

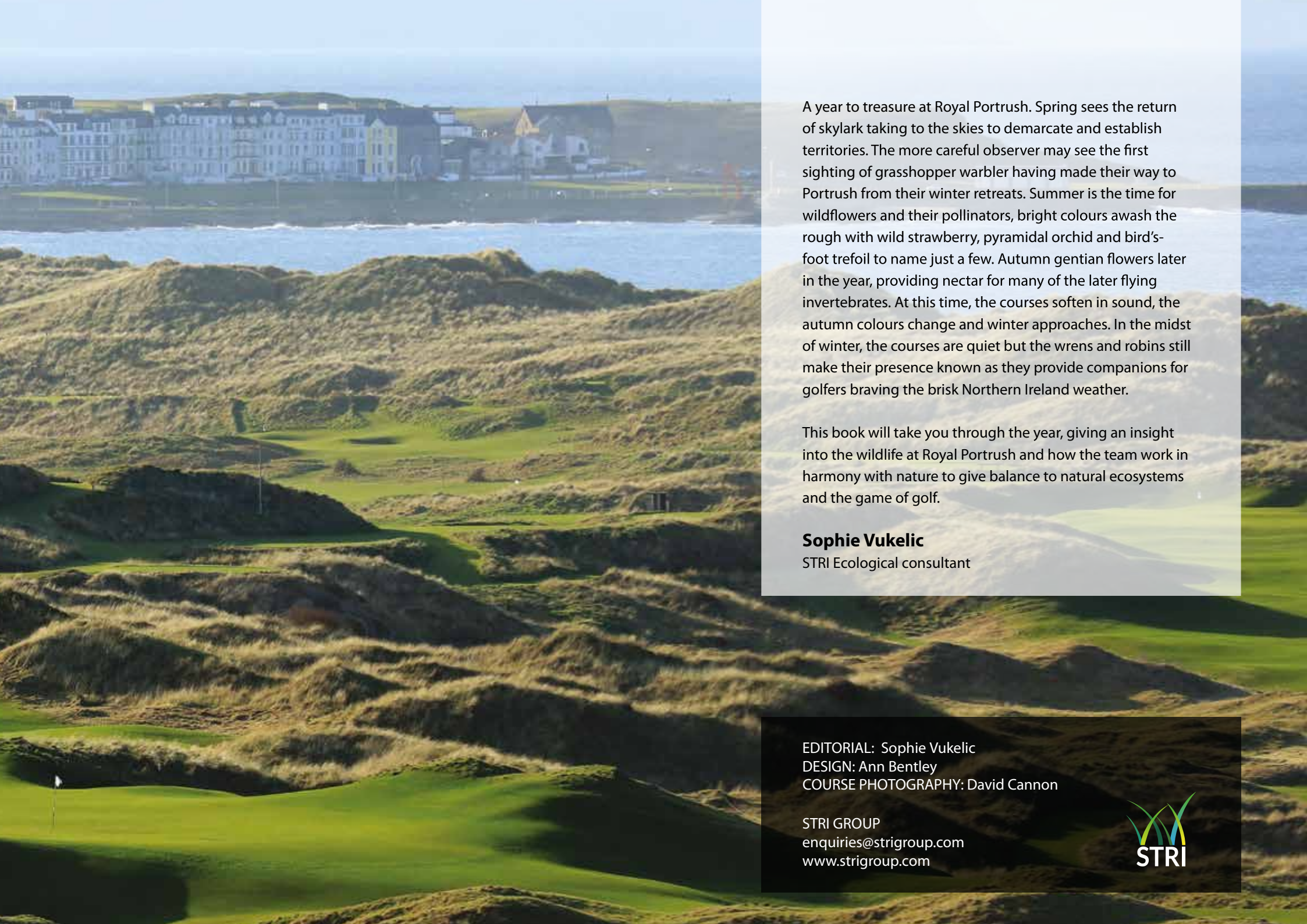
Royal Portrush Golf Club

A Wild Year



R&A





A year to treasure at Royal Portrush. Spring sees the return of skylark taking to the skies to demarcate and establish territories. The more careful observer may see the first sighting of grasshopper warbler having made their way to Portrush from their winter retreats. Summer is the time for wildflowers and their pollinators, bright colours awash the rough with wild strawberry, pyramidal orchid and bird's-foot trefoil to name just a few. Autumn gentian flowers later in the year, providing nectar for many of the later flying invertebrates. At this time, the courses soften in sound, the autumn colours change and winter approaches. In the midst of winter, the courses are quiet but the wrens and robins still make their presence known as they provide companions for golfers braving the brisk Northern Ireland weather.

This book will take you through the year, giving an insight into the wildlife at Royal Portrush and how the team work in harmony with nature to give balance to natural ecosystems and the game of golf.

Sophie Vukelic

STRI Ecological consultant

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Royal Portrush Golf Club is committed to both preserving and enhancing the stunning swathe of links land we're proud to call home.

An area with a rich and biodiverse ecosystem, we appreciate our responsibility as custodian of the large sand dune complexes and verdant grassland – together with its associated wildlife, flora and fauna. To that end, Royal Portrush works hand-in-hand with external services, including STRI (Sports Turf Research Institute), Europe's leading independent consultancy for golf-related ecological and environmental issues.

As a result of surveys and by seeking specialist advice, we have been able to implement a comprehensive five year ecological management plan. Incorporated by our course management team, it influences the day-to-day running of the club and land through nature conservation, water, waste and energy management.

The tireless work of our club's Environment Committee, Course Manager and greenkeeping staff led to Royal Portrush attaining golf's international eco-label GEO Certified – a status only awarded after meeting criteria in six areas of sustainable golf: Nature, Water, Energy, Supply Chain, Pollution Prevention and Community. That seal of approval also included the assertion that the ecological value of this area of land on the County Antrim coast would be significantly lower, with little or no management of the dune system, had it not been for golf.

Commenting on Royal Portrush, The Golf Environment Organisation said: "The scale, level of effort and attention to detail given to the management of the dune habitat across the club was inspiring."

Our goal now is to continue this good work. To continue standing shoulder-to-shoulder with government, council and private agencies in protecting this wonderful habitat for future generations.

Wilma Erskine

Secretary/Manager

Meet the team



GRAEME BEATT
Course Manager

Graeme's career in greenkeeping commenced at Scotsraig Golf Club in 1995, before working at Kingsbarns Golf Links, Royal Melbourne Golf Club and County Sligo Golf Club. He became Course Manager at Royal Portrush Golf Club in 2014, just as plans and course changes for The Open were being finalised.



PAUL LAPPIN
Deputy Course Manager

Paul has been a greenkeeper for 28 years, starting his career at Moyola Park before moving to Royal Portrush Golf Club at the age of 18 where he trained and attended Greenmount College for six years. He moved to Bangor Golf Club as Deputy Course Manager before taking up the role of Course Manager at Kirkistown Castle Golf Club for 16 years. He returned to Royal Portrush Golf Club in 2016 as Deputy Course Manager.



ALISTAIR BEGGS
STRI Head of Agronomy

Alistair joined STRI in 1988. He was promoted to Northern Area Manager in 2000 and to Head of Agronomy in 2013. Currently much of Alistair's time is spent undertaking consultancy work for The Championship Committee of The R&A for whom he acts as Official Agronomist. In this capacity he has gained a wealth of knowledge on the management and upkeep of many different types of golf course.



RICHARD WINDOWS
STRI Agronomy Manager

Richard joined STRI in 2000 after receiving a degree in Plant Science from University of Sheffield. He is Championship Agronomist for The Open and his speciality areas are in golf and tournament support; cool season grass management and modern stadia sports. He is also author of Climate Change & Scottish Golf Courses, and co-author of The Disturbance Theory.



BOB TAYLOR
Senior Ecological Consultant

Bob is an experienced ecological consultant, scientist and botanist with over 25 years' involvement in golf design planning and facility management. He leads STRI's Ecology & Environment team and is official ecologist to The R&A. Bob visits all Open Championship venues on an annual basis to provide ecological and environmental advice.

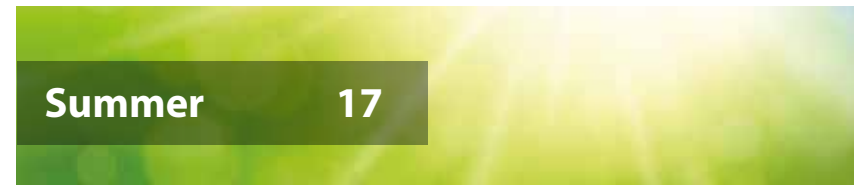
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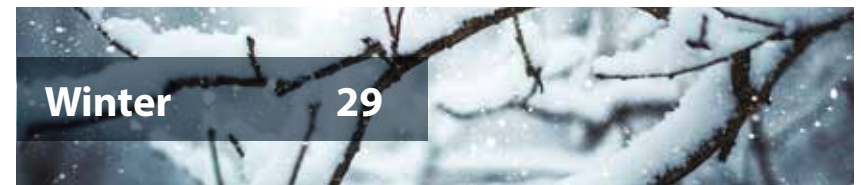
Spring 11



Summer 17



Autumn 23



Winter 29



Activities 35

A brief history

It's the combination of pure links land and a spectacular setting that makes Royal Portrush so special.

Home to two courses designed by celebrated architect Harry Colt – the world-renowned Dunluce Links and, hidden gem, The Valley – golf takes place against a stunning backdrop of golden beaches, Atlantic breakers and soaring cliffs.

Established in 1888 as the County Golf Club, this scenic corner of Northern Ireland's County Antrim coast has been at the vanguard of golf's development in Ireland.

An initial course layout close to the railway station in Portrush was the location for Ireland's first ever amateur tournament in

1892, and three years later, Sandy Herd defeated future six-time Open Champion Harry Vardon in the final of the inaugural professional event [1895 was also the year the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII, conferred 'royal' patronage on the club].

Expansion kept pace with the growth in popularity, subsequent course layouts moving further from the confines of the town towards the iconic clifftop ruins of Dunluce Castle, from which the championship course takes its name.

The Dunluce Links, formally opened in 1933, is regarded by many as Colt's greatest design, a course of constant elevation changes that wends its way through giant sand-hills.

Royal Portrush Golf Club continued to shape golfing history on the Emerald Isle, not least in July 1951 when it became the only course outside Scotland and England to stage golf's oldest 'Major', The Open Championship.

South African Bobby Locke had his sights set on making it three-in-a-row, but it was flamboyant Englishman Max Faulkner who became Open Champion.

Max would return to Portrush 44 years later to witness his son-in-law Brian Barnes win the first of his two Senior British Open titles. In all, six Senior 'Majors' have been staged on the Causeway Coast, attracting a veritable who's who of the golfing world, including Arnold Palmer, Gary Player and Tom Watson.

Royal Portrush has also played host to many of the rising stars, often glimpsed for the first time at The North of Ireland Amateur Championship, staged annually at Portrush since 1947. Pdraig Harrington, Darren Clarke, Paul McGinley, Graeme McDowell and Shane Lowry have all contested 'North' finals *en route* to stellar professional careers, with a 16-year-old Rory McIlroy shooting a course record 61 at the tournament in 2005.

Thanks to luminaries like May Hezlet, Rhona Adair and Zara Bolton, the ladies have also enjoyed their share of time in the spotlight, with no fewer than nine Ladies Amateur Championships taking place at Portrush.

Add into the equation three Amateur Championships and four Irish Opens, the most recent in 2012 making history as the first ever sell-out for a European Tour event (won by Welshman Jamie Donaldson).

The links land at Royal Portrush has not only staged great tournaments but proven itself a breeding ground for great

champions. In 1947, local man Fred Daly became the first Irishman to win The Open Championship, and two years later he became the first Irish golfer to play in the Ryder Cup.

In 2010 another Portrush native, Graeme McDowell's 'Major' triumph in the US Open at Pebble Beach was the first in this tournament by a European golfer in

40 years, and just over a year later local resident Darren Clarke emulated Daly, winning The Open at a wet and windy Royal St Georges.

Now, after a wait of 67 years, The Open Championship is returning to Royal Portrush. Two new holes have been designed by Martin Ebert (Mackenzie & Ebert) that are not only sympathetic to

the land and tradition, but also create a stunning risk and reward climax to the championship course.

The stage is set for the next exciting chapter in the history of Royal Portrush Golf Club.





ROYAL PORTRUSH GOLF CLUB

Royal Portrush has been awarded GEO Certified®. This prestigious accolade is provided to golf facilities that can demonstrate a clear commitment to the long term fostering of nature, conservation of resources and support for the community. To achieve certification, facilities have to meet high standards of practice for golf course maintenance, clubhouse and maintenance area operations.

Certification Highlights for Royal Portrush Golf Club

- An understanding of the management of over 80 hectares of ecologically rich habitats including sand dunes, scrub, grassland and pockets of wetland
- Turf cores recycled to repair and re-establish grassland areas
- Closed-loop wash water from the maintenance area is biologically treated and reused
- Outreach programme for junior members and within local schools
- Significant professional development and education programmes for employees
- Social media and internal communication increases awareness of the club's environmental and community work
- Collaborations with Tourism Ireland and Northern Ireland Tourism Board

“As an iconic links course and Open Championship venue, Royal Portrush is a flagship example of a golf facility which protects nature, conserves resources and strengthens communities.”

Jonathan Smith

Chief Executive Director, GEO

About GEO Foundation

The GEO Foundation is an international not-for-profit organisation, dedicated to helping golf clubs and the sport become recognised for its positive impact on the environment and communities. Working collaboratively with The R&A, golf industry associations, government and non-government organisations, GEO supports golf by providing the suite of 'OnCourse®' programmes for golf facility management, new developments and tournaments, and also manages GEO Certified®, the accredited and widely endorsed mark that symbolises sustainability in and through golf.

Spring



With longer days and brighter skies, spring provides optimism and new opportunities, not just for golfers but for the diversity of life that depends on the landscape habitats and management of the unique links. The volume is turned up on nature's orchestra as the air comes alive with the sweet warbling of the earliest returning migrant birds. As March winds settle and we near April, listen out for chiffchaff, one of the first arrivals to Royal Portrush, followed by willow warbler which arrives around a fortnight later.

Though these two birds look almost identical, their contrasting songs make it easy to distinguish one from the other. The chiffchaff sings its name whilst the willow warbler has a rippling melodic song – both beautiful in their own way.

The hawthorn, sea buckthorn and elder scrub found across both courses provide important nesting habitat for these two spring returners, along with many other birds that call Royal Portrush home. The tall hedgerow to the right of the 4th hole (Dunluce) comprises good structural diversity, inviting thrill-seeking chiffchaff which sing atop the highest trees, and careful willow warbler which prefer to be closer to the ground. The taller standards are also of interest to birds of prey such as kestrel, on the lookout for their next victim. Buzzard is also frequently seen flying south over the grassland of the courses in search of favoured prey.



Chiffchaff

Extremely active birds, constantly flicking their tails and wings while feeding



Kestrel

The main prey of kestrel are field voles, mice and shrews, which are common within the links grassland



Hawthorn

Also known as the May-tree, due to its flowering period

All of a sudden, as we transition from April to May and temperatures begin to hang around the teens, skylark and meadow pipit take to the skies with their trilling songs, the former darting up to 200m! Despite their love of heights, these are ground nesting birds that favour the dense marram and fescue grasslands that link each hole. Grasshopper warbler sings from several areas over the courses too, although this is quite an elusive bird, often heard rather than seen, though with patience, a fleeting glimpse may be had as the males rise to the tops of scrub to check their territories. Listen out for the long grasshopper-like call, particularly along the dune holes on the Valley course.

Not only do golfers' shoes pose a big problem, but come April, small birds such as these must be on the lookout for the arrival of the first cuckoo. Both the male and female cuckoo work together to seek out vulnerable nests of meadow pipit in which to lay their eggs. The males distract the target bird species whilst the female can sneakily lay her eggs before returning to an inconspicuous vantage point. All of this can occur within just 15 seconds or less – these are true ninja birds.



Skylark

There can be anything from 160 to over 460 syllables in the song



Cuckoo

90% of cuckoo's eggs are laid in the nests of meadow pipit, which are present in good number at Royal Portrush



Meadow pipit

In the breeding season it has a fluttering 'parachute' display flight



Grasshopper warbler

Spend the winter in the warmer climates of Africa and India

The warmth of the spring sun also teases butterflies out of their winter hibernation, with brimstone and small tortoiseshell emerging from their safe havens first, unique in that they both overwinter as adults in scrub, ivy and even garden sheds. Indeed, the name 'butterfly' comes from the butter-like colouring of brimstone – an easy way to remember their ID.

Those that do not overwinter as adults need a little more warmth. For example, orange tip will be on the wing a little later as they must emerge from their chrysalis in which they have escaped winter. This handily falls in line with the budburst of pollen-dispersing crab apple and creeping willow and the flowering of nectar-rich wildflowers, marking the start of a pollinator feast.

Brimstone

Their eggs are bottle-shaped and laid singly underneath young buckthorn leaves



Orange tip butterfly

The males are unmistakable; white butterflies with bright orange wing tips



Creeping willow

Plenty to be seen by the dune slack areas on the 4th hole of the Valley course and the 7th on the Dunluce

Spring signals new life, and across the courses, life unfurls in many different forms. There aren't many waterbodies at Royal Portrush, but common frog and toad seek them out each year to lay their spawn. The hidden pond to the left of the 14th (Valley) provides perfect breeding grounds for these carnivorous amphibians and the abundant vegetation attracts their insect prey aplenty. In the depths of the water, water boatman and backswimmer can be found and above the surface, on warmer days, when the sun makes an appearance from behind the clouds, adult damselflies and dragonflies can be found darting from reed to rush. Stay awhile to watch the females ovipositing into the shallow edges of the pond.



Common toad

Toads generally hunt at night and are most active in wet weather



Common blue damselfly

Females occur in two colour forms, one blue, as in the male, the other a dull green



Soft rush

Many birds will consume seeds of soft rush to supplement their diets

Hues of yellow begin to sprinkle the rough as spring progresses and pollinators peruse for additional resources. The sunshine-like flowers of coltsfoot, cat's-ear and rough hawkbit smatter the golf courses and gorse bursts into life, evident by the sweet coconut scent omnipresent in the air. There is an old saying that "when the gorse is out of bloom, kissing is out of fashion" referring to the fact that gorse is always in flower, somewhere!

The blooming of plentiful flowers correlates with an increase in winged insects creating a bounty of tasty morsels for newly arrived swallow and swift which dive-bomb and swoop to capture their prey. Tell the two apart quite easily by spotting the long tail streamers of swallow, compared to the pale brown colouring and shorter forked tail of swift, much like a torpedo.



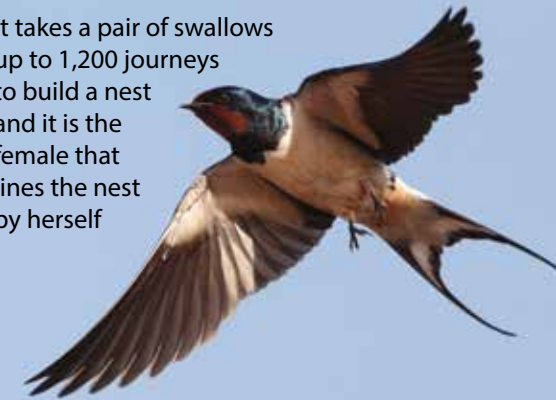
Coltsfoot

Unusual in that the flowers bloom and die before the appearance of any leaves, which earned it the name of "son before the father" in earlier times



Swallow

It takes a pair of swallows up to 1,200 journeys to build a nest and it is the female that lines the nest by herself



Cat's ear (rosette)

Also known as "false dandelion," as it is commonly mistaken for true dandelion

Summer



Royal Portrush is a delight throughout the year, but during summer, the courses truly come alive and there's nothing quite like a hot summer's day on the Dunluce or Valley courses. The wildflowers are in full bloom and the many bees, butterflies, day-flying moths and hoverflies are revelling in the pollen and nectar rich rough.

Summer is a particularly crucial time for the 97 native bee species in Northern Ireland as their broods are at their peak and require plentiful food to continue growing. Often overlooked are solitary bees, which include leafcutters, mining and mason bees – all of which do the jobs that their names suggest. At Royal Portrush, the many banks of exposed sand provide ideal nesting sites for species such as ashy mining bee. Small volcano-like mounds of earth mark the entrance to their nest sites and cuckoo bees can sometimes be seen monitoring the entrances for their chance to strike, much like the bird does to the meadow pipit nest!



Ashy mining bee

Most solitary bees collect pollen on their legs on specialised hairs called the scopa but these hairs do not form a basket like those found in honey bees



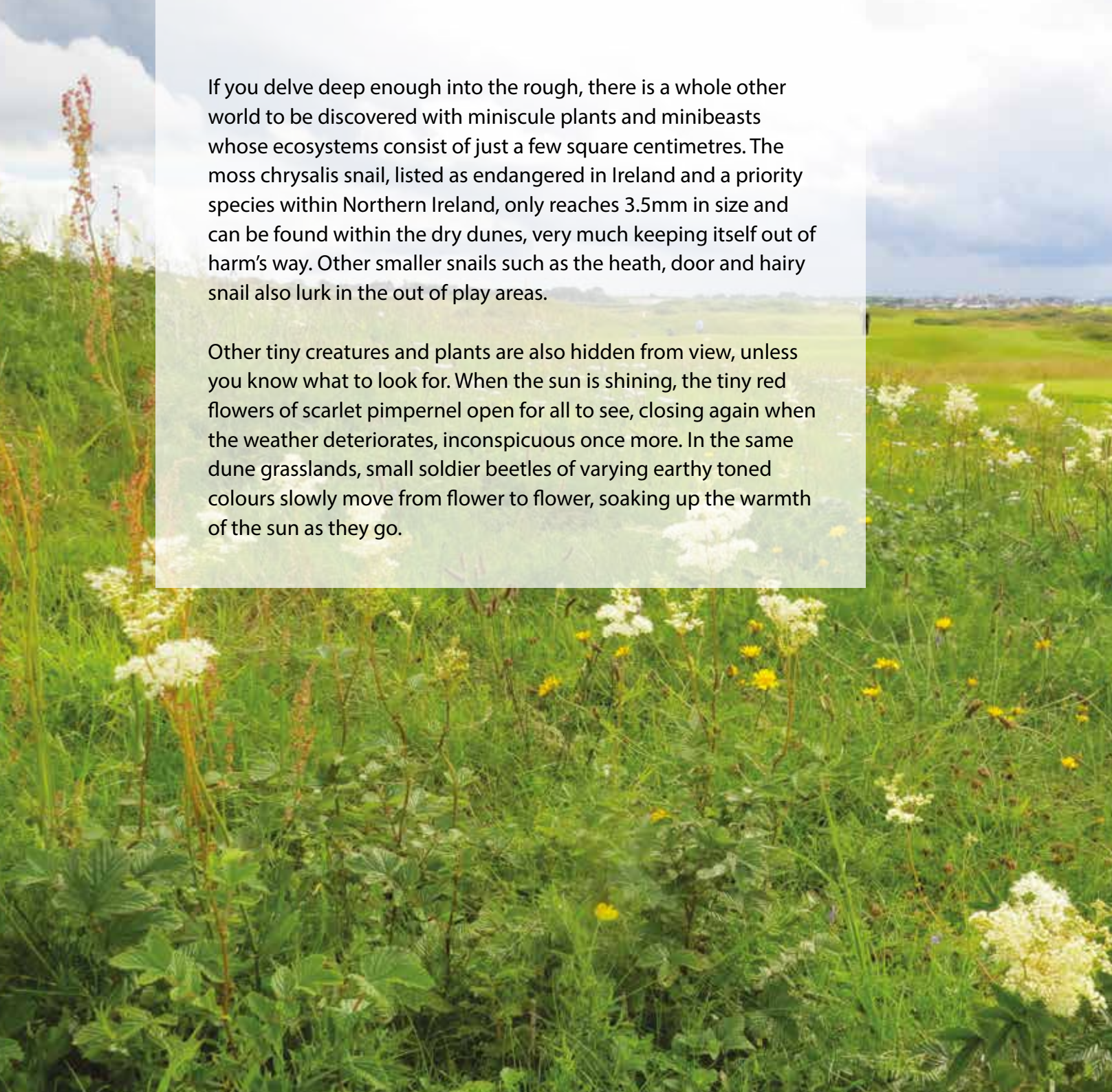
Bird's-foot trefoil

Also known as 'eggs and bacon' because of the yellow and orange hue of the pea-like flowers



Ringlet

Look for their characteristic bobbing flight in dull, cloudy conditions when most other butterflies are inactive



If you delve deep enough into the rough, there is a whole other world to be discovered with miniscule plants and minibeasts whose ecosystems consist of just a few square centimetres. The moss chrysalis snail, listed as endangered in Ireland and a priority species within Northern Ireland, only reaches 3.5mm in size and can be found within the dry dunes, very much keeping itself out of harm's way. Other smaller snails such as the heath, door and hairy snail also lurk in the out of play areas.

Other tiny creatures and plants are also hidden from view, unless you know what to look for. When the sun is shining, the tiny red flowers of scarlet pimpernel open for all to see, closing again when the weather deteriorates, inconspicuous once more. In the same dune grasslands, small soldier beetles of varying earthy toned colours slowly move from flower to flower, soaking up the warmth of the sun as they go.



Moss chrysalis snail

Sadly in decline in most of its Irish range, but still present within the sand dunes of the Valley and Dunluce courses



Hairy snail

The hairs are considered to help their movement in wet environments. Use a hand lens



Scarlet pimpernel

The flower is most widely known as the emblem of the fictional hero the Scarlet Pimpernel. Uncommon in the weaker thyme heath dunes left of 7th (Dunluce)

As more players fill the courses, disturbance from flying golf balls and trampling golfers send vibrations through the grassland and scrub, prompting a dispersal of harvestman spiders as they scuttle away to safety. Saddleback harvestman can be seen closer to the ground with their distinctive saddles, and if you look carefully, the eggs of common blue butterfly may be visible on the undersides of trefoil or clover plants.

Deep down in the grasslands, wild strawberry can also be found with its dainty white flowers from April to July. Miniature red strawberries appear soon after flowering, providing a delicious snack for any passer-by, golfer, bird or vole alike. The similar flowers of bramble also bloom in the same period, but blackberry fruits will not mature until the autumn months when small mammals gorge on their sweetness to see them into the winter.



Common blue butterfly

The caterpillar's foodplants include bird's-foot trefoil, of which there is plenty at Royal Portrush



Red clover

An extremely important nectar-rich plant, loved by a plethora of pollinators. Look carefully under the leaves to find butterfly eggs



Wild strawberry

The latin name, *Fragaria vesca*, is derived from the *fragare* = to be fragrant and *vesca* = edible

As the summer months progress, listen out for the harsh "korr kok" of pheasant as they're flushed out of their grassy sanctuaries by the increased foot traffic of golfers and their caddies. The marram-dominated dune grasslands, which are peppered with the white flowers of burnet rose and the pink florets of spear thistle, do not deter pheasant which spend their time foraging in the spiny mazes.

Patches of bracken can be found along the first few holes of the Dunluce, swaying like bright green feathers in the summer months. Dark green fritillary butterfly dance amongst the fronds from June onwards, only separated from the much rarer high brown fritillary by its green-hued underwing.



Pheasant

There are thought to be over 8 million pheasant in the countryside and a good number regularly overwinter on the courses

Burnet rose

The hips (seed pods) are purple whereas all other wild roses have red or scarlet hips



Spear thistle

Purple, fluffy-looking flowers sitting atop a spiny ball, best left alone



Dark green fritillary

Usually only seen flying singly or in twos, noted occasionally on the Valley course



In untouched areas of grassland, several species of orchid bloom, adding splashes of vivid pink and purple to the landscape. You can find northern marsh, pyramidal and twayblade orchid through the months of May to August, the latter often overlooked due to its paler yellow-green flowers, but nonetheless beautiful. Upon closer inspection, orchids have quite peculiar floral structures and the same can be said for eyebright, a small semi-parasitic plant. Eyebright keeps broad grasses at bay as it taps into their roots to siphon nutrients for its own use. Distinctive violet-like flowers with purple veins and orange centres make it hard to miss.



Common twayblade

The common name derives from the characteristic pair of leaves borne at the base of the flowering stalk



Pyramidal orchid

The seeds of most orchids do not contain enough nutrients to produce leaves and flowers initially, so to make up for this the seed relies on fungi in the soil to provide nourishment for germination and early establishment



Eyebright

The petals resemble bloodshot eyes, suggesting the plant's name and its supposed eye-clearing action

Autumn



Balmy autumn days and nights prolong the playing of the courses, and the wildlife sticks around too until the days draw in and the cold air arrives. Some plants continue to blossom well into October, rewarding late insects with delicious nectar. Ivy is valuable to many, with frequent visitors including red admiral, drone flies and other hoverflies.

The last of the year's bats forage along the boundaries and over the insect rich grasslands before congregating to mate and hibernate until spring comes around again. There are currently nine species of bat known to live and breed in Northern Ireland. Common pipistrelle, as the name suggests, are common and widespread. Soprano pipistrelle can also be found throughout the country, the two species only separated by their echolocation frequency – 55khz for soprano, and 46khz for common pipistrelle.



Ivy

One of the best wildlife plants, supporting excellent cover, nesting sites, nectar rich flowers and berries



Red admiral butterfly

The caterpillars feed on nettles, while the adult butterflies eat tree sap, bird droppings and fermenting fruit



Common dronefly

A stocky hoverfly that mimics bee drones (male hive bees)

Autumn is a month well renowned for fungi and there's plenty to wow visitors at Royal Portrush – the selection of waxcaps are particularly stunning. The red, orange and yellow tones of numerous species including the scarlet, butter, blackening and meadow waxcap all frequent the cropped and unmanaged areas of grassland. Further colourful fungus spreads over the branches of gorse in the form of witches' butter, with wet weather making this fungus much easier to find as it swells to form the yellow brain-like fruiting body. Another interesting fungus may fool you into thinking it is a stray golf ball, but on further inspection is seen to be a mosaic puffball.



Waxcap fungi

Important grassland species easily identified by their waxy surface and bright colours



Mosaic puffball

So-called due to the mosaic-like pattern of flakes that cover the surface of fruitbodies when they are young



Witches' butter

The latin name *Tremella mesenterica* translates to "trembling middle intestines"

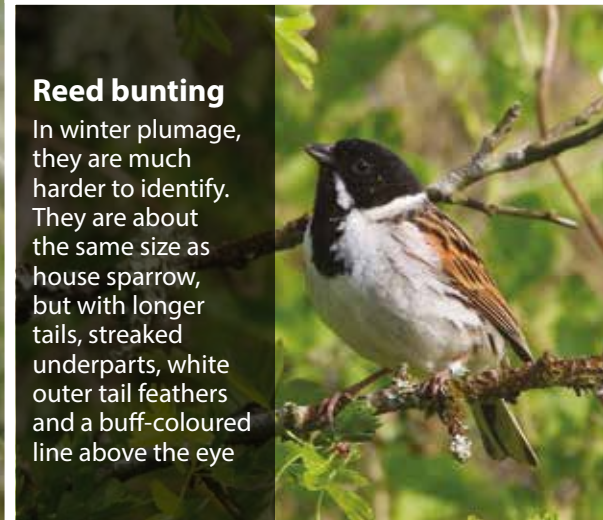
Listen for the “chak chak” alarm call of stonechat as they perch upon the hawthorn and gorse, seeking out the last of their insect prey. The fruits of bramble and elder will supplement their diet as the number of insects decline. Many songbirds, including stonechat and reed bunting, will alternate their diets with the seasons. Insects are favoured during the breeding season, and seeds and fruit through the cooler months.

See reed bunting clinging to bulrush alongside the 15th pond and watch over the dune slacks on the remaining warm days for confident new queen bumblebees as they seek nectar from early autumn flowering plants to fatten up for the long winter ahead.



Bramble

Dense bushes of bramble provide valuable protection for nesting birds and small mammals



Reed bunting

In winter plumage, they are much harder to identify. They are about the same size as house sparrow, but with longer tails, streaked underparts, white outer tail feathers and a buff-coloured line above the eye



Stonechat

Their name was given due to their call sounding like two stones being thrashed together

Tinges of blue and purple speckle the grasslands, with devil's bit scabious and greater knapweed replacing wild thyme to continue the reward of pollen and nectar for late pollinating insects. Autumn gentian also flowers late into October and is a sight to behold with its mauve tubular flowers. It is a biennial plant, meaning that its leaves grow in the first year, and the flowering stem appears in the second.

Blue tit and goldfinch continue to gather in small flocks and paint the courses with their brightly coloured feathers as they whisk through the air picking off the last of the juicy invertebrates. Watch as they flit from gorse to hawthorn to elder, like stepping stones across the land.



Autumn gentian

Gentians contain compounds which are nowadays best known as ingredients of bitter alcoholic drinks



Devil's bit scabious

The flowers are visited by various types of insects, but especially frequently by hoverflies of the genus *Eristalis*



Wild thyme

Tolerates pedestrian traffic and emits an aromatic fragrance of lemon when trampled upon

Goldfinch

Young goldfinch lack the red face of the adult, and are often known as grey pates



With the warm air still lingering, an early morning at Royal Portrush reveals twinkling gossamer across the land, created by tiny linyphiid spiders as they weave their silk. Autumn is also a good time to discover the variation of mosses which, if you look closely on your hands and knees, fill every pocket of the land. Dense fringe-moss with its fluffy matt tufts, bicoloured bryum like a green blanket and twisted moss, also known as star moss due to its appearance. Often disregarded, mosses are vitally important throughout the landscape and are an incredibly resilient group of plants that can withstand complete desiccation only to be brought to life again by a few drops of water.



Gossamer
Formed by money spiders, as the linyphiid family of spiders are more commonly known



Twisted moss
Used as a model organism in studies of desiccation



Six-spot burnet moth
Often found in complete stillness on flowerheads on a balmy autumn morning

Winter



As the year draws to a close, winter brings with it a new assemblage of wildlife, offering a change of scenery across the courses. Rook and carrion crow take shelter within the boundary trees, swooping down and staying awhile on the fairways when the coast is clear. A rook can be distinguished from a crow by its shaggy, cartoon-like appearance, 'baggy trousers' and a bare grey face and bill. The old saying "if there's more than one crow they are rooks, if there is only one rook it's a crow" doesn't always work, so it's best to look for those distinguishing features.

Other tricky birds include gulls. There are eight species known to frequent or reside in Northern Ireland and out on the Dunluce and Valley, four species are commonly seen, but which is which? Black-headed gull lose their black (actually brown) head through the winter replacing this with a dark spot just behind the eye, but do look for the red legs as these separate the species from the not so common, common gull. Common gull are about the same size as the black-headed gull but have yellow legs and will only occasionally be seen on the course. The larger gulls on the fairways are herring and lesser black-backed gull. These birds will roost and forage and in poorer weather conditions seek out shelter.



Rook

In flight the tail is more rounded than crow



Carrion crow

The name 'crow' is imitative of their calls



Black-headed gull (summer and winter plumage)

Rare inland over 100 years ago, however now they are the gull species most commonly seen in urban and suburban gardens



Despite the cold, short days, some flowers still brave blooming, so be on the lookout for the tiny, white, star-shaped flowers of chickweed and the purple labiate flowers of red dead nettle. On a bright December day, you could be lucky enough to spot a red admiral, the only nectar-loving butterfly that may make a rare appearance late in the year, seeking out additional reserves. Other species will have found their safe winter hibernation homes, or will be waiting out the cold spell cosied inside cocoons. Other insects seek shelter at this time of year too. Fallen leaf litter, fallen branches and the small gaps between roots, are the perfect hideaways for white-legged snake millipede, common pill woodlouse and dusky slug. These insects, crustaceans and molluscs now safely hidden away from robin and wren as they flit across golf holes, keeping players company.



Chickweed

The common name refers to the herb's appeal to birds and barnyard fowl, particularly young chickens



Red dead nettle

The whole plant is astringent, diaphoretic, diuretic, purgative and styptic



Wren

The second smallest bird in Northern Ireland after goldcrest

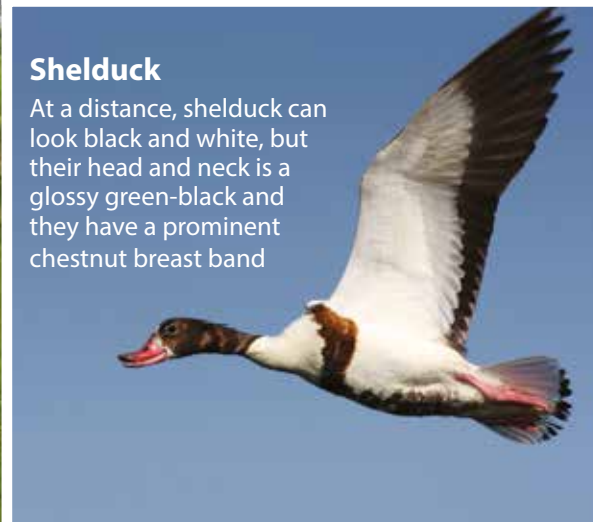
The fairways and turf nursery receive frequent trampling by oystercatcher over the winter period as they search for soft bodied delicacies to supplement their otherwise specialised diet of hard-shelled molluscs – cockles and mussels being their favourite, despite the name. Oystercatcher are perhaps one of the most colourful and evocative birds to be seen at Royal Portrush and these birds, with their black and white plumage and bright orange bills, can be heard from afar with their loud piping “kleep kleep” call as they fly overhead and in to land. Don’t be surprised if you see 30 or more birds on a single fairway, keeping safety in numbers.

Another bird, more often associated with intertidal habitats, also may be caught out and about on the courses. Shelduck, a big, colourful duck, has been known to forage for invertebrates over the fairways.



Oystercatcher

When in flight, they have an obvious white wing-stripe, a black tail and a white rump that extends as a ‘V’ between the wings



Shelduck

At a distance, shelduck can look black and white, but their head and neck is a glossy green-black and they have a prominent chestnut breast band



Pied wagtail

Gather in numbers for warmth on cold winter nights, listen out for their distinctive “chis-ick” call

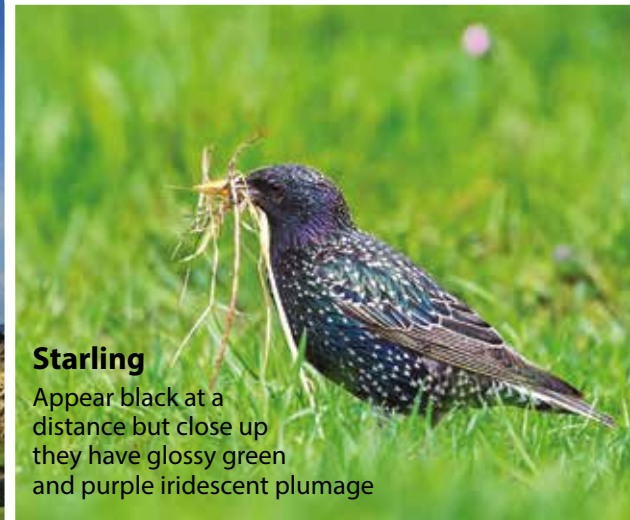
January brings other rewarding sights with flocks of snow bunting of over 20 individuals, often spotted on the driving range. These are large buntings, with striking 'snowy' plumages, though the females are more mottled above. In autumn and winter they develop a sandy-buff wash to their plumage which contrasts beautifully against snowfall. Snow bunting breed around the Arctic, from Scandinavia to Alaska, Canada and Greenland, migrating south in winter. Seed and insects collected from the turfed areas form an important part of their diet at this time of year.

Starling may displace snow bunting as they too fight for winter sustenance in the form of seed and insects, their bills acting as fine tines in the turf. They are a welcome visitor to the course due to their feeding habits, being much more preferable to those of crow and rook with their much broader bills.



Snow bunting

Can fly at speeds approaching 45km per hour



Starling

Appear black at a distance but close up they have glossy green and purple iridescent plumage



Wild carrot

Other common names include Queen-Anne's lace and bees' nest

February sparks hope for sunshine and spring's arrival. Milder spells, hopefully increasing as the month goes on, tempt ladybird and the queens of early bumblebee out of their overwintering sites in search of warmth and new nest sites. The first bright yellow flowers of lesser celandine appear and the paler lemon flowers of primrose too.

The dawn chorus builds to a crescendo as song thrush, blackbird and chaffinch welcome a new year and the approach to the breeding season which runs from March through to September, though some are early starters like woodpigeon which are known to breed throughout the year. The breeding season is not a rule of thumb however, and with climate change, eggs are being laid much earlier in the year – is this a precursor of things to come?



Ladybird

An adult ladybird can eat up to 50 aphids in one day



Early bumblebee

Bumblebee colonies have a yearly lifecycle and new queens emerge each spring



Chaffinch

Male chaffinches will start to defend their breeding territories as early as February, but nest building will not begin until at least April

Activities



Quiz

What are the first migrant birds to arrive in April?

Which bird species likes to sing from a height?

What height can skylark fly upto?

Which birds' nests does the cuckoo at Royal Portrush prefer to lay their eggs in?

Which is the first butterfly to emerge in spring?

What is the size of the moss chrysalis snail?

Are frog and toad herbivores or carnivores?

Some female common blue damselfly aren't blue, what colour are they instead?

What does gorse smell like?

How many journeys do swallows make to build a nest?

How many native bee species are there in Northern Ireland?

What are the hairs called that bees have to help collect pollen?

How big is the moss chrysalis snail?

What colour are the flowers of wild strawberry?

What does '*fragare*' translate as?



Which butterfly species can be found alongside bracken?

What colour are the hips of burnet rose?

What term is used to describe the nutrient-stealing nature of eyebright?

How many species of bat are known to live and breed in Northern Ireland?

At what frequency do soprano pipistrelle echolocate?

What fungi looks like a golf ball?

What is the growth habit of autumn gentian?

What is the name for the fine webs spun by money spiders?

What colour is the head of a black-headed gull?

What late flowering plant attracts red admiral?

How many pairs of legs do millipedes have per segment?

What comprises the diet of oystercatcher?

Where do snow buntings breed?

What is one of the first flowers to bloom in the year?

How long is the lifecycle of a bumblebee?

How many aphids can an adult ladybird consume in one day?



Tick off the species you find

Plants

- Autumn hawkbit
- Bird's-foot trefoil
- Bluebell
- Bulbous buttercup
- Burnet rose
- Bush vetch
- Cat's-ear
- Cocksfoot
- Common sorrel
- Common sow thistle
- Common spotted orchid
- Common twayblade
- Corsican pine
- Creeping buttercup
- Creeping soft grass
- Creeping willow
- Dandelion
- Dewberry/Rubus agg.
- Dog rose
- Early hairgrass
- Eyebright
- Fairy flax
- False oat grass
- Fodder vetch
- Germander speedwell
- Greater knapweed
- Harebell
- Hawthorn
- Herb Robert
- Hogweed
- Japanese rose
- Kidney vetch
- Lady's bedstraw
- Lesser stitchwort
- Mare's-tail
- Marram
- Meadow vetchling
- Meadowsweet
- Milkwort
- Mouse-ear hawkweed
- Nipplewort
- Northern marsh orchid
- Perennial ryegrass
- Portland spurge
- Pyramidal orchid
- Quaking grass
- Ragwort
- Red clover
- Red fescue
- Reindeer moss
- Ribwort plantain
- Rosebay willowherb
- Rough hawkbit
- Rough meadow-grass
- Scots pine
- Sea buckthorn
- Sheep's fescue
- Slender thistle
- Southern marsh orchid
- Stinging nettle
- Sweet vernal grass
- Thyme leaved speedwell
- Tormentil
- Tufted vetch
- White clover
- Wild carrot
- Wild strawberry
- Wild thyme
- Yarrow
- Yorkshire fog



Mosses & lichens

- Springy turf moss – *Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus*
- Twisted moss – *Tortula ruraliformis*



Fungi

- Blackening waxcap
- Butter waxcap
- Common puffball
- Fairy ring
- Field mushroom
- Ink cap
- Meadow waxcap
- Scarlet waxcap
- Shaggy inkcap
- Witches butter/Yellow brain fungus



Invertebrates

- Common blue butterfly
- Common harvestman
- Dark green fritillary
- Gatekeeper
- Marsh fritillary
- Orange tip
- Peacock
- Red admiral
- Ringlet
- Saddleback harvestman
- Small tortoiseshell



Birds

- Blackbird
- Blackcap
- Blue tit
- Buzzard
- Chaffinch
- Cuckoo
- Dunnock
- Goldcrest
- Goldfinch
- Grasshopper warbler
- House sparrow
- Kestrel
- Linnet
- Magpie
- Meadow pipit
- Merlin
- Oystercatcher
- Pheasant
- Reed bunting
- Reed warbler
- Robin
- Rook
- Sand martin
- Sedge warbler
- Shelduck
- Short-eared owl
- Skylark
- Snipe
- Song thrush
- Sparrowhawk
- Starling
- Stonechat
- Swallow
- Wheatear
- Whitethroat
- Willow warbler
- Woodpigeon
- Wren
- Yellowhammer



Name that bird









Name that flower









Name that grass





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