

# BALLYBUNION GOLF CLUB



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

## FOREWORD



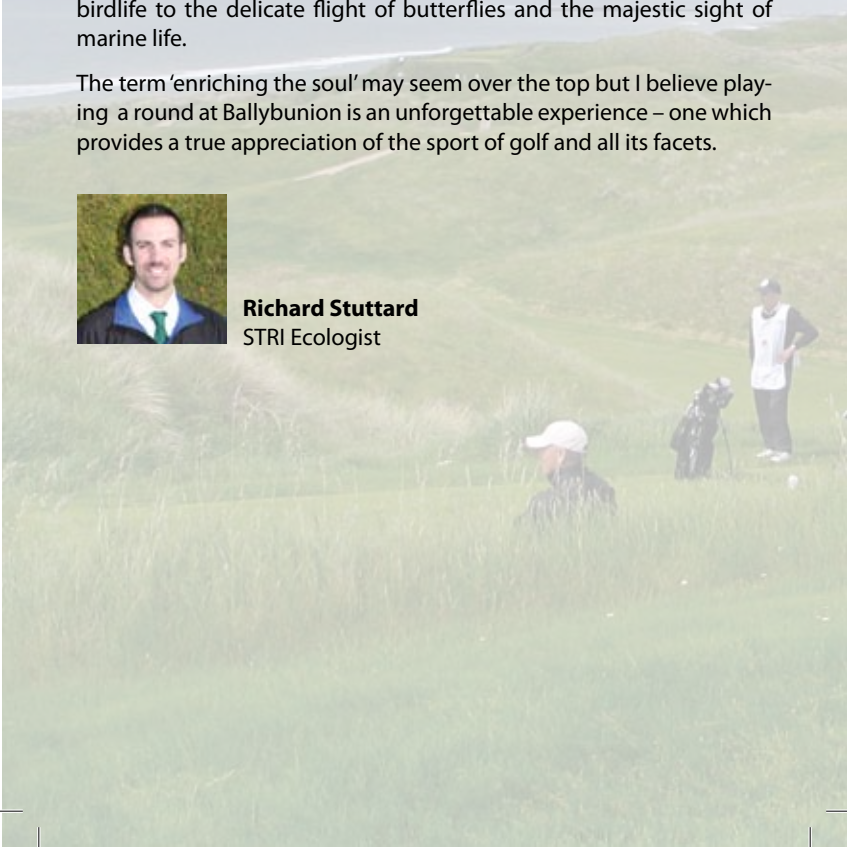
Golf is a diverse sport. When played in the right environment, it offers a rare combination of the thrill of competition, coupled with a direct enrichment of the soul. This all sounds very dramatic, but step out onto either the Old or Cashen Courses at Ballybunion and you will immediately understand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

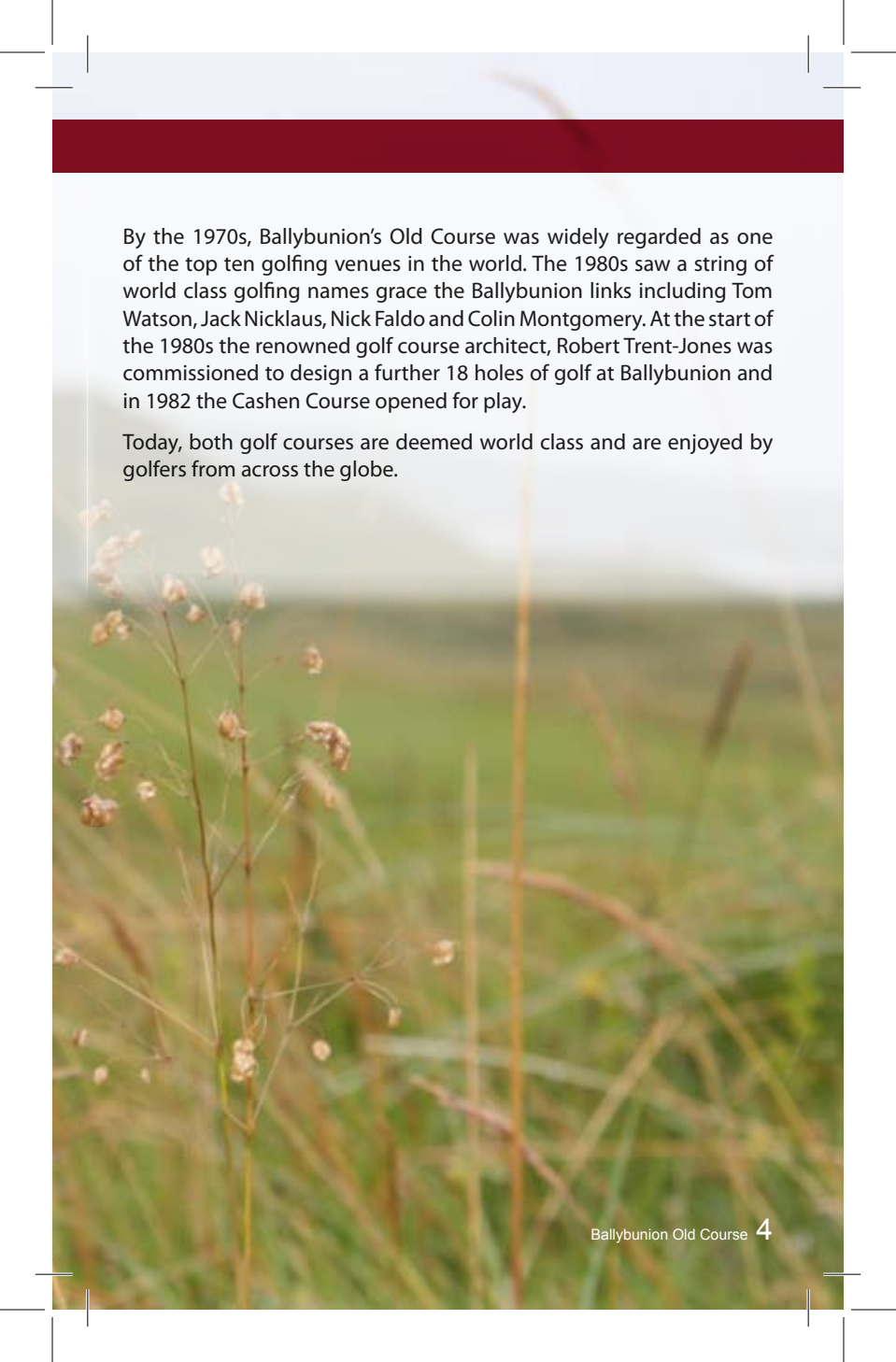
The extensive dune grasslands that appear to almost swallow up certain fairways on both the Old and Cashen Courses not only play an important role in the strategic aspects of the golf course set up but also have significant wildlife value.

It was Tom Watson who commented *"After playing the Old Course for the first time, a man would think that the game of golf originated here. Located on the Shannon Estuary, the Old Course is a true seaside links course, virtually treeless and a course of sharp contours throughout. There appears to be no man-made influence, it looks like a course laid out as it was back in the 10th century. There is a wild look to this place"*. The grasslands, from the peaks of the sand dunes right through to the base of the deep and dramatic hollows, not only support a considerable number of rare and visually striking wild flower species but provide an intimidating but fair setting for golf. The grasslands are important for breeding skylark and meadow pipit. They provide a rich food source for these birds as well as being an important corridor habitat for the dispersal and movement of other wildlife.

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. Despite the enthusiasm and dedication of those involved, the club was not financially equipped to survive at this time and course management lapsed in 1898. It was then a further eight years before Ballybunion Golf Club was resurrected, with the creation of a new nine hole track (forming part of the current Old Course layout) and since that time the club has gone from strength to strength. 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.



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



**Southern  
marsh  
orchid**



**Primrose**



**Red clover**

An outstanding assemblage of coastal plants presents the golfer with a stunning tee shot from the 1st hole, particularly during the summer months.

The view of the spectacular surrounding dune system and associated species-rich grasslands provides a memorable start to a course that does not fail to impress on any level.

Having struck your tee shot, take a moment to look out for the delicate flowers of scarlet pimpernel and the unmistakable form of southern and northern marsh orchids to the left of the 1st carry. These flowers are sitting in a grassland sward dominated by false oat-grass and marram—a critical stabilising element for the dune systems of Ballybunion.

## HOLE 2

**2nd hole**



**Skylark**



**Field vole within grassland**



The par 4 2nd hole presents a new challenge to the golfer. Whilst the tee shot appears straightforward, it is vital that a good position is achieved for the second.

The dominant sand hills framing the 2nd hole provide an aperture just wide enough to thread a shot through and towards the green. Look out for green-veined white butterfly in and around the area of the open ditch running across the 2nd fairway. Skylark can frequently be seen crossing the 2nd green, traversing from one pocket of deep rough grassland to another.

You will note upon reaching the 2nd green the extensive linked swathes of deep rough grassland that are providing valuable nesting habitat for these birds in addition to creating a protected passage for other wildlife such as small mammals across the Ballybunion site.

## HOLE 3

**Fine rough allows ball retrieval with penalty**



**Bird's-foot trefoil**



**Lesser black-backed gull**



Turning back towards the clubhouse for the tee shot from the 3rd hole the golfer will gain a true appreciation of the stunning landscape within which Ballybunion Old Course sits.

Whilst scanning the vista from the 3rd tee, take a moment to appreciate the wide expanse of relatively flat landscape to the left, starkly contrasting with the dynamically undulating sand dunes system that forms the mainstay of Ballybunion Old Course.

When walking to the green, look out for flashes of colour in the spring provided by bulbous buttercup and in the summer by bird's-foot trefoil within the extensive dune grasslands in this area.

## HOLE 4



**Chough**

A 500+ yard challenge faces the golfer on the 4th hole when playing from the medal tees. With the pin out of sight and the strong bands of deep rough grassland to either flank, the tee shot from the 4th hole is far from easy.



**Mute swan flying over the  
Old Course**

Chough can frequently be seen foraging within the area of managed turf to the back of the 4th tees. This member of the crow family is easily identified by its vibrant red legs and red bill and can be readily seen displaying its mastery of flight with wonderful aerial displays of diving and swooping.



## HOLE 5



Gatekeeper  
butterfly



Hooded crow

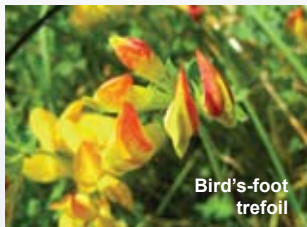


Goldfinch and bulfinch in  
local garden

The air is often filled with the sound of birdsong in and around the area of the 5th hole. In addition to the dune grassland inhabitants of skylark, meadow pipit and stonechat, the nearby local gardens support a variety of bird species including chaffinch, wren, robin, blue tit, great tit and goldfinch. Look out here for the occasional hooded crow.

The 5th hole gives the golfer a brief respite from the otherwise undulating nature of Ballybunion's Old Course. Although relatively flat, the 5th hole provides a series of challenges including a network of bunkering and strong bands of rough grassland dominated by false oat-grass and marram to the left-hand flank and by more coarse-leaved species to the right.

## HOLE 6



Bird's-foot  
trefoil



Stonechat



Sand sedge

The tee shot from the 6th hole is an inviting one, however judging the distance is crucial given the well defined dogleg towards the 6th green. It is from here that the golfer gets their first glimpse of the Shannon Estuary and the peninsula beyond.

Stonechat use the grasslands in this area as nesting habitat and can frequently be seen and, more often, heard in and around the area of the 6th tees. As their name suggests, these birds have a sharp, loud call that sounds like two stones being tapped together.

Upon reaching the 6th green, the golfer is presented with a panoramic view of the Atlantic Ocean and Cashen Estuary. It is at this point that many golfers feel the full force of the infamous offshore winds.

## HOLE 7

**Common gull**



**Goosander**



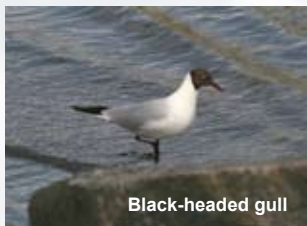
**Cormorant**



Play will understandably be temporarily suspended upon reaching the 7th tees as golfers spend a few minutes admiring the spectacular view that this vantage point provides. On a clear day, several miles of Irish coastline are visible along the far side of the Cashen Estuary.

The tee shot from the 7th hole requires careful planning. A sliced shot from the tee will result in the ball plummeting more than 50 ft. down to the beach below. However, the strong ever present offshore winds will no doubt help counter a sliced shot somewhat. A variety of seabirds including common gull and cormorant can readily be seen foraging along the coastline.

## HOLE 8



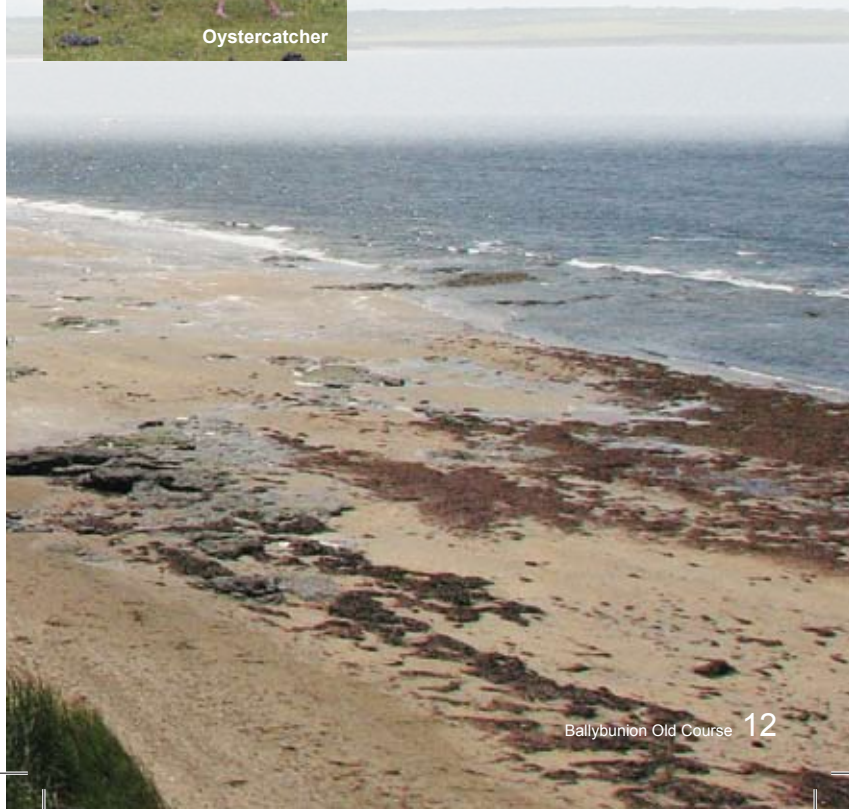
Black-headed gull



Oystercatcher

Look behind you from the 8th medal tees and you will be presented with a tranquil view of the open ocean. Whilst the sound of the waves dominates, you may also be able to pick out the sound of various seabirds in the area including herring gull, black-headed gull and oystercatcher.

The par 3 8th hole itself is framed beautifully by tall undulating sand hills. It is not unusual to see skylark and meadow pipit emerging from the sand hills and chough foraging on the playing areas.



## HOLE 9



The 9th hole on the Old Course follows a line of transition with undulating sand hills to the right and an area of more level topography to the left.

The small water body to the back of the 9th green is a haven for wildlife, with broad-bodied chaser dragonflies and common darter damselflies often seen around the perimeters. Stonechat are also a common sight around the vicinity of the water body and surrounding grasslands.



## HOLE 10



**Chough in flight**



**Stonechat**



**Swallow**

The 10th hole has been crafted beautifully into the surrounding dune landscape. The undulation of the dune systems in this area means that only a small portion of the fairway is visible from the tee and skylark, meadow pipit and stonechat are all known to be frequenting the extensive swathes of deep rough grassland on the 10th.

Swallows can frequently be seen around the area of the 10th hole, their agile and acrobatic flight patterns taking them in search of small insects within the grasslands.

## HOLE 11

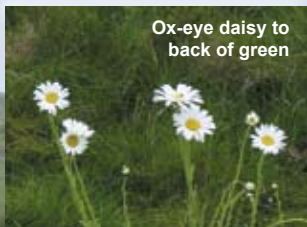
11th green complex



Kestrel



Ox-eye daisy to  
back of green



The 11th hole plays directly along the coastline at Ballybunion and offers long distance views across the undulating sand dune systems.

The imposing sand dune to the left-hand flank of this hole creates an almost isolated feel to this part of the course. Looking out to sea, the golfer may be fortunate enough to catch a glimpse of a dolphin or perhaps even a porpoise as they meander close to the coastline during times of high tide. The dune grassland to the left of the 11th is a favoured hunting ground for kestrel and these majestic birds of prey can frequently be seen hovering effortlessly above the dunes.

## HOLE 12

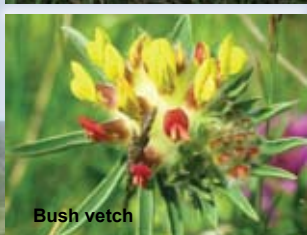
Looking back over the  
sand hills to the spray  
from the sea



Puffballs (*Calvatia  
exipuliformis*)



Bush vetch



The extensive rough grassland carry of the 12th hole is dominated by marram, red fescue and false oat-grass. Within this grassland, rough hawkbit, northern marsh orchid and kidney-vetch provide considerable floristic interest.

A steady nerve is required when taking a tee shot from the 12th as a wayward shot receives severe punishment.

## HOLE 13

Mouse-ear hawkweed



Dove's-foot crane's-bill



The view from the 13th hole is one of the most stunning at Ballybunion's Old Course. Standing on the back tees, you will notice how the golf course footprint has been almost entirely swallowed up by the undulating dune grasslands. Within these grasslands can be found a wide range of wild flower species including cowslip, dove's-foot crane's-bill, mouse-ear hawkweed and wild thyme. When these species are in flower, bumblebee are present in large numbers across this area of the course.

## HOLE 14

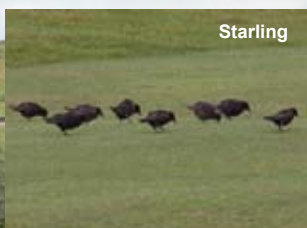
Lesser stitchwort



Cowslip



Starling



The par 3 14th hole incorporates an intimidating deep rough grassland carry. The elevated position of the tees makes it a susceptible position to the offshore breeze providing an extra dimension to the tee shot.

Within the dune grasslands can be found plant species including wild thyme, lesser stitchwort, rough hawkbit, cowslip, bird's-foot trefoil and common sorrel. Starling can frequently be seen foraging on the green and green approach, these birds characterised by their unmistakable speckled plumage.

## HOLE 15



The extensive dune grasslands comprising the 15th hole are almost dwarfed by the vast openness of the Atlantic Ocean.

This long par 3 hole is one of the most intimidating on the Old Course given the distance to the green and the fact that the golfer is playing into the offshore breeze. The rough grasslands are particularly deep around the area of the 15th hole and these are providing valuable shelter for ground-nesting birds and are also providing safe passage for small mammals including stoat which the keen-eyed golfer may be fortunate enough to catch a glimpse of during their walk to the green.

The tall dunes over the course also provide safe shelter for overwintering birds such as snipe.



## HOLE 16

Swathes of bush vetch  
carpet the rough left of hole



Buttercups and orchids  
within the rough



Bulbous buttercup and  
southern marsh orchid



The well pronounced dogleg of the 16th hole means the tee shot must be positioned perfectly in order to get onto the green in three shots.

The vibrant yellow flowers of lady's bedstraw, rough hawkbit, bush vetch and bird's-foot trefoil are common sights throughout the rough grasslands surrounding the 16th tee complex.

Turning the dogleg, the golfer is required to thread their shot to the green between two imposing sand hills that perfectly frame the hole.



## HOLE 17

**Sand dunes of the 17th**



**Common vetch  
(white variant)**



**Kidney-vetch**



The elevated position of the 17th tees provides the golfer with a privileged look across the Old Course site.

The tee shot to a fairway situated some 50 ft. below the tee elevation requires the golfer to clear a rough grassland bowl which is supporting a large number of nesting skylark and meadow pipit. Common vetch, dewberry and kidney-vetch are all well represented within these grasslands and frequently attract the vibrantly coloured common blue butterfly to this area.

## HOLE 18

**The clubhouse**



Upon reaching the 18th tee, the golfer is presented with their first clear glimpse of their final destination—the visually striking Ballybunion clubhouse.

The tall sand hills framing the 18th hole contrast starkly with the deep gullies that are also a feature of this area. Within the grasslands of the dunes, early purple and green-winged orchids may be spotted by the sharp-eyed golfer.



**Early purple  
orchid**



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