

One Million Bluebells for Ramsey Forest

The Ramsey Forest Project is celebrating the purchase of Crossags Coppice; a five-acre field of gorse and bracken that is being turned into new woodland that will link two neighbouring woodlands together to create a 60-acre site at the Ramsey Hairpin.

One of the great attractions of this new purchase is its magnificent show of bluebells in the spring: over one million of them in the five acres.



Bluebells at Crossags Coppice
©Andree Dubbeldam

If one million bluebells sound good, look at the maths:

Each bluebell stem has, on average, eight flowers. Each flower will last one week, refilling with nectar every night. Indeed, on a warm day in May, you will see honey-bees, bumble bees, mining bees, nomad bees, hoverflies, beetles and butterflies competing for the 56 million insect dinners served up by this site every year.

If that's the significance of this site at the little end of the animal spectrum, we can also look at the other end. Manx Birdlife surveyed the site in May and recorded both sparrow hawk and peregrine falcon on site. Walk the 60 acres of the Hairpin woodlands on a regular basis and you will see the remains of a 'kill' pretty much every day. That's 360 small birds taken from the ecosystem every year. We just have to think about the bluebell maths and look around the woodland to understand how this woodland can sustain this.

Hen Harrier Monitoring

A small team of hardened volunteers monitor winter roosts of hen harriers once a month in all weathers and temperatures. Their efforts are well rewarded as the data collected confirms that the Island has the highest density of wintering hen harriers in the British Isles. The peak co-ordinated count for the 2018/2019 winter period was 50, recorded in January.

Some monitoring also takes place over the breeding season. The long, hot summer of 2018 produced good sized broods with a high fledging success rate. Brood size was down in 2019, with one to three chicks recorded per nest.

Sadly hen harriers are the most persecuted bird in the UK; it is likely that Manx bred birds are leaving the Island and are illegally shot or trapped and this is suppressing the breeding population here. Through satellite tagging, in conjunction with Manx Bird Life, RSPB and the Manx Ringing Group, we can track individual birds' movements and monitor their survival. This can be a gloomy process as two females tagged on the Isle of



Male hen harrier ©Pete Hadfield

Man have disappeared in Wales before they had a chance to breed themselves. The fact that they have disappeared without a trace suggests the birds have been persecuted. This year, four females have been tagged; hopefully they will stay on the Island where they are safe and not wander elsewhere.

Louise Samson, Hen harrier roost count co-ordinator

The Manx Wildlife Trust are now actively trying to turn the remaining 55 acres from conifer plantation by the Hairpin into bluebell woodland too - an extra half a billion insect meals.



**Andree Dubbeldam,
Manx Wildlife Trust**

(Crossags Coppice was funded by kind donation from Society for the Preservation of the Manx Countryside and Environment).

Dragonfly Hotspot

The smaller satellite ponds at the Point of Ayre Nature Reserve are teeming with dragonflies, making it the best place on the Isle of Man to see these



Red-veined darter at Point of Ayre
Nature Reserve ©Pete Hadfield

fascinating insects. The current list stands at 10 species out of the 18 recorded.

The ponds hold three quarters of the known Manx emperor dragonfly population and in 2019 we confirmed the reserve has breeding species found nowhere else on the Island including; migrant hawkler, brown hawkler and black-tailed skimmer. Being our largest area of freshwater, it makes it a hotspot for migrant dragonflies from the European continent during UK wide influxes. There have been several records of the stunning red-veined darter and even a breeding attempt from a pair of lesser emperors.

Pete Hadfield, Dragonfly Recorder for the Isle of Man

Public access is not currently permitted to the gravel pits, but groups can organise guided walks through Manx Birdlife (contact via email at enquiries@manxbirdlife.im or phone on 01624 861130).

Biodiversity Matters



UNESCO
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Brian Liggins 2018

What do bogs do for us?

Bogs are wetland areas where near-permanent waterlogging prevents the complete decomposition of dead plant material which, in turn, forms peat. Sphagnum moss is the main bog builder; this is a highly specialised plant that thrives in the correct conditions on wet upland areas and lowland sites such as the Central Valley as well as in glacially formed depressions at Ballaugh Curragh and on the northern plain. Sphagnum absorbs water like a sponge, which helps to take the sting out of rain storms as water is held in the hills for longer. This helps reduce downstream flooding, keeps streams flowing in droughts and also helps to filter our drinking water. Bogs can be large or small but all are

special and sometimes colourful habitats that support specialist species of plants, insects, and birds.

Possibly the most important service that bogs provide for free is carbon capture and storage. It is estimated that the Manx upland peat soils store somewhere in the region of 14,000,000 tonnes of carbon. It is, therefore, no surprise that the upland peat soils are our Island's largest carbon store.

What you can do:

- Buy peat-free compost to protect peat bogs.
- If you own a boggy area, consider how you can enhance bog moss growth by keeping the site wet.

- Search for specialised wonders such as insect-eating sundews and butterwort flowers.

Shaun Gelling, DEFA Uplands Manager



Sphagnum moss at Dalby

Manx Bats

Four bat experts from the UK recently visited the Isle of Man to undertake a week of intensive survey work of the Island's bats.

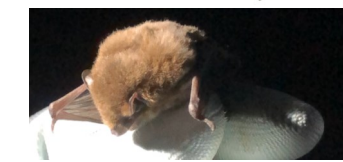
The bat ecologists were licensed by DEFA to fit radio tags to the bats and this enabled the identification of two new whiskered bat roosts. Eight sites around the Island were monitored. Manx Wildlife Trust's Close Sartfield reserve, part of the Ballaugh

Curragh ASSI and Ramsar site, had five of the Island's eight bat species.

Common pipistrelle bats were the most abundant and recorded at every location. Analysis showed that Manx common pipistrelle bats are smaller than those found in Cambridgeshire. Whiskered bats were, surprisingly, encountered at every site and are more abundant than previously thought.

The two bats known to have a close association with water, Daubenton's bat and soprano pipistrelle, were found adjacent to the River Neb at the Raggart.

Bob Moon, Manx Bat Group



Common pipistrelle © Sue Moon

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Terns at the Ayres



Through the summer months, the beaches at the Ayres NNR are punctuated by the calls of Arctic and little terns. These birds, which migrate thousands of miles each year, aggressively and noisily defend their nests and young chicks.



Little tern feeding a juvenile © Marc Hughes

This year's breeding season resulted in eight Arctic terns and 14 little terns fledging from the shore.

This is the first time in three years that little terns have successfully fledged on the Isle of Man, so this season has provided a very welcome change to recent trends and we hope next year will be even better!

Glen Geeves, DEFA Biodiversity Warden

Biosphere Badge

A 'Biosphere Badge' launched for Girlguiding Isle of Man is encouraging participants to care for their Island.



The world's first Biosphere Girlguiding badge

Rainbows, Brownies, Guides and Rangers earn the badge by completing tasks relating to the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

The Global Goals, as they are known, are a plan of action for people, the planet and prosperity.

Encouraging sustainability is a priority of UNESCO Biosphere Isle of Man.

Unique to the Isle of Man, the Guiding Badge was launched in January and has already been awarded to 150 members.

Su Simpson, Guiding Development Chair, outlined the imaginative ways members earn the badge.

'For the Zero Hunger goal, units have donated to the Food Bank,' Su said.

'Tackling the Clean Water and Sanitation goal, a unit raised money for a toilet-twinning project.

'Looking at Life Below Water, a unit had a visit from Manx Whale and Dolphin Watch, calculated the length of a whale and went on a whale watch. Units have linked up with Beach Buddies and carried out beach cleans.

'For the Life on Land goal, members have explored the Island; had visits from Isle of Man Beekeepers; learned about bugs and wildlife from the Manx Wildlife Trust and met Highlands cows and learned how they help the land.

'Units have really embraced the challenge and they are starting to think about our Island in different ways.'

Jo Overy, UNESCO Biosphere Isle of Man Project Officer — DEFA

Getting involved in your Biosphere

Entries are open for the second UNESCO Biosphere Isle of Man Awards, with categories for Energy, Economic Sustainability, Education/Public Awareness, and Environment.

For further information about the awards visit:

www.biosphere.im/biosphere-awards

From May to July 2019, UNESCO Biosphere Isle of Man, Culture Vannin and The Manx Bard invited the public to submit entries for a Poetry Map of the Isle of Man.

More than 170 poems about the Isle of Man's environment, nature, wildlife, biodiversity, habitats and landscape were received.

Entries for the Poetry Map are now closed and judging takes place in August 2019.

Show your support for UNESCO Biosphere Isle of Man and for a more sustainable Isle of Man by taking the Biosphere Pledge and signing up your business, community group, etc as a Partner. Visit the website – www.biosphere.im/get-involved – to find out more.

Search the website below to apply to become a partner to UNESCO Biosphere Isle of Man.

<https://www.biosphere.im/become-a-partner/>

BECOME A PARTNER

Manx Wildlife Week Overview

In 2018, Manx National Heritage, with the Manx Wildlife Trust and DEFA, launched Manx Wildlife Week to highlight some of the beautiful and interesting species found on this Island. It proved to be so popular that we thought we'd do it all again; after all, you probably won't save what you don't love. From the 3rd to the 12th May we had more than 700 people attending 29 events.

There were lots of different activities for all ages and abilities, whether it was learning how to identify and control invasive plant species, discovering bee keeping, listening to talks by experts, having guided walks in the countryside by wardens, making herbal tonics at Cregneash, learning to identify butterflies and flies, bird spotting, listening for bats and many more. We also invited back Simon King of BBC Spring Watch fame to give a lecture at the Manx Museum that was impassioned and inspiring.

To finish off there was a UNESCO Biosphere event - Voices For Our Future - which had popular keynote speaker Dara McAnulty come to the Island and encourage young conservation advocates to come together and work towards a better future.



Bumble bee © Laura McCoy

Next year, Manx Wildlife Week will be from the 8th to 17th May.

Originally the purpose of Wildlife Week was to celebrate the Isle of Man becoming a member of the NBN Atlas (<https://isleofman.nbnatlas.org>). This free public site helps answer questions about when and where you can find wildlife by searching a database of sightings that have been gathered together and recorded for more than a hundred years.



Manx Biological Recording Partnership



Orb weaver spider © Kate Hawkins Scabious sawfly © Steve Crellin

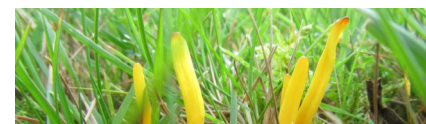
Kate Hawkins and Steve Crellin two notable specialists, are devoting more time to their recording work in an attempt to locate and identify rare species on the Isle of Man. Kate recently found a newly recorded species of orb weaver spider (above left) at Dalby Mountain MWT reserve, which is likely to be *Hypososinga pygmaea*. Steve took this splendid photo of a scabious sawfly (above right) at Ballaugh Curragh. This fly has a very specific food plant on the Island, devil's-bit scabious, which grows in damp acid grassland.

The Colourful World of Grassland Fungi

Most people tend to overlook fungi. However the bright colours and pleasant smells of our grassland fungi can enchant even the fungophobes. As well as vibrant mushrooms, a natural grassland can have equally colourful clubs, spindles and corals, creating a miniature magical world reminiscent of fairy tales.

Waxcaps

Waxcaps are among the first fungi that most people notice in their lawn. They come in a wonderful array of colours: red, scarlet, orange, peach, yellow, purple, green, brown, beige and white. They have thick, waxy gills and features such as a wet, greasy cap and stem that help to identify the species. Some waxcaps have distinctive smells that have given rise to their common names including the honey waxcap and the cedarwood waxcap. Blackening waxcaps are one of the first to appear in autumn; they are yellow-orange initially but gradually turn to black before shrivelling up and returning to the soil. The pink waxcap, also known as the Ballerina, is one of the most elegant mushrooms you are likely to see and always raises the spirits on an autumnal day. It is not very common and is a valuable indicator of old grassland.



Manx Whale and Dolphin Watch

2019 Sea Watches

The high winds have meant that sightings have been limited this year. However, on 29th July four species were reported, harbour porpoise, common dolphin, Risso's dolphin and our winter visitor the bottlenose dolphin.

Sunday Sea Watches at the Sound

Come join the team at the Sound on Sunday 18th August and Sunday 1st September to spot whales, dolphins, and porpoises (or basking sharks or seals). Session are held from 11:30 to 13:00. Watches will be weather dependent and subject to change at short notice. Follow Manx Whale and Dolphin Watch on facebook for updates.



Public watch at the Sound © Bryony Manley

Clubs, spindles and corals

As well as waxcaps, you may also encounter an equally colourful array of clubs, spindles and corals.

These fungi are like tiny coloured fingers deep among the grass, with some branching like coral or antlers. Some species are very common, while others are rare and indicators of fungal-rich ancient grasslands.



Ballerina waxcaps

Earthtongues

Earthtongues are like tiny monoliths and come in a variety of shades of black. They can occur singly or in troops.

Places rich in grassland fungi are becoming increasingly scarce. We only see these fungi when they are fruiting and the rest of the time they are below ground and forgotten, making them vulnerable to practices that may

inadvertently damage or even wipe them out completely. Old lawns and grasslands that have not been fertilised or reseeded are the best places to see a good variety of these little gems.

If you have a waxcap lawn or grassland and would like to know more about the species you have and how to look after them, or if you would like to join us on an autumnal potter looking at, and photographing these beautiful fungi, please contact the Isle of Man Fungus Group, or find us at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/fungusiom/>

Liz Charter, Isle of Man Fungus Group



Golden waxcap