



AUTUMN 2022 NEWSLETTER

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Autumn is very much in evidence in the Burren National Park and it has become a veritable larder for mammals and birds, many eager to stock up for the coming winter months. The trees and shrubs are laden with berries, haws and nuts some of which we will explore in our Autumn Newsletter. The last of the late summer early autumn flowers are going to seed and with a bit of practice it is possible to tell what's in store for us next spring and summer. We will also focus on shield bugs, the large and often colourful species of insect belonging to the order Hemiptera. Check out our upcoming Halloween events, details of which can be found at the end of this newsletter. We ask visitors not to forage in the Burren National Park but to leave the nuts, berries, haws and hips for the wildlife.



Nut Nibblers

BURREN
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Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) is one of the most abundant plants throughout the Burren and provides both food and shelter to many of its fauna. At this time of year hazel nuts are ripe (top left) for gathering and storing by a number of animals. It is sometimes possible to tell who has been eating the nuts if you know what feeding signs or clues to look for! The photograph on the above right shows a hazel nut which has been cracked in two by a squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*). Squirrels will first chew a small hole in the shell and then a more mature squirrel can use their lower jaw teeth to split the nut in half. The woodmouse (*Apodemus sylvaticus*) sticks its lower teeth into the shell and gnaws a hole on the opposite side of the nut, turning it as they do so and leaving noticeable downward facing tooth marks around the edges of the hole. The bank vole (*Alethrionomys glareolus*) uses its upper front teeth to grip the nut and gnaw with their bottom incisors leaving less obvious teeth marks on the nut. Both squirrels and mice store nuts for the winter months, squirrels in particular may have several burried caches of nuts, some of which are forgotten and may go on to germinate in the following spring!



Páirceanna Náisiúnta
National Parks

Autumn Fruits

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One of the many plants bearing Autumn fruit is the humble Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*). Its clusters of red and black berries are an important source of nutrition for insects, rodents, mammals and birds.

In Ireland one superstition states that blackberries should not be eaten after the feast of Samhain (halloween) as the púca has spat on them. In Britain it is considered unlucky to pick them after Michaelmas (29th September) for similar reasons involving the devil!

The Purging Buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*) tree is so named because of the laxative effects of its small purple black berries (drupes) when eaten by humans. It is however an important food source for mammals and birds who help spread the seed contained in the fruit. The leaves of purging buckthorn and its cousin Alder Buckthorn are the only foodplants of the caterpillars of the Brimstone Butterfly (*Gonepteryx rhamni*).



The shiny red fruit of the of the Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) are fast disappearing from the trees and bushes in the park.

These berries or haws are eaten by birds including migratory ones such as Fieldfares (*Turdus pilaris*) and Redwings (*Turdus iliacus*) as well as small mammals such as woodmice (*Apodemus sylvaticus*) and squirrels (*sciurus*). Traditional uses of hawthorn, its leaves and berries, saw it associated with heart health, it is also high in vitamins B and C. Many superstitions surround the hawthorn and it has long been associated with the supernatural and good or ill fortune. The hawthorn is known as 'Huathe' in Ogham and symbolises the letter 'H' the sixth letter of the Ogham alphabet.

Sloes are the fruit of the thorny shrub Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*). This excellent native hedging plant is now laden with bluish black fruit which sometimes appear to have a waxy coating. The berries or 'drupes' are very bitter to taste but they may sweeten after the first frost and are an excellent source of vitamin C. Birds and small mammals eat the fleshy part of fruit discarding the stone which may be carried off and gnawed by other small mammals, larger animals such as foxes or pine martens eat the fruit whole with the seed often visible in scat.



Dead Heads

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The Burren is renowned for its abundant flora, the Spring and Summer months offering no end of delights to both the amateur and the professional botanist. From Spring Gentians and Mountain Avens as well as an array of beautiful orchids, one species gives way to another as the weeks and months pass and the seasons change. Autumn brings an end to most of the flowering but it is still possible for a time to see and sometimes identify the seed heads of these wonderful wildflowers. Below are six of the more common species you might encounter in the Burren National Park at the moment.



Wild Carrot (*Daucus carota*)



Red Clover (*Trifolium pratense*)



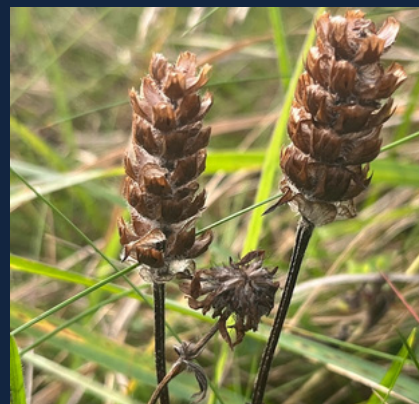
Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*)



Wood Sage (*Teucrium scordonia*)



Bloody Crane's-bill (*Geranium sanguineum*)



Self-heal (*Prunella vulgaris*)



Páirceanna Náisiúnta
National Parks

Shieldbugs

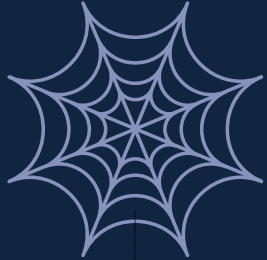
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There are 18 different species of shieldbugs (*pentatomidae*) and related bugs in Ireland. These distinctive insects take their English name from their oval to triangular flat shield-like appearance. They belong to the order Hemiptera which means they are 'true bugs', that is they have sucking tube like mouth parts used to pierce and extract sap or fluids from plants or other invertebrates on which they feed. Nearly all are herbivores but some are carnivorous feeding on soft bodied moth or beetle larvae.

Most of the shieldbugs in Ireland have an annual lifecycle with the majority of species overwintering as adults. This lifecycle consists of an egg, nymph and adult stage. The nymph stage sees the shieldbug shed its outer covering in order to grow larger, this can happen up to five times and is referred to as 'moulting' with each period between moults called an 'instar'. It is during the final instar before adulthood that the shieldbug develops its wings. The picture above on the left shows the fifth instar of the Common Green Shieldbug (*Palomena prasina*), a widespread bug of hedgerows, scrub and gardens, it likes sunny sheltered locations. The Common Green Shieldbug feeds on a variety of vegetation and does not cause any harm to the plants it feeds on. If disturbed or threatened it can release a substance which smells similar to marzipan. The shieldbug above right is an adult Hairy Shieldbug (*Dolycoris baccarum*) which likes to live in flower rich habitats and unimproved grasslands, the Burren National Park is a perfect location! They are also called Sloe shieldbugs and now is a good time to spot them around Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) as they like to feed on its juicy bluish black fruit though they also feed on a wide range of other plants. As their more common name suggests they are covered in fine pale hairs as are their nymphs.





HALLOWEEN


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JOIN US THIS HALLOWEEN FOR SOME
CRAFTY FUN AND WONDROUS
WANDERINGS IN THE BURREN NATIONAL
PARK: SATURDAY 29TH OCTOBER- MONDAY
31ST OCTOBER




Events in the Park

 'Hazelwood Tales' - 1.5 hour guided walk


10am Saturday 29th October - leaving from Gortlecka Cross in the Burren National Park.


[CLICK HERE TO BOOK](#)

 'Mysteries of Slieve Carran'- 3 hour guided walk at Slieve Carran Nature Reserve

9:30am Sunday 30th Oct [CLICK HERE TO BOOK](#)

9.30am Monday 31st Oct [CLICK HERE TO BOOK](#)

 Why not join us this Halloween at the Burren Information Point in Corofin where you can see our weird and wonderful nature display all weekend in our 'Museum of Curiosities'

 Have your little goblins and ghouls try their hand at some Halloween themed Arts and Crafts at our kids art events on Saturday, Sunday and Monday from 3pm - 4:30pm at the Burren Information Point in Corofin.

[CLICK HERE TO BOOK](#)

Guided walks will take place weather permitting

All events are free but must be booked in advance as spaces are limited

Please contact burrennationalpark@housing.gov.ie for more details and to book



Páirceanna Náisiúnta
National Parks

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPDATES

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UPDATED OPENING HOURS:

Please note that the Information Point in Corofin will be open on weekends only until Christmas
(Including Bank Holiday Monday 31st October)

Burren National Park:

Information Point: Clare Heritage Centre, 2
Church Street, Corofin, Co. Clare V95 T9V6

Website: <https://www.burrennationalpark.ie>

Email: burrennationalpark@housing.gov.ie

Phone: 065 6827693



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