

MY SECRET GARDEN

Did you ever dream about creating a secret garden? What animals would live in your secret garden? Here are some animals that live in the wild in Ireland - have you ever seen these in your favourite garden or park? Read the stories below and find out more about biodiversity!

Biodiversity is another word to describe nature or wildlife. It means ALL living things (or species) in the world. The different types of plants, animals, birds, insects, even the tiny bacteria that are too small to see with your eyes!

It describes the different types of ecosystems - the groups of species living in an environment. It means not just the number of species but the differences within the species and how everything is connected. The more biodiversity in an ecosystem the better! Meaning, the more species in a garden the "healthier" the garden will be.



Magpie

The Magpie's name is made up of two words - pied (old English word which means something is black and white) and maggot (as in the creepy crawlies!). The Magpie is a member of the crow family and will eat a range of food including young birds and eggs, insects, scraps and carrion, nuts and cereals. One of their biggest enemies is the Grey Squirrel, who tries to steal the eggs from its nest.



Garden Snail

The Garden Snail is a gentle herbivore and it feeds on lots of different types of trees, vegetable crops, garden flowers, and cereals. They have also been known to feed on dead animals! The Snail has a special tongue called a radula - a tongue covered in teeth that it uses to cut or scrape its food from plant or rock surface. Snails are a food source for many other animals, especially Hedgehogs who are able to crunch through their shell and digest their slimy bodies.



Hedgehog

Hedgehogs are nocturnal animals, which means they mostly are active at night. This makes sense as at night there are fewer predators about and more of the food that they like to eat (slugs, snails and earthworms!). Hedgehogs are also covered in spines to protect them from predators - an adult hedgehog has approx. 5000 spines all over their body! This is good for protection but makes grooming impossible, and Hedgehogs suffer a lot from fleas and ticks.



Robin

The Robin is one of the birds that stays in Ireland over the winter months. They are song birds and they sing nearly all year round. They don't live for very long, usually only two to three years at most. Both male and female Robin have a red breast and are very aggressive. If a Robin hops up to you it's not being friendly - it's trying to chase you away from its territory!



Fox

The Fox or Red Fox is a member of the canine family, which includes dogs and wolves. They are usually thought of as being carnivores (meat eaters), but really they are opportunistic feeders, meaning they'll eat anything they like the taste of. This includes insects, slugs and snails, earthworms, blackberries, apples and other fruit, mice, rabbits, birds, eggs, frogs and fish!



Grey Squirrel

The Grey Squirrel is an introduced species to Ireland - one story tell us that a basket of them were brought to Ireland from England as a wedding present, but they all escaped into the wild. The Grey Squirrel is active by day and sleep at night in their nest or "drey". Grey Squirrels do not hibernate, and feed through the winter.



Small Tortoiseshell Butterfly

This colourful butterfly is usually seen in the late spring and summer. The adults feed on nectar from flowers, while the caterpillars (known as a "hairy molly") feed on nettles. The Small Tortoiseshell's bright wings help frighten away predators like birds. The dark backs of the wings are dull and this helps camouflage the butterfly when it's resting or hibernating.



7-Spot Ladybird

The 7-Spot Ladybird is one of the most common ladybirds in Ireland and Europe. It is red, with seven black spots on its back. The bright colour warns predators that they are poisonous. Most birds are unable to eat them without becoming ill. They are known as the "gardener's friend" as both adults and the larvae (pronounced lar-vay) eat aphids (greenfly).

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It is important that we protect biodiversity as we are all connected, and depend on each other. We need to share our green spaces with nature. If we didn't have any insects, for example, crops wouldn't grow and we wouldn't have bread, breakfast cereals or biscuits!! Remember, the more biodiversity the better for us all!

According to the National Parks and Wildlife Service, our island is home to:



Approx 815 species of flowering plants



80 native ferns



Over 800 species of mosses and liverworts



3,500 different types of fungi



1,400 algae



29 species of freshwater fish species are found in our lakes and rivers



Over 20 land mammals



Over 1,000 species of lichens



2 types of seal - the Grey seal and the Common seal



25 whale, dolphin and porpoise species



475 bird species have been recorded



9 bats species



1000's of invertebrates including 3194 wasps, bees and ants!



3 amphibians - the smooth newt, common frog and the natterjack toad



7 reptile species including four sea turtles such as the visiting leatherback turtle

Are you surprised that there are so many different types of living things in Ireland?
And we are all connected!

