



# WILDFLOWERS OF LOUGH CARRA *PART THREE*

A selection of 14 Wetland Flowers found around Lough Carra



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## What are wetlands?

Wetlands are ecosystems where the land is saturated with water, either permanently or seasonally. This creates a unique environment that supports a diverse range of plant and animal species, many of which are specially adapted to waterlogged conditions. Wetlands are often transitional areas between aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems and include habitats such as fen, marsh and reed swamp. Lough Carra's water level rises and falls by around a metre, and since much of the shoreline is relatively flat, significant areas are inundated, making these habitats quite important.

Fen habitat is formed when a layer of peat builds up on an alkaline substrate, such as Carra's marl lakebed. Fen habitat is typified by the presence of plants such as Black Bog-rush, Sedges, Grass-of-Parnassus, Devil's-bit Scabious etc.

Marsh habitats form on waterlogged soils (but not on peat) and have rich plant communities. They are distinguished from fens by the absence of Black bog-rush and the presence of plants such as Marsh Thistle, Yellow Flag Iris etc.

Reedswamps occur on the edge of many of the bays and grade almost imperceptibly into the aquatic habitat. They are mostly dominated by Common Reed which forms dense stands in some places, but in many locations there are also dense stands of Great Fen Sedge and True Bulrush.

These areas surrounding Lough Carra are of great conservation importance. Wetland wildflowers serve as indicators of ecological health. Their presence signals a well-functioning ecosystem with minimal human disturbance, as many of these species are sensitive to grazing pressure, and land management practices.

Habitat loss and changes in land use can all negatively impact the delicate balance of wetland ecosystems. Many of the wildflowers that thrive in Carra's wetlands are vulnerable to even small changes in their environment. Any increase in nutrients from fertilizers threatens the survival of sensitive species.

## Distribution map for each species

Each of the species illustrated is accompanied by a distribution map from the National Biodiversity Data Centre. The small, coloured blocks indicate the number of records of the relevant species per 10km block. Green indicates 0 records; Yellow indicates 1 to 100 records and Orange to Red is 101 to 460 records. For more information visit [www.biodiversityireland.ie](http://www.biodiversityireland.ie)

## Introduction

The wetlands of Lough Carra are home to a rich and diverse array of wildflowers, each contributing to the ecological health and beauty of the landscape. From the delicate blooms of Grass of Parnassus to the graceful Lesser Butterfly Orchid, these plants are not only a joy to behold but are vital components of a wetland ecosystem. Many of these wildflowers are specially adapted to the nutrient-poor, lime-rich soils that characterize Lough Carra's wetlands. These plants help stabilize soils, reduce erosion, and provide habitat and food for a wide array of wildlife.

## YELLOW IRIS

Latin name  
*Iris pseudacorus*

Irish name  
*Feileastram*

Height  
Up to 1  
metre

Flowering time  
May - July

### Where to find

Marsh habitats including wet fields and watercourses. They can be seen in the fields along the Ballintubber stream and Annie's river

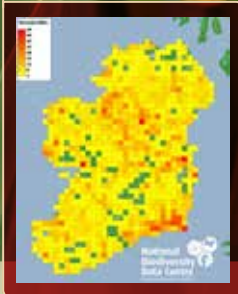
### Pollination

Bees (bumblebees and honeybees) and hoverflies are the primary pollinators



### Special Note ★★★★★

A symbol of beauty in Irish mythology, the appearance of the 'flag' heralds the arrival of summer. Its graceful drooping yellow flowers, paired with tall, blade-like leaves, grow from underground rhizomes that can spread extensively. In autumn they produce large buoyant capsules which contain numerous seeds. Once used in folk medicine to cure coughs and toothache. It is Ireland's only native Iris



## PURPLE LOOSESTRIFE

Latin name  
*Lythrum salicaria*

Irish name  
*Créachtach*

Height  
1.5  
metres

Flowering time  
June - August

### Where to find

Fen, damp ditches and wet patches and on the lake edge

### Pollination

Bees and hoverflies, Emperor moth and Elephant Hawk-moth, Brimstone butterflies



### Special Note ★★★★★

This native plant, with striking magenta spikes, adds vibrant colour from midsummer through autumn. Its prolonged blooming season offers essential nectar to pollinators, including late-emerging insects, at a time when many other nectar sources have diminished. It has deep roots that can withstand fluctuating water levels, making it well-suited to the lake shore environment



## LESSER WATER-PLANTAIN



Latin name  
*Baldellia ranunculoides*

Irish name  
*Corrchopóg bheag*



Flowering time  
June - August

Where to find

Marshy land along the lake shore

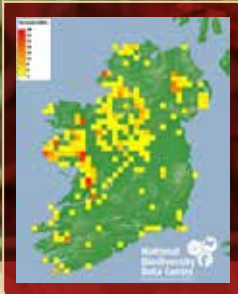
Pollination

A favourite for bees but also visited by butterflies



Special Note ★★★★★

Found along the semi-aquatic fringes of Lough Carra, this dainty creeping plant features white, pink-tinged flowers and grass-like basal leaves. When crushed, it releases a distinctive coriander scent. Often an indicator of good water quality, its habitat at the lough is increasingly coming under threat. Most commonly found in the west of Ireland where it thrives in nutrient-poor wetlands



## EARLY MARSH ORCHID



Latin name  
*Dactylorhiza incarnata*

Irish name  
*Magairlín mór*



Flowering time  
May - July

Where to find

Fen habitat around the lakeshore

Pollination

Primarily bumblebees but also by flies and beetles

Special Note ★★★★★

This orchid thrives around Carra, particularly in the fen and grassland habitats of the Kilkeeran Peninsula. It produces a spike of flowers patterned with dots, with the colour varying from purple to white. Like all orchids, it relies on a symbiotic relationship with fungi. However, inappropriate grazing and habitat loss continue to threaten all orchid species around the lake



## LARGE-FLOWERED BUTTERWORT



Latin name  
*Pinguicula grandiflora*

Irish name  
*Leith uisce*



Flowering time  
May - July

### Where to find

Heath, bog and fen habitats

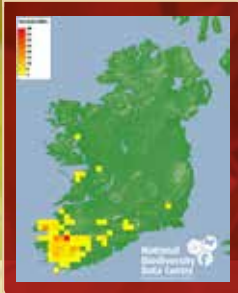
### Pollination

Butterflies, moths and bees with long tongues that won't get stuck to the sticky leaves



### Special Note ★★★★★

One of Ireland's Lusitanian Flora – this is a small group of plants that occur in the south and west of Ireland and in the north west of the Iberian peninsula (north Spain and Portugal). It is a very rare plant found in Cork, Limerick and Clare but it was recently discovered on the shores of Lough Carra. Several plants were first identified flowering in a damp meadow near Moorehall in 2023. It is an insectivorous plant with sticky leaves that trap insects which the plant then digests to obtain vital nutrients

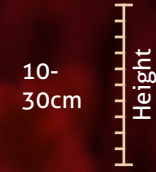


## FEN VIOLET



Latin name  
*Viola persicifolia*

Irish name  
*None*



Flowering time  
April - July

### Where to find

Fen and wetland habitat close to the lake shore

### Pollination

Various insects but is also self-pollinating

### Special Note ★★★★★

Fen violets are a rare and delicate plant found in the fens at Lough Carra. With lilac-blue flowers and deep green narrow leaves, they thrive in damp limestone soils and short calcareous grasslands.

Now critically endangered, with populations restricted to a few areas in the west, fen violets rely on traditional land management practices and appropriate grazing to maintain their fragile habitat



## MARSH MARIGOLD



Latin name  
*Caltha palustris*

Irish name  
*Lus buí Bealtaine*



Flowering time  
March - July

### Where to find

Damp areas by rivers, ponds, meadows, woodland, fen, bogs

### Pollination

Syrphid flies (that mimic wasps and bees) and small bees



### Special Note ★★★★★

Recognized for its glossy leaves and radiant yellow, cup-like flowers that bloom in early spring and provide early nectar for pollinators. Bees are drawn to its flowers as they stand out in their visual spectrum. Adapted to marshy conditions, with stems containing air spaces above and below water level. This plant was closely tied to the May festival and hung over doors to ward off evil



## WATER AVENS



Latin name  
*Geum rivale*

Irish name  
*Machall uisce*



Flowering time  
May - September

### Where to find

Marshy habitat including bogs and damp riversides

### Pollination

Primarily bumblebees and hoverflies



### Special Note ★★★★★

A charming wildflower forms dense clusters of plants in the damp meadows and wet places around Carra. It is a member of the rose family and has nodding bell-shaped orange-pink petals which hang from a purple stem. While it thrives in damp habitats it is not aquatic. Though still common, the loss of wetland habitats due to drainage and agricultural intensification poses a threat to its populations



## BOGBEAN



Latin name  
*Menyanthes trifoliata*

Irish name  
*Báchrán*



Flowering time  
March - June

### Where to find

Fen and bog habitat in pools of shallow water and wet flushes

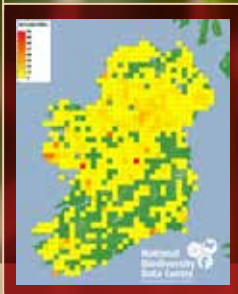
### Pollination

Small aquatic insects, flies, gnats



### Special Note ★★★★★

This plant thrives in bogs, with its name deriving from its bean-like fruit. Bogbean is recognized by its clusters of star-shaped white flowers that rise above dense masses of trifoliate leaves, while its roots remain submerged in water. It spreads through creeping on rhizomes through shallow water, and its seeds are dispersed by water and birds. Bogbean was boiled into a tonic to purify the blood. It is an important food plant for Elephant hawkmoth caterpillars

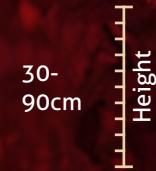


## WATER MINT



Latin name  
*Mentha aquatica*

Irish name  
*Mismín mionsach*



Flowering time  
July - October

### Where to find

Marsh habitat around the lake and in the catchment where there are water-logged soils

### Pollination

Wide range of pollinators, attracting bees, butterflies and moths



### Special Note ★★★★★

This fragrant plant can be found growing in the damp marshes around the lough. Along with its distinctive minty scent, it is recognizable by its purple-tinted stems, rounded leaves, and dense clusters of lilac flowers that bloom from mid-summer to early autumn. Long valued for its medicinal uses, particularly in treating digestive ailments



## MARSH THISTLE



Latin name  
*Cirsium palustre*

Irish name  
*Feo Chadán corraigh*



Flowering time  
*June - September*

### Where to find

Marsh habitats, wet grassland.  
Often found in same location as  
Purple Loosestrife

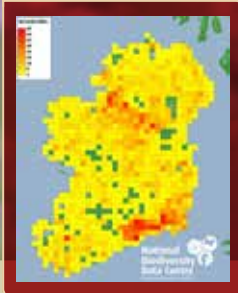
### Pollination

Bees, butterflies, moths  
and hoverflies



### Special Note ★★★★★

This tall thistle is crowned with clusters of small purple flower heads. Its dark green, deeply lobed leaves are lined with sharp spines, and its stem is extremely prickly. The presence of Marsh thistle is a positive indicator of semi-natural grassland. Like other thistles, its seeds are attached to tiny white parachutes, allowing them to be carried by the wind

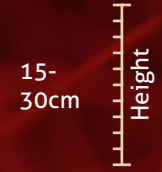


## BOG ASPHODEL



Latin name  
*Narthecium ossifragum*

Irish name  
*Sciollam na móna*



Flowering time  
*June - August*

### Where to find

Fen and bog habitat where  
there are peaty soils

### Pollination

Primarily bumblebees  
and hoverflies



### Special Note ★★★★★

This plant with striking yellow, star-shaped flowers adds a splash of colour to our wetlands. It stores its nutrients in bulbs along underground stems to conserve nutrients in bog habitats. Its Latin name "ossifragum" comes from the belief that it caused brittle bones in livestock on poor-quality land. Interestingly, it was also used to make hair dye!



## GREAT FEN-SEDGE



Latin name  
*Cladium mariscus*

Irish name  
*Sábhsheisc*

Height  
Up to  
2.5m  
metres

Flowering time  
*June - August*

### Where to find

Fen habitat in a few locations around Carra including near Kilkeeran

### Pollination

Wind pollinated



### Special Note ★★★★★

Cladium Fen is a high-value priority habitat in Ireland and listed under Annex 1 of the EU Habitats Directive. It represents diverse, mineral-rich wetlands crucial for biodiversity. It is threatened by drainage, pollution and land-use changes. It is an important habitat for breeding/feeding birds. It occurs in some fens around Lough Carra including near Kilkeeran and Moorehall



## GRASS OF PARNASSUS



Latin name  
*Parnassia palustris*

Irish name  
*Fionnscóth*

Height  
30cm

Flowering time  
*July - September*

### Where to find

Fen habitat and damp grassland around the lake shore

### Pollination

Strong reliance on hoverflies and other flies



### Special Note ★★★★★

Grass-of-Parnassus, despite its name, is not a grass but an exquisite, flowering plant with delicate, green-veined white petals, standing on slender upright stems surrounded by heart-shaped leaves. The name comes from ancient Greece where the cattle on Mount Parnassus enjoyed the plant – hence it was an 'honorary grass'. Pollinators are attracted to its mild honey-like scent



# LESSER BUTTERFLY ORCHID



Latin name  
*Platanthera bifolia*  
Irish name  
*Magairlín beag an fhéileacáin*



Flowering time  
May - July

## Where to find

Nutrient-poor, damp unimproved grassland

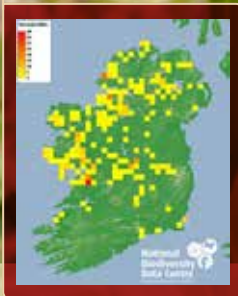
## Pollination

Nocturnal moths, especially hawkmoths using long proboscis



## Special Note ★★★★★

Another stunning orchid found at Carra; its name is translated from Irish as "the small orchid of the butterfly". These orchids emit a sweet fragrance to attract night-flying moths and thrive in areas with low-intensity grazing. Seen as an indicator of habitat quality, management should allow the plants to flower and set seed while keeping competitive vegetation in check





*For more information please visit:*

[www.loughcarra.org](http://www.loughcarra.org)   [www.loughcarralife.ie](http://www.loughcarralife.ie)  
[www.species.biodiversityireland.ie](http://www.species.biodiversityireland.ie)   [www.wildflowersofireland.net](http://www.wildflowersofireland.net)  
[www.irishwildflowers.ie](http://www.irishwildflowers.ie)



Water Avens and Marsh Thistle (Istock). All other images by Lynda Huxley.  
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