

## ***ABBEY TO ABBEY PILGRIMS WALK***

### ***WILDLIFE GUIDE TO KILLONE & CLARE ABBEY'S***

#### **Clare Abbey Wildlife**

Clare Abbey is situated in a field surrounded by wet land, one might think at first glance that the abbey does not support much Biodiversity when looking at the bare limestone walls but think again as on closer inspection one will find a variety of species, even evidence of ancient marine life!

The Abbey is constructed mainly of limestone blocks and these have provided a substrate on which Lichens, mosses and ferns can grow, see Figs 1 and 2 below. This stone also support plants such as Birds Foot Trefoil, Marsh Penny Wort, Navel Wort and Herb Robert.



*Fig 1: Left –Rusty back Fern. Middle – Crustose Lichen white & orange. Right –Moss, Tortula muralis with spore capules.*



*Fig 2: Left -Nostoc living in solution of rain water within a Font at Clare Abbey. Middle -Birds Foot Trefoil. Right –Navel Wort.*

On the lower blocks in the main graveyard of Clare Abbey, 335 million year old Solitary Coral fossils, can be seen, see Fig 3 below. This indicates that the limestone has derived from what once was a sea floor! These are 'fairly common in the limestone as are colonial Corals and Crinoids' L. Cotter Burren Geo Park



*Fig 3: Solitary Coral Fossils*

On an enclosed Hawthorne tree within the abbey, birds such as Blue Tit, Coal Tit, Robin, Blackbird & Wren can be seen, due to the tree's ability to provide shelter and food by way of its resident insect population and berries, see Fig 4 below.



*Fig 4: Haw Thorn Tree & Fig 5: Fungi growing on Conifer shedding.*

On the approach to the bank of the Fergus River, one will find a gateway surrounded by conifers. Although these trees are not native, Collared Dove and Wood Pigeon can be seen roosting in the boughs above. This area is also good for fungi due to Conifer sheddings on the floor beneath. Fungi use this shedded material to obtain their energy requirements as they are a source of Carbohydrate.

The Fergus river at this location is a good place for spotting birds such as Shelduck, Mute Swan, Waterhen, Cormorant, Heron, Kingfisher (see Fig 6 below), & Mallard. These birds like to hide amongst the reeds and it is thought that some may be nesting at this location. This area is also home to a family of otters which sometimes make their way down river, to the Quay in Clarecastle village.



*Fig 6 Left – Kingfisher. Middle – Otter. Right –Shelduck (Amber Listed).*

On the opposite bank there is a small forest of deciduous trees (see Fig 7 below). These trees are home to a communal roost of breeding magpies, which can hold a territory of up to 5 hectares all year round. These magpies build large domed nest in these tall trees.



Fig 7 Left: Fergus River with small forest in background. Fig 8 Right: *Barn Owl – can be seen from the slip road to the Motorway or post hopping in the Marsh area near Clare Abbey.*

This small forest and surrounding wetland is also a hunting ground for the barn owl. Sometimes this hunter can be spotted at dusk from the slip road to the Motorway. These birds feed on field mice and brown rats.

The grass land surrounding Clare Abbey is also a good place to see Devils Bit Scabious and Ox Eye Daisy, and a variety of grasses (see Fig 9 below).



Fig 9: Left –Devils Bit Scabious. Right –Ox Eye Daisy.

## Killlone Abbey Wildlife.

Killlone Abbey is situated near woodland beside a lake and is rich with Biodiversity.



Fig 10: Killlone Abbey surrounded by daisies.

The Bluebell wood is deciduous and is mostly made up of Beech, Oak, Ash, Horse Chestnut and Holly Trees. The wood is home to Badger and a wide range of birds including Wood Pigeon, Pheasant, Black Bird, Robin, Thrush, Wren, Blue Tit, Coal Tit, Long Tail Tit, Gold Finch and Magpie.



Fig 11: Bluebell wood at Killlone Abbey.



Fig 12: Left: Gold Finch. Middle: Badger Foot Print at Killlone Abbey woods. Right: Badger



Fig 13: Badger set at Killone Abbey woods.

Trees & shrubs found at Killone with new Spring leaves, see Figs 14 to 15 below.



Fig 14: Left: Spring Horse Chestnut Leaves. Right: Horse Chestnut Tree.



Fig 15: Left: Sallow. Right: Black Thorn.

The wood displays a spectacular abundance of Spring woodland flowers which are must see. Examples are seen in Figs 16 to 19 below



Fig 16: Left: Greater Stichwort. Right: Primrose.



*Fig 17: Left: Wood Violet. Right: Dog Violet*



*Fig 18: Left: Wood Sorrell. Right: Bluebell.*



*Fig 19: Left: Lesser Celandine. Right: Gorse*

The wood contains a variety of Fungi (see Fig 1 below) in the autumn due to the fallen leaves on the forest floor. The forest also contains a variety of Mosses and ferns, particularly around the Waterfall area, see Fig 2 below. Some ferns can also be seen growing on very large branches of Oak trees. This relationship allows the Fern to obtain more light, which is premium in a forest.



*Fig 20: Left: Scarlet Elf Cup Fungi. Right: Waterfall at Killlone Abbey woods.*



*Fig 21: Left: Hart's-Tongue Fern. Right: Broad Buckler Fern.*

The lake has a limestone shoreline, which is very distinctive. The lake itself supports numerous birdlife including Cormorants which can be sometimes seen with their wings outstretched to dry while sitting on a buoy. Grebes can also be seen here and have a dramatic courtship displays where the birds shake their heads and hold their head feather tufts erect, they dive bringing up lake weed and almost dance on the water until they come together breast to breast. Mute Swan, Moor hen, Black headed Gull, Tufted duck, Mallard and Heron can also be seen in the Lake area along with some migratory species in the winter months.



*Fig 22: Left: Dancing Great Crested Grebes. Right: The Lake's Limestone shoreline at Killlone Abbey.*

A gate lodge which is based on the right hand side a 5 minute walk in from the entrance is a good place for nests. Birds make use of ivy and the little alcoves around the corners of the old stone building to build their nests.



Fig 23: Left: Derelict Gate lodge at Killone Abbey. Fig 24 Right: Owl Pellet & it's contents.

Killone abbey itself supports lots of plants see Figs 25 and 26 below and is also a roosting point for an owl as pellets can be seen discarded by the owl on the ground by O'Donnell's Crypt (see Fig. 24 above). Owls are unable to digest hair and bones so these are coughed up in the form of a pellet.

St John's well is home to a variety of marsh type plants such as Daisies, Buttercups, Clover and yellow Iris. Bats can be seen flitting up and down at dusk, while they feed on insects, these bats are roosting in a cave not far from St John's well.



Fig 25: Left: Yellow Iris. Middle: Herb Robert. Right: Germander Speedwell.



Fig 26: Left: Common Duckweed. Middle: Marsh Pennywort. Right: Marsh Penny worth growing on St John's well.

Jean Ryan, Sept 2019