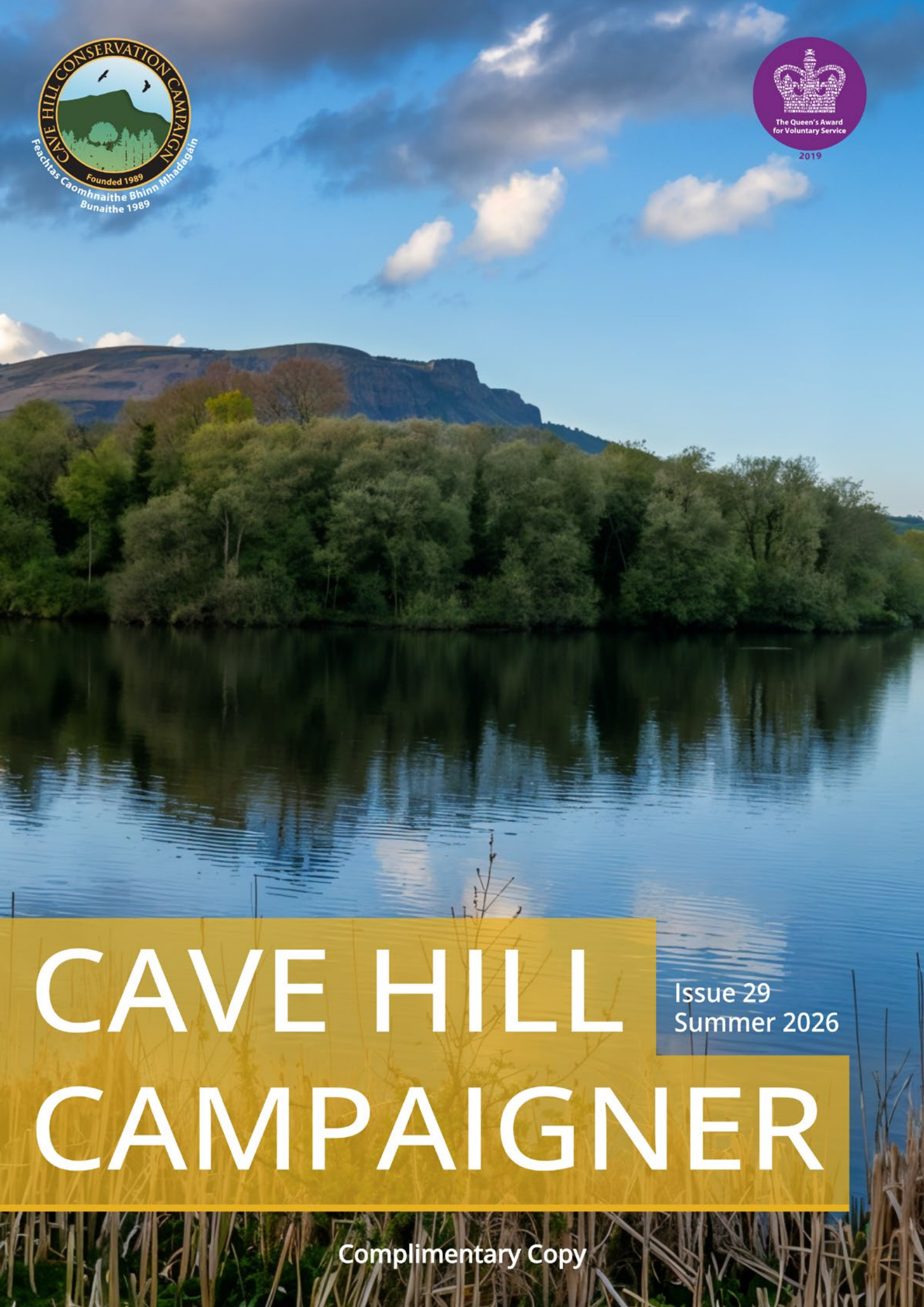




CAVE HILL CAMPAIGNER

Issue 29
Summer 2026

Complimentary Copy

Chair's Campaigner Report for 2025-26

Cave Hill is very important to all of us in Belfast and indeed further afield. It provides a refuge and a solace for those who care to visit, whether to take a long walk or a short stroll, or even to sit on a bench for a while. It provides a link to nature and also to our history. And it never ceases to delight. Nature always provides something memorable on every visit. Those are the reasons that underpin our organisation's commitment to Cave Hill and inspire our activists to give their time to it. We want people to realise what we have and we want also to pass the Park on to coming generations so that they too may benefit and enjoy.

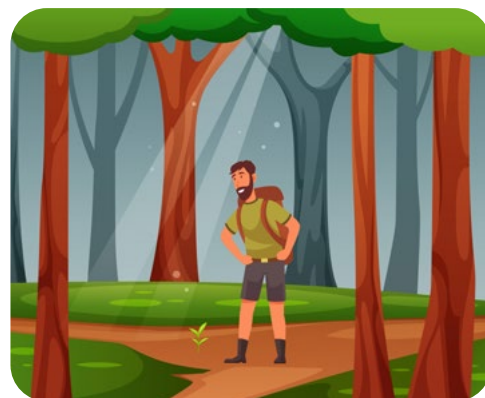
We in Cave Hill Conservation Campaign were very active throughout the year. We organised and shepherded our usual ten public walks on Cave Hill, mainly on Saturdays from April to October. These had an average attendance of between 10 and 20 walkers. In truth, we would not want many more participants; these walks work best with small numbers.

As part of our extra walks programme, we hosted a number of other walks:

- three walks for carers in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust in the summer
- Siúlóid Mhic Reachtain - a walk on Cave Hill by the McCracken Irish Summer School in July.
- a walk for Royal National Institute for the Blind in July
- a Volunteer Now litter lift in September
- a litter lift by ImageNation – a local Indian organisation in October



Cormac Hamill



- a guided walk in Irish for a local GAA club in March
- Siúlóid Chonradh na Gaeilge - A guided walk in Irish for the Gaelic League in March
- 4 Big Walks from the Castle to Ligoniel (see my article in this issue)

As part of a broader outreach programme we had a presence at a number of other occasions:

- a stall at the Volunteer Now event for older people
- a stall at the two-day BCC annual Spring Fair
- a stall at the BCC Big Lunch event at the Castle
- a stall at the Cavehill Road family event
- a stall at the Men's Health Day in St Comgall's centre
- a stall at the Women's Health Day in St Comgall's centre
- we attended a City Hall event for older volunteers
- a stall at the annual Ballynature fair in Ballynure

I also delivered an illustrated talk on Cave Hill to the Royal Geographical Society in Queen's University and on two occasions to the community in Ligoniel

Our volunteer program is expanding. We can have up to 20 volunteers at each work party. Volunteers meet once a month April – October and twice a month during the winter – a total of 18 times. There is always work to be done managing the Maze and

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the Herb Garden as well as tackling the invasive laurel in the area of the Volunteers' Well. When you visit the Castle, drop down to the herb garden in the ornamental gardens and see what our volunteers have done. If you are walking to the Volunteers' Well, marvel at the way our volunteers have created a light and airy space around what had been a gloomy path. Among our volunteers are three secondary school pupils doing the service section of their Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme.

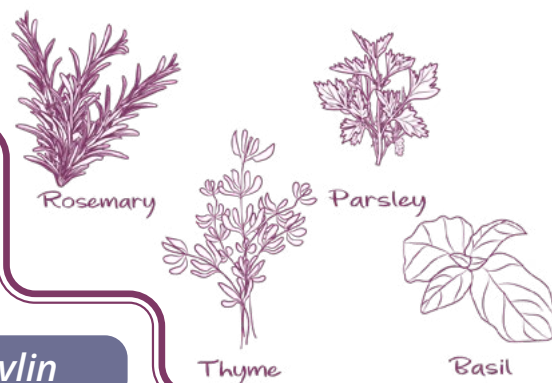
I want to thank Belfast City Council for their help and support throughout the year and in particular, their staff who are responsible for the Park. I want to thank our current fifteen directors for their active help and support and the body of volunteers who are leaving a very visual mark on the Castle estate. Finally I want to thank our 120 or so members who value our work and support us with their subscriptions.

And if you want to help us, we are always keen to take on more volunteers. Talk to us or find us on social media and get in touch.

Cormac E Hamill
April 2026

My Love of the Cave Hill Began Long Before the Brush Touched the Canvas.

by Adrian Devlin



Growing up in North Belfast I was fortunate enough to have a full view of Ben Madigan from my bedroom window. The ancient silhouette was an unchanging constant. It was my first view and my last view every day.

I always felt comforted by its steadfastness. I just hadn't realised how it was going to capture my imagination and creativity through painting.

As a young child we were told the stories of the sleeping giant and Napoleon's nose, sparking the imagination.

Then as a school kid attending Parklodge and Hightown CBS, the hill was always there. Before, after and sometimes during the day, when class work seemed like hard work.

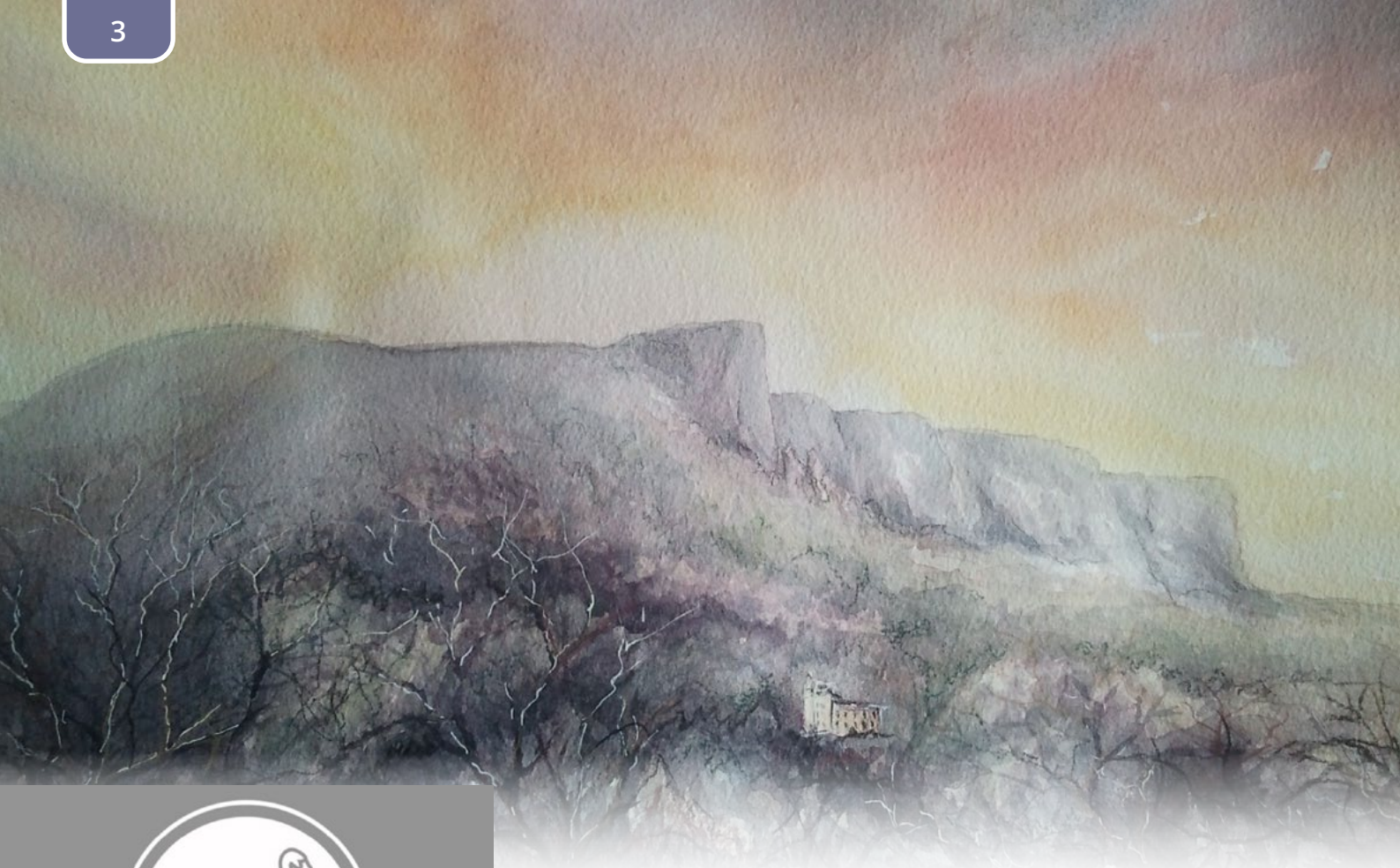
Later on, studying art at college, the Cavehill began to reveal more of its atmosphere and mood shifts. From the clouds rolling in and lifting around the basalt cliffs, to the yellow and purples of the gorse and heather of the summer months.

Now living on the Cavehill Road, the daily presence of the hill is a constant source of inspiration and also gives a sense of belonging and purpose.

My partner and myself also refer to the Cavehill as a beacon from afar, or, the way home.

At times we also use the hill to forecast the weather, with me being asked, "What's it like out?" And me responding,





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Someone has stolen the Cavehill. Meaning of course the clouds are on top of us and a coat is needed.

I now paint the Cavehill regularly. Using Watercolour as the medium I feel can capture the hills constant mood shifts. It's an old friend I've known all my life, but I'm still getting to know. The light changes, the weather and the seasons are always inspiring, like a personality that reveals something interesting.

My paintings are available exclusively from Belfast Bookshop in St Georges Market, and I am happy to say, are now hanging in homes around the world.

With the great work the Cavehill Conservation Campaign, and all its volunteers continue to do, I really hope our Cavehill will always inspire others and continue to be a Beacon from afar and the way home.

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CAVE HILL HOVERFLIES

by Jawine Westland

Hoverflies belong to the family of true flies, meaning they have just one pair of wings, unlike wasps/bees and dragonflies. Their second pair has evolved into tiny balancing organs called halteres. These allow them to hover with extraordinary precision. If you see an insect suspended almost motionless above a flower, it is very likely a hoverfly.

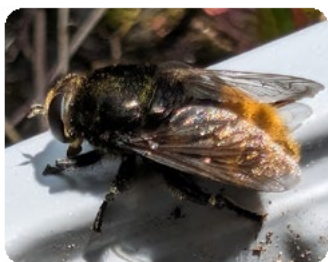
Many hoverflies look remarkably like bees or wasps — a clever survival strategy known as mimicry. By resembling stinging insects, they discourage predators. An effective

disguise can fool birds, AI models and people alike.

Hoverflies are important pollinators, Some hoverflies are migratory and they are found resting on North Sea oil platforms. The pollen they carry with them reaches our plants and add to genetic diversity.

Do you know your hoverflies from your bumblebees and wasps? Answer at the bottom of the article.

Find the real bumblebee:



a



b



c



d

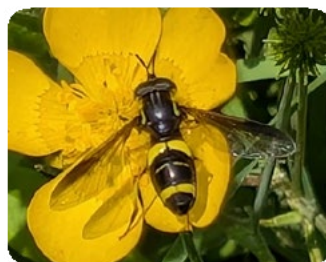
Find the real wasp:



a



b



c



d

Cavehill formed around 60 million years ago, and hoverflies were already present during the Eocene epoch. Today, they still thrive here thanks to its rich mix of woodland, carr, and wildflower meadows.

Early in the year we can see the Marmalade Hoverfly with

its "moustache" shaped bands.

When the wild garlic blooms, we have the lovely Ramson Hoverfly. Later in summer, wild carrot, angelica, and other flowers support many more species.



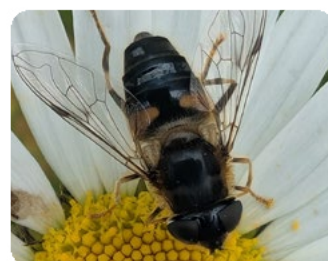
Marmalade Hoverfly



Ramson Hoverfly



Pellucid Fly



Drone Fly

Hoverflies will also visit gardens, feeding from crocus, dahlias, geraniums, borage, daisies, and field scabious. The larvae of many species feed on the aphids plaguing your roses.

If you want to know which one you saw, just take a photo. Facebook has some great forums where you can get help

or you can buy Wild Guides Hoverfly book.

Quiz answer time!

The Bumblebee is b, the Wasp is b. How can you tell? Flies have rather large "aviator sunglasses" eyes and shorter to very short antenna.

Linenopolis and the Cave Hill

by Martin Donaldson

"Tie up our ends we will surely do, tie up our ends we will surely do, tie up our ends we will surely do, aye for Jimmy Malone but not for you, raddy right fol ra raddy right fol ree."

I learned the Doffers' Song from my mother many years ago. She worked as a weaver in Barbour's Spinning Mill, often called the Low Mill during the 1940s.

By the middle of the 19th century linen had moved from being a cottage industry in the North of Ireland to becoming a highly industrialised, mill centred world producer. Not long after the middle of the 19th century there were approximately fifteen thousand power looms manufacturing linen for home consumption and worldwide distribution.

I first heard the term 'Linenopolis' being used to describe Belfast at that time by the late Dr. Eamon Phoenix on one of his exceptional walking tours of Belfast. He described how so much of the wealth of Belfast in the 19th century sprang from the linen trade.

The hills around Belfast were a source of rivers and streams which flowed from the hills into Belfast Lough. This water power was harnessed as the industrial revolution unfolded during the 19th century into the 20th century by entrepreneurs and mill owners enabling Belfast to grow and develop as the city became a world powerhouse in several industries.

The villages scattered amongst the hills and those gathered by the shores of Belfast Lough provided the labour for the new industries. As a result of the Famine in the mid-19th century many thousands of people thronged to the city and augmented the labour force. By 1891 Belfast had become the biggest city in Ireland.

The emergence of the mills as a power base was enabled by the invention of a "wet spinning" method by James Kay of Preston. This was a process by which flax was passed through warm water resulting in a finer yarn than previously possible. The wet spinning mills using water power began to be built in Ulster at the beginning of the 19th century. This methodology grew rapidly and by 1871 there were 78 mills throughout Ulster employing some 45000 people.



Whitehouse Flax Spinning Mills on Main Street, Whitehouse, what is now Shore Road.

There were some 60 mills operating in Belfast in the mid-19th century with a concentration in North and West Belfast. The York Street Mill which was founded in 1830 was one of the largest in the world but there were other major mills operating in North Belfast during this period.

Within the shadow of Cave Hill there were several important mills stretching from York Street to Whiteabbey and towards Ballyclare via Mossley.

Established business entrepreneurs played a major part in the development of the linen sector some of them starting with other industries such as printing and cotton production before grasping the opportunities which was presented in linen development.

The Grimshaw family was a major player in the development of textile trade, beginning with Nicholas Grimshaw in the cotton and calico printing trade. He moved to Ireland from his native Lancashire in 1776 and settled in Greencastle, County Antrim.

He became a member of the Belfast Charitable Committee



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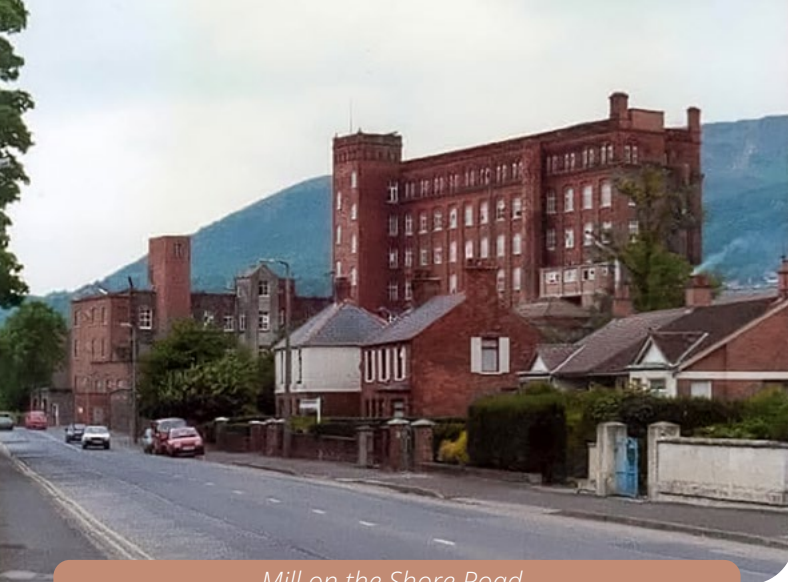
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Mill on the Shore Road.

working alongside Robert Joy, (the uncle of Henry Joy and Mary Ann McCracken) and Thomas McCabe to provide a spinning wheel as an aid for the destitute children of the Poor House.

In 1784 Grimshaw became the owner of the town land of Ballygollan and established the village of Whitehouse. Along with his partner Nathaniel Wilson he set up cotton – spinning mill and further developed his burgeoning business with the acquisition of the Bleach Green in the area. This mill, which was established in 1784 is probably the first cotton mill in Ireland which was powered by water from the Glas na Bradan River which can be seen at the Shore Road beside the Rathcoole Estate. The complex of mills spread along what is now the Mill Road, up as far as the Old Church Road with an Upper mill and a Lower mill as I referenced at the beginning of this article. The Lower Mill became Barbour's Mill when it was purchased by the company in 1908.

His sons, Thomas and Edmund consolidated and further developed the family business. Edmund began flax spinning in Mossley in 1834 and proceeded to expand this new enterprise with a mill dam, using the power of water to run the mill machinery. The spinning mill went through several changes of ownership as it developed into the 20th century before it was finally acquired by Herdmans flax spinners of Sion Mills in 1993. It finally closed in 1995 but the buildings were preserved, unlike the mills of Whitehouse and became a Civic Headquarters for Newtownabbey Council, opening in 2000. A Museum at the Mill was opened in 2010, followed by a theatre and arts centre.

The era of the Mills in Belfast has long past, Linenopolis is part of the cultural history of Belfast and a feature of the tours of the City . The streams and rivers which powered the mills sweeping down from Cave Hill and the other hills around Belfast have , for the most part, been culverted and diverted. Partial remains of walls and buildings associated with this crucial period of local history are still to be found around the slopes of Cave Hill and by the Loughshore. The mill songs of this bygone period are part of the folk music scene and bring us echoes of past times.

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A VILLAGE CHURCH GOES WILD

by E. McCamley

Our nature and conservation event

On one day every February, **Ballynure Presbyterian Church** undergoes a delightful transformation as the church hall becomes a bustling ark of biodiversity. This is the **Ballynature Festival**, an event considered by many to be Northern Ireland's premier celebration of the natural world.

With thirty displays, this is an event for everyone; a perennial favourite, the **Cave Hill Conservation Campaign** has its usual impressive stand offering plants, booklets, maps, and information on how to join. Visitors can also find out about the health of local rivers, the best spots for birdwatching, or the delicate balance of the ecosystems on our doorstep. In a journey from the minuscule to the magnificent, a few steps brings one from the world of the tiniest insects to the intimidating sharp-eyed gaze of native birds of prey.

The crafts tables prove that learning about nature can be a hands-on, creative experience for children. Storytelling and face-painting provide a playground for the imagination. And adding a splash of colour to the occa-

sion, artists demonstrate, through their work, yet another way of appreciating the natural world.

The **Ballynature Festival** is an inspiring example of community spirit in action. But it isn't possible without the generosity of **Ballynure Presbyterian Church** and the support of Newtownabbey Council. It's also a reminder that a city-sized venue is not necessary to host such an impressive celebration of creation. All you need is an involved community, a willingness to learn, and a welcoming church hall.



Laghairt ar Bheann Mhadagáin

Lizards on Cave Hill



Ní fhaca bunús na ndaoine a shiúlann i bPáirc Tuaithe Bhinn Mhadagáin laghairt ariamh; i ndairíre ní chreideann daoine go bhfuil siad ann ar chor ar bith. Ach is fíor go bhfuil an t-aon reptíl dúchasach in Éirinn ar an chnoc. Tugtar an laghairt dúchasach nó an laghairt bheobhreithe air mar gheall ar a oiriúnú dár n-aeráid réasúnta trína hainmhithe óga a iompar ina chorp seachas uibheacha a leagan mar a dhéanann formhór na reptílí eile

Mar chruthúnas ar sin, seo grianghraf a thóg mé roinnt blianta ó shin i gcairéal Wallace – an cairéal mór os cionn Ghleann Carr. Bhí mé mar chuid d'fhoireann bheag a bhí ag déanamh suirbhé ar laghairteanna sa Pháirc. Leag muid amach matai plaisteacha dubha in aiteacha éagsúla sa cheantar sin. Tá laghairteanna fuarfhuilteach; caithfidh siad dul i mbun gréine chun téamh suas. De ghnáth roghnaíonn siad carraigeacha ach is fearr arís plaisteach dubh ná carraig le téamh suas. Fuair muid iad i dtrí no ceithre ait istigh sa chairéal.

Gan chabhair an phlaistigh tá sé an-deacair laghairteanna a fheiceáil mar gheall ar a gcamúfláil nadúrtha agus a nós imeacht má fheiceann siad aon ghluaiseacht in aice leo. Ach má shiúlann tú go mall agus má amharcann tú ar charraigeacha nó ar phaistí talún lom i gceantair den chnoc nach bhfuil mórán cuairteoirí iontu, tá seans ann i gcónaí go bhfeicfidh tú na créatúir iontacha seo.

Wild Women of the Woods

Wild Women of the Woods NI is a social enterprise bringing women together through a shared love of the outdoors, regularly meeting around a campfire to talk, eat and laugh. In 2022 they became a non-profit making Community Interest Company which follows co-operative practices. The group encourages women of all ages and abilities to reconnect with nature, build confidence, and form lasting friendships. They organise affordable day events and weekends away across Ireland, making outdoor adventure accessible to all.

Activities range from walking and openwater swimming to kayaking, sustainable foraging, storytelling, crafting with natural materials and visiting ancient archaeological sites.

Many members live in Belfast, and Cave Hill is a favourite place to connect with nature. Many are regular walkers and appreciate its history and importance. The group has hosted several successful day events at Cave Hill in partnership with Redbarn Cavehill.



Environmental stewardship lies at the heart of Wild Women of the Woods. Members take part in conservation projects, promote sustainable practices and develop a deeper appreciation for Ireland's natural heritage.

Above all, Wild Women of the Woods NI is a place to find new friends, for personal growth and adventure, making the outdoors accessible and enjoyable for everyone.

Women interested in getting involved can find out more and view upcoming events at www.wildwomenofthewoodsni.com



Hazelwood Forest School

by Hazelwood Integrated Primary School

by Jim McDaid

In 2005 I read a report about an innovative approach to learning that was common in Scandinavian countries called Forest School.

The more I read about this type learning the more convinced I became of the immense value it would have for our pupils at Hazelwood Integrated Primary.

Children spend less and less time outdoors. Their leisure time is almost entirely consumed by digital online experiences. They have never felt less connected to their natural heritage. Children who spend time in their natural settings are less anxious and happier. As a school we understood the potential this type of learning would have for our entire school community

In 2007 I met with Brian Poots now the CEO The Northern Ireland Forest School Association (NIFSA). We both agreed that there was an opportunity to use Hazelwood Integrated Primary School as a template for Forest Schools across N. Ireland. That year we became the first Forest School in N. Ireland. Today thanks to the work of Brian and his team in NIFSA there are over 250 Forest schools.

We know that the experience that we offer our pupils at Hazelwood is a unique one. Our pupils from Nursery to P7 benefit from the restorative and therapeutic experiences that being outdoor brings. At Hazelwood we believe that we can get our nurture from nature! To offer this learning experience in such a beautiful place as the Throne Wood is truly special.

Pedagogical research shows us that deep profound learning often comes about when the learning experience is multi-sensory and child centred. Forest School isn't a rest or pause from learning

but rather it consolidates learning. It incorporates aspects of history, geography and science, delivers an opportunity to develop thinking skills and personal capabilities and has a strong emphasis on promoting numeracy and literacy. Even more importantly than this, the initiative connects children to their outdoor environment, stimulating curiosity and inspiring a love of the natural world that is likely to remain long after the end of primary school.

Having regular learning experiences in the Throne Wood ensures our pupils have a connection and positive relationship with it. They will care for it and if they do this, they will want to protect it. In a climate crisis is there anything as important as allowing children to love their outdoor environment.



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The Volunteering Experience

by William Sedgwick, Noelle Vrabelova, Noah Braithwaite and May Curran

Volunteering is a great way to get out of the house and give back to the community. Not only is it a way to get active but it also helps you make connections and friendships that could last lifetimes. We are four Belfast Royal Academy GCSE students who volunteer with the Cavehill Conservation Campaign every other Saturday from ten to one. We have all found volunteering to be a really positive experience and we would like to share with you the benefits and environment of volunteering at the CCC.

Our journey with the CCC began when we signed up for Bronze Duke of Edinburgh. We initially started Duke of Ed for fun, little did we know the many skills and opportunities we would pick up along the way. Duke of Ed consists of four parts: a volunteering section, a physical section, a skills section and an expedition. At first we thought it was a chore but we soon found out the many important life skills it teaches us, for example, how to protect baby shoots from pests; how to properly take care of nature; how to work as a team and how to focus on tasks.

We chose Cavehill Conservation Campaign over other volunteering organisations because it is open to all age groups and offers so much more than other organisations. Another advantage to choosing CCC is that we get given useful items like midgie repellants, gloves and watches free of charge to help us in our efforts. The senior volunteers are all very friendly and helpful, especially when you first start out and don't know a lot. They teach you how to help out with the upkeep of the maze and our volunteering experience would have been a lot harder and a lot less enjoyable without them.

Two of us have been doing it for two years now. In the beginning we were in the maze, cutting the beeches and picking up the sticks. After the others joined, we were promoted to bending willows which helps the maze look more tidy and enjoyable for the public. Every session at around halfway, we get given

hot chocolate, biscuits & other treats to keep us going. In the winter time this is especially nice as there is nothing better than a good hot drink on a cold day. The snacks are the highlight of our morning and we are very grateful to the volunteers that make them possible.

Now, you might be wondering what bending willows actually involves, well, to start we find a branch that is too high and bring it down using a hooked pole. Then we weave it through the other branches and tie it down using wire. During the Winter, a lot of Dieback accumulated in the willows so we are making an effort to trim and get rid of the problem. It has been a lengthy job but it will ensure the maze stays green and healthy. Thanks to many of the senior volunteers we have a range of tools and handy equipment to help us such as secateurs, loppers, and poles.



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Volunteering isn't just about cleaning things up or labouring away as many think, volunteering is about the people, the feeling, the mindset and so much more. It's a whole community within itself full of friendships just waiting to be unlocked and it gives you a sense of purpose that is hard to find anywhere else. We all highly recommend and encourage everyone to volunteer and join us in the benefits.



CAVE HILL KIDS

Have you ever looked up at Cave Hill and wondered what secrets it holds? From ancient rocks to wild animals, this amazing place is like a giant outdoor treasure chest just waiting to be explored.

Grab your coat, bring a grown-up, and let's go on a nature adventure!



Cave Hill isn't just fun—it's important! It helps protect wildlife and gives people a place to enjoy nature. It's also part of Belfast Castle Estate, a historic and beautiful area full of woodland trails.

Nature Scavenger Hunt Challenge

Next time you visit Cave Hill, see if you can find these items. Tick them off as you go!

By taking care of places like this, we help animals, plants, and future explorers just like you.

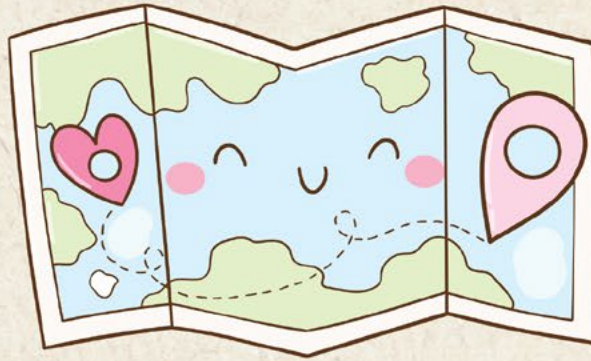
 Can You Spot...?

- ☐ A leaf bigger than your hand
- ☐ A bird in flight
- ☐ Something rough (like tree bark or rock)
- ☐ Something smooth (like a pebble)
- ☐ A wildflower
- ☐ An insect
- ☐ A feather on the ground
- ☐ A cloud shaped like something fun ☁️
- ☐ A tree with an interesting shape
- ☐ A view over Belfast

Bonus Challenge: Can you hear three different bird sounds? Close your eyes and listen carefully!



SUPER CHALLENGE: BUILD A MINI NATURE MAP



Before great explorers set off on their adventures, they don't just wander—they observe, remember, and map what they see. Every path, rocky outcrop, and hidden corner of Cave Hill tells a story. By paying attention to your surroundings, you can start to notice patterns—where the trees grow thickest, where birds like to perch, or where the best views open up over Belfast.

This challenge turns you into a real-life explorer. Instead of following someone else's map, you'll create your own as you go. It doesn't have to be perfect—just use your eyes, your memory, and a bit of creativity. By the end, you won't just have a drawing—you'll have a record of your adventure that no one else in the world has made!

WHAT TO DO

As you walk, collect (or sketch) clues about where you've been:

Draw the path you followed (twisty, straight, uphill? Mark big landmarks like rocks, trees, or views. Add symbols for things you spotted:



When you're finished, you'll have your own Cave Hill Explorer Map!

Make It Interactive:

- Swap maps with a friend or family member—can they follow your map?
- Hide a "secret spot" on your map with an X—can someone find it?
- Add a fun name to your trail (like "Squirrel Path" or "Dragon Rock Route")

THE CAVE HILL AND THE LAST ICE AGE

by Patrick Gaffikin

*The hill has its
own stories*

*That go back and back
To the very bones of time*

*From 'Cave Hill, Belfast'
by Ann Murray (2017)*

The last Ice Age

The last Ice Age commenced just over 2 million years ago and ended around 12,000 years ago. A lot is not known for certain about the last Ice Age in Ireland so we have to resort, to some degree anyway, to speculation. It is reckoned that there would have been 5 or 6 major Ice Ages during the history of our planet but each glacial episode would not have been continuous. They would have been interspersed by warm spells, which could have been warmer than today, but the cold periods would have been much colder than our winters today. It is thought there were about 20 spells of major glaciations during the last Ice Age, but this figure is debatable, and these would have varied in temperatures and durations. The last very cold episode started around 13,000 years ago, but this figure varied for different places on the planet, and concluded around 12,000 years ago and the Cave Hill did not escape being affected by it.



View of summit of the Cave Hill from Downview Avenue, Antrim Road.

The effects of the ice on the Cave Hill

Today the height of the Cave Hill is 368 metres but it would have been higher before it was eroded by moving ice. Ice, containing pebbles and rock fragments, is the most erosive force on Earth. During the Ice Age in Ireland it is thought the thickness of the ice was about 1km so it is reasonable to take it that the ice covered the basalt top of the hill. The basalt at the top formed around 60 million years ago, from magma originating deep in the Earth, and was extruded from fissures in the then chalk surface. Many millions of years later, glaciers (moving ice) would have worn away the top of the basalt. The shape we see today of the Cave Hill would have been carved by glaciers during the Ice Age. Rock debris in the moving ice would have scored and, even to a small degree, polished the basalt surface but the markings (striations) would not be apparent now due to the effect of agents of erosion and weathering – agents like rain – being active over the millennia.

When the ice melted in the warmer climate, after around 12,000 years ago, the rock debris in the ice would have been deposited. Some of this overlies the basalt at the summit of the hill. It is unlikely that the fauna and flora of the Cave Hill



*A representation of the appearance of the environment during the Ice Age.
(Photo: Mr. P. Millar, Belfast Geologists' Society.)*

during the extreme cold of the climate during the Ice Age would have survived.

Were any people living in Ireland during the Ice Age?

Modern humans first appeared around 300,000 years ago in east Africa but there is no evidence of them occupying anywhere in Ireland before around 9,000 years ago. At this time the ice would have melted. So we can confidently take it that no people were anywhere near the Cave Hill during the Ice Age.

Research about the Cave Hill during the Ice Age

The geological literature has abundant examples of geological research into the geology of N. Ireland but there is a dearth of information, to date anyway, about the effects of the Ice Age on the Cave Hill. Maybe some enterprising reader of this article will rectify this in the future!

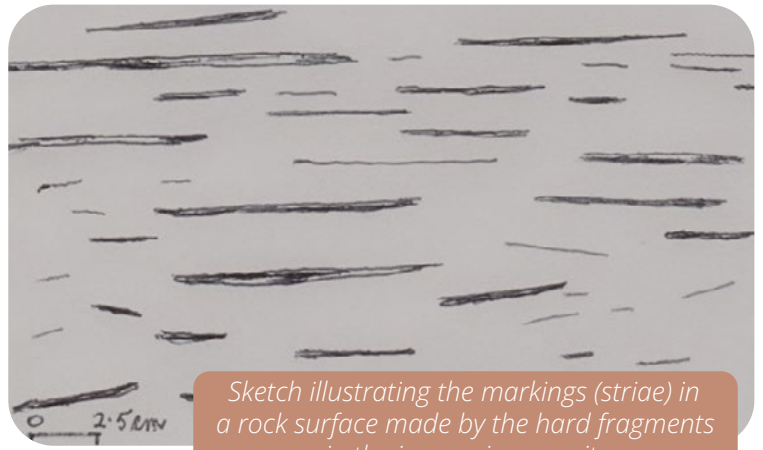
Is another Ice Age likely soon?

We are living in an interglacial phase. In the 1950s and 60s some climatologists were forecasting that an Ice Age was imminent and the severe winter of 1963 gave some credence to this prediction when places such as the cold areas of England were covered in snow for over 10 weeks and even the Thames froze over. The coldest day-time temperature, in some places, was as low as -15°C . However, things improved. Now it is claimed that another Ice Age would not occur until many thousands of years into the future. Currently the main concern, as regards climate change, is for global warming and the real possibility that living things – including ourselves – are in danger of being detrimentally affected by it.

Poetry and the Cave Hill

In conclusion it would not be inappropriate to quote the final two lines of the north Belfast poet Ann Murray's succinct and eloquent poem about the hill because it is relevant to the Cave Hill and the Ice Age:-

*When nothing was written down
But that which nature
scribed in basalt lines.*



Sketch illustrating the markings (striae) in a rock surface made by the hard fragments in the ice moving over it.

Dr Martin MacAllister
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Frolicking Frogs

by Ann Marrion

Early New Year's morning 2026 in North Belfast, all devices are off and I can hear birds starting to call; mostly doves blackbirds pigeons, magpies. No one at the feeding station yet for my peanuts mealworms and mixed seeds. Early morning new years walkers can be seen on the top of Cave Hill and have their bright lights shining. It's 9 am now and breakfast done. Robins, tits blackbirds have arrived at the bird table and a group of long tailed tits, great!! Some leftover canapés have brought great excitement. All safe for feathered friends.

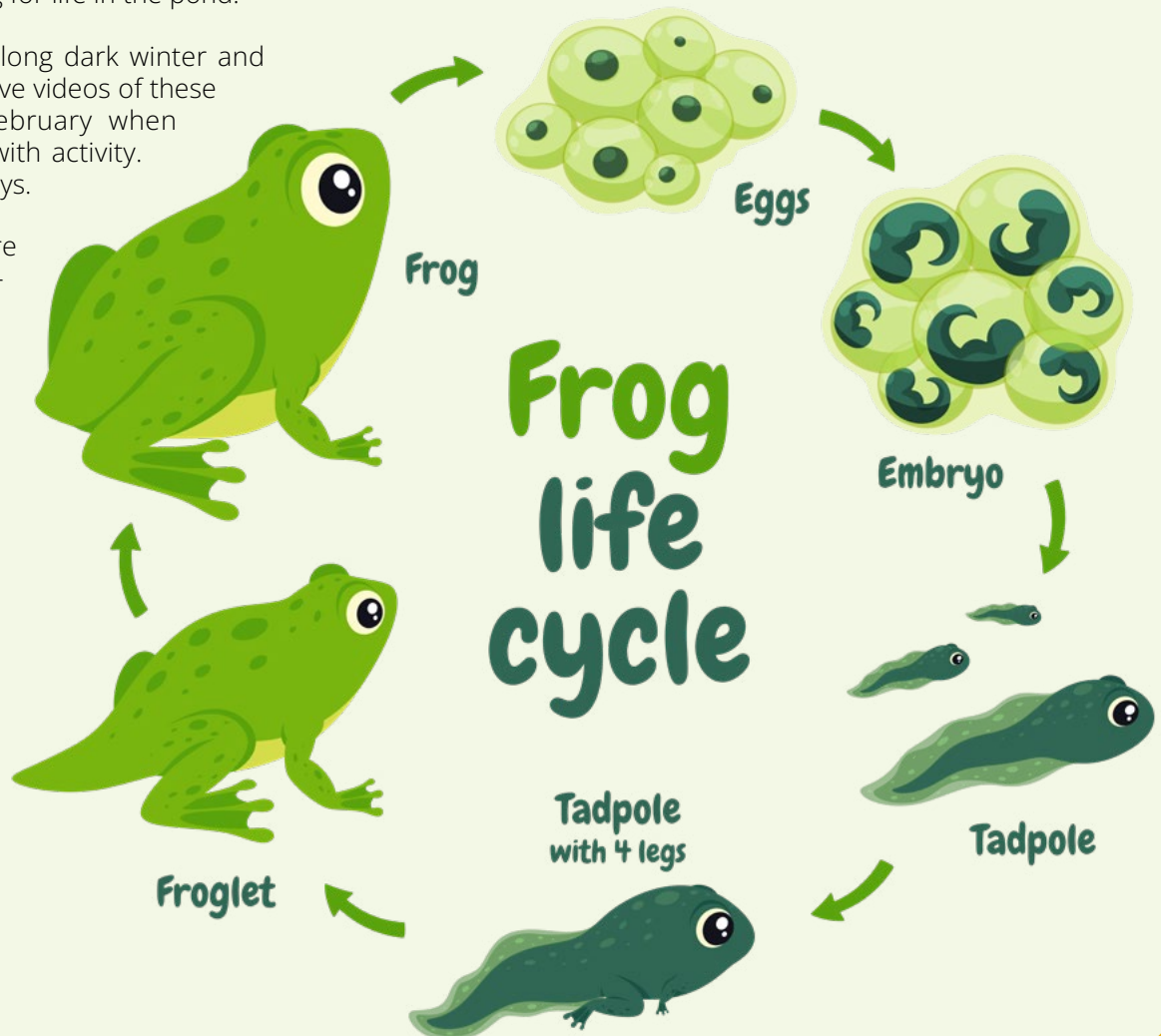
I just love being in the city and also close to nature. Also I have loved the rhythm of the seasons and have a special place in my heart for tadpoles and frogs since I was a child.

In my small back garden there is a small pond which was dug during lockdown by two young teenage friends of mine. A raised mound was made with the extracted soil and this is now an area with shrubs and flowers for the butterflies bees and other insects. The pond has a maximum depth of about 9 inches and it has never dried out. It's roughly 15 foot total circumference. I got some pond liner from the garden Centre on the Doagh Road and I'm always very careful when small children come to visit.

Last year 2025 I was surprised and shocked to notice no tadpoles in my pond by late April. My neighbour has a pond and he noted the same - horror! I was concerned that there was a pollution in the pond - too much pond weed or decaying leaves. So I have been anxiously watching for life in the pond.

February 2026 on this long dark winter and no sign of froggies - I have videos of these previous years late February when the pond was 'boiling' with activity. Nothing apparent for days.

March 10th - day before AGM of Cave Hill Conservation Campaign and I find frogs frolicking loudly and frogspawn has appeared! My faith in the resilience of nature is restored. I will watch carefully for the emergence of tadpoles and will do my best to help nature along the way and to promote the world wide aims of 30 by 30 to save our planet from the climate threat in my small way. And I get such pleasure from a very small wildlife garden pond! Check out 30 by 30 and see what you can do.



Belfast's Big Walks

by Cormac Hamill

We, in Cave Hill Conservation Campaign, have been part of the organisation of the Big Walks in the Belfast Hills since they began four years ago. Each walk consists of three separate sections and participants have a choice as to which section they wish to join: a walk from Belfast Castle to Ligoniel, another around the Ligoniel site and another on Divis. All meet together at the end in the Wolfhill Centre in Ligoniel for lunch and a talk or activity based on the theme of the walk. Each section has a guide who points out aspects of the natural landscape or the built environment which are particularly relevant to the festival which is being remembered.



The walks are themed around the four original Celtic festivals of Imbolc (1 February), Bealtaine (1 May), Lúnasa (1 August) and Samhain (1 November) and the lunch talk/activity is also related to the traditions of the particular festival. They take place on the Saturday nearest each of these festivals.

Our hope is that through these walks, members of the public will learn:

- How each walk relates to the ancient Celtic festival
- How the ancients' experience of nature was more diverse and richer than ours
- How our nature has been degraded by our demands on it and by our neglect of it. i.e. our loss of biodiversity
- How exposure to nature and immersion in it is good for our mental and physical health and good for society
- What we can do to stop the damage, restore the biodiversity and protect it in the future.



We have had an average attendance of 40-50 people at these occasions and our hope is to double this as we develop. We don't want to go beyond this number; we are aware that too



the salon

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Making St. Brigid's Crosses after the Imbolc Big Walk.

many people walking can be damaging to the environment and I know that numbers beyond this makes it very difficult to be an informative guide.

These walks have their origin in the original Belfast Hills Walk which we, along with others, started in 1989 and which were eventually stopped in 2002 by difficulties in retaining landowners' permissions. Those difficulties are not yet fully resolved but the recent acquisition by the National Trust, of more land on Divis creates the expectation that we will soon be able to consider reinstating the full walk across the Belfast Hills from Divis to Cave Hill.

The end of a hard mornings work on the Cave Hill



Join us for a series of free expert guided walks in 2026!

**Donations
greatly
appreciated!**

Learn more about birds, animals, flora and the history of the Cave Hill

Event	Leader	Date	Day	Time	Rendezvous
Geology Walk	Kirstin Lemon	25 April	Saturday	10am - 1pm	Belfast Castle
Dawn Chorus	Aaron Kelly	2 May	Saturday	5am - 7am	Belfast Castle
Bird Misting	Aidan Crean	23 May	Saturday	10am - 1pm	Belfast Castle
Solstice Walk	Cormac Hamill	20 June	Saturday	3:30am - 5:30am	Belfast Castle
Botany Walk	Judy Meharg	27 June	Saturday	10am - 1pm	Ballyaghagan
Forage Walk	Phil Simpson	4 July	Saturday	10am - 1pm	Belfast Castle
Bug Walk	Debbie Nelson	25 July	Saturday	10am - 1pm	Belfast Castle
Archaeology Walk	Cormac McSparron	29 Aug	Saturday	10am - 1pm	Ballyaghagan
Bat Walk	Aidan Crean	4 Sept	Friday	8pm - 10pm	Belfast Castle
Fungi Walk	Debbie Nelson	26 Sept	Saturday	10am - 1pm	Belfast Castle

What you need to know:

- ❖ Wear suitable clothing and shoes
- ❖ Dogs to be kept on a lead
- ❖ Under 16s to be accompanied by an adult

If you have any worries about fitness or have medical conditions which might affect your ability to walk, please talk to the leader at the start of the walk. If the leader assesses you as not being fit for the walk, you will not be able to take part.

It is very important for your own safety and that of the group that you obey the instructions of the walk leader or of any of the assistant leaders. Of particular importance is that you must ensure that the group stays together at all times.

All these activities are free.



For further details:

- www.cavehillconservation.org
- Facebook page for Cave Hill Conservation Campaign
- cormachamill47@gmail.com



CALLING ALL MEMBERS AND NON-MEMBERS!

If you are a member wishing to renew your membership for 2026, or a new member wishing to join, you can email membershipccc@hotmail.com and send a bank transfer, or attach a cheque to the form below and send it to:

Cave Hill Conservation Campaign,
32 Waterloo Park, Belfast, BT15 5HU

All e-mail addresses will be kept secure and only used to communicate with our members

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If you are a current British taxpayer, please tick here;
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There are 2 ways to pay:

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- Bank transfer (standing order if possible)

Sort Code: 93-83-19 Account number: 29194005

(Cave Hill Conservation Campaign, Allied Irish Bank, Glengormley)

Please add your name as the reference and send us an email to
membershipccc@hotmail.com so we can keep in touch

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Chair:..... Cormac Hamill

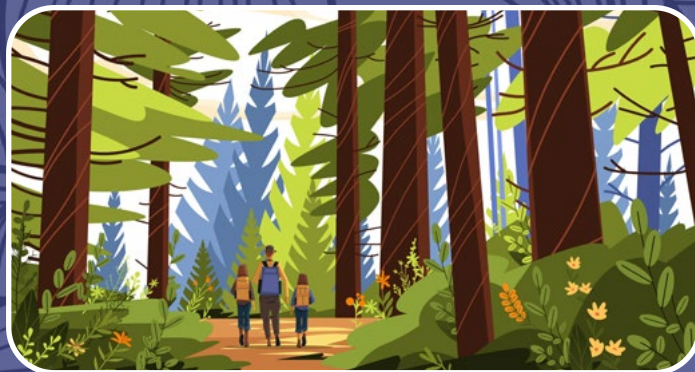
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The Dawn Walk

The Early Birds