

A walk in the woods at Ballinestragh, Killinieran.

Twenty-six people turned up in North Wexford for the monthly outing on 11th February, led by Janet Whelehan and Michael O'Donnell, for a walk in the woods at Ballinestragh, near the village of Killinieran.



Despite the damp weather, a good list of birds, including a nice flock of Long-tailed Tits and a lovely little group of Siskins feeding on Alder cones, was recorded. Spring flowering plants were starting to make an appearance and Lesser Celandine and Wood Sorrel were seen. Beautiful Hazel catkins, full of pollen, were dangling conspicuously but the tiny, red, female flowers could only be seen by searching the branches very carefully. Frogspawn was found in a few ponds with tadpoles already wriggling their way around in one pond. Whirligig Beetles were madly spinning around in circles and figure-of-eights on the water surface while a Pond-skater was able to use the surface tension of the water to literally 'walk on water'.

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After an hour in the wood, the group made it's way to Janet's garden nearby. While most people enjoyed a very welcome cup of tea or coffee with cakes and biscuits, Michael and Chris Wilson opened some nets to trap and ring some of the huge number of birds that Janet is feeding in her fabulous garden. In half an hour, 30 birds of six species, Blue, Great and Coal Tits, Chaffinch, Goldfinch and House Sparrow, were caught and ringed. One other Blue Tit, that already had a ring, had originally been ringed on 5th January 2007. It was a juvenile when it was ringed which meant that it had hatched in 2006 making it 6 years old – a very good age for a Blue Tit. Unfortunately the Tree Sparrows, which had been present earlier in the day, failed to make an appearance. This enigmatic species only turned up in Janet's garden for the first time ever just a few weeks earlier. All the while, we were accompanied by a chorus from around 200 frogs, croaking away in a mating frenzy in the nearby pond.



Overall it was a very enjoyable day. While February might not seem to be the best time to go out looking for wildlife, it shows that when you do make the effort, there's plenty to be seen.