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The Red Stables Summer School Jun - Aug 2012

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Introduction

The Lord Mayor of Dublin, Naoise Ó Muirí

I was delighted The Red Stables and St. Anne's Park was the setting for a programme of cultural and ecological exchange. The inaugural Red Stables Summer School complemented the role of St. Anne's Park itself, one of the largest and oldest of Dublin's green spaces. It provided a great opportunity for the public to find out more about the park's biodiversity and enabled artists and ecologists to share ideas. These interactions are very important, they allow us to think differently and learn about our environments in new ways. I would like to acknowledge the interesting work produced by both artists and ecologists inspired by the park which is highlighted within this publication.

I hope the summer school will continue to create further opportunities for artists and the public to engage with collaborative art and environmental projects and enjoy the wonderful facility that is St. Anne's Park.

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Introduction: The Red Stables Summer School 2012 Ray Yeates City Arts Officer

The Red Stables Artists' Studios, located in the landscape of St. Anne's Park, Dublin 3 was an ideal location for a summer school and a great starting point for the exploration of the rich biodiversity of the park. The summer school, initiated by Dublin City Council and the kind support of the Arts Council provided learning opportunities, spaces for conversations, presentations and exchanges between artistic and ecological practices. It enabled artists and ecologists who share a common interest and approach to working with nature to explore the park. The outcomes of these engagements were exhibited in The Red Stables during the Rose Festival. Through a series of short films, the summer school also looked at national and international artists whose practices focus on art and ecology and through discussions, investigated different approaches to working with the environment. 'Stories From The Field' involved an array of presentations on art and ecology, by Maryann Harris, Dr. Declan Doogue, Seoidin O'Sullivan, Christine Mackey, and Cathy Fitzgerald. Throughout the month of July there were field trips, reading groups, talks and presentations which concluded with 'Field Findings' led by Dr. Karen E. Till, Cultural Geographer, NUI Maynooth who explored the outcomes and conclusions of these events and engagements through discussion with the artists, botanists and herbalists involved in The Red Stables Summer School.

Dublin City Council is delighted to present this publication outlining the projects and events that took place.

TERRAIN

Seán O Sullivan

This year, the Red Stables Summer School has presented two projects: Seoidín O'Sullivan's *Field Work* and Geraldine O'Reilly's *Weeds Are Plants Too!*. Both used St. Anne's Park as a space for peer learning and exchange on the subjects of art and ecology. Both included an extensive set of public conversations, workshops and field trips run by different artists, ecologists, botanists and geographers. Concurrently, the summer school hosted a film programme and two exhibitions during the park's annual Rose festival. This book is a record of those events, manifested in transcripts, images, stills, and data; it is a way of hardening the associations between the summer school's participants, guests and public.

There is much to extract from Seoidín O'Sullivan's title, *Field Work*. The word 'field' carries its own historical and practical baggage – in an academic sense, it alludes to Pierre Bourdieu's explanation of the field as an outline of one's area of expertise, and in some respects, of comfort. It ties itself to the prospect of having a bordered domain – a place that serves us, but which simultaneously demands interminable manual doing. In an ecological sense, the field is mutably comparable to the park or garden. It readily reminds us that although the earth can be cultivated, it is not necessarily 'for' cultivation. It does not belong to us, instead, we belong to it. We must contend with it.

These matters can open up the motivation for *Field Work*: Seoidín O'Sullivan created an area of learning that reached between artistic and geographical disciplines.

Her events intermittently belonged to all, to some, or to a pair – never to the artist alone. The project incorporated the kinds of experiences that are native to a scientific education; specimens and records were routinely gathered, peers from diverse communities met to exchange ideas and experiences, and visiting groups were taken out on long field trips and into big discussions.

As part of *Field Work*, Seoidín O'Sullivan and Karol O'Mahony created a seating system that was used in the Red Stables' gallery throughout the summer. Each seat is nearly a cube: one of its vertical sides has a fifteen-degree slant that leads to a wide back. The slant lets twenty-four of the chairs come together and form a quite wide circle, and their hard surface obliges you to sit upright. These chairs were not idle at the summer school, they let the project's discussions fill the room in an intense way. They were part of a catalysing of occasion and place that compelled groups to close together, face one another and share their thoughts generously.

In her project *Weeds Are Plants Too!*, Geraldine O'Reilly explored the ways that weedy plants have traditionally been viewed as harmful aggressors; she surmised that in many cases those species are half-understood. For the summer school, O'Reilly made an open call to people interested in taking part in painting and drawing workshops, which took place over a week in June. She worked closely with Joan O'Farrell and Dominic Bubenzer of HerbBís as well as the local parks service to select a series of weeds from the nearby terrain and provide specimens to her twenty-two participants. The group completed a wide variety of studies; they decorated the works with ornamental lists of the historically understood medicinal properties of each plant, as well as each species' more

general standing in the twin worlds of myth and folklore. This summer's Rose festival in St. Anne's Park included talks and presentations by HerbBís, who explained ways to cultivate and study those plant species that might prove useful to us. The group worked from a large geodesic dome filled with various plants, the dome hosted an exhibition for *Weeds Are Plants Tool*.

The true nature of a weed is not easily made plain. The descriptor is typically handed to any species that makes itself unwanted to us. The looseness of that definition should characterise the kind of uncertain value we have for weeds. On one hand, they tend to power their own ecological fiefdoms with a mystic combination of chaos and exploitation. However, they also made the first vegetables, dyes and medicines, an auspicious list of inventions for even the lowliest lowlife.

In a talk at the Red Stables, Geraldine O'Reilly cited the British naturalist Richard Mabey in explaining that weeds "are the boundary breakers, the stateless minority, who remind us that life is not that tidy". It is no small irony that a project in the park should make such virtue of untidiness. The land itself strikes a paradoxical balance between the beauty of managed biodiversity, and the good health of that same miscellany running roughshod through the earth. And within the spectre of ecological balance, weedy boundlessness is worth savouring – it is an awkward unifier, and a forceful intoxicant that melds and rattles so many fields.

^{1.} Richard Mabey. 2010. Weeds: A Cultural History. London: Profile Books Ltd. chap. 12 [no page numbers]



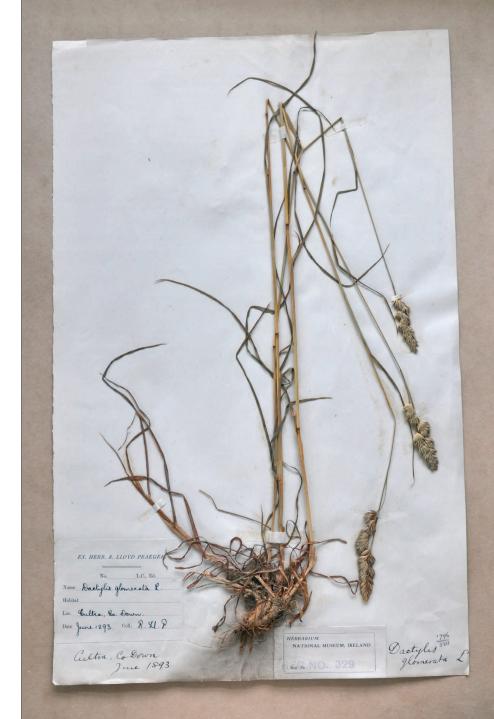
FIELD WORK Seoidín O'Sullivan

This year, I converted the Red Stables gallery into a pedagogical space where the public could discuss the relationship between art and ecology in Ireland. *Field Work* talks of working outside of a laboratory, classroom or studio to collect data, it is about a direct engagement with matter, people and plants. 'The field' was a point of departure for a number of conversations on our relationship to land use, and to land itself.

In starting the project, I researched The Dublin Naturalists' Field Club, whose members have driven the protection of Ireland's natural habitats and created a learning space for naturalists since 1886. The club's members are both amateurs and professional scientists. Dr. Declan Doogue refers to it as "a university without the university: an alternative learning system, a 'free university'." In 1973, Joseph Beuys set up the Free International University as a place of research, work and communication, a place to ponder the future of society. Beuys remains a point of reference for artists engaging with experimental pedagogy. In his text *I Am Searching for Field Character*, he claimed that "communication occurs in reciprocity: it must never be a one-way flow from the teacher to the taught. The teacher takes equally from the taught."

We often see fields two dimensionally, as sites to be developed or used agriculturally. But it may be possible to look at Ireland's fields in a new way, with more complexity not least through the identification of their species.

Dr. Jenni Roche and I chose an area of the park for



transect – a transect requires moving along a fixed line to record how frequently a species is visible, and how close it is to your path. These measurements help to determine how densely an area is populated by a given species. The area we chose was once grassland for horses and cows, and was later used as a sports field, but has in recent years been managed by the park as a meadow and biodiversity area. Dr. Doogue and I invited the public to participate in a field trip to this transected meadow to examine the various plant species inhabiting the field. Although the meadow's grass seemed to be all the same, it is composed of twenty-five separate species. The field trips' documentation was exhibited in the Red Stables gallery.

While researching in the Botanic Gardens Library, I discovered an image of the Belfast Naturalists' Field Club meeting at the Giant's Causeway in the mid-nineteenth century. The Causeway consists of interlocking hexagonal basalt columns formed by an ancient volcanic eruption. The front cover of Caroline Tisdall's book *We Go This Way* features a photograph of Joseph Beuys walking across the column tops.

I created a seating system in collaboration with architect Karol O'Mahony, which was used for talks, reading groups and exhibitions throughout *Field Work*. Together, the seats form a closed circular shape, and can be separated to make smaller dynamic sets. These arrangements echo the Giant's Causeway's hexagonal formations; hexagons also entered my drawing practice through research on Buckminster Fuller and his geodesic domes. The seats are a kind of nomadic school system. The audience can break away from the feeling of a conventional lecture space, and shift into formations suitable for intimate conversation or public discussion.



A meeting of the Belfast Naturalists' Field Club at the Giant's Causeway, 11 June, 1868. Photograph © National Museums Northern Ireland Collection Ulster Museum





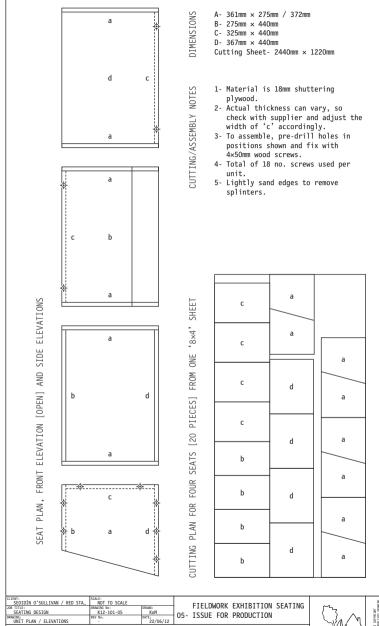












FIELDWORK SEATING SYSTEM

FIELDWORK EXHIBITION SEATING 05- ISSUE FOR PRODUCTION















Fieldwork with Dr. Jenni Roche and Dr. Declan Doogue.



Fieldwork with Dr. Declan Doogue, 1 July 2012.

SHORT FILM PROGRAMME Carriage House Studio

Below:
Cathy Fitzgerald, The HollyWood
Diaries, film still, 08m54s,
2008-2012
Waldemar Januszczak, Andy
Goldsworthy - Land Art (ZCZ
Films), film still, 06m08s, 2008

Opposite:
Grace Weir, Transect, film still,
6m30s, 2008
Aoibheann O'Sullivan & Nigel
Heather, Car Park Cultivation,
film still, 06m05s, 2010
David Nash, David Nash at Kew: A
Natural Gallery (Culture Colony),
film still, 13m20s, 2012











FIELD FINDINGS

Dr. Karen F. Till Dept. of Geography, NUI Maynooth

'Art is a discovery rather than a given: we humans aren't born into art as we are into a home. One discovery in art may well lead to another ...'

The Red Stables Summer School invited residents and guests to attend to a 'natural', yet highly humanised place, St. Anne's Park. When we walked in the park together with ecologists, we learned of the intimate possibilities plants offer us to heal and become nourished. We also learned to pay attention, to see the fragile blossoms of rare orchids in our midst, and tried to sketch the richness of ordinary plants. When we watched films or heard talks by artists, we may have remembered the swishing sounds of our movements through this park; we may have begun to listen to bird calls differently or learned about new places that expanded our imaginations. Artists helped us create new collections, design spaces, and gathered stories about seeds, farming and plants shared across generations: we were invited to learn more about fieldwork, the places we share, and the environments we inherit.

As artists and ecologists remind us, there are knowledges and forms of consciousness beyond the human. Recognising this enhances our ability both to live more respectfully with our fellow species and to take better care of our shared home, the earth. Through the summer school projects, we may have learned how to pay attention to – and hence better care for – our parks and each other.

Such valuable outcomes resulting from partnerships and learning processes are often ignored by an art world that emphasises historical models of the 'avant-garde' artist as genius or by policy makers promoting economic models of valuing objects for display. 2 In this short essay, I outline three reasons to invest in shared artistic labour: its collaborative discovery in multiple fields, its creative practices of social and ecological sustainability, and its educational outreach to a range of publics.



Fieldwork: relational spaces of discovery

Environmental artists mediate natural, human, virtual, symbolic and experiential communities. They bring the outside inside and the inside outside. They experiment with multiple temporal and spatial scales, and play with perspectives. They translate scientific data into knowledge that feels tangible. They make connections visible for us so we understand them through our senses. Their aesthetic and creative ability to engage 'fields' critically and imaginatively facilitates communities to explore past, present and future relations we have with our natures, places and environments.

Artist Christine Mackey describes a 'field' as a param-

eter rather than a perimeter: a field is in constant flux, whereas a perimeter encloses space by delimiting rigid boundaries. Her understanding of field is not defined as an absolute or Cartesian space, but rather as a relational space. It depends upon her relationships to others:

'A "field" ...is agitated by my presence and interaction with the "other" – whether turning the page of a book, bending close to the ground searching for microscopic patterns and nuances associated with a "field" or socially engaged with people mediated through conversation'.³

The field allows for, as well as offers us, potential resources. Through our co-presence with others, we move through thresholds and along place-based pathways, and may make unanticipated connections and imagine new possibilities. The process of generating knowledges about place can exist in the archive, in a meadow, in a chat over tea; we listen to misplaced stories, unearth hidden histories, disentangle ecological formations, trace seasonal landscape patterns, and smell shared traditions.⁴

The multisensual activities of Christine's *Field-Work Pad II*, developed with students in Fingal County, 5 or Seoidín O'Sullivan's *Lost Knowledges* and South Circular Road Community Gardens projects in Dublin, 6 acknowledge that our bodily presence does something once we're in a place. In turn, we may become changed, or can be changed, if we're attending to how we interact with others and places. Phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty also suggests that we come to know our environments through our lived bodies. He follows Henri Bergson in arguing that any objective or scientific understanding of space can only have meaning through an individu-

al's lived experience. Embodied forms of knowledge are a kind of body-memory that allow us to perceive and make sense of our world. By our movements between and through fields we create what anthropologist Tim Ingold calls 'meshworks'. This is because, as geographer Yi-Fu Tuan describes, we are not 'born' into knowing about our environment; we must learn through discovery and then follow the routes these discoveries offer us for future explorations.⁷

Attending to places: sustainable transformations

Environmental artists also collaborate with places as communities of human and non-human natures. Cathy Fitzgerald's ongoing forty-year, two-and-a-half acre forest project in the making is a good example. Drawing inspiration from the Irish Tree NGO *Crann*, Cathy has created a forest in transformation, now classified by an Irish forest cover database as a 'low impact silviculture system' (close-to-nature continuous woodlands). Her experimental films depict this forest as an inhabited place through different temporal rhythms and spatial scales. § In *Transformation* (2011), we hear 'a bird describe its forest. ...the bird lives in a small conifer plantation that is being transformed to a mixed species, permanent forest'. §

Cathy understands her work as a form of 'deep sustainability': it includes ecological functions, aesthetic innovations, and most importantly, community-based environmental consciousness through forest policy development, which entails an alteration in how individuals relate to their communities. She first learned about community forestry practices in 1995 through a South Leitrim *Crann* project; eleven years later, she revisited the place through a documentary lens and exhibition space, with



support from *Crann* and The Dock in County Leitrim. In these artistic works, Cathy brought together the voices and images of local people who volunteered to plant broadleaf woodlands almost twenty years ago. This new sustainable wood culture in what was a monoculture conifer region now offers an ecological and economic model for other regions in Ireland.

Cathy argues for a careful tending of landbases that we must return to if all species are 'to survive and thrive'. ¹⁰ Her attention to place also asks us to slow down and pay attention to the richness of forest lives. There is a practical value in slowness: it's healthy for us to pay attention to the textures of place. It allows us to create unexpected networks with lives that we wouldn't have otherwise come into contact with.

Educating through nature: rethinking urban environments

Through acts of discovery and making connections to communities through art and ecology, we may also begin to understand environmental education in new ways.



But what can we learn about 'nature' in urban settings?

An example from the U.S. might inspire Irish audiences to think differently about 'natures' in the city. Minnesota-based nature-society artist Christine Baeumler recreated a tamarack bog on the roof of the Minneapolis College of Art and Design. "Bogs are often thought of in pejorative terms, referred to as 'quagmires', peatlands, flarks, or swamps. But as Christine noted: 'What I love about these tamarack bogs …is that they're exotic, but in our own midst'. 12

The rooftop bog is now a rich educational 'field' for urban residents who can view the mini-ecosystem from inside the College, on the second floor while equipped with binoculars. Christine collaborated with ecologists at Barr Engineering and Boreal Natives for over a year to get the right mix and chemistry of soil, water and plants. This fragile ecosystem is normally located in the northern part of the state, near Canada, and is not often seen by most people. This artistic-ecological project brought unexpected natures to different parts of our homes, allowing us

to think differently about our environments. By the way, this experimental sixteen-by-twenty-four foot wetlands restoration project with thirty-two species of native bog plants and a moving body of water seems to be doing well; the pines had already grown six inches in July 2012!

Lessons from the field

'Artists can guide us through sensuous kinesthetic responses to topography, lead us from ... land-based social history into alternative relationships to place'. ¹³

The examples of art and ecology I've touched upon here entail a cycle of collaboration and conversation, of thinking about what we're doing at home, and bringing insights and new knowledges from other places into our consciousness. The natural systems of our global biosphere have been radically altered through human impact: if we were to stop co² emissions, temperatures would continue to increase by at least one degree Celsius over the next hundred years, with artic regions rising even higher, ensuring continued changes in sea levels, glacial reserves, climates, habitat distributions, nitrates in the biosphere, and biodiversity. When we consider our world according to our three shared ecologies - of our minds, of our social relations, and our environments 14 – we should be deeply unsettled by both our treatment of the earth, and the ways 'ecocidal' representations of the environment limit our abilities to imagine alternatives. 15

In this context, public summer school programmes with artists and ecologists, such as those offered by Red Stables, have much to offer residents and urban environments. Through the shared fieldwork, spaces and collaborations between artists and ecologists, a range of

publics engaged with natures and each other in ways that changed St. Anne's Park as a place. We participated in a process of encounter and attention together. No longer just an aesthetic landscape appropriated by individuals, our park became 'a field of care'. ¹⁶

If we take a part of what we learned home with us, we may become more aware of how interconnected we are to our biosphere. Through our newly discovered artistic and ecological practices, we may even change how we think about our shared environmental inheritances and our responsibility as caretakers to our communities.

^{1.} Yi-Fu Tuan. 2004. Art, Place and Self. Sante Fe, NM: University of Virginia Press.

Grant Kester. 2004. Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Christine Mackey. 2012. The Field.
 Red Stables Summer School Presentation,
 July.

^{4.} Christine Mackey's artist statement: http://christinemackey.com/.

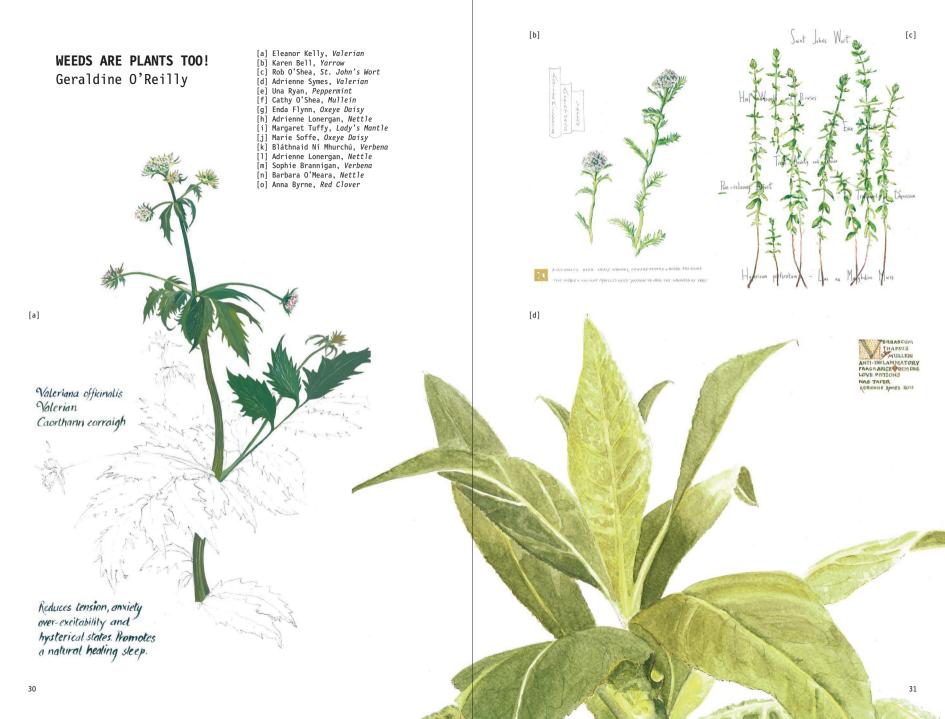
^{5.} Christine Mackey. 2007-2012. A Year in the Field. http://ayearinthefield.com/.

^{6.} Seoidin O'Sullivan. 2012. Lost Knowledges: http://redstablesartists.com/2012/07/05/the-lost-knowledge-project/ and http://southcircular qarden.bloqspot.nl/.

^{7.} Maurice Merleau-Ponty. 2002 [1945]. The Phenomenology of Perception. London: Routledge Classics. Tim Ingold. Being Alive. 2011. London: Routledge. Yi-Fu Tuan. 1977. Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 8. See Cathy Fitzgerald's webpage: http://ecoartfilm.com/category/my-experimental-film-works/.

^{9.} http://vimeo.com/27704065 10. Cathy Fitzgerald. 2012. Deep Sustainability and the art and politics of forests. issuu.com (Jan 12): http:// issuu.com/cathvart/docs/ deepsustainability forests2012). 11. Christine Baeumler. 2012. Reconstituting the Landscape: A Tamarack Rooftop Restoration: http:// facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.101509229 18519651.438538.93151904650; Adam Ardvinson. 2012. 'Rooftop Bog'. Land8 Blog. July 19: http://land8.net/blog/ 2012/07/19/rooftop-bog/. 12. Cited in Ardvinson. 13. Lucy Lippard, 1998, The Lure of the Local. Senses of place in a multicentered society. New York: New 14. Felix Guattari. 1989. The Three

Ecologies. Transl. C. Turner. new formations 8 (Summer): 131–147.
15. Cathy Fitzgerald. 2012. The Anthropocene: 10,000 years of ecocide. issuu.com (May 11). Online visual culture PDF article available at: http://issuu.com/cathyart/docs/anthropocene_10000yrs_ecocide.
16. Tuan. 1977. Space and Place.

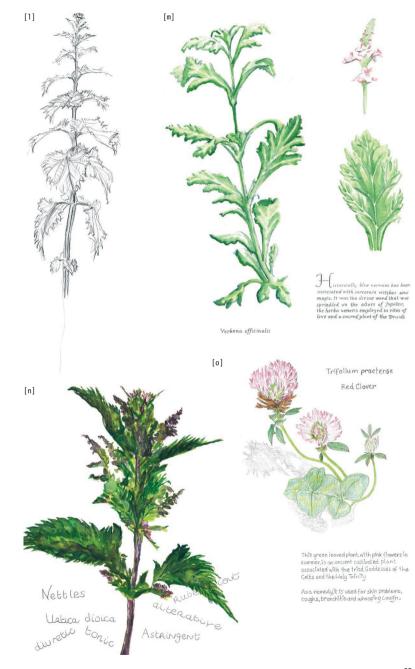












Below: Painting and drawing workshops, as part of Weeds Are Plants Too! The participants are completing studies of various weedy species native to the area.

Opposite: A Geodesic dome constructed for the Rose Festival at St. Anne's Park. The dome was the site of the Weeds Are Plants Too! exhibition, as well as workshops and seminars by HerbBis.

















THE DUBLIN NATURALISTS' FIELD CLUB

Dr. Declan Doogue

It's nice to see so many friendly faces here today – the survivors of my last field trip. I was asked to speak about the history and recent activities of the Dublin Naturalists' Field Club, an organisation that has developed the field skills, talent and knowledge of generations of ecologists and field naturalists in Dublin since its foundation. As a schoolboy, I was introduced to the club and was soon put to work recording the flora as so many modern naturalists still are in their search for knowledge and understanding of wildlife and its habitats. Where did this knowledge come from? Who were the founders of the club and why has it survived for so long?

The Dublin Club has been around since 1886. It was formed during a very interesting phase in Irish life, mainly by a secure middle class whose commitment to things Irish manifested in art, theatre, literature, archaeology, natural history, and who were seen as being predominantly Dublin-based, and either English or Anglo-Irish living in the context of the United Kingdom and hence the British Empire.



The local character of the Club is evidenced in the iconography of our early badge, which incorporates the city emblem, a moth, and other elements of symbolic character such as the shamrock. The heraldic nature

of the badge echoed those of similar style from field clubs elsewhere in England, Scotland and Wales and the imagery conforms very closely to that of the equivalent Belfast club that had been formed several decades earlier. Both emblems set the clubs very much in the context of their parent cities but reach out to the countryside and thence to the 'field'. Our own symbols have



changed – the castles have survived and the pied wagtails are common but unfortunately the lovely plane trees where they so famously roosted in their thousands on O'Connell Street have disappeared.

The bookplates of naturalists at the time are fascinating – those of Robert Welch set out his personal interests in pre-historic implements and snails, geology



and flora and of course the Clare Island survey, which was the major botanical environmental survey of the day, and has served as a template for research ever since. Welch was a superb photographer and many of the habitat and landscape illustrations from the late 1800s and early-1900s are often his work.

One of the key people as part of this transition in the 1880s in Ireland was Alexander Goodman More – an English naturalist, who had come to work in the Dublin Natural History Museum. More exerted an extraordinary influence on the study of Irish natural history. When he died, Barrington, a significant contemporary of his wrote that, "He was not a scientist of the modern type".

He meant this in a complimentary way, but one that begs the question as to what did one have to do in order to be "not a scientist of the modern type". Barrington said that More was concerned with the correct identification of species – of plants, birds, insects, as well as with knowing something about their habits, meaning the habitat



type of each of these and also with knowing about the significance of the geographical distribution of individual species. A species might be widespread in Ireland or it might be very rare. It might be common in one area and scarce in another. This creates great difficulty for legislators and enforcers who must deploy environmental laws evenly throughout the country despite the fact that the occurrence of a species or habitat type will have differing significances in different parts of the country.



More inspired a natural history golden age at the end of the 1800s. In 1866, he and David Moore produced one of the great works of Irish botany, *Cybele Hibernica*, which summarised the whereabouts of all the rare plants in Ireland. The iconography of the book cover is again significant; they used Saint Dabeoc's Heath, a species of large-flowered heath widespread in

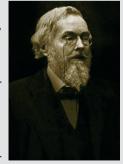
the west of Ireland but unknown wild in Britain. They thus recognised an Irish perspective and the key components in the Irish flora that distinguished it from that of the flora of the British Isles. More supported the formation of the Field Club in 1886. But, the prime mover for its foundation was Professor A.C. Haddon, known later as 'Head-hunter



Haddon'; he was interested in ethnography and had written a book called *The Races of Man*. It sounds eugenic nowadays, but he was in fact a very great humanitarian. In common with many career academics, he later moved to on wider fields, presaging the dearth of talent that was yet to become apparent.

The first officers of the field club were both professional and amateur experts of natural history research in Ireland. They were motivated by a willingness to impart their knowledge to the public. Institutional backers such as the Museums and the Royal Irish Academy were similarly forthright in their support. At that time, very few individuals progressed to a university education, but the prime academics made their services, skills and goodwill available to club members by means of field trips and lectures. In effect, the field club was an open universi-

ty, without tuition fees other than a very modest annual subscription, its leaders did not and still do not charge for their services. The early leaders were individuals of substance and were well positioned in terms of the intellectual hierarchy of Dublin. Although most would have come from English or Anglo-



Irish backgrounds, there were some exceptions. The very distinguished George Sigerson was one of the first

committee members – he was a neurosurgeon in Dublin, he wrote a paper on the flora of Tyrone and was the first Cathaoirleach of Seanad Éireann, albeit briefly and in a ceremonial capacity.

Another leading naturalist in the club was Henry Chichester Hart, who had connections in Donegal, but who often stayed with his brother in Howth. He was



an extraordinarily energetic character who was a Shake-spearian scholar, the Sheriff of Donegal, an international explorer, and a writer on the folk music of Donegal, as well as a serious mountaineer and author of *Flora of the County Donegal* (1898) – a detailed account of the distribution of the wild plants of that county. Some years

earlier he had written *The Flora of Howth* (1887) in which he drew attention to the significance and richness of the local flora of Howth where so many of the rarest Irish species were, and where some still are. The current DNFC research project is a revision of that work, identifying not only the subsequent botanical casualties of more than a century of development and habitat destruction but also the number of invasive species (mostly garden ejects) that have made Howth their home and which now threaten the remnants of the natural flora.

In its early days, the club produced a little magazine every month, published by Eason's. This journal, *The Irish Naturalist*, cost sixpence, came by post, and recorded the various botanical and zoological discoveries that

had been recently made. One of the enduring benefits of that journal was that it included site reports, where experts wrote accounts of topics such as The Flora of Lough Ree or Lough Erne. That information become part of the factual basis for the recognition of many present National Heritage Areas (NHAS) and the subsequent designation



nation of Special Areas of Conservation (sAcs), though they've been augmented in recent years by specialised state-commissioned ecological studies of EU protected habitats and species.

My personal hero is Nathaniel Colgan, who was another of the founder members. He wrote *The Flora of*



County Dublin in 1904 – an evaluation and summary account of the localities of different plants living in Dublin. A species such as Golden Samphire, which is quite rare in Ireland, grows in quantity on the south side of Howth on vegetated rocks occasionally sprayed by waves. Colgan drew all the previously published records

together and then added details of the new sites where he had also found the species. It is now possible more than a century later to return to these sites and assess the current conservation status of this species. As a schoolboy, when I was leaning my fieldcraft I used Colgan's book as a topographical field guide and visited the places where he had found these plants more than sixty years earlier.

The great man of Irish natural history at the time



was Robert Praeger. He had a good regard for the club and became its president on three different occasions. He wrote, "This little society serves as a useful training ground for membership of the larger scientific societies of Dublin". And so it was. Praeger's enduring legacy was that he set up an administrative apparatus for collecting distribution data and analysing it on a county-by-county basis, data is nowadays collected at a far finer level of resolution, often on a spot basis, (two metre squared plots) assisted by GPS technology and by vastly superior maps. The end product of modern field species recording is that all-Ireland or European maps can now be created and easily updated, showing the distribution of individual species. The map of Golden Samphire shows that the Dublin colonies of this warm-climate species are noteworthy, being at the northern extreme of the range in Ireland, with only a single site further north on Clogherhead in Co. Louth. This is a fascinating part of plant or animal



geography. Initially, the aim is simply to map the distribution of a species but with later insight, to then search for the underlying reasons for the distribution patterns themselves (soils, climate, exposure etc.). Distribution patterns provide hard evidence as to the historical processes that have gone before and serve as predictors of what is yet to come as land-use changes, development, farming and abandonment take their toll on structural and habitat diversity as well as species occurrence.

The modern Field Club, in terms of its outlook, spirit and skills, is very similar to the organisation founded in 1886. The greatest difference is our regrettably increased awareness of the rate at which habitats are destroyed every year. With these losses of physical environment, individual species have now begun to disappear from large tracts of countryside. Original data lists and records of occurrence of rare species compiled by earlier generations of members provide devastating irrefutable evidence of the impacts of environmental change. Not only are wetland plants vanishing, but sometimes the wetlands themselves have been obliterated from the landscape.

We include within our present membership, national experts on taxonomy, plant distribution, plant geography, insect identification, field techniques – people who know species of plants and insects in the way that A.G. More knew them. Part of our remit is to ensure that other naturalists understand and become part of that ongoing learning process, connecting fieldcraft, species identification and habitat recognition. These skills are being lost from society and academia, and it is our hope that they might be preserved and nurtured. With their accumulated knowledge, Field Clubs develop an understanding of the dynamics and significance of plant and animal distributions and are in a position to point out the various trends that observant naturalists register either consciously or subliminally. We also maintain custodianship and dominion of the collected records of our volunteer experts and helpers, ensuring that the accumulated data sets are both comprehensive and of a sufficiently high standard to be used for the ultimate benefit of wildlife conservation. Recently, and in a broader all-Ireland context, we have also supported the fieldwork that culminated in the publication of a major work on the distribution of butterflies on our island entitled Irelands Butterflies - A Review.

Through the winter months, the club holds evening lecture-meetings, usually in the National Botanic Gardens, which is now our main institutional supporter. We also hold monthly identification meetings, and an additional twenty or more field trips. Every year we welcome about fifty people to membership. Some remain with us for many years. Every year we meet one or two prospective members who have all the qualities to become great biological recorders. There may be one among us today.

BIOGRAPHIES

Geraldine O'Reilly lives in Killucan, Co. Westmeath. She received a degree in Fine Art Painting from the National College of Art and Design, Dublin in 1983. In 1989 she received a Fulbright Scholarship to continue her studies in New York City. She joined Graphic Studio Dublin in 1994, and was appointed Chairperson 2008. She was was elected a member of Aosdána in 2004.

Seoidín O'Sullivan studied at Technikon Natal in Durban, South Africa and at NCAD, Dublin. Her art practice supports sustainable models within various ecological contexts, and addresses issues of land use and biodiversity. She investigates socio-political and ecological narratives, which she re-presents in critically engaged ways through a variety of media.

Dublin Naturalists' Field Club was founded in 1886. Its early members included Robert Lloyd Praeger and Nathaniel Colgan. Its aim is to promote an interest in all branches of natural history, conservation and protection of rare and endangered plants and animals, and the protection of sites of scientific interest.

Dr. Declan Doogue is a leading Irish botanist and entomologist. He is a Fellow of the Linnean Society and an Honorary Member of the Botanical Society of the British Isles. He led the *Flora of Dublin* recording project and recently published *The Wildflowers of Ireland*. He leads field research projects and lectures for the DNFC.

Dr. Karen E. Till is a Senior Lecturer of Cultural Geography at National University of Ireland Maynooth. Her curatorial work invites artists, practitioners, community leaders and publics to explore how creative practices might enable more responsible approaches to caring for places, particularly in urban settings.

HerbBis was founded by Dominik Bubenzer, Claire Gardiner, Joan O'Farrell and Marina Kessopersadh in 2011. HerbBis is an initiative that aims to educate and provide information on the use of herbs and plants for medicinal and therapeutic application in modern day Ireland, drawing on knowledge from the past.

Dr. Jenni Roche is an ecologist who holds an Honours Degree in Environmental Science and a PhD in Botany at Trinity College Dublin. She works with Botanical, Environmental and Conservation Consultants, conducting ecological fieldwork throughout Ireland and the Scottish Highlands. Jenni is currently involved in the Irish National Survey of Upland Habitats

Christine Mackey is an artist and researcher who employs diverse disciplines, subject matter, and tactics in devising works that generate different kinds of knowledge of place, their hidden histories and ecological formations. Upcoming exhibitions include Leitrim Sculpture Centre and Limerick City Gallery of Art.

Cathy Fitzgerald is an experimental filmmaker / visual artist with a background in research biology. She is presently a Visual Culture Ph.D. Scholar at the National College of Art & Design, looking at experimental cinema [practice and theory] and ecology in this age of biospheric crisis. [www.ecoartfilm.com]

Karol O'Mahony B.Arch M.RIAI is an architect having qualified from UCD in 2006. He practices in Dublin and Kerry. He enjoys the domestic scale where close relationships and trust are vital to create unique spaces. He is active as a landscape photographer, a discipline that complements and informs his role as an architect.

Maryann Harris is the Senior Executive Parks Superintendent for Dublin City Council. She is responsible for the planning, design and management of green infrastructure in Dublin city. She holds a B. Sc. in Landscape Architecture from Cornell University, and an M. Sc. in Environmental Science from Trinity College Dublin.

