

Mí na Nollag – Gairdín éan na scoile

Paddy Madden continues his series of SESE tips

December

Hands-on: the school bird garden



Stonechat. Pic: Mary Twomey.

What is it?

An area or areas in the school grounds devoted to trees, shrubs, climbers, grasses and other herbaceous plants, feeders and nesting sites for the welfare of birds.

Background information

Some bird species are in serious decline mainly because of loss of habitat. Schools can remedy this by making the school grounds bird-friendly.

Did you know?

In the survey, Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland 2008-2013 conducted by BirdWatch Ireland and the RSPB (Northern Ireland), alarming declines in a number of bird populations across the island were identified. Those that had declined by over 70% were placed on a 'Red List'. Some of these included the barn owl, corncrake, yellowhammer (90% decline), and yellow wagtail. 25 in total have been allocated to this list. In

1999 there were 18 on the list.

The Countryside Bird Survey 1998-2010 identified an increase in Goldfinches and Stonechats but a decline in skylarks, kestrels, greenfinches, swifts and grey wagtails. The most notable decline was in the goldcrest species.

Very few children recognise the chaffinch, one of our commonest birds!

A sample of some feeders:

- ✦ Tits love caterpillars, spiders and greenflies which they

find on trees, bushes, annuals and herbaceous plants.

- ✦ Finches love the seeds found in a wildflower meadow and a sunflower forest.
- ✦ Starlings and blackbirds love a lawn area where they find leatherjackets and worms.
- ✦ Dunnocks and robins love leaf litter where they find a great variety of invertebrates such as slugs and worms.
- ✦ Thrushes love snails, worms and berries.

A bird survey

Are the school grounds bird friendly?

Food

Shrubs with berries?

Pyracantha	Cotoneaster	Holly	Privet	Viburnum opulus
Honeysuckle	Ivy			

Native shrubs with berries?

Holly	Wild privet	Honeysuckle	Bramble
-------	-------------	-------------	---------

Trees with fruit and seed?

Hawthorn	Elder	Bird cherry
Alder	Rowan	Crab apple

Shrubs with insects?

Hawthorn-149*	Blackthorn-109*	Dog-rose-100*	Hazel-73*	Holly-7*
---------------	-----------------	---------------	-----------	----------

Trees with insects?

Oak-284*	Willow-266*	Birch-229*	Crab-93*	Scots Pine-91*
Alder-90*	Elm-82*	Ash-41*	Lime-31*	Sycamore-15*

Flowers with seed?

Sunflowers	Teasel	Snapdragon	Asters	Wild grasses
------------	--------	------------	--------	--------------

Other food sources

Rotting logs	Heap of leaf mould	Leaf litter	Nuts in a feeder	Bird table with food
Suet or lard balls	Water in container	Apples strewn on grass		

Health

Bird bath	Hollow place with sand	Muddy place
-----------	------------------------	-------------

Shelter

Thick hedge	Evergreen shrubs	Wooded area
-------------	------------------	-------------

Nesting

Honeysuckle	Hole in tree trunk	Native hedgerow	Stone wall with crevices
Trees of different heights	Evergreen shrubs & trees	Nesting boxes (facing north east, east or south east)	
Wide eaves for swifts, starlings & sparrows		String bags with feathers, wool, hair & moss for nest	

* The figure refers to the number of insect species found on the tree.

Paddy Madden & Marian Rollins



Blackberries. Pic: Mary Twomey.



Mistle thrush on a Yew tree. Pic: Mary Twomey.



Dunnock. Pic: Mary Twomey.



Literacy/Litearthacht

✦ **Bird habitat/Gnáthóg Éan:** A place that has food and shelter for birds. *Áit a bhfuil bia agus dídean ann d'éin.*

✦ **Bird-feeder/Beathadán Éan:** A hanging container which has food such as nuts and seeds for birds. *Soitheach ar crochadh a bhfuil bia (cnónna agus síolta, mar shampla) ann d'éin.*

✦ **Bird-table/Bord Éan:** A moveable table

on which food is placed daily for birds to eat. *Bord inaistrithe ar a gcuirtear, go laethúil, bia d'éin.*

✦ **Bird-box/Bosca Éan:** Wooden box with suitable openings to attract different species of birds to nest. *Bosca déanta as adhmaid le hoscailtí oiriúnacha ann chun speicis dhifriúla d'éin a mhealladh chuige chun nead a thógáil ann.*

✦ **Bird-hide/Falachán Éanbhreathnóireachta:** A camouflaged viewing shelter to spot birds.

Dídean a bhfuil duaithníocht curtha air ionas gur féidir breathnú ar éin uaidh.

✦ **Leaf-litter/Easair Dhuilli:** Rotting leaves under trees which attract many species of vertebrates and invertebrates for feeding and shelter. *Duilleoga lofa faoi chrainn a mheallann chun beathaithe agus chun dídine go leor speiceas de veirteabraigh agus d'inveirteabraigh.*

Buíochas do Marie Whelton (MIE) don aistriúchán.

Suitable plants to attract birds to the garden

Trees		Rowan (<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>), Crab Apple (<i>Malus sylvestris</i>), Birch (<i>Betula pendula</i>), Oak (<i>Quercus petraea and robur</i>) and Willow (<i>Salix spp</i>)
Shrubs	<i>Native</i>	Hazel (<i>Corylus avellana</i>), Hawthorn (<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>), Holly (<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>), Bird Cherry (<i>Prunus padus</i>)
	<i>Non-native</i>	Herring-bone plant (<i>Cotoneaster horizontalis</i>), Firethorn (<i>Pyracantha 'Orange Glow'</i>), June Berry (<i>Amelanchier canadensis</i>), Butterfly Bush (<i>Buddleia spp</i>), Quince (<i>Chaenomeles japonica</i>).
Climbers	<i>Native</i>	Ivy (<i>Hedera helix</i>), Dogrose (<i>Rosa canina</i>), Sweet Briar (<i>Rosa rubiginosa</i>), Honeysuckle (<i>Lonicera periclymenum</i>), Bramble (<i>Rubus fruticosus</i>)
Herbaceous plants	<i>Native</i>	Teazel (<i>Dipsacus sylvestris</i>), Common Knapweed (<i>Centaurea nigra</i>), Meadowsweet (<i>Filipendula ulmaris</i>), Lesser Burdock (<i>Arctium minus</i>), Common Bird's-Foot-Trefoil (<i>Lotuscorniculatus</i>).
	<i>Non native</i>	Sunflower (<i>Helianthus anuus</i>), Snapdragon (<i>Antirrhium spp</i>), Michaelmas Daisies (<i>Aster spp</i>), Honesty (<i>Lunaria biennis</i>), Common Evening Primrose (<i>Oenothera biennis</i>)



Holly

Planting

- ✦ Plant bare-rooted trees and shrubs to make a mini-wood or hedgerow in any month with an 'r' except September and April. Include a log-habitat in the wood.
- ✦ Sow a wildflower meadow in

April or September.

Strategies

1. Place bird-boxes with different sizes of entrance holes and gaps in place in mid-winter.
2. From November to March (earlier if weather is very cold)

- provide birds with food on a bird table or hanging feeder. Clean bird-table regularly with boiling water and move regularly as well.
- 3. Supply fresh water daily.
- 4. Ensure that feeding continues over the school breaks.

Resources Websites mentioned plus:

- ✦ www.futureforests.net Good source for native trees and shrubs. They will send these to schools bare rooted.
- ✦ www.birdwatchireland.ie Good site relating to birds in Ireland.
- ✦ www.rspb.co.uk Good site for identifying birds and listening to their calls.
- ✦ www.naturedetectives.org.uk Good site for activities on studying birds in school.
- ✦ www.learnnc.org/lp/media/articles/wildnb0701/birddiagram.pdf Parts of a bird.
- ✦ www.biology.ie Submission of bird sightings.
- ✦ www.enfo.ie

- General information on birds.
- ✦ www.birdsireland.com/ Website of bird expert, Eric Dempsey.
- ✦ www.fatbirdier.com/links_geo/europe/ireland.html Interesting facts on birds in different counties.
- ✦ *The complete field-guide to Ireland's birds*, by Eric Dempsey and Michael O'Clery (Gill & Macmillan, 2010)
- ✦ *Pocket guide to the common birds of Ireland*, by Eric Dempsey and Michael O'Clery (Gill & Macmillan, 1995)
- ✦ *Birdwatching in Ireland with Eric Dempsey* (Gill & Macmillan, 1995)
- ✦ *Go Wild at School, Chapter 5 A Bird Sanctuary.*

Linking to the curriculum

- ✦ **Make a bird hide.** Find a huge cardboard box. Paint it with colours that match its surroundings. Cut out holes shaped like a letterbox for viewing. Site it in an area frequented by birds. To prevent it being blown away tie the four corners with string to stakes hammered into the ground. Cover with polythene in wet weather.
- ✦ **Make a string nesting bundle in the spring.** Gather materials such as straw, dry grass, dry moss, feathers, wool, hair and cotton. Use a forked branch c. 30 cm long as an anchor. Place the material in the fork and then wind the string around it. Hang it from the stump end onto a branch. *Gardeners' World* Jan. 2008.
- ✦ See www.birdwatchireland.ie for 18 school projects on birds which include design and make activities and surveys on birds around the school grounds.
- ✦ See www.blackrockec.ie/content/current-projects-for-information-on-a (a) How to make a bird-feeder (November); How to make a bird-table (December); How to make a bird-box (December); Birdfeeding during winter (January).
- ✦ **Drawing birds** using Gordon Darcy's book *Narture*: See www.gordondarcy.ie

Tits on a home made bird feeder. Pic: Cormac Madden.



Haws



Starling.
Pic: Mary Twomey.



Cotoneaster



Robin on bird table.
Pic: Cormac Madden.



Bullfinch.
Pic: Mary Twomey.



PADDY MADDEN lectures on SESE in the Marino Institute of Education. He also gives short courses to whole staffs on school gardening. His book *Go Wild At School*, has recently been reprinted. Available for €18 from paddy.madden@mie.ie (Includes p&p). Mor info on school gardens on www.schooleartheid.ie