



Carnmoney Hill

Leaders: Jim Bradley and Larry Toal

19th May 2015

Botany

On a chilly May evening hardy members assembled in winter coats and woolly hats for a birdsong and botany walk up **Carnmoney Hill**.

This green oasis of grassland, wetland and woodland is owned By **Newtownabbey & Antrim Council** and covers 70 hectares. It is managed by the **Woodland Trust** who have planted 60,000 native trees to bolster the fragments of ancient woodland.

We examined the sheath-like spathes of **Lords & Ladies** (*Arum Maculatum*). *Maculatum* means 'spotted' for the leaves, but they are generally not spotted in Ireland. Inside is a spadix, a column with the male and female flowers whorled around it. Pollinating midges get trapped inside and the flowers develop into poisonous red berries. **Garlic Mustard** (*Alliaria petiolata*) is a crucifer but has a garlicky smell.

The older woodland is mostly of **Hazel** (*Coryllus avellana*) with **Bluebells** (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), **Wood Anemones** (*Anemone nemorosa*), **Wild Garlic** (*Allium ursinum*), and **Wood Sanicle** (*Sanicula europea*), an umbellifer which is an indicator of ancient woodland. The strange-looking **Toothwort** (*Lathraea squamaria*) is a parasite on hazel and other trees and has no green pigment and scales instead of leaves. The one-sided spike of flowers is supposed to look like a set of teeth! It is one of 8 uncommon plants to be recorded on the **BSBI Irish Species Project**.

Near the old farmhouse a large patch of **Red Campion** (*Silene dioica*) and **Ox-eye Daisy** (*Leucanthemum vulgare*) had been sown and were flourishing. Even in the cold the fresh green of the springtime woods and the views over Belfast and as far as the Mourne made it an evening to remember.

Margaret Marshall

Zoology

The woodland provided an ideal spot for evening birdsong. We are indebted to **Larry Toal** for sharing his keen ear and expertise to help us unravel the cacophony of birdsong.

The **Blackcap's** (*Sylvia atricapilla*) song was heard throughout our walk. The song consists of short phrases, often with a terminal flourish of loud clear notes regarded by many as the as equal to the nightingale in quality. These are the summer visitors which have migrated from Mediterranean and North Africa. Increasingly we are seeing Blackcaps feeding at our garden feeders but these migrate to Eastern Europe to breed.

Altogether we heard sixteen birds singing, the easiest to pick out were, the **Wren** (*Troglodytes troglodytes*), **Chiffchaff** (*Phylloscopus collybita*) and **Great Tit** (*Parus major*). With Larry's help we were able to hear many more.



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The highlight was the **Goldcrest** (*Regulus regulus*) with its thin, high rhythmical song which ends in a flourish. The full list is below.

There are several opinions and theories on why birds sing in the evening. The most widely held idea is for communication, just as daytime singing is used for communication. Individual birds "talk" with each other during mating periods and to let other birds know they are in the area. Some birds have only one "song" perhaps with slight variations on this while others sound off with a lot more variety, depending on whether they are protecting territory, finding a mate or raising an alarm if a predator is nearby.

After we thanked Jim and Larry for a very interesting evening we made it back to the cars before the weather changed and to a heavy hailstorm. Perfect timing!

Pamela Thomlinson

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*
Wren *Troglodytes Troglodytes*
Robin *Erithacus rubecula*
Blackbird *Turdus merula*
Dunnoek *Prunella modularis*
Great Tit *Parus major*
Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*
Chaffinch *Fraginella coelebs*
Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*
Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybit*
Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus collybita*
Jay *Garrulus glandarius*
Magpie *Pica pica*
Hooded Crow *Corvus corone cornix*
Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*
Swift *Apus apus*
Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*