

Glens Great Grassland Trail





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01 Common spotted orchid
Tieveragh Allotment Gardens,
Cushendall (*front cover*)

Foreword

This booklet tells the story of the remarkable transformation of some rather dull patches of mown grass into a chain of attractive flower-filled meadows, buzzing with insect life. A few years ago this process would have been considered difficult, expensive and lengthy, but by using simple and natural techniques the change has been achieved in a couple of years. However this has not been just one change repeated at a lot of sites, but a whole series of individual changes, each tailor-made to the place, its soil, aspect and microclimate. As you read the booklet and visit the grasslands you will become aware of the differences and the diversity of plant communities that have been created and nurtured. The team at Heart of the Glens Landscape Partnership have worked closely with a wide range of partners, and some dedicated volunteers, to demonstrate how relatively easy it can be to make a real difference to our local environment. I recommend that you follow the trail and take in the beauty of these special meadows.

Patrick Casement

Chairperson of Northern Ireland Environment Link

Images

01 Local children enjoying the meadow in Cushendun



Glens Great Grassland Trail



“What is the Glens Great Grassland Trail?”

The Glens Great Grassland Trail is a route consisting of eleven public meadow sites across thirty miles of the iconic landscape that is The Glens of Antrim. This biodiversity trail links the main villages of The Glens in what is increasingly becoming known as ‘The Cultural Heart of The Causeway Coastal Route’. The Trail provides locals and visitors a better understanding of endangered meadow habitats. The meadows also act as stop-off points to explore the landscape, beaches and rich local heritage of the area.

All the meadows along the trail were created through a range of management measures to return sterile mown areas or rank grassland to species rich meadows for the benefit of people and wildlife. The Heart of The Glens Landscape Partnership Scheme, a five-year project funded mainly by the Heritage Lottery Fund, have developed the project and supported landowners to create and manage these sites long into the future.

Images

01 Yellow rattle

01

Traditional Wildflower Hay Meadows

Species rich meadows in Ireland are unique because of the geography, climate and cultural use. These native grasslands host numerous species of grasses, flowering herbs, sedges and rushes. The variety of plant species provides a vital source of nectar and pollen for insects such as native bumble bees, butterflies, moths and hoverflies.

Before the advent of modern agricultural practices, such as artificial fertilizers and chemical sprays, meadows provided the source of winter fodder, through hay making or winter grazing. Due to agricultural intensification over the last 70 years, meadows more so than any other habitat have suffered a major decline. Unable to keep up with the pace of modern farming, meadows were often reseeded with new quick growing grasses, which responded well to artificial inputs. Native meadow plants could not compete in these new conditions, which saw the rapid decline of wildflowers throughout the countryside.

“More than 50% of Ireland’s bees have undergone substantial declines since the 1980’s due to habitat loss.”

All Ireland Pollinator Plan
2015-2020

“Over 97% of UK wildflower meadows have been lost since the second world war.”

Plantlife

Conservation of endangered species

These changes in management practices in the landscape resulted in some once common wildflowers becoming much rarer and locally endangered. The Glens of Antrim has three such species; great burnet (*Sanguisorba officinalis*), meadow crane’s-bill (*Geranium pratense*) and wood crane’s-bill (*Geranium sylvaticum*). The Trail has created the opportunity to help reintroduce these species into the wider landscape and showcase them to the public.



03



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Images

- 01 The mown paths through the meadows in Glenariff were designed with the local primary school children and allow for all sorts of natural play opportunities
- 02 Meadow on the National Trust lands in Cushendun
- 03 Great burnet, one of the three nationally rare wildflowers found in the Glens that are being introduced on sites on the Trail
- 04 Meadow crane's-bill now growing on Ballycastle Golf Club



04



01

Ballycastle Town Park

Special Feature(s): Flowering thistles and insect life in late summer

Size: 0.27ha

This meadow, located along the Tow River, and flanked by mature trees on two sides, has a very different feel to it. It doesn't have the typical wildflower species found in a traditional hay meadow. This site was only recently restored from an area of rank grass and the soil is very damp and rich. These conditions led to the growth of reed grasses, which tower over you as you walk along the mown paths maintained by the local Council (Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council). In late summer, thistles put on a spectacular show of colour, which supports a myriad of insect life.

Ballycastle Community Development Group and local volunteers were the driving force behind the project, which has opened this once neglected space for community use. It will be exciting to see how the meadow evolves over time with the new management regime now in place.



Images

- 01 Ox-eye daisy
- 02 New meadow in the Town Park
- 03 Mown paths in the meadows allow access for local people and visitors through the meadows

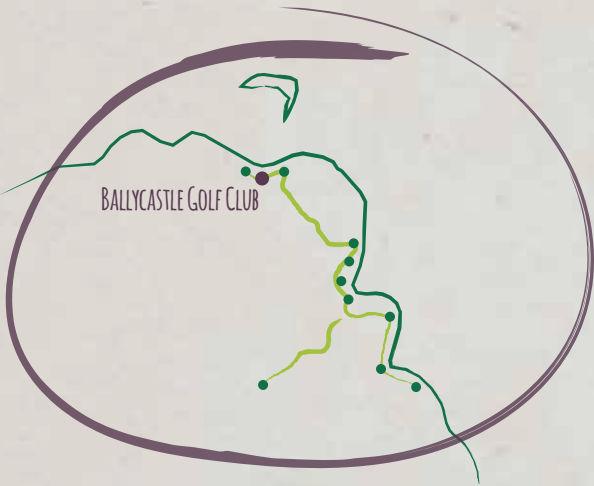
02



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Ballycastle Golf Club



Special Feature(s): Swathes of Devil's-bit Scabious in flower in late summer

Size: 2.39ha

The meadows developed on Ballycastle Golf Club were created with several practical golfing purposes in mind. The management regime (see Pg. 34) that creates the best 'rough' areas is also the same one that supports wildflower meadow habitat. The fact that these meadows are great to look at in the summer, are full of wildlife and are free to maintain as (a local farmer takes the species rich grass to feed to his cattle), is a bonus.

The sandy, nutrient poor soils on the course create ideal conditions for many wildflowers and have allowed the meadows to develop quickly. There are wonderful displays of wildflowers throughout the season from the early dandelions to the late flowering devil's-bit scabious (larval food plant for the marsh fritillary, Ireland's only designated butterfly species), eyebright and harebell.

Images

- 01 Walking through the meadows
- 02 'Roughs' on the golf course are now managed as summer hay meadows
- 03 Red clover
- 04 New meadows on Ballycastle Golf Club



01



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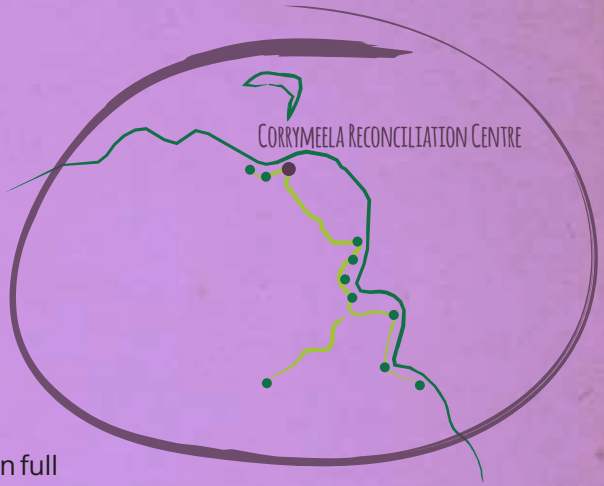


04



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Corrymeela Reconciliation Centre



Special Feature(s): The wildlife pond surrounded by wildflowers in full bloom and the flush of orchids during the summer

Size: 0.44ha

The grounds of Corrymeela have been transformed in recent years. Where once they were managed as mainly mown grass with little wildlife, there is now a myriad of different habitats. These include small pockets of woodland, a wildlife pond, bird and bat boxes, and of course wildflower meadows! There is an interesting mix of meadows and species across the grounds because some areas are much drier and free draining than others. The area surrounding the wildlife pond is particularly rich and full of colour in the summer and includes some aquatic wildflowers as well.

These meadows were created as part of The Corrymeela Community's overall commitment to reconciliation, sustainability and biodiversity. Reconciliation is not only about equity, balance and interdependence with each other but also with our environment and the living world around us.

Images

- 01 Bumblebee feeding on selfheal
- 02 Relaxing in the meadows
- 03 Speedwell
- 04 Wildflower meadow around the wildlife



02



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04

☘ The Warren Cushendun ☘



Special Feature(s): A sea of yellow when the cat's-ear is in full bloom in the summer or the sea of blue when the bluebells are flowering in April/May

Size: 1.35ha

The National Trust have been managing this coastal grassland over the last few years as a wildflower hay meadow. The hard work of the local staff and volunteers, with the recent input and support from the Heart of the Glens LPS, is paying off as the species diversity has increased dramatically in this time. For long spells in the summer the meadow is a spectacular display of yellow created by the flowering cat's-ear, which is abundant throughout. There are also some other little gems to be found such as the sheep's-bit scabious, growing on the walls and bare sand banks. In early summer, before the other wildflowers get up, the bluebells are in full show forming a blue carpet over the meadow.

Images

- 01 Hayleage being spread on the meadow
- 02 Meadow along the beachfront in Cushendun





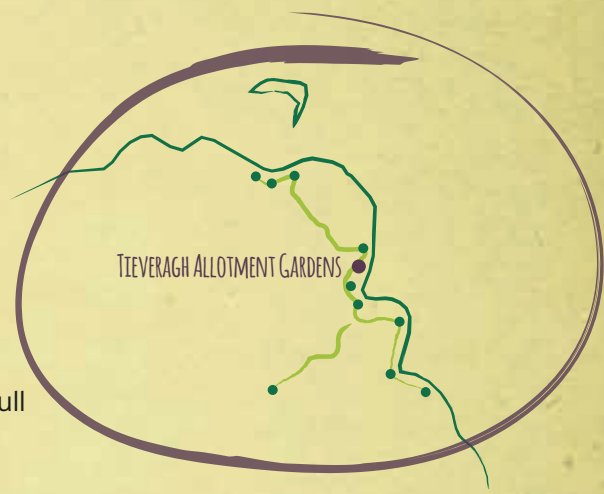
01

Tieveragh Allotment Gardens

Special Feature(s): The fairy ring centre piece and the red clover in full bloom with the spectacular views across to Lurigethan

Size: 0.33ha

This small meadow outside Cushendall is part of a community allotment gardens and boasts spectacular views out across the surrounding Glens. There is a lot going on in this meadow thanks to the industrious Cairns Residents Group. There is a sculptural fairy ring in the heart of the meadow tying into local folklore. Mown paths connect this area to the rest of the site and link to the traditional orchard, which was also planted as part of the scheme. The most striking feature of this meadow is the amount of red clover throughout, which is a great food plant for native bumblebees during warm summer days.



Images

- 01 Meadow at Tieveragh Allotment Gardens
- 02 Strolling through the meadow paths



02

“ Agnew’s Field ”

Special Feature(s): Sea of yellow and pink colour when the meadow buttercup and ragged robin are in flower with the stunning background of Red Bay Castle and Glenariff

Size: 1.39ha

With the stunning backdrop of Red Bay Castle and Glenariff, this coastal meadow and picnic area is well worth stopping into when travelling along the Causeway Coastal Route. The soil is slightly richer than the other coastal meadows on the Trail and so supports wildflowers such as meadow buttercup and ragged robin. The surrounding coastline and rocky outcrops are also a great place to spot wildlife such as oystercatchers and seals.

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council manage the meadow with a local farmer, who cuts the meadow and uses it for winter fodder for livestock.



Images

- 01 Ragged robin flowering in Agnew's Field
- 02 Meadow buttercup in flower with Red Bay Castle and Glenariff in the background



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Glenariff Beachfront

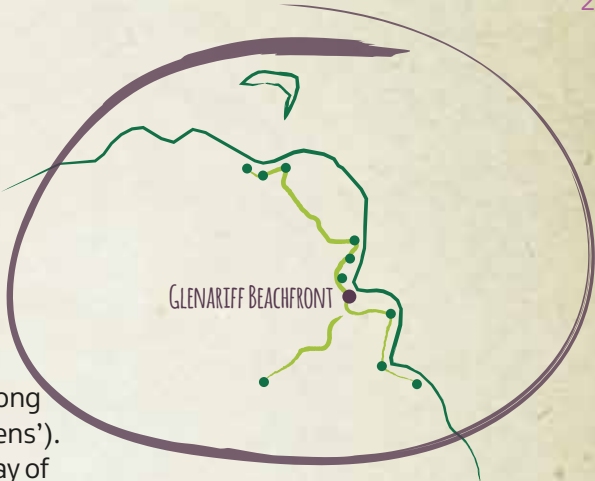
Special Feature(s): Conservation grazing at ‘An Coimín’; the natural play paths beside the Beach Café

Size: 3.79ha

The largest meadow on the Trail, which is broken up over four sites along the beachfront at the foot of Glenariff (known as the ‘Queen of the Glens’). The meadows have established quickly, producing a wonderful display of colour throughout the summer. Yellow rattle, a parasitic plant of grasses, is a key meadow wildflower and is very common in the area. Look out also for the brilliant blue flower of the field scabious and the more delicate pink of the common restharrow.

The local community were heavily involved in creating these meadows with the local primary school children even designing the layout of the mown paths. The meadows and the paths are part of the bigger drive in the community to enhance natural play and walking opportunities in the area.

The largest single section of meadow here (An Coimín) is managed by conservation grazing, which involves the introduction of livestock over the winter months to graze down the summer growth. This replicates the traditional grazing regimes that would have been widespread practice across Ireland until modern farming systems took over.



- Images**
- 01 Early purple orchid
 - 02 Paths in Glenariff allow opportunities for natural play
 - 03 Glenariff beachfront meadows (overleaf)



02



“ Mary Queen of Peace Church, Glenravel ”

Special Feature(s): The early pink flowering cuckooflower or lady’s smock when in full bloom

Size: 0.5ha

This meadow is situated between Cargan and Martinstown and acts as a gateway point to the Glens when coming from Ballymena. The summer of 2017 was the first season of the meadow and it has already proven very popular with the parishioners. It has also been used as an outdoor learning resource by the local primary school with a small wildlife pond further adding to the wildlife habitat on the grounds.



Images

- 01 Meadow on church lawn
- 02 Dandelion, one of the most important early flowering wildflowers for bumblebees



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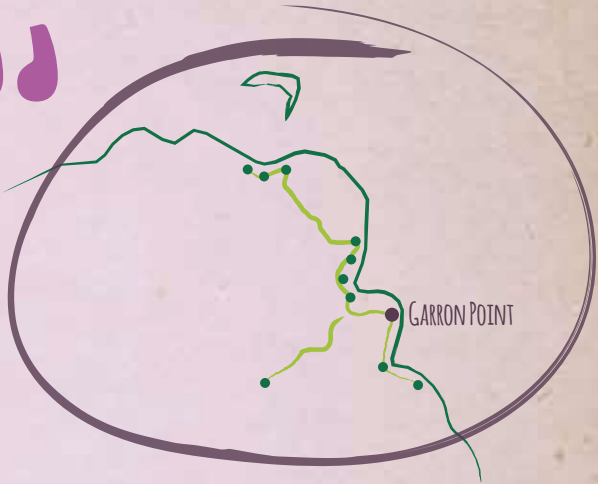
“ Garron Point ”

Special Feature(s): The variety of coastal wildflower specialists such as thrift (sea pink), sea campion and sea plantain

Size: 0.17ha

This is the smallest meadow on the Trail but because of the gradient difference on the site it has produced two very distinct wildflower habitat zones. The lower half of the meadow, which can be periodically inundated by seawater, is where the coastal specialists such as thrift (sea pink), sea campion and sea plantain are found. The upper half of the site, which is out of reach of any seawater, contains more typical hay meadow species such as yellow rattle and ox-eye daisy.

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council manage the site, which contains a car park and picnic area and is a popular spot for sea anglers. It is also a great place to go whale watching with views up and down the coastline.



Images

- 03 Bumblebee feeding on thrift
- 04 Coastal meadow at Garron Point (overleaf)



☘☘ Hurry Path, Carnlough ☘☘

Special Feature(s): The bank of ox-eye daisy and cat's ear when in flower

Size: 0.2ha

Managed by Mid and East Antrim Borough Council, this small meadow is a beautiful place to pause and soak in the views on the walk up to Cranny Falls and Gortin Quarry Nature Reserve. Although the meadow is one of the smaller meadows on the Trail it more than makes up for it in species richness. This is because the lime rich soils formed from quarrying practises in Gortin Quarry create the perfect conditions for wildflowers to thrive. The bank running from the meadow down towards the Waterfall Road is particularly spectacular when in full flower in the summer.



Images

01 Ox-eye daisy



01

☘☘ Glenarm Sports Field ☘☘

Special Feature(s): The carpet of woodland edge and traditional hay meadow wildflowers flowing around the mature oak and sycamore trees

Size: 0.53ha

The grand setting of Glenarm Estate is the location of the most southerly of the Trail meadows. In one small corner of the Estate the meadow sweeps along the soccer pitch and under mature oak and sycamore trees. The mown paths allow you to wander through the meadow and into the newly planted native woodland, which contains a range of woodland wildflowers such as nettles, bluebells, red campion and wild garlic. Given its proximity to the site of the ASSI site for the nationally rare wood crane's-bill at Feystown, this meadow has formed an integral part of the conservation plans for this beautiful little purple wildflower.



Images

02 Mixed use park in Glenarm with meadows

03 Mix of woodland and meadows provide a range of habitat for wildlife



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Glens Primary School Meadows

The Glens Great Grassland Trail has had some wonderful ‘side shoots’ since its inception, the most exciting of which was the chance to work with the local primary schools. A number of these schools expressed an interest in creating meadows on their grounds, as well as carrying out other wildlife friendly actions, which were key elements in the production of the Heart of the Glens LPS Outdoor Learning Resource. The types of meadows created varied greatly across the schools given the different conditions at each site. Some, such as Gaelscoil an Chaistil or St Patricks Primary School, had plenty of lawn space to work with allowing them to create meadows with mown paths through them. In others, such as Carnlough Integrated, space was more limited, but it did not stop them from getting involved. Here they installed planter boxes, which the school children helped plant with native wildflowers.



Images

- 01 St Patrick’s Primary School, Waterfoot
- 02 St Mary’s Primary School, Cushendall
- 03 Carnlough Integrated Primary School
- 04 Gaelscoil an Chaistil, Ballycastle
- 05 Seaview Primary School, Glenarm



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Management of Public Meadows

General Check List:

1. The meadow should be allowed to grow between Mid-March and Early September.
2. Mow paths and meadow borders (along footpaths and roads) at least every ten days. This allows access through public meadows and makes public amenity sites more physically attractive.
3. Control of noxious weeds; Cut or pull entire plant including roots before they go to seed. If manual control measures aren't practical then spot spraying may be considered (where possible this should be a last resort as it is deleterious to wildlife and people).
4. Ensure minimal dog fouling on meadows.
5. Tight mowing and removal of long meadow areas should occur from mid-August or September. Cuttings must be removed from the meadow. (Note: Meadows with late flowering species such as devil's-bit scabious may require a delay of cutting until after their seed has set).
6. Where appropriate winter and autumn grazing of meadows can be employed as an alternative to mowing. Traditional cattle breeds are best and are simply allowed to graze the meadow down between September and March. Cattle are removed before the growing season, or before the sward becomes damaged by heavy poaching with hooves.
7. In the first few seasons of meadow creation augmentation of meadows with locally harvested native seed and/or plug plants is best carried out in the autumn period directly after mowing and removal of meadow sward.



Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the different landowners, partner organisations and individuals who helped in any way to create the Trail. There are too many to mention individually but this Trail is a result of all their work and expertise since 2014.

One special mention must go to local volunteer Matt Woodhouse. Matt gave up countless hours driving around and photographing the different meadows throughout 2017, without which we wouldn't have been able to produce this guide.

Images

- 01 Meadows on Ballycastle Golf Club being cut at the end of the season
- 02 Mown paths being cut into the meadow at Agnew's Field
- 03 Bumblebee feeding on Red Clover
- 04 Bumblebee training at Tieveragh Allotment Gardens

Further Information

The following are just some of the websites available about Ireland's wildflowers:

- <http://www.biodiversityireland.ie/projects/irish-pollinator-initiative/>
- <http://www.wildflowersofireland.net/index.php>
- <http://www.irishwildflowers.ie/index.html>

Photo Credits

All photos were taken by Matt Woodhouse or Brian Gaynor.

PP The ongoing decline in our native pollinating insects is very often associated with habitat loss. Native, flower rich meadows, are a key habitat for many pollinating insects, offering them food in the form of nectar and pollen.

The Glens Great Grassland Trail has transformed sterile grassland sites into diverse, attractive meadows that are wonderful for insects but also easily accessed and enjoyed by locals and visitors alike.

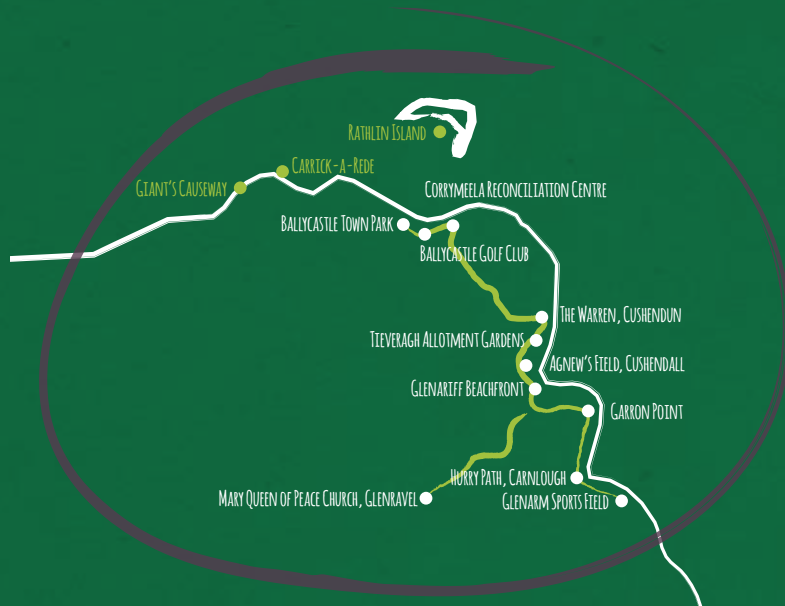
This project is an example of a best practice landscape wide scheme and is important in demonstrating that public places can be enhanced for people while also becoming more nature friendly.

Dr Úna Fitzpatrick

National Biodiversity Data Centre
(All-Ireland Pollinator Plan)

Written and edited by

Dr Réamái Mathers and Brian Gaynor
2017



The Glens of Antrim has a unique sense of place in our iconic causeway Coastal Route. This project provides visitors with access to spectacular landscapes which are off the 'beaten track'. Our visitors will be enjoying the opportunities to get up 'Close to Nature' with flower rich meadow trails, winding paths and natural adventure areas while uncovering the area's rich heritage.

Brian Connolly Tourism NI



This project is supported as part of the Heart of the Glens Landscape Partnership Scheme, which is kindly funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund.



C/o. Antrim - Downpatrick Distillery
Downpatrick Distillery Ltd. 2017

