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Picture 1

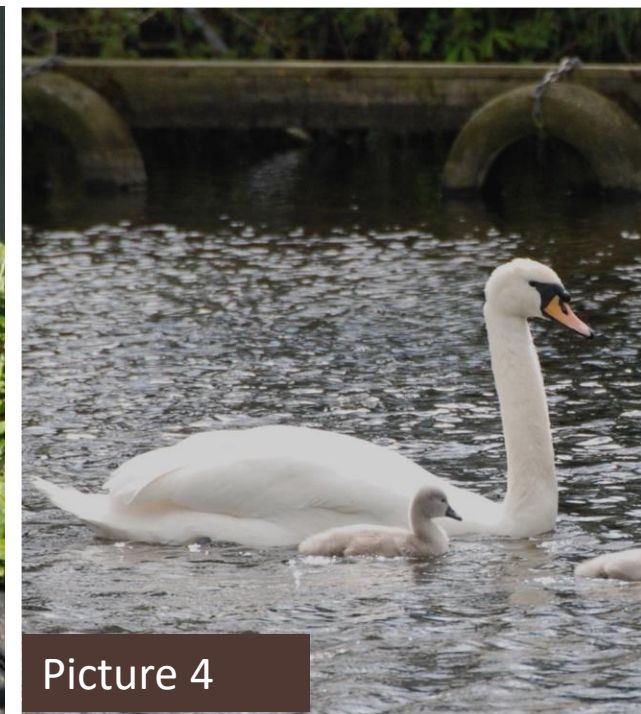
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Picture 2

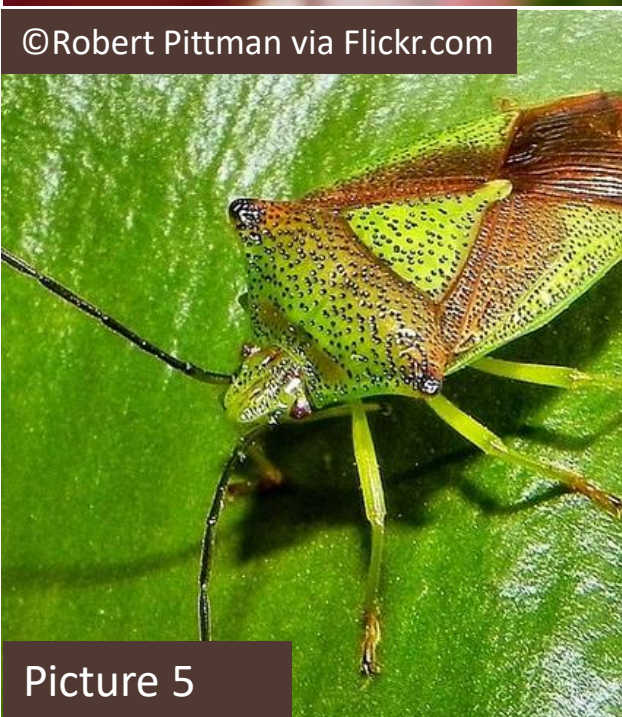


Picture 3



Picture 4

©Robert Pittman via Flickr.com



Picture 5

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Picture 6

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

• Picture 1

• Picture 2

• Picture 3

• Picture 4

• Picture 5

• Picture 6

Creeping Buttercup

Common Name: Creeping Buttercup

Irish Name: Fearbán

Scientific Name: *Ranunculus repens*



Description

Creeping buttercup is a small yellow flower with 5 shiny petals. It is a perennial plant (lives for more than 2 years) which flowers between May and August. Unlike other members of its family it has a root system which spreads rapidly underground.

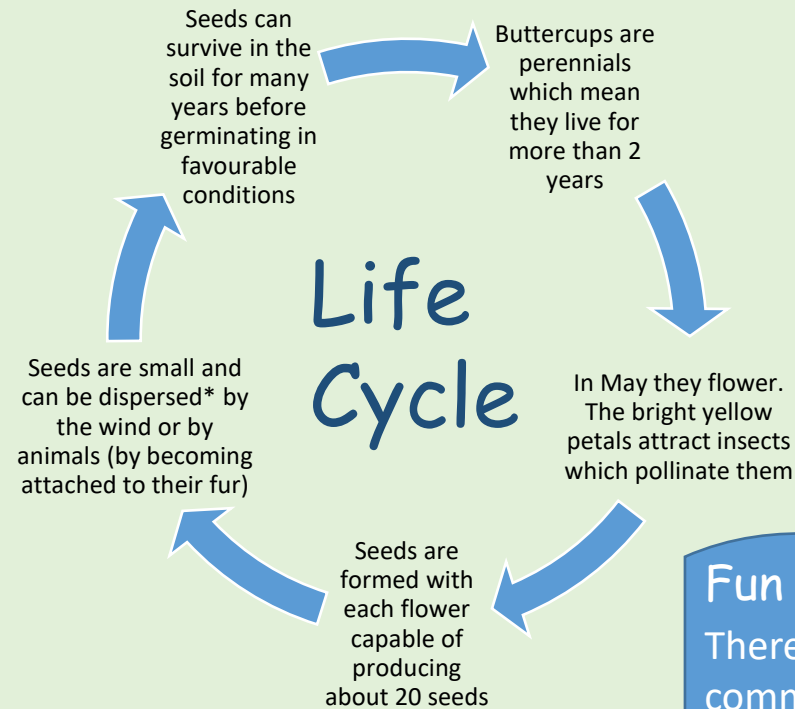
Habitat found

Creeping buttercup is extremely common and widespread in Ireland. It is often seen in meadows, gardens, parks, school grounds and anywhere else grass is growing! As its name suggests it can spread quickly and is often considered a weed.



Photo: Peter O'Connor via Flickr.com

Flowers: May to August



*Seed dispersal is the way that seeds get moved away from the plant they grew on to possibly end up somewhere they can grow into a new plant themselves. Often the wind or animals help this to happen



Photo: Dr Mary Gillham via Flickr.com

Fun Facts!

There are two other members of the buttercup family commonly found in Ireland: meadow buttercup and bulbous buttercup. All three look very similar with yellow flowers but with small differences in shape and leaves. They are easy to get mixed up but all are buttercups!

Creeping Buttercup

Draw a picture of a meadow of buttercups with different animals feeding on them



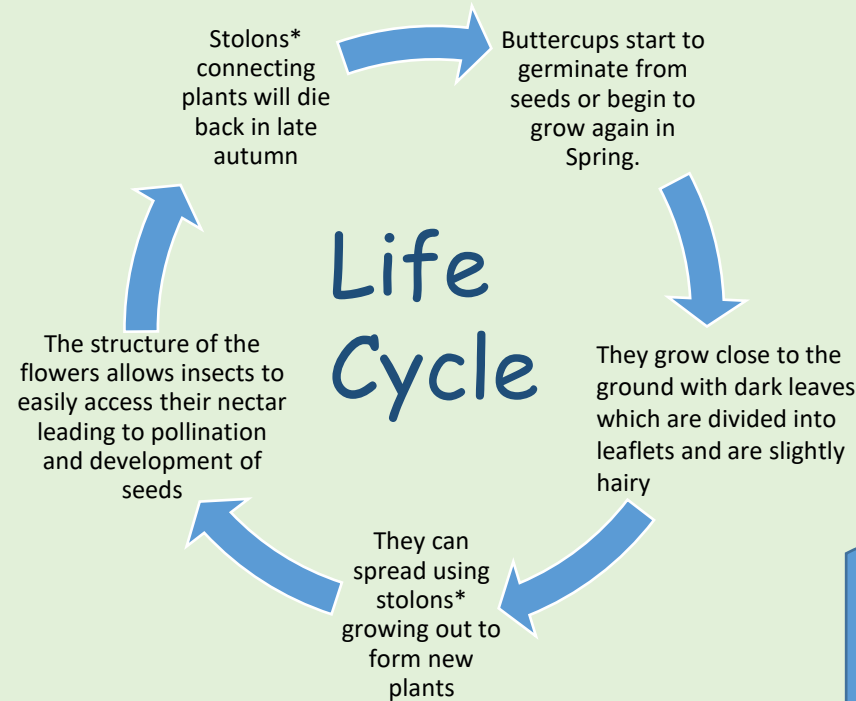
Photo: Matt Lavin via Flickr



Buttercups in the ecosystem

Buttercups have many effects on species within their ecosystem. They are a food source for a variety of animals. Insects such as bees, butterflies and hoverflies will feed on their nectar and pollen. Grazing animals such as rabbits and deer may eat the flower and leaves. This can be toxic to some grazing animals if eaten in large quantities. This includes cattle and sheep. The seeds are also eaten by a variety of birds including wood pigeons. Buttercups can have a negative effect on other plants. Creeping buttercups can quickly spread and take over an area, leaving little room and resources for other plants.

Draw a picture of a buttercup in bloom



*Stolons are branches which grow from existing plants and then create roots to form new plants.

Fun Facts!

It is rumoured you can discover if someone likes butter by holding a buttercup under their chin. If you see the yellow reflected back on their skin they love butter!

What is a weed?

A weed is a name given to any plant that is growing somewhere it isn't wanted or was not specifically planted by a human. Plants such as buttercups, dandelions and thistles are often considered weeds.

Elder

Common Name: Elder

Irish Name: Trom

Scientific Name: *Sambucus nigra*



Photo: Bob Peterson. Flickr.com



Description

Elder is a short tree with green leaflets (several leaves per stem) and flat clusters of white scented flowers. Their fruit is small black berries which hang in bunches.

Habitat found

Elder is widespread and common. It is often found in woodlands, parks, along hedgerows and on waste ground.



Photo: Teanitiki via Flickr.com

Flowers: May to July

Fruits: August to October

Elder is a deciduous tree. It loses its leaves in winter

In spring leaves begin to grow again. They consist of 5 or 7 leaflets

In May to July their white flowers appear

The fruits are dark purple clusters of berries. They appear in Autumn

Their seeds are inside the berries. They are dispersed* in bird poo!

Life Cycle



Photo: Melissa McMaster. Flickr.com



Photo: Tom Anderson. Flickr.com

* Seed dispersal is the process that moves seeds away from the plant they grew on. Hopefully some seeds end up on a patch of soil which is suitable for them to grow on (although many will end up in unsuitable places like car windshields, school roofs etc). Most seeds which grow in berries are dispersed when the berry is eaten by an animal who then moves elsewhere before "doing their business". The seed can move through the animal's body without being damaged. Animal poo is also very helpful for the seed as it contains nutrients which help it grow!

Fun Facts!

Elder has soft, spongy material on the inside of their stems. This makes them an unreliable tree to climb because their branches break easily!

Elder

Make a design or recipe of something you would like to make using some part of the elder tree



Elderflowers and Elderberries.

Both the flowers and berries are often used as food sources. The flowers can be collected and used to make cordial or tea. The berries contain toxins which can make you sick if the berries are eaten raw however they are often used safely after cooking for jams and jellies and even wine!

Draw a picture of elder flowers

Life Cycle

As winter approaches the trees lose their leaves. Elder can be identified in winter by the strong unpleasant smell from the twigs.

New elder trees from dispersed seeds may begin to grow in spring. Elder trees are fairly short, often reaching about 10 metres.

Animals and birds who eat the berries deposit the seeds away from the mother tree. Some seeds may be in a suitable place to grow.

The flowers have a strong smell and are pollinated by insects in early summer.

Dark purple berries are formed containing the seeds. These are attractive to birds who eat them.

Other uses of Elder:

Elder stems are filled with a spongy white pith. This can be easily taken out leaving you with a hollow stem. Traditionally people used these hollowed out stems to make whistles, pea shooters and even jewellery!

Did you know that elderflowers have often been used in herbal medicine to treat flus and colds? Recently research has shown they can even help people manage their diabetes!

Magpie

Common Name: Magpie

Irish Name: Snac breac

Scientific Name: *Pica pica*



Description

Magpies are a member of the crow family. They are a large black and white bird with long distinctive tail which has bright greenish feathers. They have blue wing feathers. The long tail is very noticeable when a magpie is in flight.

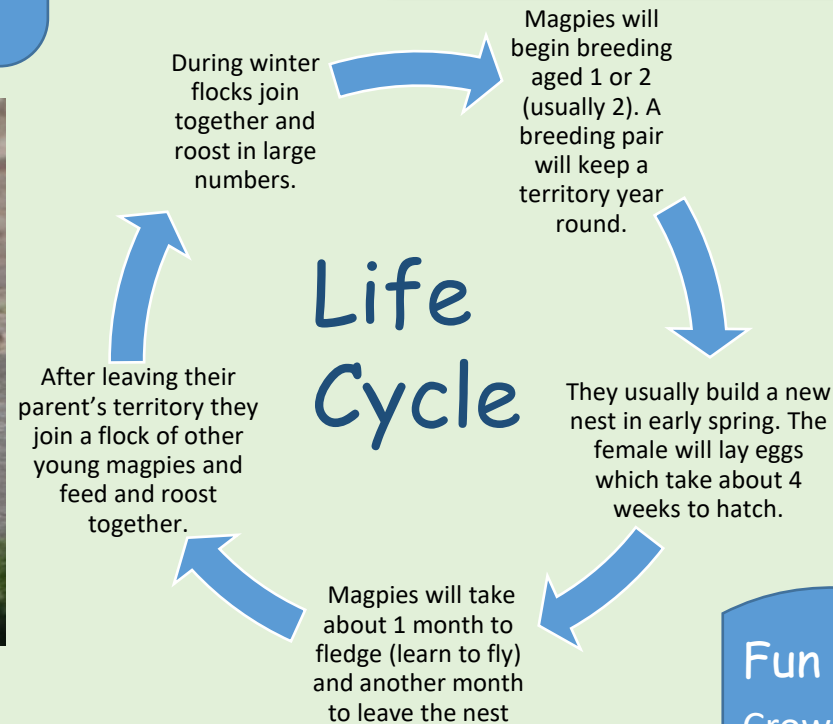
Habitat found

Magpies are widespread and common throughout Ireland. They are one of Ireland's top 20 most common garden birds. They are found in woodlands, scrubland, gardens, parks and urban areas. Their nests are often found at the top of tall trees.



Seen in Ireland: Year-round

Are magpies thieves?? Magpies are often accused of stealing shiny things. Some people think they put shiny objects in their nest so that the sun reflects off it and scares off other birds or keeps their eggs warm. However there is no evidence that magpies really do collect shiny things. They along with other crows are curious and may pick unfamiliar things up but there may not be much reason to hide your jewellery if there is a magpie nearby!



Fun Facts!

Crows are a very intelligent group of animals. They are one of the very few who can “use tools” (not chainsaws or drills!). Using tools means using something (apart from their body) to complete a task. For example, using a stick to reach a piece of food.

Magpie

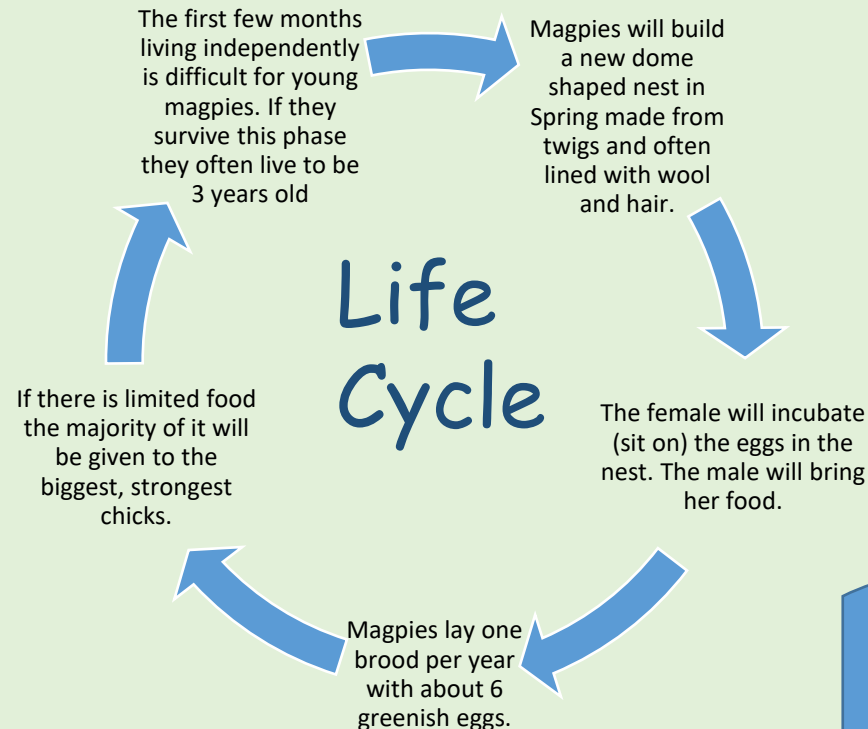
Draw a picture of a magpie.



Diet and Predators

Magpies have an extremely varied diet. They are omnivores which means they eat meat and plants. They will prey on small mammals, young birds, other birds eggs and lots of insects. They will also eat seeds and fruits. When food is abundant magpies will sometimes hide some for later. They will make a cache, this is a small hole in the ground, place the food in and cover it with a stone or other covering so they can find it later (similar to a squirrel hiding nuts for winter).

Magpies do not have many natural predators in Ireland due to their large size and their ability to defend themselves. Young magpies are more vulnerable to predators like foxes, larger birds and even cats.



Draw a picture of somewhere in your school grounds or local community that you think would be a suitable place for magpies to nest.



Sounds like a magpie...

Magpies have a very harsh sounding call which sounds similar to a cackle. They may repeat it over and over if they are alarmed.

Fun Facts:

Magpies are associated with lots of old superstitions in Ireland. It was common (and sometimes still is) to always "salute" a magpie when you see one for good luck!

Mute Swan

Common Name: Mute swan

Irish Name: Eala bhalbh

Scientific Name: *Cygnus olar*



Description

Mute swans are very large, white birds with a long, curved neck, an orange beak and black, webbed feet. They are one of two species of swan in Ireland and the only species that live here year-round.

Habitat found

Mute swans are very common and widespread throughout Ireland. They are found in wetlands such as lakes, rivers and estuaries across the country.



Seen in Ireland: Year-round

Did you know.... swans (and ducks) should not be feed bread? This is not a natural part of their diet and does not provide them with the nutrition they need. Too much bread is bad for them. If you enjoy feeding swans and ducks try bringing lettuce or frozen peas instead. This is more similar to their usual diet so it is better for them.

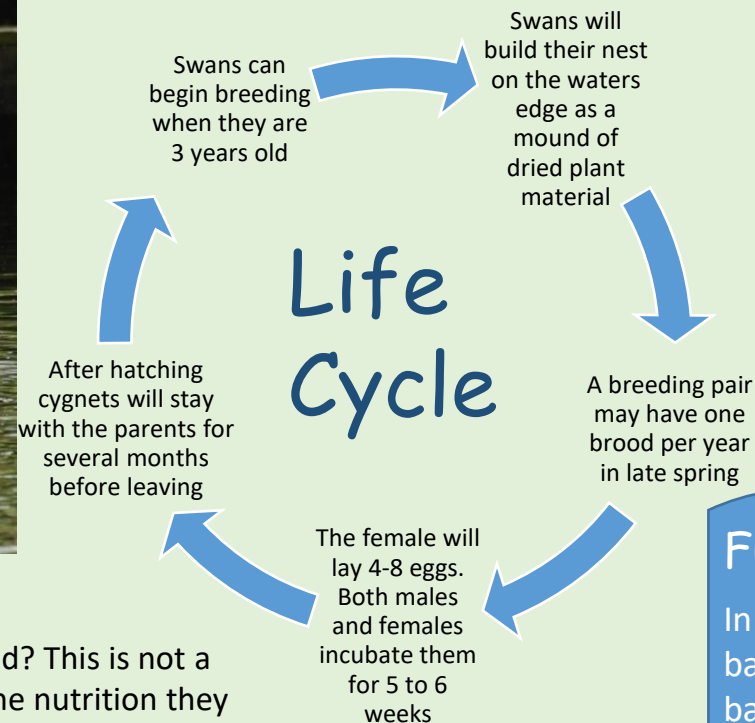


Photo: Marianne Bevis via Flickr.com

Fun Facts!

In many species of bird you can tell males and females apart based on their different colours. With swans however, it is based on their size (the male is larger) and the black lump on the top of the beak (again the male has a slightly larger lump).

Mute Swan

Draw a picture of a cygnets with their parents



Diet:

Swans mainly feed on water plants and invertebrates (like pond snails). They can use their long neck to reach deep into the water looking for food. They can also graze when they are on land, eating grass and other plants

Predators:

Young swans (cygnets) are vulnerable to predation from foxes and large birds such as herons. They will generally stay close to their parents for protection.

Life Cycle

The parents will then return to their breeding area in Spring

Breeding pairs (a mother and father) usually stay together all of their lives.

In April/May the female lays a clutch of eggs.

Cygnets have a brown/grey plumage and spend late summer and autumn with their parents

In winter, swans often move to a different area with greater food availability and cygnets often then leave the parents

Draw a picture of a swan's nest. What kind of materials is it made from?

Fun Facts!

Swans are strongly featured in Irish folklore. One of the most famous Irish legends is "The Children of Lir" which tells the story of 4 children being turned to swans for 900 years!



Swan Sounds

Despite the name mute swans are not silent! You may hear them making a few different noises. Adults make a low rumbling sound and will hiss when alarmed. Juveniles will make a high pitched call to ask for food.

Green Shield Bug

Common Name: Green Shield Bug

Irish Name: Fríd scéithe ghlas

Scientific Name: *Palomena prasina*



Description

Green shield bugs look just like their name suggests! Their back is the shape of a shield. They are bright green all over with a dark triangular patch where their wings overlap. They become darker in autumn and winter. They have a pair of long segmented antennae which are red and black at the tips. They have 6 legs.

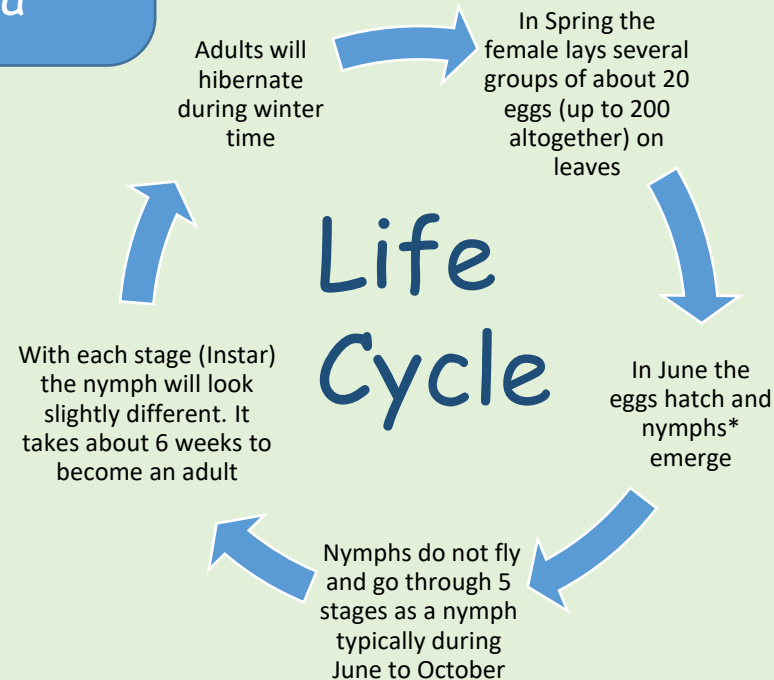
Habitat found

Green shield bugs are widespread throughout Ireland and are commonly found in hedgerows, on trees and in gardens. Although, they can be difficult to spot as they are very well camouflaged on most leaves they stop to eat on.



Photo: Robert Pittman via Flickr.com

Seen in Ireland: Late Spring to Autumn



*Nymphs are the name given to shield bugs (and some other insects) just after they hatch from their eggs. Unlike many other insects nymphs look similar to adults and will go through a process of moulting as they grow. Other insects such as butterflies hatch as a completely different looking larva (caterpillar) and then go through a complete metamorphosis.



Colour change in winter

Photo: Bob Knight via British Bugs

Fun Facts!

The green shield bug is just one of many members of the shield bug family. There are about 15 different species in Ireland with various colours and sizes.

Green Shield Bug

Draw a green shield bug camouflaged on a plant.

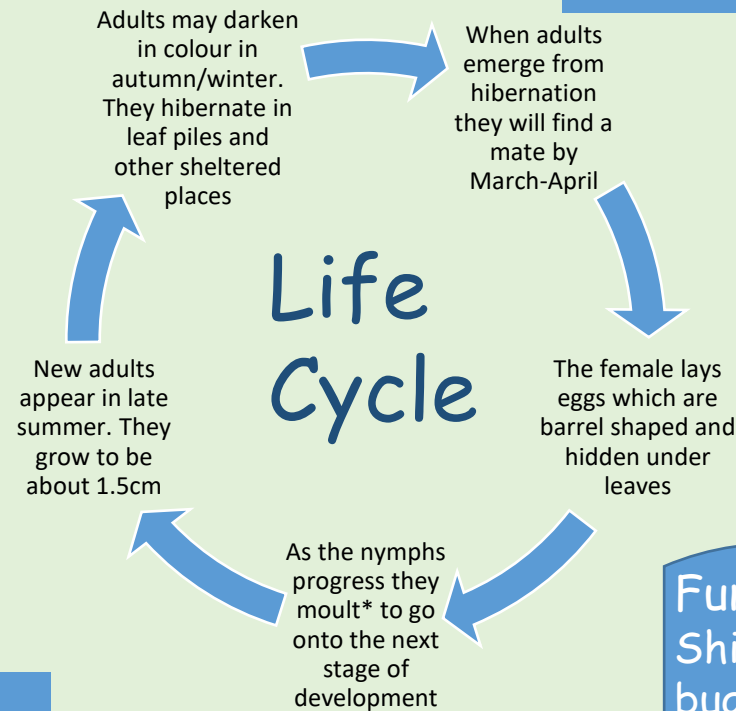


Diet

Green Shield Bugs are herbivores. They eat a variety of plant sap and leaves of trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants. They have mouth parts specially adapted to their feeding habits.

Predators

Green shield bugs have a variety of predators including birds, frogs and other insects. They have two main lines of defence. Excellent camouflage and the ability to emit a bad smell!



Fun Facts!

Shield bugs are often known by their nickname "stink bug". They will leave their scent behind on the vegetation they were crawling on. Also when threatened they can release a bad smell to try to convince a nearby predator not to eat them!

* Moulting is the process of shedding skin or an outer covering. This happens to animals who have a hard shell or fixed covering which can't expand as the animal grows

Did you know that green shield bugs are not part of the beetle family although they look similar. They are actually "True Bugs".

Smooth Newt

Common Name: Smooth or common newt

Irish Name: Earc Coiteann

Scientific Name: *Lissotriton vulgaris*



Description

Smooth newts are the only species of newt in Ireland. They are an amphibian and can sometimes be confused with lizards as they are a similar shape and size. Adults grow up to 10cm. They are dark brown/green in colour with smooth, slimy skin and a long tail. They have a lighter, slightly spotted underside.

Habitat found

Newts are found throughout Ireland. They spend the first few months of their lives as tadpoles so will be found in ponds, lakes and other wetland areas. As adults they will spend time on land and in water. They can often be found in gardens, woodlands and meadows. During winter they may take shelter in log piles or crevices as they hibernate.

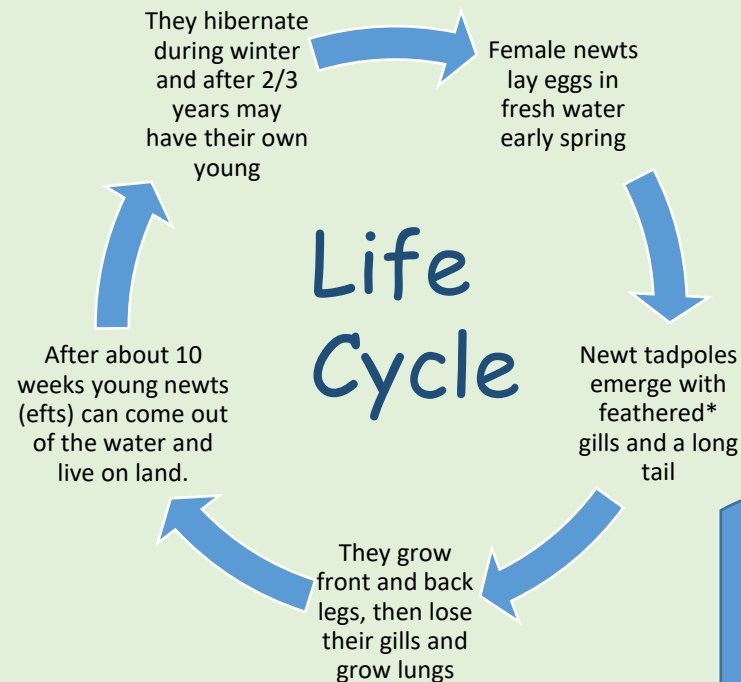
Newt Tadpole



Photo: Gail Hampshire via Flickr.com

Seen in Ireland: Spring to Autumn

Although newts are in Ireland year round we generally do not see them during winter as they are hibernating.



* Feathered gills are slightly unusual looking and can be mistaken for horns or antennae (which newts don't have). These gills have tiny hair like structures which take in oxygen from the water

Adult Newt



Photo: Tony Morris via Flickr.com

Fun Facts!

Male newts will try to attract a female by doing a courtship dance! They become more colourful as they approach the breeding season, their underside becomes orange and their spots get larger and more distinctive. They dance in a way to display these colours to impress the female!

Smooth Newt

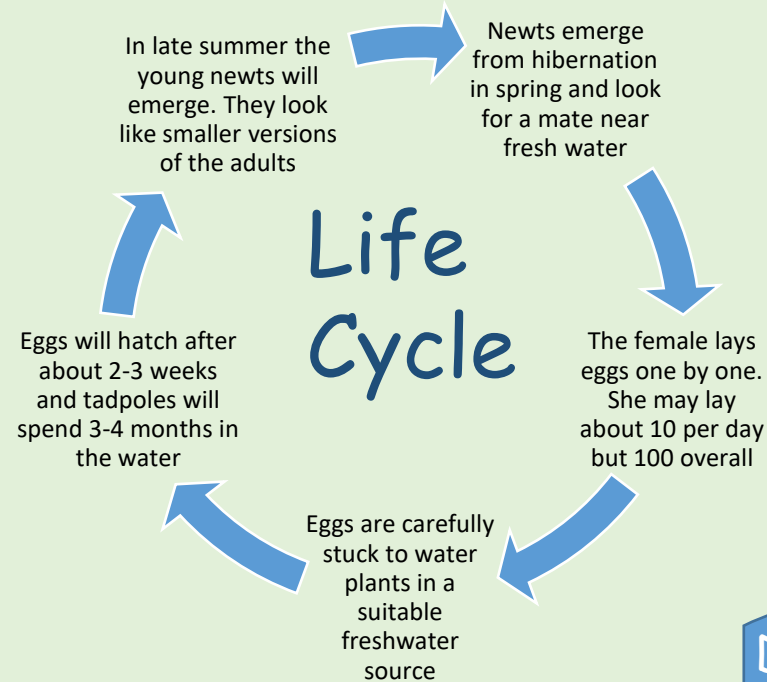
Draw a picture of a newt tadpole



Diet and Threats

Newts have a varied diet depending on what stage of life they are in. As tadpoles they feed on water insects and tadpoles. As adults they feed on insects on land including caterpillars and worms.

They have several predators. As tadpoles they can be eaten by fish or large water invertebrates. As adults they can be eaten by badgers, foxes and a variety of birds such as herons. The larger threat is the loss of suitable habitat. There has been a dramatic loss in Irish wetlands which make it difficult for newts to find suitable breeding grounds.



Draw a picture of an adult newt either in or out of the water camouflaged in its surroundings.

Newts rely on camouflage to stay safe from predators in water and on land. In water they are camouflaged on both sides. Their back and head is a darker colour to their underbelly which allows them to appear camouflaged to animals above and below them in water. When animals look up when under the water it is bright as the sun is shining from above. When animals are looking down into water it is dark as there is no light source. Many water based animals have this pattern of colour, for example killer whales.



Photo: Steve Herring via Flickr.com

Did you know...

Newts and other amphibians are more effected by the drop in temperature during winter than most other animals. This is because they are cold-blooded which means they cannot regulate their own body temperature. It is determined by the outside temperature. This leads to newts generally spending winter under log piles or in other sheltered areas.