



Title: MISE Wildlife Walk, Portlaw Woods, Sunday 2nd October 2011- as part of National Trails Day, 2011

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Members of the public who attended the MISE wildlife walk. Photo: Denise O'Meara



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The MISE Portlaw Woods Wildlife Walk was organised by the MISE team as part of the National Trails Day 2011 event which is run annually by Coillte to encourage the public to enjoy the great outdoors. The MISE team worked in conjunction with Waterford County Council and Waterford Sports Partnership to publicise the event in Co. Waterford and to contact groups who would potentially be interested in such a walk. The aim of the walk was to show members of the public how to spot signs of wild mammals in the countryside, to explain how some methods of wild mammal surveying work and to discuss some of the other wildlife we saw along the way. We also saw National Trails Day as a good opportunity to further publicise the MISE project in Co. Waterford and build contacts with interested groups and volunteers.



De La Salle beaver troop and other members of the public getting ready for the walk. Photo: Denise O'Meara

At 2pm, the walkers gathered at the entrance to Portlaw Wood. Despite showers and fog, the walk was well attended- 37 people in total came along, including some of the De La Salle Beaver Scout troop from Waterford City and some members of the Waterford branch of the Irish Wildlife Trust. The walk began with a short talk by Andrew Harrington (who led the walk) about the MISE project, followed by a brief introduction to the history of the woodland and its current condition.

As the walkers moved up the hill through the woodland, we stopped at various points along the way to discuss some of the signs of wild mammals we saw. Portlaw Woods contains a wide variety of native Irish mammals, including Pine Martens, Foxes, Badgers, Red Squirrels,

Mice and Shrews, and Fox and Pine Marten trails and scats were spotted along the track up to the top of the hill.

When we had reached the top of the woodland, the walkers were shown a squirrel drey in the spruce trees there and feeding signs of squirrels. We had also set up small mammal bait pots, squirrel hair tubes and a stealth camera. We checked the five bait pots, which had been smeared with peanut butter the night before to attract mice, shrews and voles, and we found that some of these animals had visited them and left signs of their presence. The scats contained in the bait pots were taken back to the lab in W.I.T. and their DNA was extracted and analysed. We found that the pots had been visited by Wood Mouse (*Apodemus sylvaticus*), which is native to Ireland, and Bank Vole (*Myodes glareolus*), which is an introduced species. We also explained how we use the squirrel hair tubes to get samples of squirrel hair for genetic analysis and the stealth camera can be used for visual evidence of wild mammals in places we are surveying. Unfortunately, no animals showed up in front of the camera the night before the walk!



Andrew Harrington explaining how a squirrel hair tube works to walkers. Photo: Denise O'Meara

Overall, the walk was highly enjoyed by all, and the MISE project made some contacts for future work around the county, including Faithlegg and Dunhill. We had an invitation from the De La Salle beaver group to do some mammal survey work with them in the coming months also. It provided a good template for future introductory wildlife walks, and we would be interested in conducting a walk as part of National Trails Day in the coming years.

Acknowledgements

We would particularly like to thank Jane O'Dwyer of the Waterford Sports Partnership for helping to organise and publicise the walk with local youth groups in Waterford City. We would also like to thank members of the Waterford Branch of the Irish Wildlife Trust, De La Salle Beaver troop, and other members of the public who attended the walk.