



THE DUBLIN NATURALISTS' FIELD CLUB

Honorary Secretary's Report 2023-24

This report covers the 11-month period since the last AGM, which was held online on 17th June 2023. During this period the Field Club has continued with its programme of field outings; its botanical identification workshops on the first Saturday of each month; and it also continued with its series of monthly online presentations during the autumn and the winter.

Our field excursions included a series of outings, led by Declan Doogue and David Nash, to record plant species for an updated Flora of Howth; and a continuation of the joint initiative with students from Trinity College Dublin, led by Declan, to explore the flora of Inner Dublin. Other excursions visited a diverse range of habitats including: old sessile oak woodlands at Clara, old estate woodlands at St. Catherine's Park and planted forests at Brockagh Wood in Co. Wicklow; a tree walk at Farmleigh Estate and a visit to the arboretum at Kilmacurragh; wet woodland, cutaway peatland and raised bog flora at Abbeyleix; coastal vegetation at Booterstown, Corballis and at Claremont Strand; lichens on the rocks at Powerscourt Waterfall, fungi in Knocksink Wood and bryophytes at Liffey Head Bog; visits to working farms in counties Wicklow and Kildare; rock pools at Portmarnock; birdwatching at Rogerstown Estuary, Bull Island, Kilcoole and at Poolbeg; an appraisal of the built environment and the underground watercourses of Rathmines; and the traditional St. Stephen's Day walk in Santry Demesne. Altogether a total of 26 outings were held during the year, with 12 in or around Dublin city, and the other 14 in the surrounding counties. I would like to thank all of the leaders, both from within the Field Club and from outside, who volunteered their time and expertise and who made the excursions a success.

A large vote of thanks is due to our Honorary Vice President, Declan Doogue, for all of his work in organising the series of Praeger Centre events on the first Saturday of each month. These workshops have mainly focused on plant identification, including *Epilobium*, *Dryopteris*, *Taraxacum*, *Frullania*, *Euphrasia*, *Salix*, *Erophila*, members of the Asteraceae, Umbelliferae and Cruciferae, and conifers that self-seed in Ireland. The workshops have also introduced participants to the floras of SW China, South Africa, Co. Meath, Howth and Co. Mayo; ecologically significant habitats on farmland, botanical Latin and digital mapping devices. Many books were reviewed, including those by Carl Linnaeus, Robert Lloyd Praeger and Dr. Patrick Brown. A fern workshop, hosted by visiting experts Alison Evans and Roger Golden was held at the end of August 2023; and many thanks to Ursula King for her excellent series of presentations on plant genetics.

The series of online talks, which ran from last September through until March this year, covered a wide range of topics, such as: harvestmen (Opiliones), butterflies, medicinal plants, botanical illustrations on Irish postage stamps, species interactions and relationships and the wild Irish cousins of well-known garden plants.

The DNFC WhatsApp Group, which now has 125 participants, has continued to post interesting and informative materials on a wide range of organisms throughout the year. It is an excellent platform for the sharing of knowledge and for learning, and particularly useful to members who have just joined the Field Club and to those who are no longer able to join in our excursions and workshops. Many thanks to Tom Minter for managing the group, as it continues to be a well-used medium for information exchange.

I would also like to thank Philip Grant for his stewardship of the Field Club's Facebook page, which posts information about DNFC's activities and also highlights other relevant events in the environmental arena.

Since the last AGM the DNFC Board has met on 4 occasions, with all of the meetings being held by teleconference using Zoom. Alexis FitzGerald was appointed Vice President and President-designate in January 2024, taking over from P.J. Walls who has given the Field Club an exceptional period of service and who led the Board through the difficult years of Covid restrictions. A new bank account, to hold any donations and bequests received for specific purposes, was set up during the year; and the Board has also completed its compliance with the Charities Governance Code for the year ending in December 2023.

The Conservation Sub-committee met on a number of occasions and compiled and submitted its response to the *Draft Strategic Plan 2024-2028* of the National Biodiversity Data Centre in October. The Sub-committee also produced and disseminated its second position paper on '*Protecting the Threatened Flora of Old Walls*' in January 2024. The Research and Publications Sub-committee met in January to discuss the programme for the Praeger workshops and to plan the summer programme of outings to record the flora of Howth.

Several online planning meetings were held with the Belfast Naturalists' Field Club to organise the joint outing to the North Antrim Coast and to Rathlin Island, that will take place in mid-June.

I would like to thank our President, Sunniva Hanley, for her production of the Club Newsletter, which provides information on our outings, workshops and online presentations, as it is especially valuable to those members who are no longer able to enjoy getting out in the field.

Over the period since the last AGM, the Board has approved applications from 40 new members to join the Field Club, 8 of whom are Student Members; and at the end of calendar year 2023 we had a total of 180 members.

I would like to thank all of the presenters who have contributed to our series of online seminars; and all of our members who actively participate in the WhatsApp Group, who willingly share their knowledge and expertise and who help to keep the great educational tradition of the Field Club very much alive. Thank you.

Charles Shier
Hon. Secretary