

Clare Island

... a natural paradise



Raven



Sparrow Hawk



Guillemot



Puffin



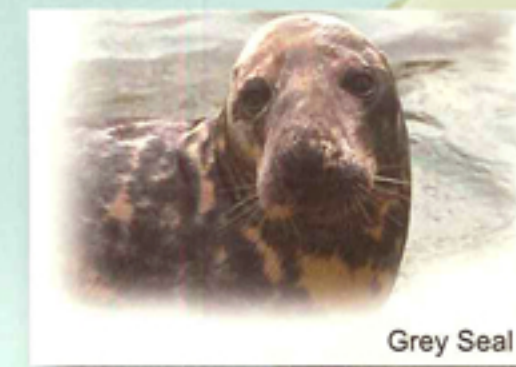
Barnacle Goose



Peregrine



Bottlenose Dolphin



Grey Seal



Cormorant



Chough



Chaffinch



Thrush



Otter



Skylark



Irish Hare



Kittiwake



Wheatear



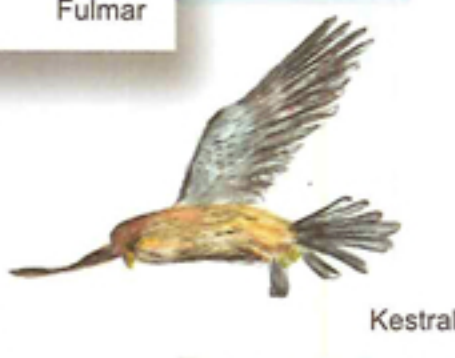
Curlew



Fulmar



Gannet



Kestrel



Oystercatcher



Irish Heath



Purple Loosestrife



Heath Spotted Orchid



Bird's Foot Trefoil



Ladies Bedstraw



St. Patrick's Cabbage



Common Sundew



Fuschia



Thrift



Yarrow

The Flora and Fauna of Clare Island

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Clare Island, lying three miles off the coast of Mayo, is one of the most studied islands in Europe. Its dramatic cliffs and inland landscapes provide natural habitats to a rich and varied flora and fauna. Since the days of Robert Lloyd Praeger and the landmark Clare Island Survey, carried out in the early part of the twentieth century, Clare Island has remained a focus of interest for ornithologists, botanists, geologists, marine biologists and all nature lovers. In fact, the 'New' Survey of Clare Island is still ongoing.

The Peregrine Falcon's piercing cry is often heard as it patrols Clare Island's northern cliffs in search of prey. These cliffs provide suitable nest sites for thousands of sea birds during the summer months. Fulmars, Kittiwakes, Guillemots and Razorbills nest on the cliff ledges while Puffins nest in burrows on the steep grassy slopes. A small Gannet colony of only three pairs exists on a sea stack off the north west of the island. This is the most northerly of the five Gannet colonies found in Ireland. Suitable habitat is also provided for the rare Chough, which forms large flocks on the island. Its distinctive high-pitched call and acrobatic flight distinguishes it from other crow species.

The island also plays host to a wonderful diversity of plant species. The inaccessible nature of the cliffs means that plant communities remain relatively undisturbed. Here the pink flowers of Sea Thrift add a splash of colour amongst the sea bird colonies. On the upper reaches of the impressive Croaghmore ridge there is a concentration of important alpine species. Amongst the small pockets of bogland to the east of the ridge the insectivorous Sundew ingeniously survives on the nutrient poor peat soils. Even along the roadsides flowers of the hedgerows and meadows will entertain the onlooker. Yellow Flag Iris and Ragged Robin dance in the breeze while Fuschia and Common Spotted Orchid delicately dress the hedgerows.

Amongst the meadows Hares often seek shelter creating their nest (a form) amongst the soft grasses and rushes. Otters clumsily bound along the edges of rivers, only feeling safe when they enter the sea. The cliffs near the Lighthouse are a good place to sit and listen for the plaintive cry of an otter cub for its mother. Looking to the sea you may spot an Otter expertly devouring a fish amongst the rolling waves. Common and Grey Seals also bob amongst the waves inquisitively watching any onlooker. A pod of Bottlenose Dolphins are frequently seen patrolling the sea from Clew Bay to Killary Harbour. If they are in a playful mood they may even bow ride with one of the Clare Island ferries.

The beauty of Clare Island will inspire any visitor to explore its varied habitats, leaving lasting, cherished memories of its wild and unspoilt nature.