

## What is Biodiversity?

Biodiversity or Biological Diversity is simply the variety of living things around us. Micro organisms, plants, invertebrates, birds and mammals all make up biodiversity in an ecosystem. Biodiversity is all around us including our gardens, parks, fields, lakes and rivers, people are also important for biodiversity as their actions can improve it or destroy it!



Biodiversity is important to the economy, to people and to culture and heritage. Without biodiversity we would not have the raw materials to make clothing and medicine and many people would not have jobs in industries such as agriculture, tourism and fishing. Many people also appreciate biodiversity through leisure activities such as hiking in the countryside or bird watching.

Every one of us needs to play our part in looking after our native plants and animals.

Here at Creggan Country Park, we value and depend on our natural surroundings and through a range of projects we aim to protect and enhance biodiversity on our 100-acre site. By doing this we can create a safe habitat for a wide range of invertebrates, birds and mammals and we also improve the visual aspect of our site so that visitors can appreciate the beauty of local wildlife.



## Why is biodiversity important at Creggan Country Park?

Creggan Country Park aims to increase biodiversity on its 100-acre site through annual tree and wildflower planting, clean ups and environmental workshops such as nest box building, with the help of local schools and community groups.

In 2007, 1000 native trees and 500 wildflowers were planted, local schools and community groups helped carry out scrub clearance and path maintenance, a bird feeding area was created, and a large willow dome structure with seating was installed. Picnic areas were also created beside the activity centre, bird tables and nest boxes were installed at various areas of the site and a range of workshops were delivered to pupils from local schools on how to help wildlife.



## Derry's Local Biodiversity Action Plan

In January 2007, Derry City Council employed a Biodiversity Officer to develop a Local Biodiversity Action Plan for Derry; the Derry and District Biodiversity Partnership was then set up. The partnership consists of local stakeholders and interest groups, including Creggan Country Park, and the aim of the partnership is to ensure local biodiversity issues are being addressed.

The Biodiversity Action Plan is set out to protect and enhance biodiversity in the rural and urban areas of Derry and thus provide a clean, safe, accessible and sustainable environment for people to enjoy while also looking after the health and well being of its communities. More information on the LBAP is available from Derry City Council's Biodiversity Officer. Future projects at



Creggan Country Park will compliment this action plan by helping protect listed species that inhabit Creggan Country Park.

## How you can help biodiversity

- Feed birds in your garden or at school, especially during winter months
- Take part in annual tree planting workshops at Creggan Country Park
- Build a nest box for a barn owl or bats as part of the Nest Box Challenge each year at Creggan Country Park
- Plant a hedgerow – they're great for birds!
- Create a log pile in your garden for insects to live
- Make your own window box
- Attend Derry City Council Biodiversity Festivals in Spring and Autumn



# Mammals at Creggan Country Park

## What is a mammal?

A mammal is an animal with a backbone. They are warm-blooded, breathe air, and the females have milk-secreting glands for feeding their young. It is important to track and monitor mammal species in order to conserve their population, but we can only protect a mammal if we know where it occurs.

Mammal species detected in and around Creggan Country Park's 100-acre site include: Hedgehogs, Foxes, Pygmy Shrews, Rabbits, Bats, Field mice and even an Otter.



Following an interview with staff and some regular visitors to the fishery at Creggan Country Park, it was revealed that an Otter (*Lutra lutra*) has been spotted on the 100-acre site several times over the years. Since the Otter is always alone and there has been no evidence of feeding areas or a Holt, we can only assume that the otter is a visitor from another site.

## Conducting a mammal search

Ecologists use a variety of techniques to detect the presence of mammals:

- Sightings
- Finding signs i.e. droppings, tracks, feeding remains, smells
- Hearing a call
- Interviewing people living in an area to obtain records of sightings and other signs



## Some important equipment in mammal tracking:

Maps, collection jars, rubber gloves (for handling droppings if necessary), recording forms/information sheets and binoculars – in case you see an mammal in the distance

## Other important things to note before you begin a mammals search:

- Wear dark clothes
- Do not move if you spot a mammal, if you must, move very slowly
- Avoid wearing perfume or aftershave as mammals have a keen sense of smell

## Some tips on mammal tracking

- Choose an area of interest, this could be a dense woodland area
- Bring all equipment
- Choose a spot to sit and take in surroundings
- Locate area on map, make notes of trees, vegetation, draw diagram if possible
- Begin walk to identify footprints and other signs using ID charts
- Record all observations
- Take cast of footprints if possible
- Take photos – especially if there is evidence of feeding

## Bats at Creggan Country Park

Bats are mammals too! Like all mammals they have hair or fur on their body, are warm blooded and the young feed on the mother's milk. Bats are the only mammal in the world capable of flight; they really are amazing! People associate bats with Halloween, vampires and all things creepy but in fact bats are totally harmless, they do not attack humans and they don't try to stick to your hair. However, if you happen to visit South or Central America, you might come across the Vampire Bat, which feeds on the blood of other animals. Here in Ireland and Britain however, our bats eat only insects. A single bat can eat up to 3000 insects in one night and so play an important part in keeping our insect populations under control!

## Bat species at Creggan Country Park:

- Daubenton's Bat
- Common Pipistrelle
- Soprano Pipistrelle
- Leisler's Bat



Photo courtesy of NI Bat Group.

There are 17 species of bat in Britain and Ireland, 8 of which can be found here in the north of Ireland. All bats are protected by law because their numbers are in fact in decline, mainly because of habitat loss as bats rely on hedgerows and woodlands for feeding and roosting. Bats are also featured on Derry's Local Biodiversity Action Plan, ensuring that steps will be taken to protect our bat population in the City.

Bats choose various places throughout the year to roost; suitable places could be a cave, a roof space, hollows in trees or even houses! For a few weeks during summer, a female bat will find a warm location to have her babies and will keep them there until they are strong enough to feed and fly on their own. In winter, bats hibernate in cool dark areas, their heart rate and breathing slow way down and their temperature drops so that they waste little energy.

Bats are NOT blind; they can see just as well as humans. Since they hunt for food at night their ears are more important as they catch prey using a technique called echolocation. As the bat flies around it sends out signals, the returning echoes give the bat information about the location, shape and size of the insect, the bat then catches its prey in mid air. The sounds the bat makes cannot be heard by a human ear, as it is too high pitched. We can hear these sounds if we use a bat detector, an instrument used in bat surveys.

The Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) announced in July 2008 that bats have been added to its set of 'indicator species,' which help measure progress towards the British Government's target of halting biodiversity loss by 2010.

Bats are an important part of our natural heritage, and are indicators of a healthy environment.

Creggan Country Park now offers mammal tracking (including bat detecting) as part of its environmental education programme 'Nature's Classroom.' Contact our Environmental Officer for more information.



## More local places to explore Wildlife

**Prehen Wood** – Why not visit this ancient woodland and see the red squirrel in its natural habitat.

**Lough Foyle** – Our very own Ramsar site! Take some time out and visit this spectacular site which is host to an incredible number of wintering birds including Whooper swans which come all the way from Iceland! (Magilligan/Benone Strand can also be included in these trips).

**Brooke Park** – This 100 year old parkland is host to an amazing variety of ancient trees and birds.

**Banagher Glen** – Located just outside Dungiven this site is very similar to Creggan Country Park as it is now used to supply water to the City. Look out for a range of birds including Buzzards and Sparrow hawks. Creggan Country Park now offers educational trips to Banagher Glen to explore its History and Natural Heritage.

## Useful Contacts

Biodiversity Officer, Derry City Council  
028 71365 151

Northern Ireland Environment Agency  
028 9056 9605

RSPB (Birds and Wildlife advice)  
01767 693 690

Northern Ireland Bat Group (to report injured bats)  
028 90292138

For more information about Creggan Country Park's environmental education programme 'Nature's Classroom' contact Karen Healy, the Environmental Officer at the Creggan Country Park.

For information about the historical tours available at the Creggan Country Park and associated sites contact Mickey Cooper, Heritage Co-ordinator at the Creggan Country Park. All the tours are organised in association with our partner organisation derrybluebadgeguide ([www.derrybluebadgeguide.com](http://www.derrybluebadgeguide.com)) which specialises in walking and coach tours of Derry and beyond. For further details on all of the above contact (028) 71363133 or [info@creggancountrypark.com](mailto:info@creggancountrypark.com).



# Creggan Country Park Biodiversity in the Park

By Karen Healy, Environmental Officer, Creggan Country Park

