-  Hedgehogs are covered in around 7,000 spines, which are made of keratin – just like our fingernails.

June



Peacock butterfly © Rachel Long

-  Enjoy your wildest June yet, by taking part in 30 Days Wild - the UK's largest nature challenge. Get your free pack - wildlifetrusts.org/30daywild
-  June is one of the best months for butterflies. Look out for species like the peacock, red admiral, and small tortoiseshell. Download a spotter sheet.
-  When alarmed, the peacock butterfly can make a hissing noise by rubbing its wings quickly together.

October



Otter © Elle Burgin

-  Winter is tough for birds, so why not make a bird feeder using pinecones, lard, seeds, cheese and raisins, and then hang up with some string.
-  Visit one of our nature reserves and see if you can spot frozen spider webs, animal footprints in the mud, or fungi growing on dead wood.
-  Otters have been spotted at our Balloo Wetland Nature Reserve in Bangor. These nocturnal visitors live in hidden homes called holts.

November



Red deer © Jan Hawkins

-  Leave part of your garden wild and resist the urge to tidy to up to help insects and birds find shelter and food.
-  Autumn is rutting season for red deer, when stags compete for mates. Visit a woodland such as our Glenarm Nature Reserve at dawn or dusk to spot them.
-  Male red deer grow huge, branching antlers that can be as wide as a car! They shed them every year and grow new ones.

December



Whooper swans © Danny Green

-  Help protect our precious local wildlife from hedgehogs to barn owls by adopting an animal this Christmas - ulsterwildlife.org/adopt-an-animal
-  Scan fields near water for groups of whooper swans visiting from Iceland. Look for their yellow and black bills and listen out for their loud honking.
-  Whooper swans are one of the biggest swans in the world, with a wingspan of up to 2.5 meters



Jellies and their lookalikes



Comb jelly

Compass jellyfish

Moon jellyfish

Rootmouth jellyfish

Stalked jellyfish

By-the-wind-sailor

Portuguese man o' war

Lion's mane jellyfish

Mauve jellyfish

Blue jellyfish

www.wildlifewatch.org.uk



Nature's music



Nature is full of great opportunities in turning natural objects into musical instruments...

Maracas

You will need

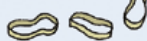
- An empty, clean tin can (with the label removed)



- A balloon



- Elastic bands



- A handful of seeds, rice, lentils, nuts or small stones



- 1 Put your loose materials into your tin can.



- 2 Stretch the balloon over the open end of the tin.



Be careful of sharp edges.

- 3 Once in place, secure it with elastic bands.



- 4 Give it go - shake your maraca!



Grass whistle

You will need

- A wide blade of grass



- Your two thumbs



- 1 Hold the grass taut between your thumbs.



- 2 Blow into the gap between your thumbs until you hear a whistle.

If you don't hear anything at first, try re-positioning the grass between your thumbs. Don't worry - it can take a bit of practice!



www.wildlifewatch.org.uk

Illustration: Corinne Welch © Copyright Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts 2015

Attention parents/guardian

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