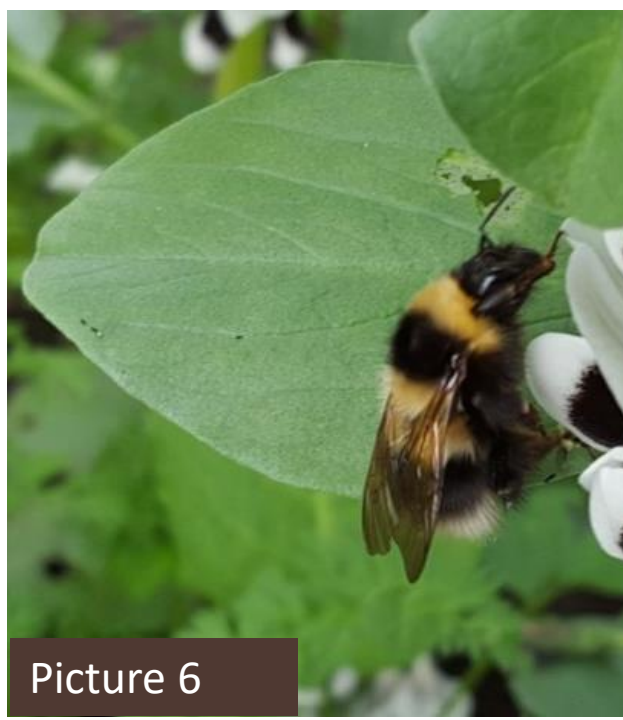
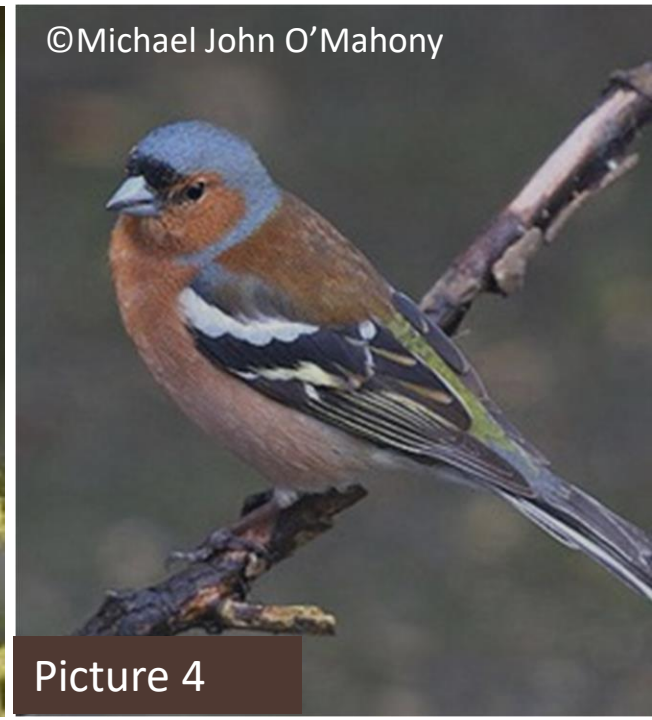




Can you name these Irish Plants and Animals? Try our interactive quiz [here](#) to learn more about them.

• Picture 1

• Picture 2

• Picture 3

• Picture 4

• Picture 5

• Picture 6

Silver Birch

Common Name: Silver Birch

Irish Name: Beith gheal

Scientific Name: *Betula pendula*



Description

The silver birch is a small to medium sized deciduous tree. It has fine branches and small leaves, white bark with dark ridges and cracks. There are two types of birch in Ireland, Downy and Silver. The Silver Birch overall looks more 'weepy' like a Weeping Willow tree, and the leaves are more pointed than heart-shaped, in comparison to the Downy Birch.

Habitat found

Silver Birch will grow in poor soils, but likes a sunny position, and it needs good drainage. Birch woods occur widely, especially on marginal soils, lake edges and on dried out bogs. It makes a good ornamental garden tree, as it does not grow too large, so you may find it in parks, gardens and on school grounds.

Image by Gilles San Martin via Flickr.com



Image by Jon Sullivan via Flickr.com



Parent plants lose their leaves in winter. Seeds will lie in the soil for the Winter.

With the warm weather in Spring mature trees start to grow leaves and flowers.

Little seeds from last year's trees will also start to grow in the soil as small trees or 'saplings'.

As Spring progresses the leaves grow and the flowers form a cluster called a 'catkin'.

Pollen is blown between catkins on different trees. If any tiny flower gets pollen from another one it is fertilised and turns into a tiny seed.

The catkins, with all of their tiny fertilised flowers then become more like a small tower of seeds by Autumn.

These new seeds dry out, and break apart and are carried on the wind a small distance from the parent tree.

Life Cycle



Image by Maja Dumat via Flickr.com

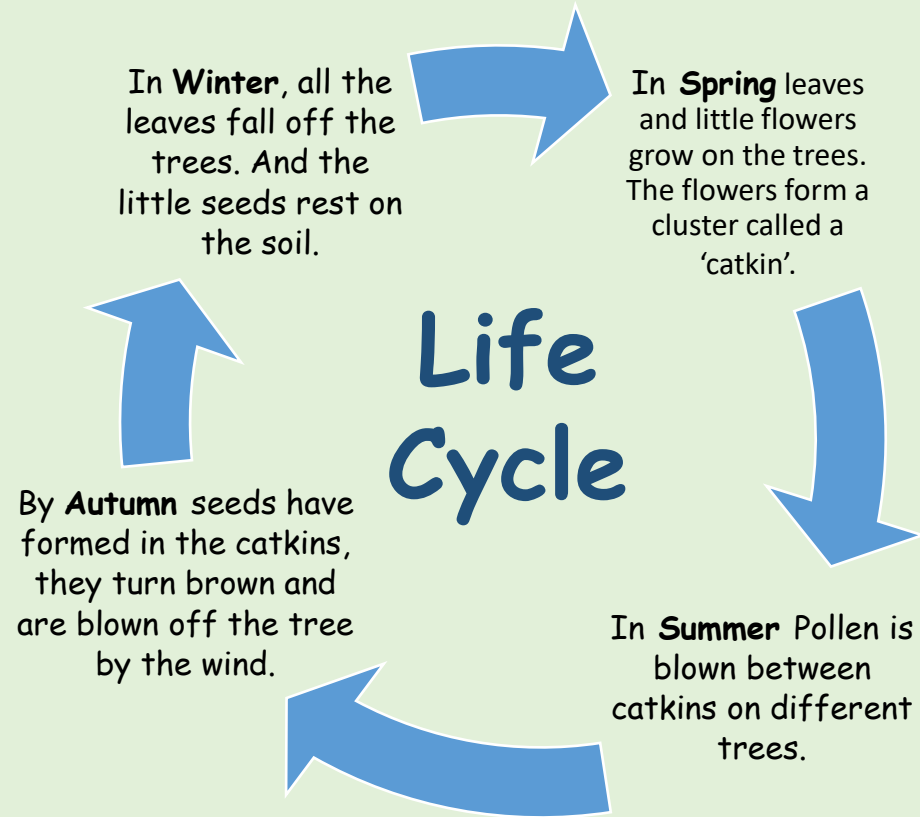
Fun Facts!

In early times "toghers" or walkways, usually across bog land were made from birch. Nowadays, it is more commonly used in making plywood.

Flower: April – May
Fruit: Seeds late Summer to Autumn

Silver Birch Tree

Draw birds in a Silver Birch Tree:



Draw a Birch Leaf and Catkins in Spring:

Creeping Thistle

Common Name: Creeping Thistle

Irish Name: Feochadán reatha

Scientific Name: *Cirsium arvense*



Description

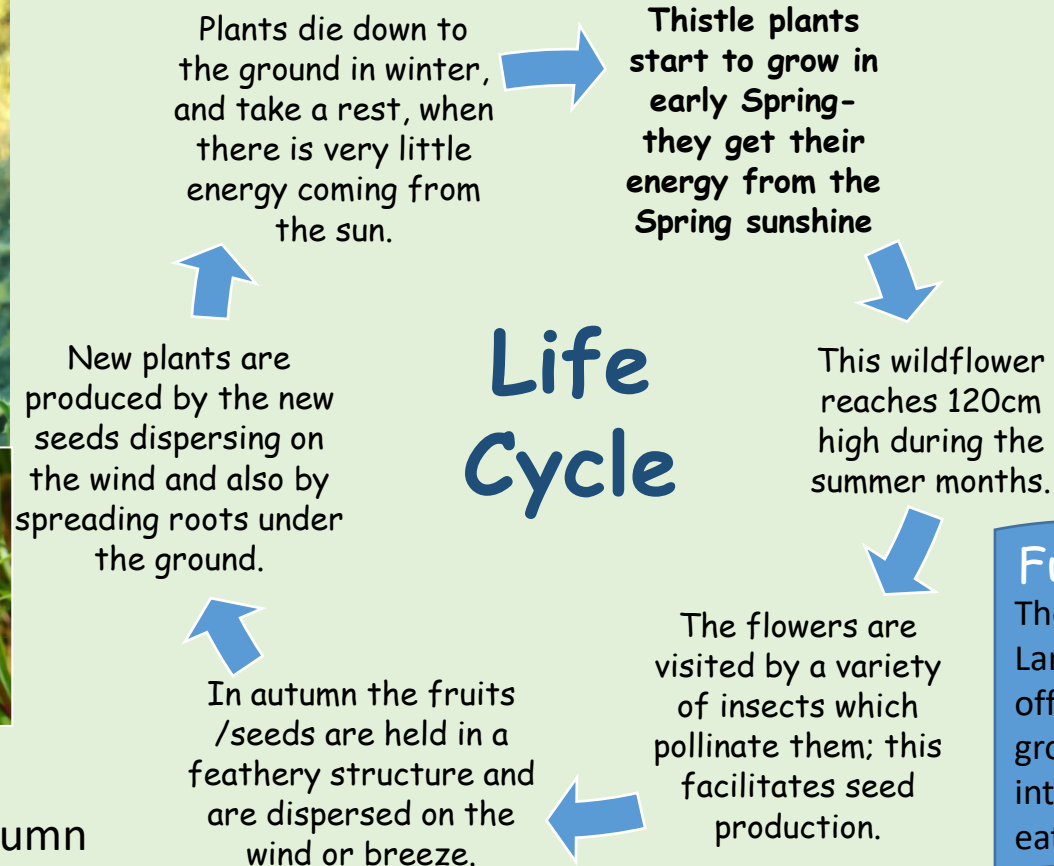
A very common plant. Unlike the other types of thistles, the upright stems are spineless. The leaves can be cottony underneath. Flowers are lilac coloured (15-25mm across) arranged in fragrant clusters. Take time to make sure not to confuse this with Marsh Thistle and Slender Thistle; both have spiny stalks so you'll know the difference!

Habitat found

This wildflower grows in grassy and waste places. They are visited by lots of insects looking to drink its sweet nectar. During these visits the insects bring pollen and pollinate the flowers.



Flower: June – September
Fruit: Seeds disperse in Autumn



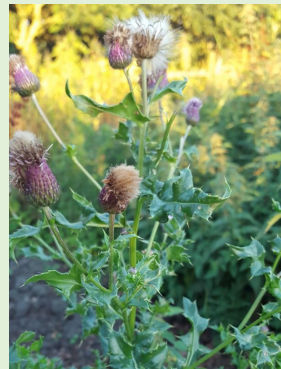
DO NOT TOUCH a thistle unless you are wearing rubber gloves!! The thistle's sharp needle-like leaves can puncture your skin!

Fun Facts!

The Creeping Thistle is one of our most troublesome plants! Landowners and farmers often have trouble keeping them off their land. This is because the plant can spread just by growing more roots, which then produce shoots, which grow into new plants. Also they are too prickly for most animals to eat! Clever plants!

Creeping Thistle

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Draw a Creeping Thistle growing in Spring:

Draw the seeds blowing away from the Thistle in Autumn:

The seeds rest on the soil during **Winter**.

In **Spring** the seeds start to grow, and turn into a little thistle plant with sharp pointy leaves.

Draw insects visiting the Creeping Thistle's flowers in Summer:

By **Autumn** the flowers have turned into seeds. The seeds look like tiny circles covered in fluff. They blow away with the wind.

Life Cycle

In **Summer** the thistle grows purple flowers at the tips. Butterflies and Bees visit these flowers.

Blue Tit

Common Name: Blue Tit

Irish Name: Meantán gorm

Scientific Name: *Parus caeruleus*

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Description

A mix of blue, yellow, white and green makes the blue tit one of our most easily recognisable birds. The sexes are similar, but females can be duller than males. The juveniles have a more yellowish face than the adults.

Habitat found

They are common in woodland, hedgerows, parks and gardens. And are widespread across Ireland.

Image by Simon Redwood via Flickr.com



The parents help the young for a few weeks. Then they all move away from each other to live separately over autumn and winter.

In February the birds start to look for a good nest site and a suitable partner for the year ahead.

The young fledge at about 20 days old (in early to mid June). Their main predators are sparrow hawks, magpies and cats.

The female does most of the nest-building from April for 1-2 weeks using mostly moss, and wool for lining.

Life Cycle

Each chick can eat up to 100 caterpillars per day! So the adults need to work really hard to feed them all!

Mid-May eggs are laid; one per day for usually 8-10 days. Then the female sits on top and starts incubating them.

At the end of May the chicks hatch. The timing of hatching coincides with the abundance of caterpillars!



©Michael John O'Mahony

Fun Facts!

In the time when 'the milkman' delivered bottles of milk to our doorsteps, Blue Tits discovered that if they pierced the top of the milk bottle, they could get a drink of the cream which always rose to the top of the milk. Clever (or cheeky!?) birds!!

Seen in Ireland: Year-round

Blue-Tit



Draw a Blue-tit:

Draw Blue-tit chicks with their parents:

In **Autumn** the chicks will move away from their parents, and they will spend the **Winter** on their own.

In **Spring** the Blue-tits find a partner and build a nest

Draw a Blue-tit's nest:

By **late Summer** the chicks have hatched and are being fed caterpillars and other food by both parents, until they are ready to fly.

Life Cycle

In **Summer** the mammy lays up to 10 eggs in the nest. The eggs are white with light brown speckles.

Chaffinch

Common Name: Chaffinch

Irish Name: Rí Rua

Scientific Name: *Fringilla coelebs*



Description

The plumage of the Chaffinch is unmistakable and this species is unlikely to be confused with any other species. Male's breast, face and underside is a pinkish orange-brown, and they have a blue-grey crown and nape. The female is more grey, with washed out grey under-parts (this is good for camouflage on the nest!). Both male and female display large white patches on otherwise blackish wings.

Habitat found

The Chaffinch is one of Ireland's most common finches. It is found in parks, gardens, woodland and farmland. In winter they can form large flocks of hundreds of birds, especially in stubble fields and under beech trees.



©Michael John O'Mahony

During the autumn and winter, Chaffinches will feed on seeds on the ground. They can sometimes form large flocks when doing this in the countryside.

In February males start to defend their breeding territories. Despite this early start in the year, the nest building does not begin until April.

Parents look after the young for a few days after leaving the nest, and may then decide to have a second family in the summer, if it's not too late.

The female builds the nest; usually a neat cup made from moss and grass, webs, feathers and wool. It is often in a fork of a tree.



©Michael John O'Mahony

Life Cycle

Chicks will grow quickly and will be ready to take their first flight after 11-18 days.

In early May the female will lay 2-8 eggs, and incubate them for around two weeks.

Once hatched, the chicks are fed mainly on caterpillars and insects by both parents.

Fun Facts!

Chaffinches have been found to have regional accents, with slight differences in the typical song depending on where in the country the bird lives. I wonder do the Cork Chaffinches sing a bit faster than Chaffinches elsewhere in Ireland 😊

Seen in Ireland: Year round



Image by NottsExMiner via Flickr.com

Chaffinch

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Draw your own Daddy Chaffinch:

Draw a Mammy Chaffinch building the nest:

During the **Autumn** and **Winter**, Chaffinches will feed on seeds on the ground. They feed in large flocks in the countryside.

In **Spring** a Chaffinch finds a partner and the mammy builds a nest

In early **Summer** the mammy lays up to 8 eggs. They will hatch after 2 weeks. The parents then feed them insects.

By late **Summer** the chicks will fly out of the nest. The parents will stay with them and help to feed them for a few more weeks.

Life Cycle

Peacock Butterfly

Common Name: Peacock Butterfly

Irish Name: Péacóg

Scientific Name: *Inachis io*



Flight Period: April to June and Late July to September



Image by Peter von Bagh via Flickr.com



Description

The open wings are mainly a rusty red colour, and have dramatic eyespots in blue pink and cream. The underside of the wings is a very dark brown all over. The wingspan is 62-70mm.

Habitat found

Gardens, woodlands and hedgerow. It hibernates through the winter.

Peacock Butterflies will hibernate in dry sheltered spots. Sometimes they think our houses or sheds are just the right spot for the winter!

Adult butterflies come out of hibernation (a long sleep over winter) in March and April

The new butterfly will spend weeks feeding in preparation for a long winter without food. It will go into hibernation in September.

Life Cycle

The mammy or 'female' lays eggs on the underside of nettle leaves in May

Eggs hatch after 7-21 days, and little larvae called caterpillars come out.

After ~ 3 weeks, the little animals come out of their cocoon in the shape of a butterfly!

They grow by changing the size of their skin or 'moulting' a few times. After their final moult the caterpillars hang from plant stems in a cocoon to 'pupate'; this is when their whole body reorganises itself.

Fun Facts!

The colourful eye-spots on the wings resemble the marks on a peacock bird's feathers, and this is where this butterfly gets its name.



Image by Dean Morley via Flickr.com

Peacock Butterfly

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Draw a cocoon hanging from under a Nettle leaf:

In **Autumn** the butterflies eat as much as they can, before finding somewhere warm and dry to sleep for the whole **Winter**.

In **Spring** the butterflies wake up, and try to find a partner.

Draw a Peacock Butterfly:

By **late Summer** the caterpillars build a cocoon and stay in there for about 3 weeks. In this time they turn into a Butterfly!

Life Cycle

In **early Summer** caterpillars come out of the eggs that were laid by the mammy butterfly on the Nettle leaves.

Draw the caterpillars crawling around eating the Nettle leaves:

Garden Bumblebee

Common Name: Garden Bumblebee

Irish Name: Bumbóg Gáirdín

Scientific Name: *Bombus Hortorum*

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Description

This bumblebee has a white tail, two yellow bands on its thorax, one on its abdomen, and it has a long face (its face is longer than it is broad).

Habitat found

This species of bumblebee is common and wide spread in Ireland. It can be found in many habitats including gardens and grasslands.

A Black Body with...

First yellow stripe on **Thorax**

Second yellow stripe on **Thorax**

First (and only) yellow stripe on **Abdomen**

White Tail

Long horse-like face, with VERY LONG tongue!

DO NOT TOUCH

Remember! All female bumblebees have a sting. They are very mild mannered by nature, but if they get a fright they will defend themselves! Ouch!

If you're finding it hard to see a bee's features, it is safe to catch them with a butterfly net, and transfer to a glass jar, with a lid, for a minute or so. But be sure to put the bee back in the same place that you found it ASAP!

Life Cycle

All the bumblebees die before Winter, except the New (now mated) Queens, who go into hibernation!

The Queens come out of hibernation in early Spring, usually around February

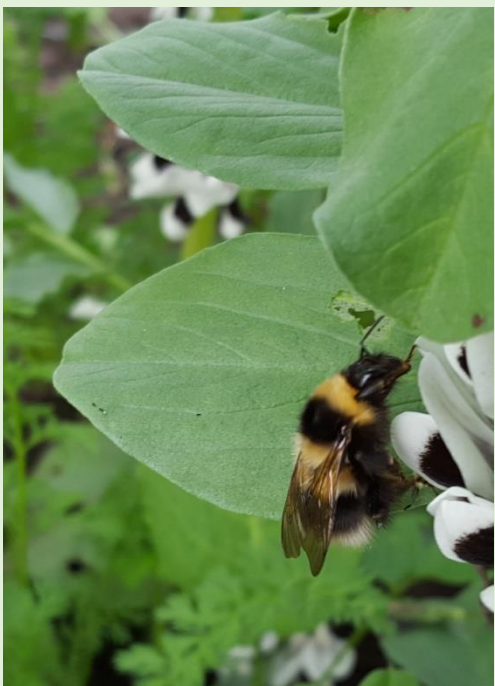
She then searches for a good nest site (usually this will be underground or in long grass) and for food.

By mid-Spring she has collected and stored nectar and pollen in her nest for her young, in the form of a 'nectar pot' and a 'pollen loaf'. She lays eggs.

The first eggs to hatch are worker bumblebees (all female!). Once strong enough, they take over the duties of the nest, and rear all the other young.

Males and new Queens are born in late summer. They will breed with individuals from other colonies by Autumn.

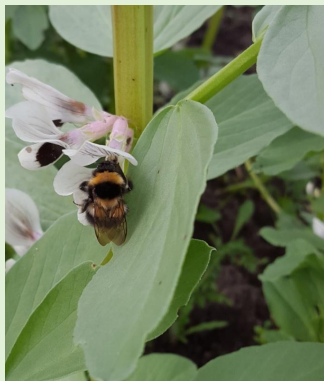
The colony will grow to around 100 bees over the summer, as the Queen continues to lay eggs (still producing mostly worker bees at this stage).



Seen in Ireland: February to October (and maybe some Queens will also appear out of hibernation in winter months, if the weather is very mild!)

Fun Facts for Identification

- There are just 20 species of Bumblebee in Ireland; only a few are common and widespread, and even fewer have a white tail! So start by looking for a white tail!
- Only one other (the Heath Bumblebee) has the same pattern of yellow stripes and white tail, so you should have no trouble finding bees with this pattern near your school! The long face and tongue will confirm whether it is a Garden Bumblebee or the Heath Bumblebee.
- Enjoy all the bumblebees that you bumble into on your travels! Don't get too bogged down with identification; just record the colours and patterns of whatever ones you meet to see if you have a few different types at school.



Garden Bumblebee

Draw a Garden Bumblebee:

Draw bumblebees collecting nectar and pollen from flowers:

