

BALLYBUNION GOLF CLUB



**A hole-by-hole guide to the wildlife
and conservation on the Cashen Course**

FOREWORD



Golf is a diverse sport. When played in the right environment, it offers a rare combination of the thrill of competition, coupled with a direct enrichment of the soul. This all sounds very dramatic, but step out onto either the Old or Cashen Courses at Ballybunion and you will immediately understand what I mean.

The raw thrill of striking a clean, crisp drive is heightened immeasurably when playing within a spectacular landscape teeming with a seemingly endless variety of wildlife. This wildlife, whether you realise it or not, is making itself known to you throughout your round – from the vibrant colours of wild flowers, the aerial acrobatics and melodious calls of birdlife to the delicate flight of butterflies and the majestic sight of marine life.

The term 'enriching the soul' may seem over the top but I believe playing a round at Ballybunion is an unforgettable experience – one which provides a true appreciation of the sport of golf and all its facets.



Richard Stuttard
STRI Ecologist

INTRODUCTION

Ballybunion Golf Club offers two world renowned golf courses providing an unparalleled golfing experience. Both the Old and the Cashen Courses wind their way through some of the most visually striking and wildlife-rich coastal dune systems in the world. It is testament to the architectural design and management that the golf courses fit almost seamlessly within the extensive dune systems of Ballybunion without taking anything away from their majesty and grandeur.

Ballybunion Golf Club, fully aware of the special landscape in which its courses sit, plays a vital role in conserving the landscape into which the golf courses are placed, ensuring perfect harmony between golf and the environment.

The extensive dune grasslands that appear to almost swallow up certain fairways on both the Old and Cashen Courses not only play an important role in the strategic aspects of the golf course set up but also have significant wildlife value.

The course is an important breeding site for skylark—a species in steep decline elsewhere.

The layout of the Cashen Course at Ballybunion serves to maximise the value of its coastal location, with stunning views of the Cashen Estuary and the Atlantic Ocean.

The purpose of this booklet is to enhance your experience at Ballybunion Golf Club by providing a hole-by-hole insight into the wildlife highlights of the area. The booklet is your essential golfing companion.

HISTORY

Ballybunion Golf Club was originally established back in 1893 when 12 greens were laid out within the coastal sand dune systems. Robert Trent Jones said of the Cashen dunes that the land chosen for the New Course was the finest piece of linksland that he had ever seen and perhaps the finest piece of linksland in the world.

The course provides 18 spectacular holes, each with its unique character and challenge. The grasslands bordering the holes support a diversity of wildlife, some of which is considerably rare. The Old Course was extended to the current 18 hole layout in 1927 and was first recognised at a national level in 1932 when it was chosen as the venue for the Irish Ladies' Championship. Since that time, the club has hosted the Irish Ladies' Championship a further four times in addition to the Irish Amateur Close Championship and the Irish Professional Championship.



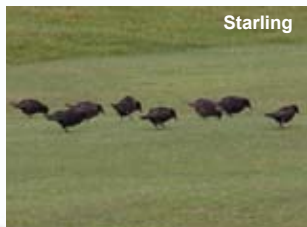
The Cashen Course is a relatively recent addition to the Ballybunion Golf Club. The lower (southern) sandhills were purchased by the club in the late 1960s. The course, designed by Robert Trent Jones Snr., was opened for play in 1982.

By the 1970s, Ballybunion's Old Course was widely regarded as one of the top ten golfing venues in the world. The 1980s saw a string of world class golfing names grace the Ballybunion links including Tom Watson, Jack Nicklaus, Nick Faldo and Colin Montgomery. At the start of the 1980s the renowned golf course architect, Robert Trent-Jones was commissioned to design a further 18 holes of golf at Ballybunion and in 1982 the Cashen Course opened for play.

Today, both golf courses are deemed world class and are enjoyed by golfers from across the globe.



HOLE 1



Starling



Sand sedge



Swallow

Striding out from the clubhouse, starling, stonechat and blackbird may all either be heard or seen. The golfer begins their round heading south, gradually working their way towards the Cashen Estuary.

Looking to the right from the 1st tee, the golfer will note the dramatic view of the large undulating sand dune system that they will have to negotiate later on in their round.

When striking the tee shot on the 1st, take time to notice the beautifully managed deep rough grasslands surrounding the tee complex. Within these, grassland species including red fescue, false oat-grass and sweet vernal-grass provide fantastic definition and ecological interest around the playing areas.

Walking along the fairway, the golfer is more than likely to encounter swallows darting acrobatically across the fairways, often at very low levels. It is not uncommon to find yourself being circled by these inquisitive birds whilst walking along the fairway.

HOLE 2



Stonechat



Northern
marsh orchid



Chough

The deep grasslands surrounding the 2nd tee complex are a known breeding ground for stonechat and it is not unusual to see these small birds darting from one area of grassland to another. In the summer, the male stonechat is easily identified by its rust red breast and its distinct white neck patch.

Whilst walking along the fairway, your eye may be caught by the erect purple spires of northern marsh orchid which is frequently found through the late spring and early summer within the rough grassland that flanks both sides of the 2nd hole. This and the other orchids to be found over the course are easily identifiable by their erect habit and striking colour.

Choughs are a common sight on the 2nd fairway and can often be found feeding over this section of the course early in the morning. The jet black chough is easily identified by the distinct red beak and red legs. Choughs are generally rare, although quite common on the Ballybunion courses.

HOLE 3



Oystercatcher



Lapwing and redshank



Bird's-foot trefoil

The par 3 3rd hole is nestled beautifully within undulating sand dune systems to all sides. Accuracy with the club is vital here as a wayward shot will land in the well-placed deep rough grassland. It is important to recognise that the management team at Ballybunion Golf Club take steps to ensure that the rough grasslands adorning the sand dune systems of the whole site are allowed to develop as nature intended and this is why the Cashen Course sits so well in the natural environment.

From the back of the 3rd tee the golfer is afforded an elevated view of the Cashen Estuary and it is not uncommon to hear the unmistakable shrill of oystercatcher. The dazzling black and white plumage and large bright bill make this one of Ireland's most distinctive birds.

The vibrant flashes of yellow frequently seen in the grasslands around the 3rd hole during the summer months are likely to be common bird's-foot trefoil. This attractive and delicate plant is a member of the pea family and produces erect stems topped with fan-shaped clusters of brightly coloured pea flowers.

HOLE 4



Grey heron



Greenshank



Common vetch
(white variant)

The view from the 4th tees is an intimidating one. With the tee complex perched high up on the sand dune system, the fairway to which the golfer must play sits at sea level more than 50 ft. below. This elevation, coupled with the strong offshore crosswinds that Ballybunion is synonymous for, ensures that a great deal of skill is required to get a good result from the tee shot.

Upon reaching the 4th green, the golfer is offered a privileged view of the Cashen Estuary and its many wading birds including greenshank, redshank, knot and sanderling. The imposing grey heron are a frequently seen spectacle on the mudflats of the estuary and flocks of the unmistakable lapwing can often be seen congregating in the fields to the far side of the water.

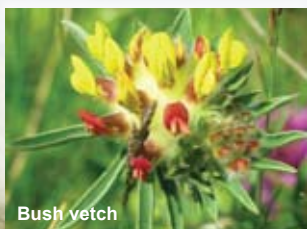
It is also not uncommon to see a variety of duck species residing within these relatively calm waters. Shelduck, pochard and teal will often be amongst the large number of species seen in this area.

In between the 4th and 5th holes a few common vetch (white variant) can be found. These are very unusual and are normally a pink-purple colour.

HOLE 5



Coltsfoot



Bush vetch

The 5th hole picks its way beautifully through the sand dune system, working its way towards the very heart of the dune network at Ballybunion.

In the spring, flashes of vibrant yellow within the grasslands are provided by coltsfoot and in the summer this role is taken by kidney-vetch.

The extensive dune to the back of the 5th green is known to be supporting one of several badger setts across the Cashen Course site—the presence of these elusive creatures only given away by the occasional presence of small spoil heaps following the creation of further access tunnels into the sett. The early morning golfer may also be fortunate enough to catch a glimpse of a fox roaming around the area of the 5th green. Badger and fox prints can often be seen in exposed areas of sand.

HOLE 6

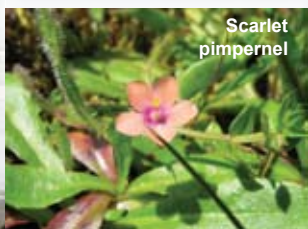


The par 3 6th hole offers a short but dramatic challenge to the golfer. Accuracy with the club is required as the green slopes sharply to three sides.

Upon reaching the 6th green, the golfer is in the heart of stonechat territory and it is not uncommon for this area to be awash with birdsong.



In the more open dune areas around the 6th hole, the yellow flowers and trailing growth habit of black medick can be seen adorning the landscape of the 6th during the summer months.



A close inspection of the grasslands in this area may reveal the delicate flowers of scarlet pimpernel—a member of the primrose family.



HOLE 7



Common gull



Sticky stork's-bill



Blackening
wax cap

The close proximity of the 7th hole to the Atlantic is not immediately apparent because of the imposing sand dune system that runs along the flank of the tee complex. The ocean is given away however by the rumble of waves and frequent calls of various seabirds including Arctic tern, common gull and black-headed gull.

When standing on the tee, take a moment to look to the right of the fairway and admire the large expanse of unspoilt sand dune system within which the Cashen Course sits.

It is well worth walking along the left-hand flank of the 7th fairway and peering over the grassland bund to enjoy the extensive ocean views.

The grasslands surrounding the 7th hole are home to a number of rare plant species, including sticky stork's-bill and small-flowered crane's-bill. Both species exhibit small, delicate, lilac-coloured flowers.

The Cashen Course supports a variety of species of fungi including blackening wax cap which can be found to the back of the 7th tees. This poisonous species occurs in a variable range of colours including yellow, orange, tomato red and olive green. With age, the entire fruit body begins to blacken, hence the origins of its name.

HOLE 8



Skylark



Pied wagtail



The walkthrough to the 8th tees provides the golfer with breathtaking views of the entire Cashen Course and also one of the most stunning sections of Ireland's western coastline. It also provides an opportunity to witness a number of ground-nesting bird species including meadow pipit and skylark. Although these species are similar in colouration, skylark can be identified by its distinct raised crest and dominant chirruping call.

At more than 600 yards from the medal tees the 8th hole is a true test of golf. The hole sweeps sharply to the left and with the strong offshore winds the golfer must carefully judge the distance and direction of their tee shot. The extensive expanse of deep rough grassland defining the 8th hole is a truly wondrous sight. Note the numerous connections between areas of rough grassland across the golf course. These are in place to ensure that a safe passage is provided for small mammals such as stoat which forage in this area.

The 8th fairway is a favoured feeding ground for pied wagtail. These commonly found birds can be seen in considerable numbers throughout much of the year.



HOLE 9



Many
banded snail



Fairy flax



Cowslip

The 9th hole heads directly back towards the clubhouse, with its imposing and architecturally impressive structure forming the backdrop to the 9th green.

The golf course supports a wide variety of molluscan interest, with a total of 21 different species of snail known to be residing within the dune system. Of particular note is the rare and protected narrow-mouthed whorl snail which has very specific habitat requirements. Its presence at Ballybunion is testament to the sympathetic way in which the course is being managed.

Further wild flower interest can be found in the grasslands flanking the 9th hole, with fairy flax, lady's bedstraw and cowslip an attractive yet often elusive sight.

HOLE 10



Eyebright

The 10th hole picks its way through a narrow aperture between two dominating sand dunes.

The backdrop of the ocean and hills on the horizon is perfectly framed by the sand hills and is one of the most memorable views on the Cashen Course.

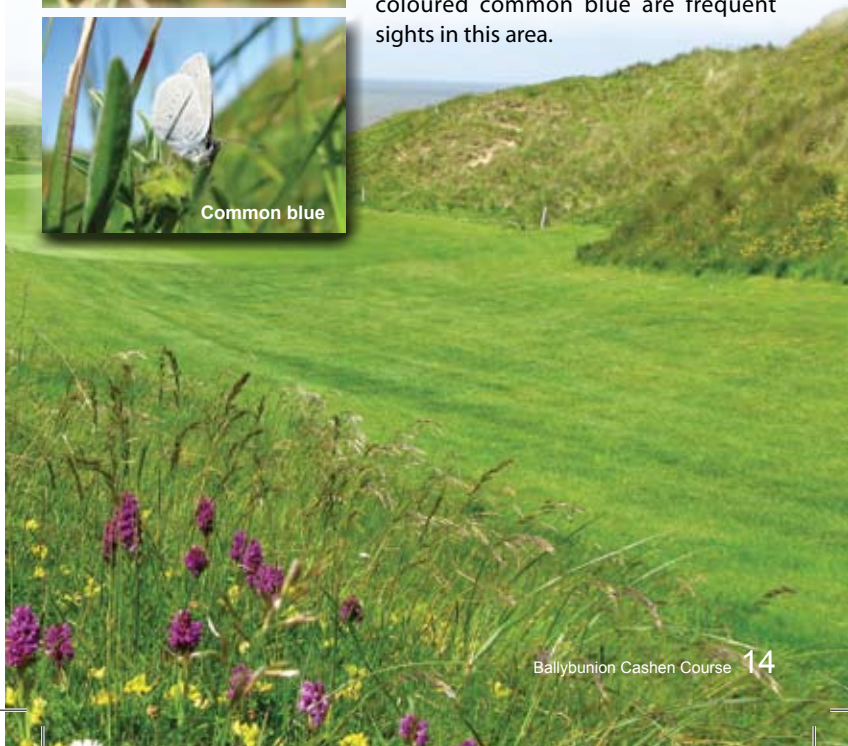


Kidney-vetch

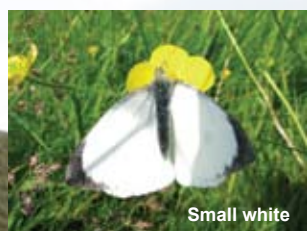
The dense marram-dominated rough grasslands binding the sand dunes together contain a variety of wild flower species including eyebright and kidney-vetch. As a result, it is not unusual to see a variety of butterfly species in this area. Small blue and the larger, vibrantly coloured common blue are frequent sights in this area.



Common blue



HOLE 11



Small white

The par 3 11th hole plays from an elevated tee to an elevated green over a deep grass-land bowl. From the privileged vantage point of the tee, it is not uncommon to see the large and imposing form of cormorant flying gracefully along the coast.

On a hot day the golfer may be treated to the rare sight of a viviparous lizard basking in one of the more open areas of the 11th hole. The viviparous lizard is Ireland's only reptile.

VIVIPAROUS LIZARD

The viviparous lizard is so called because it gives birth to live young.

They grow to between 10 and 18 cm in length and their colouration ranges from grey, brown, bronze and green.

They hunt insects, spiders, snails and earthworms, stunning their prey by shaking it, and then swallowing it whole.



HOLE 12



Kestrel



Common blue

The well-sculptured fairway and deliberate encroachment of rough grassland adds a great deal of strategic interest to the 12th hole.

Looking to the left during the walk towards the green, the golfer will note a significant and imposing sand dune system of more than 75 ft. in height. This extensive swathe of grassland is a favoured hunting ground for kestrel. Look out for this majestic hunting bird as it hovers effortlessly above the grasslands looking for its prey.

Upon approaching the 12th green the bank of wild flowers to the right provides an opportunity to witness the common blue butterfly—one of the most common butterflies seen at Ballybunion.



HOLE 13



Marram



Rough hawkbit

Standing on the 13th tee, other than the smallest fleck of visible fairway, the golfer could be forgiven for feeling they were striking into the unknown. This only serves to add to the extraordinary golfing experience that Ballybunion has to offer.

A large component of the elevated grasslands around this area, and indeed across much of the site, is marram. This tufted spike-like grass is a critical stabilising element of the Ballybunion sand dune systems. Without it, the mobility of the dune systems would increase dramatically, causing significant changes to the landscape.

Examples of rough hawkbit form one of the many flashes of yellow within the dune grasslands of this area.

HOLE 14



Common ragwort, foodplant of the cinnabar moth



Cinnabar moth larvae

A degree of the unknown is again apparent with the tee shot from the 14th hole. Here, the golfer is required to play over a deep grassland bowl to the fairway that is situated on an elevated plateau.

In early summer the golfer's eye may be drawn towards a series of vibrant yellow and black striped caterpillars spread often in great numbers over common ragwort plants within the grasslands of the 14th fairway. These are cinnabar moth caterpillars and they are favouring common ragwort for two reasons—firstly, it is their sole food plant and, secondly, they are able to absorb the poisons from this plant and use them as a defence against predation from birds.

HOLE 15



**Western
marsh
orchid**



**Common
vetch**

From the tees, the golfer may be excused for thinking that this is a quite open and forgiving hole. This is a deceptive view however as just beyond the crest of the sand hill, not visible to the golfer, the hole drops into an extremely tight and strategically challenging winding fairway between two significant sand dune systems before leading to a final steep ascent to the elevated green.

Within the grasslands surrounding the green, look out for the upright form of the western marsh orchid. This stunning orchid flowers between May and June and is certainly one of the most visually striking plants to be seen at Ballybunion's Cashen Course.

HOLE 16



Arctic tern



Black-headed gull

The par 3 16th hole brings with it a wealth of visual and ecological interests. Whilst waiting to take their tee shot, the keen-eyed golfer may be fortunate enough to spot a bottle-nosed dolphin meandering through the coastal waters. The sight of these majestic creatures is something that will lift the spirit of the golfer, adding a new dimension to the enjoyment of their round.

The 16th hole, with its strong grassland flank to the right and the close proximity of the ocean to the left, offers a rare opportunity to witness a wide variety of both seabirds and ground-nesting inland birds. Along the coast, look out for black-headed gull, Arctic tern, common gull, herring gull and cormorant, and within the grasslands stonechat, meadow pipit, skylark and linnet.

HOLE 17



**Bulbous
buttercup**



Kidney-vetch



**Pyramidal
orchid**

On a clear day the views out to open ocean from the 17th tees are truly breathtaking.

The 17th fairway is framed beautifully by the sweeping curves of the sand dunes to either flank and within the grasslands on these sand hills an infusion of yellow is provided by the presence of bird's-foot trefoil, bulbous buttercup and kidney-vetch.

The golfer may also be fortunate enough to spot an early marsh or pyramidal orchid during its typical flowering period of May to July.



HOLE 18



**Germander
speedwell**



Bee orchid



The clubhouse

The final hole on the Cashen Course provides one of the toughest tee shots the golfer will have experienced during their round. The carry from the 18th is extensive and includes a deep rough grassland bowl. Floral interest is considerable within the grasslands flanking the 18th fairway. Lesser celandine, common vetch, germander speedwell, eyebright, bee orchid and wild pansy are all well represented and contribute greatly to the visual prowess of this hole.

Having sunk a putt at the 18th, the golfer can head to the clubhouse for well-earned refreshment and take stock of the memorable experience the Cashen Course has given them.

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