



Bog Walk at Killyconny Bog

THE peatlands of the Irish Midlands are among the most important raised bog systems remaining in Europe. It is estimated that the Republic of Ireland contains 50% of the intact (virgin bog), oceanic raised bog systems remaining in Europe. As part of European Heritage Week, a bog walk will be held at Killyconny Bog on 1st September as part of Heritage Week. It will be guided by Angela Wallace, Coillte (The Forestry Company), and Lee McDaid, NPWS (The National Parks & Wildlife Service). All are welcome for the walk which starts at 2pm meeting at Whitegate Crossroads.

Ms. Wallace is working with Coillte on an EU funded Raised Bog Restoration Project and one of the 14 sites in this project is Killyconny Bog. Killyconny Bog is a National Heritage Area, designated here in Ireland, and is a Special Area of Conservation, designated by the EU; it contains rare habitat i.e. Raised Bog. NPWS also have plans to do restoration works on this bog.

Raised bog

Raised bog habitat – which is formed in former lake basins – was once extensive over the Midlands and mid-west of Ireland covering an estimated 310,000 ha of our country, however today it is estimated that a mere 18,000 ha of raised bog habitat of conservation value remain. Most of the loss of raised bog habitat is a result of harvesting of peat for electricity production, for house fuel (turf), and the manufacture of horticultural products.

Afforestation of raised bogs has also resulted in habitat loss, but on a much smaller scale – it is estimated that about 2% of the original total area of Irish raised bogs has been afforested.

Killyconny Bog is situated approximately half way between Virginia and Kells on the Cavan/Meath border. As a result of the huge loss of raised bog habitat in Ireland the site is designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), and forms part of the European NATURA 2000 network. The NATURA 2000 sites have been selected to protect habitats for flora and fauna that are of European importance.

Killyconny Bog remains one of the largest areas of relatively intact raised bogs in the north east of the country. Many of the plants which grow here are to be found nowhere else in the surrounding region. This includes a whole sward of heathers, and grasses that display their colour on the bog during the summer months. These plants support a rich and varied wildlife from dragonflies hunting insects above the bog pools to hares grazing on the vegetation. Birds to be found on the bog include meadow pipit, curlew and sometimes to be seen kestrel and long-eared owls, which hunt over it for beetles, pygmy-shrews and frogs.

NPWS and Killyconny Bog

Due to its importance to wildlife The National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Dept. of Environment, Heritage and Local Government hope to carry out bog restoration work on Killyconny over the coming

months. This will include drain blocking to keep water the bog, grading of the face bank to prevent erosion and the insertion of a plastic 'blanket' around the bog to prevent water from leaking out. These works will help to preserve the bog and its wildlife for now and future generations.

Coillte, Killyconny Bog and LIFE

Coillte planted peatland areas like Killyconny Bog during the, 80's – when it was in fact government policy to plant these areas, as it created employment in rural areas.

The Coillte owned section of Killyconny Bog is 11.6 ha in size, the forestry company are fortunate to be in the position where it is was possible to restore sections of Killyconny bog and 13 other bogs spread throughout the Midlands. In 2004 Coillte applied to the EU for LIFE funding – this funding is given by the EU for habitat restoration. 75% of the 2,500,000 funding required for this raised bog restoration project has been secured from the EU, and 25% is being contributed by Coillte. The project runs from Oct 2004 to Sept 2008. There are 14 sites in the project, a total area of 571.2 hectares of raised bog will be restored.

LIFE Project Actions

Various operations will be carried out on the project sites during this 4 year period, they include – felling of all non-native trees – such as the Lodgepole Pine which was planted at Killyconny. After the areas were felled and

cleared, drains were blocked using peat dams, in order to elevate the water levels on the sites. Fire lines have been 'cut' to provide perimeter protection of vulnerable raised bog sites from fires. Fences have been erected to mark boundaries, and prevent trespassing livestock, and dumping which has taken place on the site in the past.

The project ecologist will ensure that the monitoring of vegetation and water levels which commenced before operations started on these bogs is ongoing throughout the 4 year period of the project. The water monitoring which commenced before the trees were felled is showing positive results, with a rise in the water levels after tree felling and a further increase since the peat dams have been put in on this site.

Growing the Bog

Bogs grow very slowly indeed – in ideal conditions – that is if the water levels are within 10 cm of the surface all year round – the sphagnum mosses or peat forming mosses will grow at a rate of 1mm per year! It would take 1,000 years to grow 1 metre of bog..... So bog restoration is a slow process, but positive results are to be seen already! In some of the areas where trees have been cleared and drains have been blocked, mosses are beginning to grow again in the drains. The guides for the bog walk look forward to taking you to Killyconny Bog on Friday September, 1st – meeting at Whitegate Crossroads at 2 p.m.

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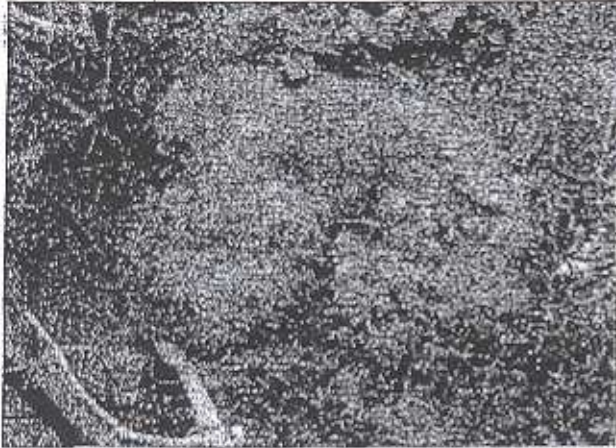
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Sphagnum - is the peat forming moss. They are trying to raise water levels sufficiently at Killyconny to enable them to grow again. There are a number of varieties of this moss.



Sundew - is one of the carnivorous plants which grows on the bog. It traps insects and eventually 'digests' them!