

Biodiversity in the Mourne Mountains



What is Biodiversity?

Biodiversity is the variety of plant and animal life within a habitat.

The Mourne Mountains provide a number of different habitats such as bogland, forest, heathland, field and coastal habitat.



Food Chains

Every living thing needs energy to survive. Food chains show how living things are linked to each other by showing what they each eat. When we look at them we can see how energy is passed down a line or 'chain'.

Producers – The producers in a food chain are plants. Plants can produce their own 'food', in the form of glucose/sugar. Plants produce this through a process called photosynthesis. Plants need light energy from the sun, carbon dioxide from the air, water, and nutrients from the soil for photosynthesis.

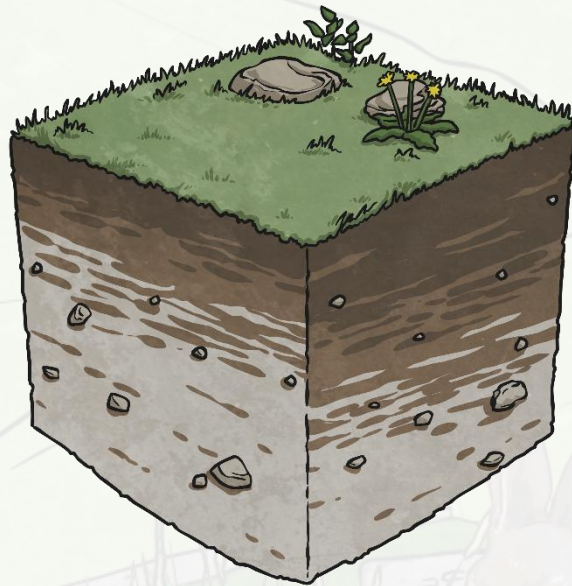
Consumers – Animals are consumers, they consume or take in the energy from plants or other animals they have eaten.

Decomposers – Bacteria and fungi are an important link in the chains as they break down or decompose dead, rotting and decaying plants and animals.

Plant Life in the High Mournes

High up in the Mournes, where it is often cold and wet, the soil is shallow, acidic and peaty.

This type of soil is low in nutrients. Plants that grow here have to be hardy and tough. There is not much soil above the rock they grow on and it is very windy and exposed.



Wildlife in the Mournes

In the High Mournes, there is less wildlife than in other, milder, more sheltered places. The conditions are tough and there is less food to eat.

Despite this, within the Mourne area there are very important mountain, heathland, bog, coastal and forest habitats.

These habitats provide homes for species of birds, animals and insects.



Sundew

The Sundew is a plant that grows well in boggy places, wet heaths and peaty moors.

It is a killer plant! It has solved the problem of the lack of nutrients in the soil where it grows, by attracting and trapping insects.

This plant has sweet-smelling, glittering drops on tiny red hairs on the edge of its leaves. When insects are attracted by these drops, they land on the plants and are trapped by the sticky hairs.

The plant's leaves then close over the insects. They are slowly dissolved by a digestive juice. This is how the plant gets the nutrients it needs to survive.

There are only a few of these types of 'insect-eating' plants in Ireland.



Bell Heather

Bell Heather is a wildflower. It has beautiful purple-pink flowers.

These plants paint the mountains with colour in the summer. Bell Heather grows well in harsh habitats such as heathland, where other plants may struggle.

The flowers of the Bell Heather are very important for bees and other insects.



Juniper



Juniper is a prickly, conifer shrub. It dates back 10 000 years. It blooms with little yellow flowers.

Its 'berries' (fleshy cones) are used to flavour a drink called gin. Sadly, juniper is in decline in the upper Mournes.

Issues such as arson (deliberate fires), erosion and over-grazing by animals have meant that it is much rarer than it used to be.

The Mourne Heritage Trust have been looking after it carefully.

Wheatears

Wheatears are yearly visitors to the Mourne, where they come to breed in summer. They spend the winter months in central Africa. Wheatear nest in rocky crevices in cliffs. They are small birds that eat insects and larvae.



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Raven

Ravens are the biggest members of the crow family. They are glossy black, with a large bill and long wings. They can nest on rock ledges. Ravens mainly eat carrion (dead animals).



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The Irish Hare

Hares are larger than rabbits. They can jump to a height of about 2 metres. They have a russet brown coat, long ears and eyes that are high on their heads, which gives them a wide field of view for spotting potential predators.

The Irish hare is found in both upland and lowland areas. They do not live in burrows, but above ground. The Irish hare is special, as it is a native mammal that has lived here for a very long time.

They were even here during the last Ice Age! In spring, male hares may fight for females. They look like they are boxing or kickboxing!

This is why people might use the phrase 'as mad as a March hare' about something.

Baby hares are called leverets.



Mourne Food Chains



Gorse



Gorse Shield Bug



Wheatear



Buzzard



In food chains, an arrow means 'is eaten by'.

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Mourne Food Chains



Heather



Heather Beetle



Red Grouse



Peregrine Falcon



In food chains, an arrow means 'is eaten by'.

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Mourne Food Chains



Bilberry



Irish Hare



Fox (Fox dies)



Raven



In food chains, an arrow means 'is eaten by'.

Mourne Food Chains



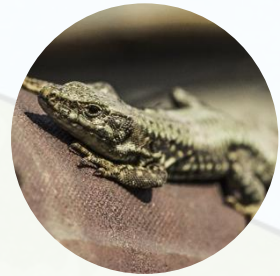
Algae



Caddis Fly



Keeled Skimmer
Dragonfly



Common
Lizard



In food chains, an arrow means 'is eaten by'.

How can we Help?

We can learn more about the special habitats in the Mournes and tell family and friends.

We can follow the Northern Ireland Country Code when we are exploring or visiting the Mournes:

1. Respect the people who live and work in the countryside.
2. Know where you are allowed to go.
3. Keep to paths across farmland.
4. Use gates and stiles to cross fences, hedges and walls.
5. Leave gates as you find them.
6. Do not interfere with livestock, machinery and crops.
7. Keep dogs under strict control.
8. Protect wildlife, plants and trees.
9. Keep all water sources clean.
10. Take your litter home.
11. Guard against all risk of fire.
12. Make no unnecessary noise.
13. Respect other recreational users.
14. Take special care on country roads.
16. Consider your personal safety.



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