



The Grasslands Trail

Showcasing some
Great Irish Grasslands

VERSION 3



NPWS

An tSeirbhís Páircanna
Náisiúnta agus Fiadhúlra
National Parks and Wildlife Service



An tIonad Náisiúnta Sonraí Bithéagsúlachta
National Biodiversity Data Centre
ag Doiciméadú Fiadhúlra na hÉireann | Documenting Ireland's Wildlife



What is the 'Grasslands Trail'?

The 'Grasslands Trail' is a network of public and private grasslands spread across the country. All of these sites are managed sensitively, with nature conservation and grassland diversity in mind. This booklet expands the number of trail sites to 30 and includes a section featuring Farmland Sites.

The Grasslands Trail allows locals and visitors to gain a better understanding of endangered pasture and meadow habitats. For those sites that are publicly accessible, you can see and experience up close what great Irish grasslands look like. Many of these sites are close to other amenities and attractions, so might be a peaceful place to stop for a walk or a picnic on a busy day.

When to visit

Summer is the best time to visit most grasslands, but at these sites there is lots to see year round. For example, you might see a meadow being mown in late summer, or a grassland full of wild spring flowers in March/April. Autumn is the time that birds feed on seedheads in grasslands, and in mid-winter ponies might be grazing thick grass so that the pastures can be left for biodiversity the rest of the year.

The site profiles

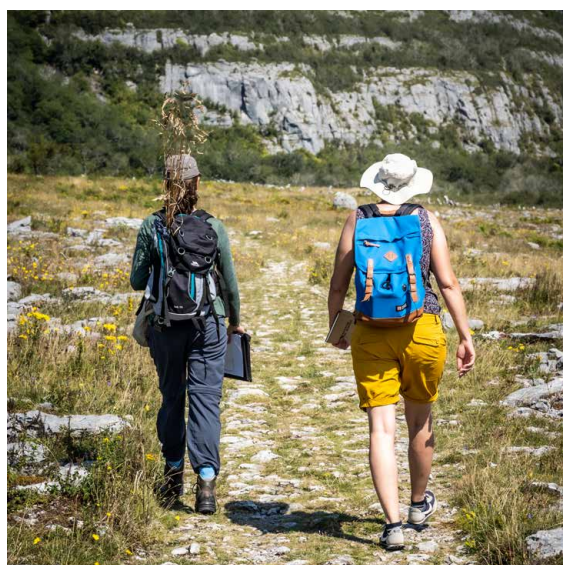
Each brief site profile in this booklet will give you a flavour of that grassland, from orchids to rare breed cattle, from patches of meadow to vast areas of grassy habitats. All the grasslands on the Grasslands Trail are supported by a range of management actions to ensure that they are in the best condition for wildlife. For those sites that are publicly accessible, there is also information on parking and access. **For each site, a more detailed site description and information on management is available by visiting the online site profile.**

Future plans and feedback

The Grasslands Trail began as a pilot initiative in 2023, featuring nine sites. Since then, an additional twenty-one sites have been added. These are just a few examples of great Irish grasslands. Please use the hashtag #GrasslandsTrail to share other locations which might be added in the future! Over time, we will continue to expand the trail, but for now, we hope you enjoy those highlighted.



Share your pictures or ideas on social media using #GrasslandsTrail or #GreatIrishGrasslands



This booklet provides an overview – please visit the website to see full information for each site: <https://www.greatirishgrasslands.ie/the-grasslands-trail>

Semi-natural grasslands

All the grasslands on the Grasslands Trail are what ecologists call 'semi-natural grasslands'. They are not fully natural habitats because their existence is dependent on some human management. Without this, most would change to scrub or woodland. Semi-natural grasslands have not been heavily altered by agriculture, but instead, are managed in a less intensive way.

Grassland types

Just as there are different types of woodlands, there are different types of semi-natural grassland on the island of Ireland. Broadly, a grassland can be wet or dry, acidic or calcareous (= lime-rich), and rich or poor in nutrients (e.g. nitrogen, phosphorus). The type of grassland is also influenced by the soil, geology, climate, and past management. All of these factors combine to give us an amazing array of subtly different grassland types in Ireland.

The Grasslands Trail is a tour through the amazing diversity of Ireland's semi-natural grasslands. From dry grasslands managed to balance leisure activities with nature at Ballycastle Golf Course, coastal grasslands on calcareous soil (machair) at Sheskinmore Nature Reserve, and suburban/parkland areas managed as hay meadows at Newbridge House and Farm, Castletown House or Tymon Park. There are diverse farmland pastures managed by grazing, sites within the unique limestone pavement of the Burren, damp grasslands elsewhere in the country, and a pasture within the wooded Glengarriff Nature Reserve.

Accessibility:

Note that while most of the publicly accessible sites have footpaths or relatively even areas for walking, many will not be fully wheelchair accessible. If you have accessibility or other queries, it's best to contact the location directly.



GRASSLAND

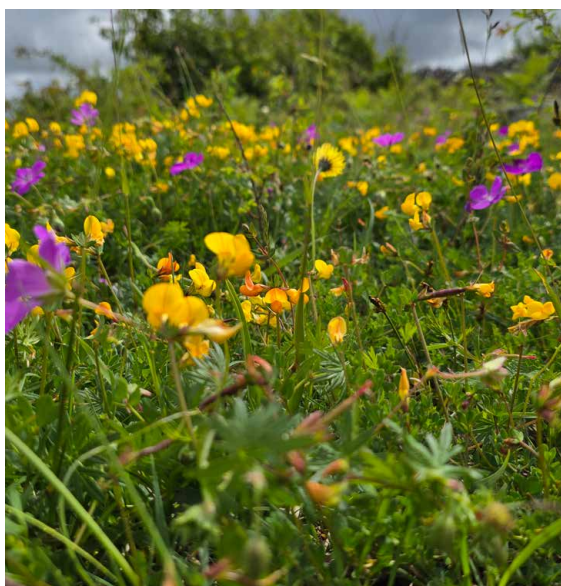
any area dominated by grasses

MEADOW

usually a grassland managed by mowing

PASTURE

a grassland managed by grazing



ABOUT US

This booklet has been developed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, with support from the National Biodiversity Data Centre and the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan.

Visit GreatIrishGrasslands.ie for more information

Why are semi-natural grasslands important?

Semi-natural grasslands are more important than you might think!



Nature

Semi-natural grasslands are hugely important for our native biodiversity, supporting vast arrays of plants and animals, many of which will only thrive in open grassland habitats. This includes many orchids and other wildflower species, many insects (e.g. grasshoppers, butterflies, etc.), and a range of farmland birds, such as Corncrake, Yellowhammer, Barn Owl and Skylark.



Carbon

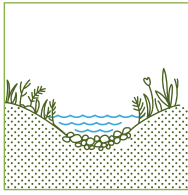
They capture and store great quantities of carbon. Some grassland types, such as floodplain meadows, rival woodlands for carbon capture.



Soils

Diverse grassland plant communities support healthy soils, with thriving ecosystems of their own. There can be up to 1 billion individual microscopic cells and around 10,000 different species in a gram of healthy soil!





Water

Grasslands work hard to filter water through their healthy soils, helping to provide us with clear water in our streams and rivers.



Flooding prevention

They carry out a valuable function in times of flooding, by holding water and slowing its flow downstream. We need more grasslands and other semi-natural habitats to hold water in times of extreme rainfall and to help keep urban areas free from flooding (see page 66).



Health & wellbeing

There is little better than a flowery, buzzing summer meadow. We all derive great pleasure and sustenance from being in nature, and diverse, functioning grasslands help us to feel good and connected to nature.



Tourism

Flourishing grasslands can support tourism, by providing visitors from near and far with beautiful views and experiences.



A disappearing habitat:

Recent data from the National Parks and Wildlife Service in the Republic of Ireland show losses of about 30% for some of our most special grassland types, over a period of just ten years. The main causes of loss are:



- A. conversion to intensive agriculture (e.g. ploughing, re-seeding, fertilising),
- B. planting with forestry,
- C. and perhaps counter-intuitively, abandonment. This is because lack of management quickly leads to decline in quality in most semi-natural grasslands.



Some key principles for managing semi-natural grasslands:

Nutrients

On sites with high nutrient levels (e.g. heavily fertilised grasslands), a small number of grass species will dominate, along with plants like thistles and docks. These species thrive when nutrient levels are high, and squeeze out many other species. If you want floral diversity, nutrient levels must be lowered.

- Avoid or reduce fertiliser.
- Remove all cuttings if the area is mown. The cuttings are like a layer of compost if left on site.

Timing

If grasslands are mown or grazed at the height of summer, then many species don't get to flower or set seed.

- Winter-grazing is ideal for dry sites but may not always be practical.
- Mowing in late summer allows many plants and invertebrates to have completed their life cycle. But like many things, a diversity of mowing times is also beneficial – having an earlier cut the odd year is no harm!
- Using a combination of mowing and grazing can be very beneficial.

Grazing

If the grassland is pasture, rather than meadow, then the species and breed of grazer will have an impact.

- Sheep graze grasslands tight. Cattle and horses create more diversity of structure. Goats are great for managing scrub but can be hard work to fence in!
- Traditional breeds of stock can have many benefits such as being lighter (less poaching), hardier (less vet bills, less need to house in winter), and some even thrive on rough vegetation (less need to supplementary feed).

Advice

Always get appropriate advice – this is likely to come from more than one source. Depending on your starting point (e.g. abandoned scrubby area, intensive agricultural grassland), management needs will differ, at least initially, making relevant advice even more important.

- Consider speaking to an ecologist.
- Find a nearby farmer who already does what you'd like to do and ask them for advice. 'Farming for Nature' has lists of such farmers, along with farm visits which are highly recommended.
- Explore some of the resources provided at the end of this booklet.





Expectations

When managing or restoring a semi-natural grassland, the aim should always be a diverse and well-functioning grassland, rather than a showy sward. A typical and healthy grassland is, perhaps unsurprisingly, grassy!

- Rest assured, a healthy grassland will be excellent for pollinators, other invertebrates, and a range of other biodiversity, and it will be humming with life, especially in summer.
- There will be a good mix of native grass and other plant species, but it may look green, brown or messy, rather than flowery all the time.
- It may look a little 'boring' to some eyes (but not the creatures that use it), and it may look untidy, particularly at certain times of the year - hence managing expectations is key.
- We all need to re-calibrate a little, and appreciate the beauty and wonder in the ordinary.



"I just love species-rich grasslands! There are so many colours, smells and sounds even in the smallest corner of these deceptively diverse and fascinating habitats. I also love that they provide so many functions, above and below ground, not least supporting the diet of the lucky livestock who graze them, or who get to eat the meadowed hay later that winter. The Burren really got me hooked on this habitat, but it's always thrilling to find them elsewhere, like a surprise encounter with a familiar friend. This booklet is like a taster menu for some of Ireland's great remnant grasslands, I hope you get to enjoy at least some of them as much as I still do - and if you happen to meet the farmer when visiting, do congratulate them on their custodianship of these very special places."

Brendan Dunford
Burrenbeo Trust

Grassland Site List

Tymon Park

Tallaght, Co. Dublin 10

Newbridge House and Farm

Donabate, Co. Dublin 10

Castletown House

Celbridge, Co. Kildare 11

Birr Castle Demesne

Townparks, Birr, Co. Offaly 11

Belvedere House, Gardens & Park

South of Mullingar, Co. Westmeath 12

Glengarriff Nature Reserve

Glengarriff, Co. Cork 12

Doneraile Estate

Doneraile, Co. Cork 13

Slieve Carran/ Keelhilla Nature Reserve

part of Burren National Park, Co. Clare 13

Ballyteige Nature Reserve

near Lisdoonvarna, Co. Clare 14

Derrynane House and Demesne

Derrynane, Co. Kerry 14

Ballygarry

near Tralee, Co. Kerry 15

Sheskinmore Nature Reserve

near Ardara, Co. Donegal 15

Ballycastle Golf Course

Ballycastle, Co. Antrim 16

Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park

Belfast, Co. Antrim 16

Drumnaph Nature Reserve

near Maghera, Co. Derry 17

Springhill

near Moneymore, Co. Derry 17

Crom

Newtownbutler, Co. Fermanagh 18

Killykeeghan Nature Reserve

near Belcoo, Co. Fermanagh 18

Castle Ward

near Downpatrick, Co. Down 19

FARMLAND SITES

Farmland on the shores of Lough Ree

North of Athlone, Co. Westmeath 22

Farmland at Calverstown House

near Kilcullen, Co. Kildare 22

Clomantagh Hill

near Johnstown, Co. Kilkenny 23

Kilranelagh Lodge Country House and Farm

Kiltegan, Co. Wicklow 23

Farmland at Derreenatloghtan

near Boston, Co. Clare 24

Farmland at Morgan's North

near Askeaton, Co. Limerick 24

Farmland at Mountallen

Mountallen, Co. Roscommon 25

Farmland at 'The Rocks'

near Taughmaconnell, Co. Roscommon 25

Cross Loop Walk

Mullet Peninsula, Co. Mayo 26

Farmland at Lakeview

Mullagh, Co. Cavan 26

Farmland at St. John's Point

near Killybegs, Co. Donegal 27





Tymon Park

TALLAGHT, CO. DUBLIN

Tymon Park boasts a number of great grassland areas. There are large expanses of meadows, and smaller areas of species-rich calcareous grasslands, some of which are on an old esker ridge.



Find out more:

<https://www.greatirishgrasslands.ie/grassland-site/tymon-park/>

Access:

Publicly accessible year-round

Size:

49 ha

Parking:

yes, free

Café:

coming soon

Toilets:

yes

Owners:

South Dublin County Council



Newbridge House and Farm

DONABATE, CO. DUBLIN

This historical house has a working farm with hay meadows. It also has pastures, grazed by rare breeds. It boasts a number of uncommon grasses.



Find out more:

<https://www.greatirishgrasslands.ie/grassland-site/newbridge-house-and-farm/>

Access:

Main park grasslands publicly accessible year-round (some facilities closed Mondays from Oct to Mar). Charge applies to visit Farm Discovery Trail

Size:

100 ha

Parking:

yes, free

Café:

yes

Toilets:

yes

Owners:

Fingal County Council

Castletown House

CELBRIDGE, CO. KILDARE

In mid-June, this meadow is a mosaic of colour, with Pyramidal Orchids, Common-spotted Orchids, Bee Orchids, Yellow-rattle, Goat's-beard and Hawkbits all providing essential food for bumblebees and solitary bees.



Find out more:

<https://www.greatirishgrasslands.ie/grassland-site/castletown-house/>

Access:

Usually publicly accessible year-round

Size:

33 ha

Parking:

yes, free

Café:

yes

Toilets:

yes

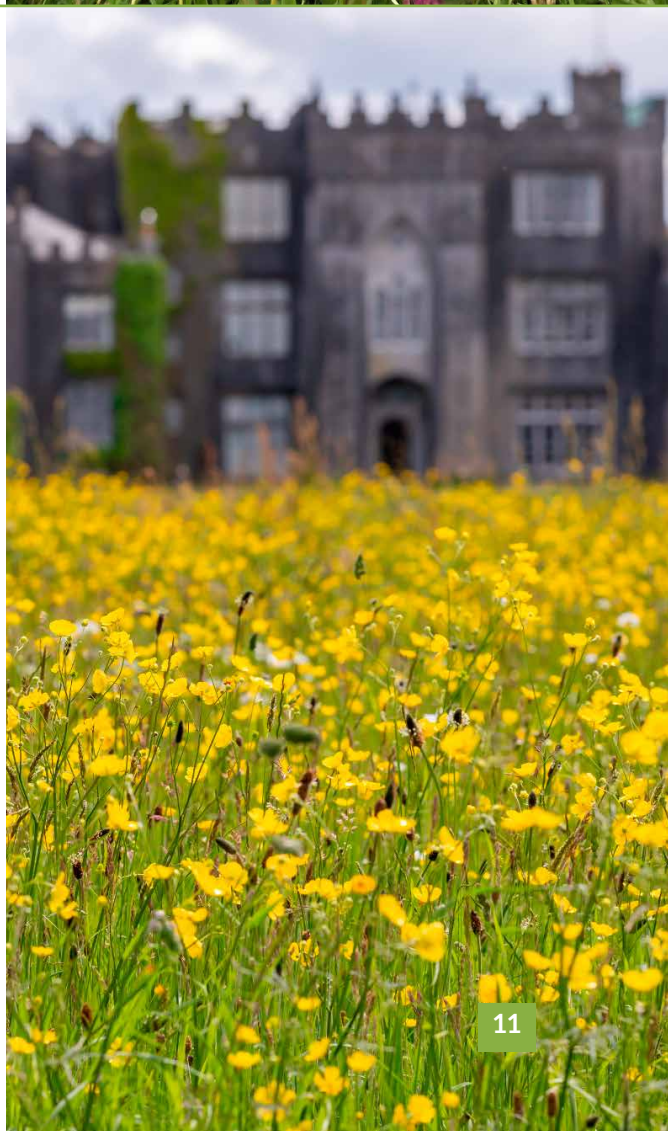
Owners:

Office of Public Works (OPW)

Birr Castle Demesne

TOWNPARKS, BIRR, CO. OFFALY

The meadow in Birr Castle Demesne provides an opportunity to view a rare example of a semi-natural, species-rich grassland that shelters thriving flora and fauna.



Find out more:

<https://www.greatirishgrasslands.ie/grassland-site/birr-castle-demesne/>

Access:

Publicly accessible year-round.
Admission costs apply (see website)

Size:

8 ha, within overall demesne of 50 ha

Parking:

no parking on-site, public car park nearby

Café:

yes (seasonal)

Toilets:

yes

Owners:

Birr Castle Estate



Belvedere House, Gardens & Park

SOUTH OF MULLINGAR, CO. WESTMEATH



This site supports large areas of meadow that are stunning in high summer, when the flowers provide a blaze of colour.

Find out more:

<https://www.greatirishgrasslands.ie/grassland-site/belvedere-house-gardens-park/>

Access:

Publicly accessible year-round.
Admission costs apply (see website)

Size:

18 ha

Parking:

yes

Café:

yes

Toilets:

yes

Owners

Westmeath County Council



Glengarriff Nature Reserve

GLENGARRIFF, CO. CORK



The 'wood pasture' grassland in the Big Meadow features swathes of purple Devil's-bit Scabious in late summer, many ant hills and several stately Oak.

Find out more:

<https://www.greatirishgrasslands.ie/grassland-site/glengarriff-nature-reserve/>

Access:

Publicly accessible year-round (via the 3km 'Big Meadow Trail', which starts in Nature Reserve main carpark)

Size:

5 ha

Parking:

yes, free

Café:

no

Toilets:

no (Glengarriff Village, 1 km away)

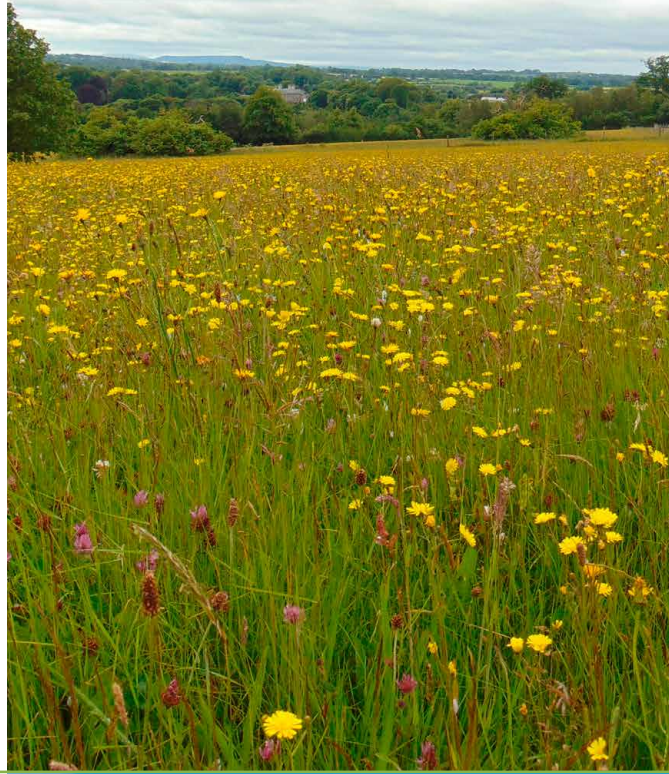
Owners:

National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS)

Doneraile Estate

DONERAILE, CO. CORK

This semi-natural damp grassland is beautiful in high summer, with lots of colour, and plenty of orchids. It is also an excellent place to see some uncommon grass species. It is managed via a late mow.



Find out more:

<https://www.greatirishgrasslands.ie/grassland-site/doneraile-estate/>

Access:

Publicly accessible year-round

Size:

22 ha, set in wider parkland area

Parking:

yes, free

Café:

yes

Toilets:

yes

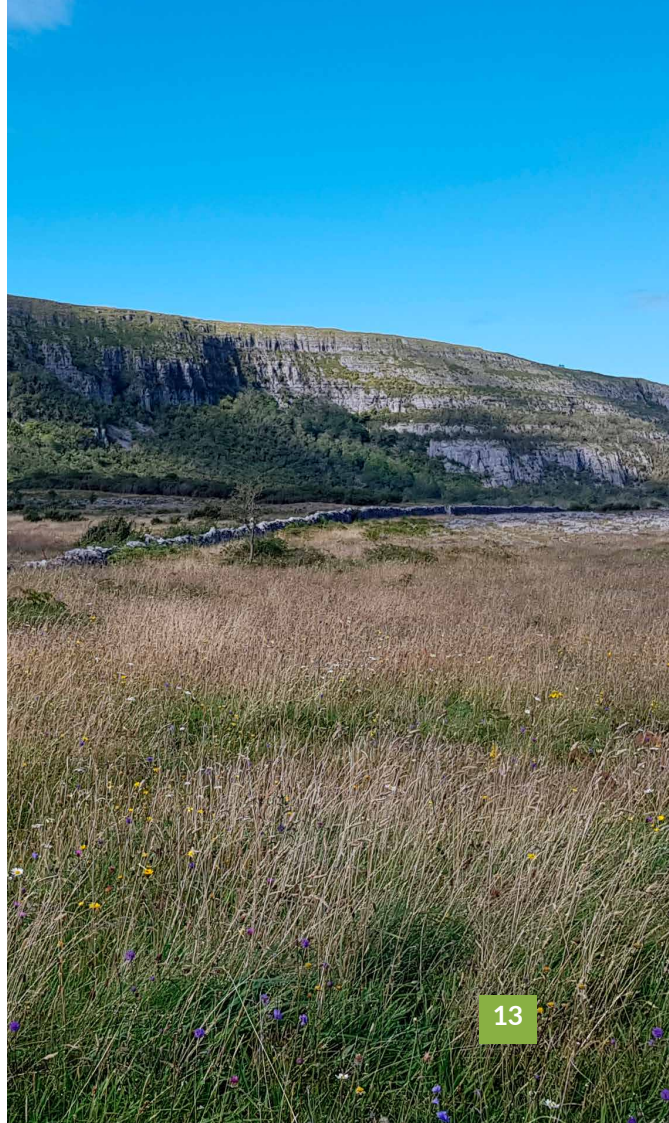
Owners:

Office of Public Works (OPW)

Slieve Carran/ Keelhilla Nature Reserve

PART OF BURREN NATIONAL PARK,
CO. CLARE

Against a dramatic wooded cliff backdrop, this site boasts limestone pavement, orchid-rich calcareous grassland, woodland and scrub. It is an excellent place to see a wide range of Burren-speciality plants.



Find out more:

<https://www.greatirishgrasslands.ie/grassland-site/slieve-carran-keelhilla-nature-reserve/>

Access:

Publicly accessible year-round

Size:

c.5 ha of permanent grassland, much more scattered through the limestone pavement

Parking:

yes, free

Café:

no

Toilets:

no

Owners:

National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS)



Ballyteige Nature Reserve

NEAR LISDOONVARNA,
CO. CLARE



Sloping down to a river valley, this lovely site is almost entirely made up of a rare and protected wet grassland type known as Molinia Meadows.

Find out more:

<https://www.greatirishgrasslands.ie/grassland-site/ballyteige-nature-reserve/>

Access:

Access by arrangement with NPWS, or via occasional walks/talks on-site

Size:

5.6 ha

Parking:

no

Café:

no

Toilets:

no

Owners

National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS)



Derrynane House and Demesne

DERRYNANE, CO. KERRY



At the southern tip of the Iveragh Peninsula, Derrynane Demesne has over 120 ha of lands rich in natural and cultural heritage, including beautiful areas of semi-natural grassland.

Find out more:

<https://www.greatirishgrasslands.ie/grassland-site/derrynane-house-and-demesne/>

Access:

Free public access year-round to open coastal grasslands

Size:

40 ha, in estate of 120 ha

Parking:

yes, at Derrynane House

Café:

yes

Toilets:

yes

Owners

Office of Public Works (OPW)

Ballygarry

NEAR TRALEE, CO. KERRY

Wet grassland teeming with insects just off walking trails along the River Lee to Ballyseedy Woods SAC.



Find out more:

<https://www.greatirishgrasslands.ie/grassland-site/ballygarry/>

Access:

Publicly accessible year-round

Size:

24 ha

Parking:

yes, parking at the Ballygarry Estate Hotel and Spa

Café:

facilities at the Hotel

Toilets:

yes

Owners:

Privately owned



Sheskinmore Nature Reserve

NEAR ARDARA, CO. DONEGAL

Sheskinmore (An Seascann Mór, the big marsh) and Magheramore (Machaire Mór, the big sandy plain) perfectly describe what to expect at this site - a fen with wet grassland behind a machair plain, with undulating fixed dunes and saltmarsh meadows, helped by conservation grazing.



Find out more:

<https://www.greatirishgrasslands.ie/grassland-site/sheskinmore-nature-reserve/>

Access:

Publicly accessible year-round (search for 'Sheskinmore NR car park' on google maps for the northern entrance point)

Size:

385 ha (across whole Reserve)

Parking:

yes, free

Café:

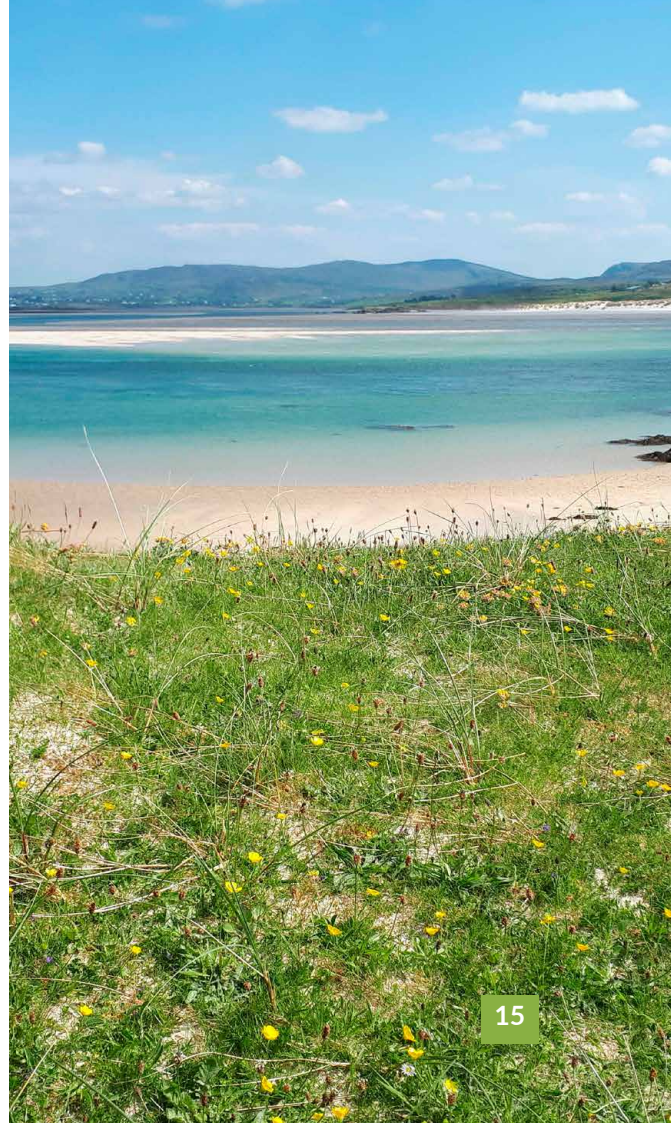
no

Toilets:

no

Owners:

National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), and some privately owned land





Ballycastle Golf Course

BALLYCASTLE, CO. ANTRIM



This golf club has lovely areas of meadow throughout, which also act as 'roughs' for the course. The management regime which creates the best 'rough' areas also helps maintain flower-rich habitat.

Find out more:

<https://www.greatirishgrasslands.ie/grassland-site/ballycastle-golf-course/>

Access:	Limited access – priority for golfers	Café:	yes
Size:	2.4 ha in the managed 'roughs'	Toilets:	yes
Parking:	yes, free	Owners:	Ballycastle Golf Club



Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park

BELFAST, CO. ANTRIM



The juxtaposition of lowland meadow and an international rose garden ensures an interesting visit to this grassland site.

Find out more:

<https://www.greatirishgrasslands.ie/grassland-site/sir-thomas-and-lady-dixon-park/>

Access:	Publicly accessible year-round	Café:	yes
Size:	c.4.5 ha	Toilets:	yes
Parking:	yes	Owners:	Belfast City Council

Drumnaph Nature Reserve

NEAR MAGHERA, CO. DERRY



Nestled on the edge of the Sperrin Mountains, Drumnaph Nature Reserve (Droim nDamh, 'ridge of the stag') is a haven for wildlife and exists as a special remnant of the ancient Irish landscape, including its fantastic meadows.

Find out more:

<https://www.greatirishgrasslands.ie/grassland-site/drumnaph-nature-reserve/>

Access:

Publicly accessible year-round

Size:

40 ha, within reserve of 85 ha

Parking:

yes, two car parks available - at Halfgayne Road & Grillagh Road

Café:

1 mile away at An Carn:

<https://ancarn.org/>

Toilets:

yes

Owners

Carntogher Community Association & The Woodland Trust



Springhill

NEAR MONEYMORE, CO. DERRY



In summer, the meadow is a riot of colour with Common-spotted Orchids, Yellow-rattle, Meadow Vetchling and Meadowsweet, providing essential food for pollinators. In Autumn, fascinating fungi can be found in the meadow and grasslands among the autumn leaves.

Find out more:

<https://www.greatirishgrasslands.ie/grassland-site/springhill/>

Access:

Usually publicly accessible year-round

Size:

1 ha of unimproved wildflower-rich meadow, within 31 ha estate

Parking:

yes

Café:

yes, check website for opening hours

Toilets:

yes

Owners:

National Trust





Crom

NEWTOWNBUTLER, CO. Fermanagh



Located on the shores of Upper Lough Erne, the flower-rich parkland grasslands at Crom are surrounded by tranquil islands, ancient woodlands and historical ruins.

Find out more:

<https://www.greatirishgrasslands.ie/grassland-site/crom/>

Access:

Publicly accessible year-round with entrance fee (free to National Trust members)

Size:

215 ha of fen, wet pasture, meadows and parkland

Parking:

yes, beside the visitor centre

Café:

yes (seasonal)

Toilets:

yes

Owners

National Trust



Killykeeghan Nature Reserve

NEAR BELCOO, CO. Fermanagh



An area of extensive limestone grasslands where you'll find delicate Thyme, Harebell and Devil's-bit Scabious.

Find out more:

<https://www.greatirishgrasslands.ie/grassland-site/killykeeghan-nature-reserve/>

Access:

Publicly accessible year-round

Size:

36.7 ha

Parking:

yes

Café:

no

Toilets:

yes

Owners

Northern Ireland Environment Agency

Castle Ward

NEAR DOWNPATRICK, CO. DOWN

Parkland site with species-rich grassland situated on the shores of Strangford Lough, within a landscape of rolling drumlin hills.



Find out more:

<https://www.greatirishgrasslands.ie/grassland-site/castle-ward/>

Access:

Publicly accessible year-round with entrance fee (free to National Trust members)

Size:

23 ha in Tullyratty, 15.5 ha of meadows in parkland

Parking:

yes, near the stableyard

Café:

yes (seasonal)

Toilets:

yes

Owners

National Trust



Forester Moth on Red Clover



Farmland Sites

Of course many stunning examples of semi-natural grassland occur on private farmland. These remain thanks to the management actions of the farmers over many years. They form part of a vital network of sites for biodiversity across the island.

POEM

'Grass'

by Grace Wells

Grass, I've been watching you,
so slow to turn from winter to spring,

then growth green and low,
pushing up your language
of spikelet and seed-head,

soft, blowsy, tufted,
florets and anthers and awns.

A plenitude. A beatitude.
Some old religious word
for abundance and beauty combined,

but nothing lofty,
just grass,

fescue, scutch, timothy,
dog's tail, fox tail,
hard-grass, hair-grass, heath.

Where grain begins.
Where it all begins,

down in the grass.

This poem is written by Grace Wells, a poet and writer based in Ennistymon, Co. Clare. Her poetry and prose are strongly informed by nature, the environment, and spirit of place. This poem was spotted in 'Windfall - Irish nature poems to inspire and connect', a collection edited by Jane Clarke. Grace can be contacted at: wellsgem68@gmail.com



Farmland on the shores of Lough Ree

NORTH OF ATHLONE,
CO. WESTMEATH



Beautiful species-rich grassland meadow running down to Lough Ree, near the Shannon Callows. This site is managed sensitively by the farmer via a late mow and an aftergraze.

Find out more:

<https://www.greatirishgrasslands.ie/grassland-site/farmland-on-the-shores-of-lough-ree/>

Access:

No public access

Size:

2 ha

Parking:

no

Café:

no

Toilets:

no

Owners:

Privately owned farmland



Farmland at Calverstown House

NEAR KILCULLEN, CO. KILDARE



This farm has lovely areas of dry and wet grassland that have persisted for decades through sympathetic management. It is situated on a long south-facing glacial bank.

Find out more:

<https://www.greatirishgrasslands.ie/grassland-site/farmland-at-calverstown-house/>

Access:

Private, but walks with farmer possible by request

Size:

5 ha, within larger organic farm

Parking:

by arrangement only

Café:

no

Toilets:

no

Owners:

Privately owned farmland

Clomantagh Hill

NEAR JOHNSTOWN, CO. KILKENNY

Clomantagh Hill is part of a low escarpment of limestone rising from the Irish central plain, creating unique and important grassland habitats. The site is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) selected for species-rich calcareous grassland.



Find out more:

<https://www.greatirishgrasslands.ie/grassland-site/clomantagh-hill/>

Access:

No public access

Size:

c.100 ha

Parking:

limited and by arrangement

Café:

no

Toilets:

no

Owners:

The hill is privately owned by three separate landowners

Kilranelagh Lodge Country House and Farm

KILTEGAN, CO. WICKLOW

Carberry's farm has diverse semi-natural grasslands bounded by wetlands, wet woodland and heath. All are managed with nature in mind.



Find out more:

<https://www.greatirishgrasslands.ie/grassland-site/kilranelagh-lodge-country-house-and-farm/>

Access:

Private, but visits can be arranged by contacting Kilranelagh Lodge Country House

Size:

c.12.5 ha

Parking:

by arrangement only

Café:

no

Toilets:

no

Owners:

Privately owned farmland



Farmland at Derreenatloghtan

NEAR BOSTON, CO. CLARE



Located in the east Burren lowlands, these fields are home to a stunning array of plants including those once common throughout Ireland, as well as rarer grassland flowers. It is a riot of colour in summer.

Find out more:

<https://www.greatirishgrasslands.ie/grassland-site/farmland-at-derreenatloghtan/>

Access:

No public access

Size:

c.33 ha set amongst a mosaic of habitats totalling c.60 ha

Parking:

by arrangement only

Café:

no

Toilets:

no

Owners:

Privately owned farmland



Farmland at Morgan's North

NEAR ASKEATON, CO. LIMERICK



Extremely diverse and unique high value grassland habitats on two adjoining farms on the Shannon estuary, consisting mainly of calcareous grassland and salt marsh.

Find out more:

<https://www.greatirishgrasslands.ie/grassland-site/farmland-at-morgans-north/>

Access:

Private, but group walks with farmer possible by request

Size:

141 ha in total across two farms, including calcareous grassland and salt marsh

Parking:

no

Café:

no

Toilets:

no

Owners:

Privately owned farmland

Farmland at Mountallen

MOUNTALLEN, CO. ROSCOMMON

This farm on the western shores of Lough Allen has been organic since 1996. It has a wonderful mix of habitats including species-rich acid grassland and wet grassland.



Find out more:

<https://www.greatirishgrasslands.ie/grassland-site/farmland-at-mountallen/>

Access:

Private, but walks with farmer possible by request

Size:

c.1 ha

Parking:

by arrangement only

Café:

no

Toilets:

no

Owners:

Privately owned farmland

Farmland at 'The Rocks'

NEAR TAUGHMACONNELL, CO. ROSCOMMON

This farm has a large area of semi-natural grassland on well-drained calcareous soil. There is an array of wildflowers, helped by conservation grazing. Like a mini-Burren!



Find out more:

<https://www.greatirishgrasslands.ie/grassland-site/farmland-at-the-rocks/>

Access:

Private, but walks with farmer possible by request (liamkildea@gmail.com)

Size:

20 ha, set within a wider area known as 'The Rocks'.

Parking:

by arrangement only

Café:

no

Toilets:

no

Owners:

Privately owned farmland



Cross Loop Walk

MULLET PENINSULA, CO. MAYO



This loop walk brings you through an area of machair grassland alongside grey dunes. These support an array of flora, which in turn supports insects including the rare Great Yellow Bumblebee and Red-shanked Bumblebee.

Find out more:

<https://www.greatirishgrasslands.ie/grassland-site/cross-loop-walk/>

Access:

Publicly accessible loop walk - note requirement to stay on path

Size:

The Green Loop is just over 5 km long

Parking:

yes, small car park beside Cross Abbey Graveyard at the north end of the beach

Café:

no

Toilets:

portalo

Owners:

Privately owned farmland



Farmland at Lakeview

MULLAGH, CO. CAVAN



Located on the Cavan/Meath border, this organic farm has a wide diversity of habitats including rare traditionally managed hay meadows which contain a diverse range of plant species.

Find out more:

<https://www.greatirishgrasslands.ie/grassland-site/farmland-at-lakeview/>

Access:

Private, but walks with farmer possible by request

Size:

c.3.5 ha, set within a larger organic farm

Parking:

by arrangement only

Café:

no

Toilets:

no

Owners:

Privately owned farmland

Farmland at St. John's Point

NEAR KILLYBEGS, CO. DONEGAL

St. John's Point occurs at the end of a long peninsula and boasts calcareous grassland, limestone pavement and Molinia Meadows. You might spot Marsh Fritillary butterflies - this is a great place to see them!



Find out more:

<https://www.greatirishgrasslands.ie/grassland-site/farmland-at-st-johns-point/>

Access:

Currently publicly accessible, with caution around cattle

Size:

16.7 ha of calcareous grassland and 13.6 ha of Molinia Meadows within the SAC

Parking:

park at the beach, and access site on foot from there

Café:

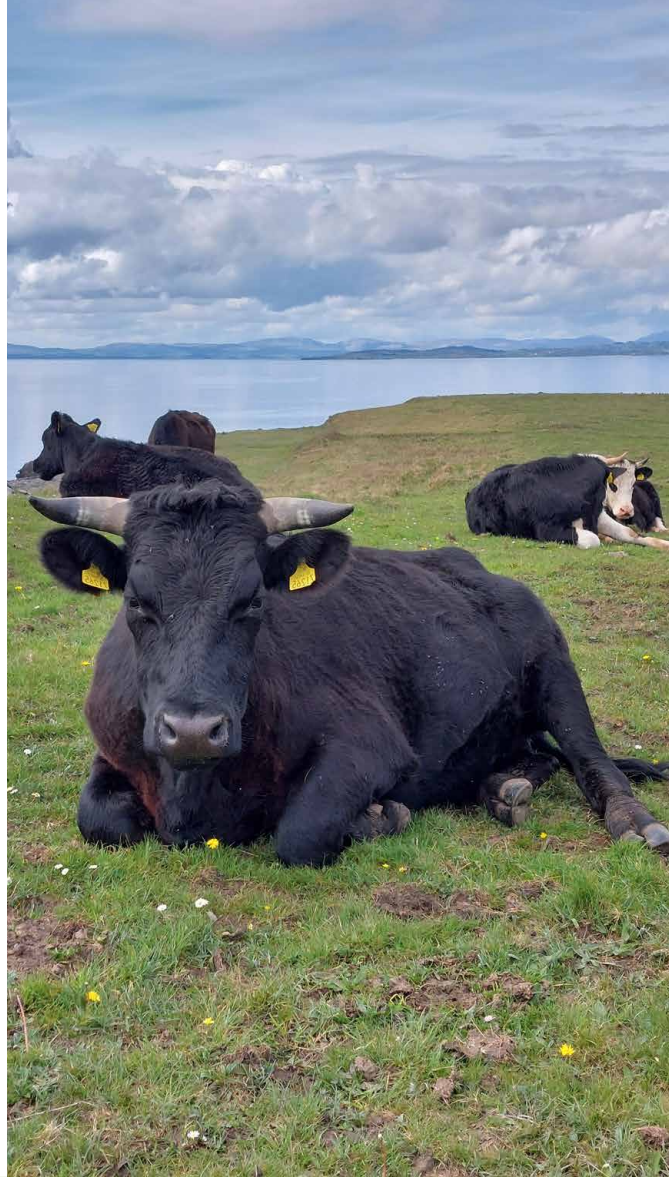
no

Toilets:

no

Owners:

Privately owned farmland



Images from across the grassland sites



Bumblebee on Devil's-bit Scabious



Selfheal



Early Marsh-orchid



Large Carder Bee



Mountain Avens



Red-tailed Bumblebees



Red Clover



Yellow-rattle



Lady's Bedstraw with Bloody Crane's-bill



Common Knapweed



Kidney Vetch and
Mouse-ear-hawkweed



Irish Lady's-tresses



Hoverfly on Devil's-bit Scabious



Great Yellow Bumblebee



Pink Waxcap



Greater Butterfly-orchid



Pearl-bordered Fritillary



Greater Knapweed



Dropwort



Oxeye Daisy



In winter the floodplain meadows of the Shannon Callows are fully submerged, but these will be productive and flower-rich grasslands in summer, after the waters recede.

POEM

'Time Cycle Repeat'

by Jeff Coles (@jeffcolesart)

River water rain, flood plain
Silt soil seed, knapweed
Flood river rise, dragonflies
Seed soil roots, muddy boots
Flower birds honeybee, biodiversity
Horse sheep cattle, yellow rattle
Mow crop hay, sunny day
Time cycle repeat, meadow sweet

This poem featured in a calendar produced by Alice Walker and the Floodplain Meadows Partnership in 2022, and was 'inspired by a day sketching and a lecture at Long Mead Meadow'. It beautifully captures the many elements that make up floodplain meadows, or as they are often known in Ireland, 'callows' grasslands.

Where to find further information:



1. GREAT IRISH GRASSLANDS WEBSITE

Information on semi-natural grasslands in Ireland

<https://www.greatirishgrasslands.ie/>



2. BSBI 'IRISH GRASSLANDS PROJECT'

Excellent training videos for plant identification

<https://bsbi.org/take-part/projects/irish-grasslands>



NPWS

An tSeirbhís Páircanna Náisiúnta agus Fíadhúla
National Parks and Wildlife Service

3. NPWS GRASSLANDS PAGE

Scientific surveys and grassland map viewer

<https://www.npws.ie/research-projects/grasslands>



4. ALL-IRELAND POLLINATOR PLAN

Resources and information on pollinators and their habitats

<https://pollinators.ie/>



5. FARMING FOR NATURE

Showcasing nature-friendly farmers, including frequent farm walks

<https://www.farmingfornature.ie/>

Text: Maria Long, Phoebe O'Brien, Ruth Wilson & Úna FitzPatrick.

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