

A close-up photograph of a red squirrel with a white belly, clinging to a tree trunk. The squirrel is looking directly at the camera with large, dark eyes. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting a forest setting.

Notes for Teachers

Irish Animals - Herbivores



Páirceanna Náisiúnta
National Parks

Ireland only has around 35 species of land mammal. They range from tiny Pygmy Shrews to large Deer and Seals.

Here we shall look at just 12 species - the common herbivores. In another lesson, we shall look at the predators.



What Age Group?

The Powerpoint slideshow can be used for any age group. Older children can investigate each species in more detail. But even infants will appreciate the different birds.

We have different optional activities to follow the slideshow - colouring in sheets, crosswords, identification posters and more.



What is a Mammal?

Slide 2



Hair / Fur

All mammals have hair. Mammals are the only creatures that have hair.

Whales have evolved to lose all their hair and become streamlined.

Milk

All mammals feed milk to their young.

Only mammals feed milk to their young.

Birth

Almost all mammals give birth to live young.

The exception are a group of primitive mammals called Monotremes. They lay eggs.

The Duck-billed Platypus in Australia is a Monotreme.

Air

All mammals breathe air through their mouth and nose. Mammals that live in the sea, like whales, must come to the surface to breathe.

Birds and amphibians also breathe air through their mouth or nose. Fish breathe through gills.

Skeleton

All mammals have a spine and a skeleton.

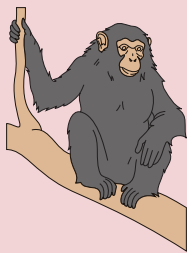
Birds, fish and amphibians also have a skeleton.

Are we mammals?

Yes! We have hair. We feed milk to our babies.

We give birth. We breathe air and have a skeleton. In fact, people are animals too!

Some Mammal Groups



Primates
Monkeys,
apes & people



Cetaceans
Whales & dolphins



Pinnipeds
Seals & sea lions



Carnivores
The hunters



Marsupials
Kangaroos & their relatives



Rodents
Mice, rats & their cousins



Red Deer - Fia Rua

Cervus elephas

Slide 3



Red Deer are the largest land animals in Ireland. They are believed to have been brought to Ireland by Neolithic people 5000 years ago. They are considered to be native.

Protection

Red deer are protected in Ireland. However, they can damage farmland and habitats, and may be shot under licence.

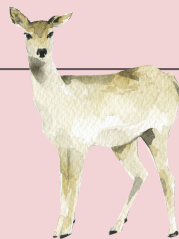
Red Deer & Sika Deer

Red deer and Sika deer are very closely related. They can hybridize and produce fertile offspring. Most of the deer in Wicklow are Sika hybrids.



Stag

The male is called a stag.



Hind

The female is called a hind.

Calf

The young are called calves.



Life Cycle

Stags live in bachelor groups for most of the year. They rut in autumn. In the rut, they become very aggressive. They roar and fight for females.

The hinds give birth to one calf in May or June. To avoid predators, the mother leaves her young calf alone, sleeping in long grass for most of the day. She only returns to feed it once or twice a day.

If you find a calf alone, please do not touch it. It is not abandoned. Please leave it alone, and quietly move away.

Antlers

Only male deer have antlers. The exception are reindeer. Both male and female reindeer have antlers. However, we do not have reindeer in Ireland.

Antlers are shed each spring. A new, bigger set grow each summer, ready for the rut in autumn. The oldest deer have the biggest antlers.

Diet

Deer mainly eat low growing plants such as grass and heathers. They will also eat and damage trees, especially in winter.

Video Clip

Slide 4

Watch a short clip of a Red deer stag in the rut. Notice the leaves on his antlers where he has been thrashing the vegetation. Hear him roar to challenge other stags and to attract hinds.

Sika Deer - Fia Seapánach

Cervus nippon

Slide 5



Sika deer were introduced from Asia to Co. Wicklow in 1860. They escaped and now freely hybridise with our Red deer.

Sika deer are smaller than Red deer. They have black and white markings around their tail. Red deer have a creamy brown tail area.

Protection

Like Red deer, Sika deer are protected but may be shot with a licence.



Ireland once had a large population of wolves. They were hunted to extinction by the late 1700s.

The wolf was the only predator in Ireland that was big enough to hunt deer and goats.

Without a predator, the numbers of deer go up and up. When there are too many deer, they cause damage to habitats.



Wolves

To protect habitats, conservationists need to cull deer each year.

Fallow Deer - Fia Buí

Dama dama

Slide 6



Fallow deer were introduced to Ireland by the Normans in the 1200s. They originally came from the Mediterranean area.

The easiest place to see Fallow deer is the large herd in the Phoenix Park in Dublin. Please remember that they are wild. Do not get too close, and do not try to feed them.

Protection

Fallow deer are protected but may be shot with a licence.

Video Clip

Slide 7

Watch a short clip of Fallow deer stags fighting. Notice the flattened palmate antlers.

Muntjac - Muinseac



Life Cycle

Muntjac can breed throughout the year. They give birth to a single fawn.

Muntiacus reevesi

Slide 8

The Muntjac, or Barking Deer, is a small deer about the size of a spaniel. Males have short upright antlers. Muntjac originated in Asia, but have been illegally introduced into Ireland, most likely by hunters as a new quarry species. It was first recorded here in 2007.

Invasive Species

The Muntjac is classed as an Invasive Species and may be hunted. In the UK where it has been established for many years, it has damaged woodlands. It eats all the flowers and other plants that grow under the trees. It is feared that it will have the same effect here in Ireland.

Wild Goat - Gabhar Fia



Life Cycle

Male goats are called billies. Females are called nannies. A nanny gives birth to one or two kids in spring.

Sucker Hooves

Goats have spongy pads in their hooves. These act like suckers, helping them to grip rocks. As a result, goats can live in very steep, rocky places.

Capra hircus

Slide 9

Wild goats come in a range of colours. They are also called feral goats. Feral means that they were once a domesticated species, but have gone wild. Ireland's wild goats have been feral for hundreds of years, and perhaps way longer than that.

Protection

The Wild Goat is not officially recognised as a native animal, and is not protected.

Horns

Goat horns grow constantly. They are not shed each year like deer antlers. Billy goats have larger horns than nannies. Older billies may have very large horns that curl outwards.

Video Clip

Watch a short clip of some wild goats resting on a hillside.

Slide 10

Rabbit - Coinín



Burrows

Only the female rabbits (does) dig burrows. Males (bucks) do not dig burrows. A warren is a group of several burrows.

Oryctolagus cuniculus

Slide 11

Rabbits were brought to Ireland by the Normans in the 12th century. The Normans kept them for food in enclosed warrens.

Diet

Wild rabbits rarely eat carrots. They prefer grasses and wildflowers.

Rabbits are eaten by many other creatures including foxes, buzzards and stoats.

Life Cycle

Rabbits can breed all year. The kittens are born underground, and are blind and hairless. The kittens are mature by 4 weeks, ready to leave the nursery burrow and join the warren,

Video Clip

Watch a short clip of a wild rabbit eating plants.

Slide 12

Irish Hare - Giorria



Life Cycle

A male hare is called a Jack or a buck, and a female is called a Jill or a doe. The young are called leverets.

Leverets are born above ground, fully furred and with their eyes open. The female leaves them alone all day, to avoid predators. She returns only to feed them once a day. The young are weaned after three weeks.

Lepus timidus hibernicus

Slide 13

Ireland has its own special hare. It is smaller than the English hare. It rarely turns white in winter, unlike its Scottish cousins.

Hare versus Rabbit

Hares are bigger than rabbits and have longer legs. Hares do not live in a burrow. They sleep in a small dip in long grass, called a form.

Protection

Hares are protected in Ireland. However, they are also classed as a quarry species and may be hunted or coursed under license.

Where can I see a hare?

Hares live in open grassy places from sand dunes to mountain tops.

The Wexford Wildfowl Reserve is Ireland's only hare reserve.

Curiously, Dublin airport is also a great place to easily spot hares.

Red Squirrel - Iora Rua

Sciurus vulgaris

Slide 14



Red squirrels are smaller than Grey squirrels. They have a red coat and ear tufts (long hair on their ears).

Red squirrels live only in live only in woodland. They feed mainly on the nuts and seeds of trees.

Squirrels sleep in a drey. A drey is a nest made of a ball of twigs.

Video Clip

Slide 15

Watch a short clip of a Red squirrel eating a nut.



Red squirrels are native to Ireland.



Introduced Grey squirrels are driving Red squirrels out of much of their habitat.

Squirrels & Pine Martens



The pine marten is a native species too. It had become extremely rare, but protection has seen its numbers and its range increase.

Pine martens hunt squirrels. When pine martens return to an area where they were once wiped out, the numbers of red squirrels goes up, and the numbers of greys go down. Greys are easier for a pine marten to catch!



So the pine marten could help to save our red squirrels!

Grey Squirrel - Iora Glas

Sciurus carolinensis

Slide 16



Grey squirrels were introduced to Ireland in 1911. The original squirrels were an unusual wedding present and were released in Castleforbes in Co. Longford. Since their release they have spread far and wide in the east of Ireland. They have still not made it west over the Shannon.

Grey squirrels are regarded as an Invasive Species because they have caused the decline of Red squirrels.

Brown Rat - Francach Donn

Rattus norvegicus

Slide 17



Life Cycle

Rats breed quickly. They can have five litters a year, with 12 pups in each litter.

Very few people like rats. They can carry diseases, such as Leptospirosis. In the Middle Ages rats spread the Black Death (bubonic plague) across Europe.

Brown and Black Rats

In fact, the rat that spread the plague was the Black Rat. Today, Black rats are perhaps Ireland's rarest mammal, found only on Lambay Island.

Brown rats are common everywhere. They arrived to Ireland from Asia in the 1700s.

Diet

Everything!

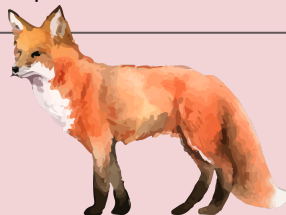
What eats rats and mice?

Rodents are a very important part of the diet of many species. Here are three. Can you think of more?

Barn Owl



Fox



Buzzard



House Mouse - Luch Thí

Mus musculus domesticus

Slide 18



Diet

House mice feed mainly on grains and seeds, but in our houses they will eat most foods.

As the name suggests, House mice like to live in our buildings. They can be a problem - eating wood and electric wires, and spreading disease.

Life Cycle

Like rats, House mice breed quickly. A female can have up to ten litters a year, with up to nine pups in each litter.

Mice are an important food source for many animals and birds. In our houses and gardens, many also fall prey to cats.

Few House mice live more than two years.

Woodmouse - Luch Fhéir



Diet

Woodmice eat mostly nuts and seeds, but they will eat insects and other small creatures too.

Apodemus sylvaticus

Slide 19

Woodmice are also called Fieldmice. They rarely live in towns or buildings. They prefer to live in woods, hedgerows and fields.

Woodmouse versus House mouse

House mice are grey-brown, but woodmice are a lovely chestnut colour with a white belly. They have big eyes to help them see in the dark.

Prey

Many predators hunt and eat woodmice, including owls, foxes and kestrels. To avoid predators, woodmice are mainly active at night. They are nocturnal.

Bank Vole - Vol Bruaigh



Diet

Mainly herbivorous, but they also eat invertebrates.

Habitat

Bank voles live in woods, hedgerows and fields, wherever there is dense undergrowth to hide them.

Clethrionomys glareolus Slide 20

Bank voles look like tubby mice with a short tail and a more rounded face.

Origin

Bank voles probably arrived in Ireland in the 1920s. It is believed that they came in with the big machines used to build Ardnacrusha power station in Shannon.

Bank voles were only actually discovered here, in Kerry, in 1964. Since then they have spread far and wide.

Protection

Bank voles are not officially protected in Ireland. They are considered to be an Invasive Species due to their recent arrival. However, their ecological impact is not known. They are an important food for Barn Owls.

Glossary - Gluais



Invasive Species

An Invasive Species is one that has been introduced from another country, and that causes harm to native plants, animals and habitats.

In Ireland, examples include Grey Squirrels, Zebra mussels, and Japanese Knotweed.

Native Species

There are several definitions of exactly what is a Native species. In Ireland, most people accept that a Native Species is one that has been in Ireland since the Ice Age. This is about 10,000 years.



Omnivore

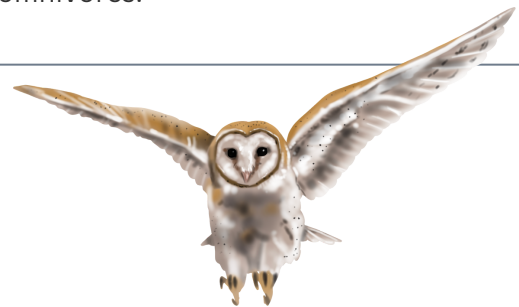


An omnivore is an animal that eats both plants and animals. Are you an omnivore?

Rats and mice are omnivores.

Predator

A predator is a hunter. All predators eat other living creatures.



Cull

Culling is the act of killing animals to reduce their numbers.

It differs from hunting. Hunters kill for food or for sport. Sport hunters often target the most impressive animals, such as the stags with the biggest antlers.

Animals, such as deer, need to be culled if their numbers increase to such an extent that they are causing damage to habitats. Usually this happens because we no longer have a wild predator, such as the wolf, to keep the population in check.



Protect Nature

We believe that every child deserves the opportunity to learn, love and protect Nature.



Learn

Learning to recognize our native plants and animals



Love

Growing to love Nature.
We love what we know.



Protect

Protecting Nature.
We protect what we love.

Follow On Activities

Each of our lessons have a toolkit of other activities, designed for various ages.

These include colouring-in sheets for the younger children, crosswords, quizzes and other activities for the older ones.

Why not take your children out into nature? We have notes to help you lead a nature walk.

What Next?

If you and your children enjoyed 'Irish Animals - Herbivores', you may also enjoy our other lesson:

Irish Animals - Hunters

This lesson looks at foxes, badgers and more - Irish animals that are predators.

We also have lessons that focus on specific mammal species and groups, such as:

Irish Bats
Hares & Rabbits

We would love to hear from you

We hope your class enjoyed this lesson, and that you found the resources easy to use.

If you have any suggestions on this lesson, or ideas for future lessons, please email us.

