Mammals & Insects

By Austin Cooney & Tom Lynch

Brown Hare © John N Murphy

Species from all but two of the nine mammal orders exploit the abundance of opportunities presented by the Shannon Airport Lagoon and its immediate surroundings. In this special habitat, mammals may be observed and understood, as they feed, survive and reproduce amidst rich plant, insect and bird life. Many of these high performance creatures with their high metabolic rate manage to thrive in this varied environment. However, because they all react in a very fine-grained way with their location, conservation has to be utmost in the mind of all those who use and manage the Lagoon.

Insectivora:	Hedgehog and Pygmy Shrew
Chiroptera:	Pipistrelle Bat
Lagomorpha:	Rabbit and Hare
Rodentia:	Rat and Mouse
Cetacea: Common Dolphin	
Carnivora:	Fox, Pine Martin, Stoat, Mink, Badger and Otter.
Pinnipedia:	Grey Seal

The following is the list of mammal species recorded at the lagoon and their status.

Hedgehog *(Gráinneog) Erinaceus europaeus*

Scare resident. Seen on the north side of the lagoon along the Shannon Golf Course road and near the Airport buildings.

Hedgehog © John N Murphy

Pygmy Shrew *(Dallóg fhraoigh) Sorex minitus*

Common resident. Their small size and nocturnal movements make them inconspicuous. Their high-pitched call is unmistakeable and they are regularly heard squeaking around the drier grassland areas on the north side of the Lagoon.

Pipistrelle Bat *(Ialtóg pipistrelle) Pipistrellus pipistrellus*

Common resident. Flies in the lighted area near the jetty and also close to the oil tanks.

Brown Hare *(Giorria) Lepus capensis*

Very common on the airfield and on the golf course. Hares regularly wander into the marsh.

Rabbit *(Coinín) Oryctolagus ciniculus*

Scarce on the north end of the Lagoon.

Brown Rat *(Francach) Rattus norvegicus*
First spotted on Dernish Island. They led to the arrival of the wild domestic cats that are now thriving in this area.

House Mouse *(Luch thí) Mus musculus*
Like the rest of their kind they can be found close to buildings on the north side.

Field Mouse *(Luch fhéir) Apodemus sylvaticus*
Widespread throughout, providing food for those species higher up the food chain.

Common Dolphin *(Deilf Comónta) Delphinade*
There is one record off the jetty.

Fox *(Sionnach) Vulpes vulpes*
Regularly seen patrolling along the edge of the reed-beds, searching out sick wildfowl, waders and carrion. Very common on the golf course where individuals can be very tame.

Fox cubs playing © CJ Wilson

Pine Martin *(Cat crainn) Martes martes*

There are only two records of this mammal, both on the north side.

Stoat *(Easóg) Mustela erminea*

Common along the causeway and the embankment on the estuary side. Its sinuous body enables it to wriggle through the tight spaces in search of small mammal prey. Scats are deposited along the rocks and found in piles near their dens along with the remnants of their prey.

American Mink *(Minc Meiriceánach) Mustela vison*

An introduced species to the lagoon as it is to the rest of the country. It has caused enormous damage to the population of nesting waterfowl especially coot and moorhen populations. A cheeky predator that is not shy along the channel and by the shore. An escape artist.

Badger *(Broc) Meles meles*

Nocturnal resident on the north side of the lagoon. The oldest landowners in Ireland.

Otter *(Madra uisce) Lutra lutra*

Scarce resident and visitor. Three or four otters have been observed together on the lagoon hunting for fish and eels within the flocks of waterfowl. They regularly cross back and forth to the estuary and trails can found from the lagoon to the river on the west embankment. Look out for tar-like sweet-smelling droppings smeared on waterside rocks. A sure sign of residence.

Badger © CJ Wilson

Grey Seal *(Rón glas)* *Halichoerus grypus*
Rare Atlantic heavyweight this far up river. On a couple of occasions they have been seen swimming close to the jetty.

Common Frog *(Frog)* *Rana temporaria*
Widespread at the Lagoon. Grey Herons constantly dine on them.

Common Frog © John N Murphy

Common Newt *(Earc sléibhe)* *Triturus vulgaris*
Scarce resident. Found in a few small ponds throughout the lagoon and probably provides a large part of the diet of Little Grebes.

Common Lizard *(Laghairt ghlas)* *Lacerta viridis*
On sunny days they can be seen basking on the dry rocks along the causeway.

Wild Domestic Cat *(Cat Fiáin)* *Felis domesticus*
They live close to the dump and feed throughout the entire habitat, taking small birds and mammals.

Butterflies *(Feileacháin) Lepidoptera*

The lagoon is host to a wide variety of butterflies. The species listed below can be seen from early spring to late autumn on the vegetation and flying around the lagoon.

Green-veined White © John N Murphy

Small Heath *(Fraochán beag) Coenonympha pamphilus*
Typically sighted during June to August.

Green-veined White *(Bánóg uaine) Artogeia napi*
Routinely identified throughout this habitat from May to August.

Wood White *(Bánóg choille) Leptidea sinapis*
Scarce visitor, especially in May and June. Has been recorded on numerous occasions at the lagoon.

Large White *(Bánóg mhór) Pieris brassicae*
Usually noticed in May, June and August.

Speckled Wood *(Breac fhéileacán coille) Pararge aegeria*
Normally noted in April, June and August.

Peacock © John N Murphy

Peacock *(Péacóg) Inachis io*

Commonly discovered from late spring to early autumn. The earliest recorded sighting for any year at the lagoon was on 11th March 2003.

Meadow Brown *(Donnóg fhéir) Maniola jurtina*

Seen in the lagoon from the middle of June to September. It feeds on grasses especially meadow grass. It flies even in overcast weather.

Red Admiral *(Aimiréal dearg) Vanessa alalanta*

Summer migrant. A conspicuous butterfly when it rests with its wings spread out but when they are closed the underside is well camouflaged. Populations are renewed each year by migrants from southern Europe. It feeds mainly on nettles and brambles.

Painted Lady *(Áilleán) Vanessa cardui*

Regularly recorded in late summer particularly during August. It feeds mainly on thistles. It is strongly migratory with a rapid and powerful flight. It varies in numbers from year to year. Like the Red Admiral it is occasionally caught in moth traps.

Small Tortoiseshell *(Ruán beag)* *Aglais urticae*
Constantly detected except in May and June.

Large Tortoiseshell *(Ruán mór)* *Nymphalis polychloreus*
A scarce visitor. Loss of elm trees to Dutch elm disease has probably played a large roll in the life cycle of this species.

Brimstone *(Buióg)* *Gonepteryx*
Can be spotted fluttering around on any fine warm sunny day in early summer.

Small Blue *(Gormán beag)* *Cupido minimus*
Scarce from late May to June.

Orange Tip *(Barr buí)* *Anthocharis cardamines*
Regularly turn up in the lagoon during April and May.

Red Admiral © John N Murphy

Clouded Yellow *(Buióg chróch)* *Colias crocea*
Rare summer migrant periodically noted during warm summers. They are powerful fliers and are especially common over areas covered with clover. They cannot survive our winters, so populations are reinforced each year by migrants from the south. Some years they are abundant, while in others they are scarcer.

Pale Clouded Yellow *(Buíóg liath)* *Colias hyale*

Very rare. One record in 1977. As its name suggests, the yellow is paler than that of the Clouded Yellow. The apex of the forewing is usually dark and the median spot in the hind wing is pale orange.

Painted Lady © John N Murphy

References

A guide to the Butterflies of Ireland: The Dublin Naturalists' Field Club

The butterflies of Ireland-A Field Guide: Dr. Norman Hickin

Butterflies (Hamlyn nature guide): Paul Whalley

Damselflies & Dragonflies

The full study of dragonflies and damselflies of Ireland is in its final year 2003.
To date the following species are noted regularly in the lagoon area.

Female Large Red Damselfly © John N Murphy

Banded Demoiselle *(Demoiselle criosach)* *Calopteryx splendens*
Recorded in June, July and early August.

Emerald Damselfly *(Béchuil smaragaid)* *Lestes sponsa*
Mainly witnessed in July and August.

Azure Damselfly *(Béchuil gormghlas)* *Coenagrion puella*
Usually spotted from May until the first few weeks of August.

Variable Damselfly *(Béchuil luaineach)* *Coenagrion pulchellum*
The summer months of May June and July are the best months for this species.

Common Blue Damselfly *(Béchuil gorm coitianta)* *Enallagma cyathigerum*
Sightings have been reported from late May to early September.

Blue-tailed Damselfly *(Béchuil eireaballach gorm) Ischnura elegans*
Noted often from May to early September.

Large Red Damselfly *(Béchuil Mhór Dhearg) Pyrrhosoma nymphula*
Observed from June to August.

Hairy Dragonfly *(Snáthaid mhór gruagach) Brachytron pratense*
Found regularly from early May to early July.

Brown Hawker *(Mangaire donn) Aeshna grandis*
Seen now and again from late June to early September.

Common Hawker *(Mangaire coitianta) Aeshna juncea*
Widespread throughout the habitat from the last week of June to the end of September.

Ruddy Darter *(Sciotán dearg) Sympetrum sanguineum*
Frequently noticed from late June to early September.

Common Darter female © John N Murphy

Common Darter *(Sciotán coitianta)* *Sympetrum striolatum*
Routinely viewed from the end of June to the end of October.

Black-tailed Skimmer *(Scimín Earrdhubh)* *Orthetrum cancellatum*
Found normally in June, July and August. Most recent sighting of a male on 7th September 2003.

Four-spotted Chaser *(Sealgaire ceithre-spotach) Libellula quadrimaculata*
Normally discovered from late May to early August.

Brown Hawker Dragonfly © John N Murphy